



THE COMMONWEALTH, SOUTH AFRICA AND APARTHEID

by Stuart Mole

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own words has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature *Stuart Mole*

Fig 1 Front cover. ‘In the shadow of the casspiers.’ EPG members, Lord Barber and Swaran Singh, in South Africa, 1986. Commonwealth Secretariat.

ABSTRACT

The study will explore the role of the modern Commonwealth in the international campaign against apartheid in South Africa. It will span the period from 1948 until the ending of apartheid in April 1994, following universal, non-racial elections across South Africa resulting in the election of President Mandela and an ANC government. It will address the central research question of the thesis which explores the significance and distinctiveness of the Commonwealth's contribution to the international anti-apartheid campaign and which seeks some measure of its uniqueness and its enduring impact. In conducting this assessment, the thesis will also consider how the Commonwealth's engagement with South Africa, over more than four decades, itself changed the association. It will focus on four key periods and events in the over four decades of study, each dealing with a markedly different aspect of the Commonwealth's opposition to apartheid. Thus, the study will examine the circumstances leading up to and precipitating South Africa's departure from the Commonwealth in 1961, and the international and domestic repercussions. It will then explore the role the Commonwealth played in the sporting boycott and the significance of the 1977 Gleneagles Agreement and challenges to its effective implementation. In focussing on the Commonwealth's emerging diplomatic methodology, the thesis will also consider the related issue of Rhodesia and the Commonwealth's involvement in the successful negotiations, elections and transfer of power that led to the birth of Zimbabwe in 1980. The third area of study will concern the mission to South Africa of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group of 1986 and will consider the extent to which this impacted on the beginnings of the negotiating process to end apartheid and the intensification of the global sanctions campaign. It will ask whether this revealed a special capacity for conflict resolution on the part of the Commonwealth. Finally, in the light of Nelson Mandela's release from imprisonment in 1990 after twenty-seven years, the study will ask how the changed political circumstances in South Africa encouraged the Commonwealth to play a constructive role in the transition process in the period 1991-1994. It will explore whether, in working alongside other international organisations, the Commonwealth was able to make a distinctive contribution to the negotiation process and to reducing continuing violence through its ability to assist mediation and conciliation.

This long process of engagement with South Africa, less as a fellow member and more as a growing critic of its racial policies, had a profound impact on the Commonwealth. Taken as a whole, the period saw marked changes to the character, composition and cohesion of the Commonwealth. It also saw the creation of independent Commonwealth institutions (notably, a Secretary-General, appointed by all Heads of Government, and a Commonwealth Secretariat) and a growing fracturing of the organisation on the issue of apartheid and race before a resolution of these differences with the adoption of the 1991 Harare Declaration. The thesis will conclude by arguing that the Commonwealth can claim a significant role in constructing an international human rights regime antithetical to apartheid. At the same time, the rigorous application of those same norms of democracy, equality and human rights to the Commonwealth itself were to have far-reaching consequences for the association as it aspired to be a modern, norms-based international organisation.



Fig.2- 'Africa – Freedom in Our Lifetime,' 1960. Margaret Ballinger Papers, University of Cape Town.

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NOTES AND ABBREVIATIONS

Terminology

As regards terminology, it is necessary to explain the use of several terms. First, references to 'Britain' and the 'British' government, are descriptions which today would be regarded as both inexact and politically insensitive. However, it was not until 1999 that, at the suggestion of the Commonwealth Secretariat, the UK government ceased to use 'Britain' and 'British' as its national description in Commonwealth documents and meetings and, as in other international fora, became known as 'the United Kingdom/UK'.¹ Thus, for the duration of this study, the former description was used. Given that quoted sources often reflect this, the old and modern appellation have been used interchangeably.

Second, a similar issue arises with the use of the term 'non-white'. At first sight, this may also appear archaic and imprecise. However, it is a description which, in the context of apartheid, is widely used in the period, both within South Africa and internationally. It captures the binary nature of the apartheid system, being one of white supremacy which excluded from economic and political power all other 'non-white' groups. 'Non-white' is therefore a collective description covering black Africans, Cape Coloureds, Indians and other 'non-white' racial categories defined by the Population Registration Act (1950). After all, this was a cornerstone of apartheid. Nevertheless, where it is more accurate to use a specific description, this has been used in preference to the generic term.

Abbreviations

AAM	-	Anti-Apartheid Movement
ANC	-	African National Congress
AU	-	African Union
AWB	-	Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging

¹ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit: Communiqués of Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings 1997-2005* (Vol.3). (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2007), 63.

BOSS	-	Bureau of State Security
CFMSA	-	Commonwealth Cttee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa
CHOGM	-	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CMAG	-	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group
CODESA	-	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
COG	-	Commonwealth Observer Group
COMSEC	-	Commonwealth Secretariat
COMSA	-	Commonwealth Observer Mission to South Africa
COSATU	-	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CP	-	Conservative Party (South Africa)
CPAG	-	Commonwealth Peacekeeping Assistance Group (South Africa)
DP	-	Democratic Party
EC/EEC	-	European Community/European Economic Community
ECOMSA	-	European Community Observer Mission in South Africa
EPG		Eminent Persons Group (sometimes COMGEP – Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons to South Africa)
EU	-	European Union
FF	-	Freedom Front
FLS	-	Frontline States
HART	-	Halt All Racial Tours
HOGs	-	Heads of Government
IFP	-	Inkatha Freedom Party
MK	-	Umkhonto We Sizwe

NAM	-	Non-Aligned Movement
NIS	-	National Intelligence Service (South Africa)
NP	-	National Party
NPKF	-	National Peacekeeping Force
OAU	-	Organisation of African Unity
OAU-OMSA	-	OAU Observer Mission in South Africa
PAC	-	Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania
PS	-	Permanent Secretary/Private Secretary
PUS	-	Permanent Under-Secretary
RSA	-	Republic of South Africa
SADC	-	Southern African Development Community
SADCC	-	Southern African Development Coordination Conference
SADF	-	South African Defence Force
SDU	-	Self-Defence Unit
STST	-	Stop The Seventy Tour
TRC	-	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDF	-	United Democratic Front
UDI	-	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNGA	-	United Nations General Assembly
UNOMSA	-	United Nations Observer Mission in South Africa
UNSC	-	United Nations Security Council

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Returning to academic study and research after an absence of over forty years has been as exciting as it has been daunting. In that time, universities have changed almost beyond recognition. They have become, in a far more obvious way than previously, portals to a treasure-trove of knowledge, available at the click of a mouse. They provide connections to networks of learning, expertise and opportunity, including digitised archives and catalogues, scarcely discernible four decades ago.

At the same time, understanding the disciplines and demands of today's postgraduate research has come with its own challenges. I am therefore particularly grateful to Andrew Thompson, now Professor of Global and Imperial History at the University of Oxford, who encouraged me to undertake a PhD at Exeter and apply for a Global Uncertainties award. My seven years of part-time study have been a full-time and protracted obsession and I have benefitted from the advice, forbearance and guidance of many. Above all, I want to thank Professor David Thackeray and Dr Stacey Hynd, my supervisors for much of that period, for their patience, their wisdom and their professionalism. It has been a special privilege to be part of such a fine University.

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INTRODUCTION

“For the entire Commonwealth there remained a duty as part of humanity, and in furtherance of Commonwealth values, to remove the stain of apartheid from human society.”²

Shridath Ramphal, 2014.

“The myth that the Commonwealth has accomplished much of enduring significance since the end of the Second World War.”³

Geoffrey Wandesforde-Smith, 2019.

1. Apartheid and the Commonwealth: research questions and argument

The study takes as its starting point the genesis and growth of the Commonwealth in its modern form, following the adoption of the London Declaration in 1949.⁴ It will examine the near conjunction of these events with the election of the Afrikaner Nationalist government of Daniel Malan in 1948, and the construction of the apartheid state which followed. Notwithstanding South Africa’s status as a Dominion within the British Commonwealth (under the Statute of Westminster 1931), its part in two world wars and pre-existing ‘imperial’ attitudes to racial discrimination and governance, the thesis highlights the central tension between South Africa and India over South Africa’s racial policies and how this loomed ever larger in the Commonwealth’s post-war growth.⁵ It will explore the relationship between South Africa and the Commonwealth over the fifty-six years of apartheid, and the impact of the divisive issues of race and identity upon the Commonwealth’s development. This was particularly so as the character of the Commonwealth altered with the accession to membership of many postcolonial states from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific, and following the acrimonious exit of South Africa from the association. As the period unfolded,

² Shridath Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life* (Hertford, UK: Hansib Publications Limited, 2014), 404.

³ Geoffrey Wandesforde-Smith, “Taking the Measure of the Commonwealth: A Review Essay,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 20:1 (2019): 1.

⁴ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit (Vol.1): Communiqués of Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings 1944-1986* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1987), 29.

⁵ Arnold Smith with Clyde Sanger, *Stitches in Time: The Commonwealth in World Politics* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1981), 154.

opposition to racism in Southern Africa, and specifically to apartheid, became the *leitmotif* of the Commonwealth's evolution and at the heart of its claim to be a multiracial and modern international organisation.⁶ But how distinctive and significant was the Commonwealth's contribution to the international campaign against apartheid alongside other international and regional organisations, such as the United Nations, the Organisation of African Unity or the Frontline States? Was its often difficult relationship with the UK government during that time a measure of how far its independence of action was compromised by Britain's deep economic, political, cultural and security links with South Africa?⁷ Or did the uniqueness of the Commonwealth's ties to the former imperial power create a capacity for special influence? Where the Commonwealth operated with genuine independence distinct from and often in opposition to the UK, were its actions substantive and far-reaching – or symbolic and self-serving?

Any assessment made of these questions will need to examine how the Commonwealth's actions were perceived at the time, both within South Africa, by all shades of opinion; and externally, by international organisations, national governments and independent commentators and academics. It will also be necessary to consider how the Commonwealth operated as a distinct diplomatic entity and ask whether existing theories of diplomacy, with their emphasis on state actors alone, provide an adequate framework for assessing the role of international organisations such as the Commonwealth in addressing multifaceted international issues. As well as looking at diplomatic methods, it is also important to examine the link to, and significance of, a shared set of ideas driving the new Commonwealth leadership (the Secretary-General and Heads of Government) as well as the part played by mass protest and civil society action within individual Commonwealth countries, and the influence that these had on the UK and other Commonwealth governments. Lastly, and drawing examples across the period, it will be necessary to test the

⁶ Krishnan Srinivasan, "Principles and practice: Human rights, the Harare Declaration and the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG)," in *The Contemporary Commonwealth: An assessment 1965-2009*, ed. James Mayall (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 67.

⁷ Ronald Hyam and Peter Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok: Britain and South Africa since the Boer War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 139-143.

Commonwealth's specific claim to have a comparative advantage in the field of mediation and conflict resolution.

The Commonwealth's assertion that it conducted a sustained, principled and significant crusade against apartheid in all the years of the racial ideology's existence goes to the heart of Commonwealth mythology. It is held up, as the current Commonwealth Secretary-General has put it, as "our collective refusal to turn a blind eye to apartheid."⁸ However, that prolonged engagement by the Commonwealth with racism in Southern Africa also created historical legacies which, arguably, had their own considerable effect on the relevance and purposes of the contemporary Commonwealth.

This study traces the different post-WWII and post-imperial perceptions of the Commonwealth in Britain, the Dominions and in the newly emerging 'Afro-Asian' Commonwealth, including among wider political and public opinion. It will ask what impact a changing global context, including decolonisation, the Cold War and new supranational governance structures, had on these perceptions and political attitudes to them. It will further consider the challenge of race to the post-war Commonwealth and how this impacted on shared values and norms, common processes and conventions and the hegemonic role of the United Kingdom. It will ask how far the creation of an independent Secretariat and the appointment of a Commonwealth Secretary-General, at the service of all member governments equally, was in part driven by issues of racism and political inequality, within and outside the association, and by differing perceptions of the organisation's global role.⁹ The study will in particular assess the distinctive and sometimes differing diplomatic styles and objectives of three successive Secretaries-General, namely Arnold Smith, Shridath Ramphal and Emeka Anyaoku, and their relationships with Commonwealth member governments. The thesis will examine contrasting theories of the Commonwealth's evolution and, in its modern form, interrogate its claim to be a norms-based and values-driven international organisation within a complex multilateral global system. It will evaluate its contested claim to coherence and unity based on shared values, in

⁸ Patricia Scotland, "OPINION: Racism seeks to drive us apart but there are rays of hope." 8 June 2020. Thomson Reuters Foundation News. Accessed 4 August 2020, <https://www.news.trust.org/item/20200608160407-704ug/>.

⁹ W. David McIntyre, *The Significance of the Commonwealth, 1965-90* (Christchurch, NZ: University of Canterbury Press, 1991), 52.

particular democracy, the rule of law and human rights, alongside sustainable development. It will conclude by raising the question whether, with the ending of apartheid, the Commonwealth has effectively lost its *raison d'être*, creating a 'strategic vacuum' it has yet to fill.¹⁰

My core argument in response to the main research question is my contention that understanding of the Commonwealth and apartheid has been clouded by two myths. These are, first, that the Commonwealth was a fierce opponent of apartheid from the system's inception, in 1948, until its ending in 1994. In reality, it was only after the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, the formation of an independent Secretariat and the appointment of the first Commonwealth Secretary-General, that opposition to racism in southern Africa, and specifically to apartheid, assumed substance and coherence. The second myth, constructed in part in opposition to the first, was that the Commonwealth's actions against apartheid throughout the period were variable and insignificant, being "at best very marginal".¹¹ My detailed analysis of archival and other material relating to the main areas of Commonwealth activity serves to replace this familiar trope with a more balanced and positive assessment.

2. Methodology

As elaborated above, the primary purpose of my thesis is to analyse the collective contribution of the Commonwealth to the international campaign against apartheid, and to assess the extent to which its role was unique in character and demonstrated measurable impact. The thesis has been structured around a range of key interventions between 1961 and 1995 - the year after South Africa's rebirth as a non-racial and democratic state. Reflecting developments in each decade of apartheid, these interventions have been grouped into four case studies. The first is South Africa's departure from the Commonwealth in 1961 and the beginnings of apartheid's journey into international isolation. The second is the development of the sporting boycott and the adoption of the Gleneagles Agreement on sport and apartheid in 1977. The third is the mission to South Africa of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group in 1986 and how this impacted both upon the sanctions campaign and on the

¹⁰ James Mayall, "Introduction," in *The Contemporary Commonwealth*, 8.

¹¹ Chris Saunders, "Britain, the Commonwealth, and the Question of the Release of Nelson Mandela in the 1980s," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 106: 6 (2017): 659.

prospects for a negotiated internal settlement. The fourth deals with the Commonwealth's role in international assistance to South Africa's transition out of apartheid, between 1991-1994. Each case study, and subsidiary elements, have been selected in order to highlight the range of Commonwealth strategies. These were negotiation, diplomacy, mediation and conflict resolution, humanitarian and other assistance, and collective international pressure to secure economic, sporting and other sanctions. In each case, the Commonwealth considers its actions to have been important and, in most instances, there is a demonstrable degree of international recognition of the Commonwealth's collective role, as expressed in the private and public comments of relevant actors.

At the same time, none of these interventions took place in isolation from the development of the Commonwealth's own shared norms, as well as how those principles were impacted more widely, and the organisation's growing perception that these were challenged by the enduring institutional racism of apartheid. In this respect, a useful starting point would be to consider how scholars have assessed the engagement of the United Nations with apartheid since it first began to address South Africa's racial policies on 8 December 1946. This vote by the General Assembly predated the introduction of apartheid from 1948 but not the racial laws, customs and attitudes which provided the apartheid state with its substantial foundations. In considering most of that forty-seven-year period, Stultz suggests that "no subject has been more enduring before the world body than apartheid."¹² The uniqueness of the UN's anti-apartheid regime must surely lie in the quality and evolving nature of the international body's actions. Stultz's approach is to draw upon the work of Donnelly in asking what constitutes an international human rights 'regime', acting upon certain international norms, which may themselves be evolving.¹³ For Donnelly, a regime's decision-making can move through four distinct categories: declaratory, promotional, implementing and enforcement, and Stultz applies this to the UN's actions on apartheid.¹⁴

¹² Newell Stultz, "Evolution of the United Nations Anti-Apartheid Regime," *Human Rights Quarterly* 3:1 (1991): 1.

¹³ Jack Donnelly, "International Human Rights: A Regime Analysis," *International Organisation* 40:3 (1986): 599-642.

¹⁴ Stultz, "Evolution of the United Nations Anti-Apartheid Regime," 2.

In many ways, the Commonwealth's own relationship with apartheid served to influence, as well as reflect, key developments at the United Nations. Prominent Commonwealth figures were actively involved in the development of the UN in its early years.¹⁵ Jan Smuts, of South Africa, and Sir Charles Webster, of the UK, together with the Australian Herbert Evatt, were instrumental in the drafting of the Preamble to the UN Charter, Smuts's segregationist views notwithstanding.¹⁶ A few years later, John Peters Humphrey, of Canada, provided the first draft of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, though his role is sometimes overlooked as the 'forgotten framer.'¹⁷ Evatt, by then President of the UN General Assembly, helped secure the Declaration's adoption and proclamation. Even so, until 1965 a British-led Commonwealth avoided attempts to agree collective human rights' norms within its ranks. However, with the creation of an independent Secretariat and with the growth of a broader membership, this attitude changed. Thereafter, the 1971 Singapore Declaration, the 1977 Gleneagles Agreement and the 1991 Harare Declaration were all significant in creating a wider impact at the UN and elsewhere and influencing international norms. As a result, Stultz's application of Donnelly's framework to the UN can also be helpful when applied to the Commonwealth. The development of the Commonwealth's 'human rights regime' over the four decades of the study is therefore a constant feature of the four case studies and integral to the key actions examined.

Each of these interventions is analysed by means of triangulated research situated on three separate but connected sets of archives. First, an extensive range of relevant Commonwealth material has been examined, including shared Commonwealth records, personal testimonies and oral histories, private correspondence and memoirs and secondary literature. Second, archival material in Commonwealth member countries, particularly the UK and South Africa, as well as other states involved in the anti-apartheid campaign, have been interrogated, as well as political comment, writing and analysis. Third, the perspective of other international organisations, particularly the UN, as well as relevant regional organisations, academics and analysts and civil society participants have been considered, assessed and referenced below. As a

¹⁵ "Partnership and policy," *The Round Table: A quarterly review of the politics of the British Commonwealth* 37:145 (1946): 3-7.

¹⁶ Peter Marshall, "Smuts and the Preamble to the UN Charter," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 90:358 (2001): 57-59.

¹⁷ Mary Ann Glendon, "John P. Humphrey and the Drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," *Journal of the History of International Law* 2:2 (2000): 250.

result, evidence presented from these three categories of archival collection can provide the basis for a broad-based assessment of the Commonwealth's collective contribution to the international campaign against apartheid.

The primary archival base of this thesis is the Commonwealth Secretariat archive at Marlborough House. This intergovernmental archive is an essential locus of evidence and differs from national, colonial and governmental archives in several important ways. Unlike the national archives of member countries which are established and governed by domestic legislation, the Commonwealth archive is international, containing the shared Commonwealth records of all member countries. Its status is recognised in the British legislation which established the Commonwealth Secretariat as an international organisation domiciled in the UK. In setting out its privileges and immunities, the Commonwealth Secretariat Act (1966) declared: "the Commonwealth Secretariat shall have the like inviolability of premises, official archives and communications as is accorded by law in respect of the premises, official archives and communications of a sending state."¹⁸ The regulations and conventions governing the archive, and arrangements for its proper care, are the responsibility of Commonwealth governments collectively and these were only developed in the 1990s as the Secretariat approached its thirtieth anniversary. Not only did the Commonwealth have to decide if it wished to adopt the widespread use of the thirty-year rule, after which time eligible records would become public; but, in deciding to do so, it resolved the dilemma that otherwise some of its shared records might be made publicly available elsewhere by the member countries concerned under their own national legislation.¹⁹

Another difference between national archives and the Commonwealth archive lies in the differing attitudes to political accountability. In national systems there is often strong continuity and vitality evident in the civil service. Civil servants answer to their political masters, but political power can be remarkably transient. Commonwealth Secretaries-General, on the other hand, have been used to a much longer shelf life. Smith and Anyaoku served for ten years each and Ramphal for fifteen. Only more

¹⁸ *The Commonwealth Secretariat Act (1966)*, Part 1 of schedule (2), Legislation.gov.uk, accessed 3 March 2017, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1966/10>. The legislation was enacted on 10 March 1966 but was deemed to have come into operation on 1 July 1965 when the Secretariat was established.

¹⁹ Jay Gilbert, "The Commonwealth Secretariat and its documentary heritage", *The Round Table; The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 92: 372 (2003): 663.

recently has the length of incumbency begun to shorten.²⁰ As a result, the Secretariat is much more focussed on the dominant and generally enduring figure of the Secretary-General.

External influences are also processed differently. In the case of, say, the UK foreign service policy positions and advice are peppered with the regular reports and intelligence supplied by ambassadors and missions abroad. This material is invariably filtered through British diplomats on the ground, with all the benefits and pitfalls that may come from those judgements and perspectives. The Secretariat, on the other hand, is keenly aware that it must be an assiduous and impartial facilitator of Commonwealth consultation. It does not have a network of missions or offices in member countries and its interface is with Commonwealth High Commissions in London or points of contact within Commonwealth capitals.

What implications does this have for historical research? The Commonwealth archive, little over fifty years old, is largely the product of a cautious mindset. The Secretariat, though based in the UK and disproportionately influenced by it, has usually had around thirty Commonwealth nationalities among its staff. This diversity, whatever its merits, tends to induce a sense of hierarchy and defensiveness in its internal exchanges, as well as in its dealings with member governments. While ostensibly committed to open and transparent governance, Gilbert suggests that there is a contrary attitude in the Secretariat that the “essentially private ‘family’ character of the Commonwealth association can only be preserved if things said, and recorded, in the unique atmosphere of the ‘bosom of the family’ are kept within that assembly.”²¹ It is unusual for annotations on draft letters or documents to be anything like as frank and open as is the case with publicly available UK records. Missions are invariably conducted in ‘discreet and non-public’ ways, and the Secretary-General may prompt a President or Prime Minister to appear as the initiator of action, rather than him or herself, in order to generate a more effective outcome.²² This fiction may be maintained after the

²⁰ Since 2000, the Secretary-General’s term of office has been four years, with the possibility of a second and final term, providing no other candidates successfully contest the extension. Future incumbents may be prevented from seeking a second term under new procedures recommended in the First Report of the High-Level Group on the Governance Arrangements of the Commonwealth Secretariat (2018), Section F, 6.

²¹ Gilbert, “The Commonwealth Secretariat and its documentary heritage”, 662

²² The Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons, *Mission to South Africa: The Commonwealth Report* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1986), 21.

event in whatever accounts appear in the public sphere. Ramphal's close aide, Moni Malhoutra, observing the Secretary-General's diplomatic method during the 1979 Lancaster House talks, remarked: "He was like a spider at the centre of a web."²³

There is a further, and fortunate, distinctiveness about the Commonwealth archive. Although the release of eligible public records is currently still bound by the thirty-year rule, it is possible to obtain access to material not yet available by seeking personal permission to do so from the Commonwealth Secretary-General. Such permission has been granted for this research both by Secretary-General Sharma and, latterly, by Secretary-General Scotland. The original research which informs the whole of the fourth case study (contained in chapter 4), as well as aspects of the third case study (in chapter 3), has benefited in its completeness from the granting of this access and from the new historical insights revealed.

At the same time, the multilateral nature of policy exchanges retained and processed by the Secretariat inevitably provide a breadth of perspective not normally present in national archives. This is particularly so in terms of the Secretary-General's correspondence and meetings with individual Heads of Government, as well as the records of collective Commonwealth meetings, particularly the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and its Heads-only Retreat. This material reveals the complex network of relationships that exist among the Commonwealth's leadership. That relationship goes to the heart of the argument, central to this thesis, that at its best the Commonwealth can generate a distinctive multilateral diplomatic dynamic in addressing and resolving controversial issues. A multilateral archive is also a useful corrective to the predominant frame of national histories, with the Commonwealth archive allowing triangulation and the reading against the grain of official government histories. Catherine Hall, as a British historian, is one of those who has become convinced that "in order to understand the specificity of national formation, we have to look outside it."²⁴ This 'transnational thinking' disturbs national histories and, while marking 'positive presence and content', also helps reveal 'negative and excluded parts.'

²³ Richard Bourne (ed.), *Shridath Ramphal: The Commonwealth and the World* (London & Hertfordshire: Hansib, 2008), 19.

²⁴ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects – Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 9-10.

Other Commonwealth and institutional archives have also been utilised in this study, including the Royal Commonwealth Society Collections at Cambridge University Library; the Institute of Commonwealth Studies collections at the University of London; and the Anti-Apartheid and African collections in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. These archives illuminate the relationship of various Commonwealth bodies and other civil society organisations, notably the Anti-Apartheid Movement, to the official Commonwealth, as well as the engagement and perceptions of key political actors at various critical points in the Commonwealth's development. The Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS), based at that time in Northumberland Avenue in central London, was a notable gathering point for South African exiles and visitors from across the Commonwealth. Its programme of public meetings in the basement auditorium of the Society provided many leaders and advocates of national independence with a public platform in the UK. Oliver Tambo, Thabo Mbeki and Aziz Pahad used the Club and early contacts were made with Lynda Chalker, at that time a junior foreign office minister. Her covert meetings with Tambo became more formalised in 1986, even though the official policy of the UK was that it would not talk to 'terrorists'.²⁵ Given this history of contact, it is little surprise that the RCS should have been the venue for Mandela's first press conference in the UK on his release from prison.²⁶ Similarly, the Institute of Commonwealth Studies was able to provide its own support to South African exiles and the anti-apartheid cause. After Albie Sachs had survived assassination in Maputo in 1988 and had recovered from his extensive injuries, he was provided with a desk, office and living support to work on a post-apartheid constitution for South Africa.²⁷ He would later become one of the most celebrated members of South Africa's new Constitutional Court. All this provides valuable context and substance in demonstrating how the Commonwealth worked with civil society across the intergovernmental divide and how, in examining the words and

²⁵"In Britain, Foreign Office Minister Lynda Chalker meets Oliver Tambo, president of the ANC", 24 June 1986, *South African History Online*, accessed 10 October 2019, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/Britain-foreign-office-minister-lynda-chalker-meets-oliver-tambo-president-anc/>.

²⁶ Verity Sharp, "Nelson Mandela and the Commonwealth", blog posted on 6 December 2013, accessed 5 May 2018, <https://thercs.org/new-and-blogs/blogs/nelson-mandela-and-the-commonwealth/>.

²⁷ Albie Sachs recounted his experiences as a visiting fellow of the ICS at a 70th anniversary conference in Senate House on Monday 25 March 2019.

thoughts of the individuals concerned, it helps to construct an all-round assessment of the effectiveness of the Commonwealth's actions.

There is an abundance of memoirs and biographies of Commonwealth leaders in this period which offer insights into their relationships with each other and with the organisation.²⁸ It is also particularly useful to have the speeches, correspondence and memoirs of each of the Commonwealth Secretaries-General, most specifically Arnold Smith, Sir Shridath ('Sonny') Ramphal and Chief Emeka Anyaoku. How useful are these kinds of memoirs, as opposed to speeches and correspondence? Rather like official communiques, declarations or minutes, a high degree of caution and discernment is needed in analysing their content. By the 1960s, it would be extremely unusual to find a Commonwealth leader or secretary-general with either the appetite or the time to prepare their own speeches (on the highly personalised Churchillian model). But, to a greater or lesser extent, substantial figures would work with a team of writers and advisers and, at the editorial stage in particular, would put their own stamp on the speech, perhaps with some specific rhetorical flourishes. The same would be true of official (as opposed to private) correspondence. This, too, might be subject to an extensive drafting process, before arriving at a settled view, not just of the principal but of his or her organisation also. What will sometimes be available to the researcher will be the various drafts, pieces of advice and marginal annotations which led to the adoption of an agreed text.

Memoirs are individual and exclusive in their perspective. It is difficult to imagine that any are not, to a major extent, self-serving and therefore lacking in self-criticism. At the same time, how the authors deal with key challenges, or say they did, and what individuals, issues and events are glossed over or left out entirely can tell the reader a great deal. Certainly, the greater the number of memoirs and autobiographies, the more the opportunity to refine areas of contestation, as well as to absorb the fresh perspectives and new sources of information they may bring. All have their limitations but better that many flourish, rather than allowing the single, egotistical narrative of a former president, prime minister or public servant to dominate public memory.

²⁸ Smith, *Stiches in Time*; Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*; Emeka Anyaoku, *The Inside Story of the Modern Commonwealth* (London: Evans Brothers Ltd, 2004).

As far as the national archives of Commonwealth countries are concerned, The National Archives at Kew, London contain a rich store of British primary sources (and Commonwealth records up until 1965). Margaret Thatcher's private archive, opened in 2003, is widely available online (with the original documents held at Churchill College, Cambridge, and at Kew). The work of the Margaret Thatcher Archive Trust in digitising material up to and beyond the end of her premiership has been very useful in providing a counterpoint to Commonwealth records and biographies. Other national archives of member countries have been consulted online, including Library and Archives Canada and the National Archives of Australia. The United Nations' online archives have also been an invaluable source, given the interplay between the UN and the Commonwealth on many different levels.

An archival perspective from South Africa has been essential to this thesis and two research trips have been made there. However, there are several specific difficulties about researching the apartheid era in South Africa. First, with apartheid's end in sight, it is now known that the regime went to very considerable lengths to expunge all evidence of its crimes. In 1992, President de Klerk authorised the destruction by the National Intelligence Agency of 44 tonnes of incriminating material.²⁹ This was incinerated at night at a location outside Pretoria. Huge amounts of other sensitive records have also disappeared in what Verne Harris has called a "large-scale and systematic sanitisation of official memory."³⁰ Second, whether in part because of the deliberate destruction of official records or for other reasons, there is very little material relevant to the Commonwealth in the South African National Archives in Pretoria after the country's exit from the Commonwealth in 1961. There are discrete collections which should be accessible, and which may have a highly specific relevance, such as Nelson Mandela's prison records originally held by the Department of Correctional Services. However, in practice, in the absence of a formal freedom of information (FOI) request, access did not always prove possible. However, this did not materially affect my research.

Considerable amounts of more recent official material, some of which is of relevance to the thesis, are stored at the Department of International Relations and Cooperation,

²⁹ Van Vuuren, *Apartheid, Guns and Money*, 1.

³⁰ Verne Harris, "The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory and Archives in South Africa," *Archival Science* 2: 1-2 (2002): 65.

also in Pretoria. This can only be accessed by approaching the archivist with an FOI request and, in the case of this research, the results have been unremarkable. That said, the not-for-profit organisation Open Secrets has in recent years used fifty FOI requests to access recently de-classified papers in eight South African government departments, with some success. Nevertheless, Van Vuuren reflects that “access to most public records remains a challenge in democratic South Africa.”³¹

As Verne Harris has argued, apartheid created “a formidable memory resource.” He explains: “By their silences and their narratives of power, their constructions of experience, apartheid’s memory institutions legitimised apartheid rule.”³² He continues: “A vast, simmering memory of resistance and struggle was forced away into informal spaces and the deeper reaches of the underground.” Harris points out that record destruction not only affected official documents. It also included material confiscated by the state from opposition and other non-state groups and then destroyed, as well as material obliterated in government bombings and raids.³³ A consequence of this was that, in the latter stages of apartheid as well as after 1994, a significant amount of material was deposited at collecting institutions, notably various South African Universities. This research has drawn on the special collections at the William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, and at the Jagger Library, University of Cape Town. There have also been initiatives like the South African History Archive (SAHA), now based in the old women’s jail on Constitution Hill in Johannesburg. This independent archive was established in the 1980 on the initiative of the United Democratic Front, the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the African National Congress, although it is now non-aligned politically. Apart from its archival collections, SAHA aims to encourage use of South Africa’s freedom of information laws to access histories which might have been lost or hidden. This study has found its material on the implementation and impact of international sanctions on South Africa particularly helpful. The genesis and focus of the archive at the Nelson Mandela Foundation in Johannesburg was rather different but it is today a well-resourced facility, which, inter alia, offers insights into Mandela’s relationship with the Commonwealth, both prior to, and after, his release from prison.

³¹ Van Vuuren, *Apartheid, Guns and Money*, 20.

³² Harris, “The Archival Sliver,” 69.

³³ *Ibid*, 70.

This remarkable range of archive material is clear evidence of South Africa's deeply contested and fragmented history. Baines points out that post-conflict societies "are often characterised by contestation over the ownership and meaning of the past" in what he describes as "memory wars."³⁴ This is a further special feature of research into apartheid in South Africa. The breadth of archival material reveals something of the spectrum of perspectives evident in the country's public memory. But it also offers an insight into another important continuum which stretches from the international to the domestic, and to society's grassroots. As well as the private papers and diaries of some of the key figures involved, the records of a variety of non-governmental organisations and material from community campaigns (on, say, non-segregated sport or violent clashes in Crossroads township, or conflict resolution in KwaZulu-Natal) have provided fascinating insights into 'bottom-up' accounts of events which are more often portrayed and understood 'top down'. This is particularly useful in augmenting research for a thesis sometimes described as 'diplomatic history'.

Oral history generally can contribute much, and this thesis has been no exception. The Commonwealth Oral History Project (COHP), conceived and managed by the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at the University of London, has built a digital database of more than sixty substantial oral history interviews with Commonwealth leaders, senior civil servants and commentators across the world.³⁵ For the purposes of this research, while my thesis draws significantly from these Commonwealth oral histories, a series of additional interviews have been arranged which supplement those COHP transcripts relevant to the study. My interviews, which received ethical approval from the University of Exeter, have been conducted with Sonny Ramphal, Emeka Anyaoku and Don McKinnon, the three Commonwealth Secretaries-General most involved with South Africa and apartheid, as well as with individuals who had direct experience of one or more of the four case studies addressed by the thesis. These include David Steel, former President of the AAM; Richard Luce, part of the UK ministerial team at the Lancaster House talks; Hugh Craft, an Australian Director of International Affairs in the Commonwealth Secretariat, who masterminded the logistics of the 1986

³⁴ Gary Baines, "Legacies of South Africa's Apartheid Wars," *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of African History*, published online: 25 February 2019, accessed 29 September 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.452>.

³⁵ Institute of Commonwealth Studies, *Commonwealth Oral History Project* (School of Advanced Study, University of London), commonwealthoralhistories.org/interview.

Eminent Persons Group mission; Clyde Sanger, a close aide of the first Commonwealth Secretary-General, Arnold Smith; Chris Laidlaw, an “All Black” star who later became New Zealand’s first High Commissioner in Zimbabwe; Patsy Robertson, a Jamaican media specialist who for many years was the Commonwealth’s spokesperson; and Max Gaylard, an Australian diplomat who had a central role for the Commonwealth throughout South Africa’s transition. In all, some eleven interviews were arranged. Some were initiated by open-ended questions, encouraging free-ranging discussion, while others were conducted by phone using a more precise set of questions. In nearly all cases, the intention was to drill below surface memory and settled opinion for more revealing insights into the dynamics of events. A full list of interviews is set out in the concluding bibliography.³⁶

In a society where the incidence of illiteracy can still be high and where orality remains strong, local oral histories have a particular importance in South Africa.³⁷ Wieder argues that: “testimony as oral history is important as a public forum for people who have been historically invisible.”³⁸ Such testimonies have public legitimacy, he contends, as a counterpoint to the official narrative, even if “total accuracy is uncertain.”³⁹ The hazards of remembering which sometimes afflict oral histories do not invalidate the voices of the invisible but, like memoirs and correspondence, provide further routes for interrogating the truth. Ritchie contends that: “Our general understanding of memory has grown subtler, shifting away from a preoccupation with establishing an objective reliability to realising that people’s reshaping of what they remember offers telling clues for scholarly analysis.”⁴⁰ As with students of colonial archives, Stoler suggests that researchers are re-reading those archives and “doing oral histories with people who lived those archived events to comment on colonial narratives of them.”⁴¹ As Ritchie puts it: “subjective perception shapes all historical evidence.”⁴² Undoubtedly, the testimonies of the ‘historically invisible’ have been

³⁶ See page 296.

³⁷ Latoya Newman, “Poor literacy levels still a concern in SA,” *Daily News*, 23 April 2018.

³⁸ Alan Wieder, “Testimony as Oral History: Lessons from South Africa,” *Educational Researcher* 33:6 (2004): 23.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁰ Donald A. Ritchie, Review of “The Voice of the Past: Oral History” by Paul Thompson with Joanna Bornat. 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) in *The Public Historian* 40:1 (2018): 180.

⁴¹ Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” *Archival Science* 2:1-2 (2002): 89.

⁴² Ritchie, Review of the Voices of the Past, 180.

important to the Commonwealth in understanding the lived experience of those who suffered under apartheid and who, in part, looked outside South Africa for help. Of necessity, much of that material was gathered indirectly and covertly, though the presence of the EPG mission in South Africa in 1986 provided discreet opportunities for it to be done directly, by EPG members and staff. Dame Nita Barrow, the only female EPG member, one night in Johannesburg famously evaded South African surveillance for an incognito visit to Alexandra township. Guided by local women and dressed in African clothes and headdress she spent many hours hearing the stories and views of local people and understanding the conditions in which they had to live.⁴³

Even so, the proclamation of public history can have a more deliberate purpose. Baines recounts how President Zuma used the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the battle of Cuito Cuanavale to claim that MK's cadres had taken part in what the president characterised as the Cuban victory over the apartheid army. This myth of MK involvement, which was unsupported by any evidence, was an example, according to Baines, of "memorialisation as a means to frame and shape the narrative of the armed struggle."⁴⁴

There are other narratives which compete to fill the gaps in South Africa's social memory, including 'struggle' art, literature and theatre, as well as museums, monuments and memorial sites. The District Six Museum eloquently tells the story of a vibrant and variegated dockside community in Cape Town ripped apart and destroyed by forced removals under the Group Areas Act. The Robben Island Museum, the Voortrekker Monument, Lilliesleaf Farm, the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, and St George's Cathedral in Cape Town are all part of a tapestry of remembrance. Often in contrast, there are also surprising confluences in "South Africa's negotiation of the past."⁴⁵ These 'alternative' archives have played a legitimate part in framing this research, illuminating important aspects of South Africa's history and occasionally providing fragmented and faint reflections of its Commonwealth connections.

⁴³ Anon ('David'), "Dame Nita Barrow-Nelson Mandela Connection." *Barbados Underground*. 9 December 2013. Accessed 5 August 2020, <https://www.barbadosunderground.net/2013/12/09/the-dame-nota-barrow-nelson-mandela-connection/>; this account is corroborated by EPG support staff operating with the mission at the time.

⁴⁴ Baines, "Legacies of South Africa's Apartheid Wars," 11.

⁴⁵ Harris, "The Archival Sliver," 85.

Are South Africa's apartheid archives, such as remain, or colonial archives of the European empires in essence any different from those of modern states like the UK, Zimbabwe or Australia, or from international organisations like the Commonwealth, or indeed from non-governmental organisations like the Anti-Apartheid Movement? Jacques Derrida has contended that control of the archive and political power go hand in hand.⁴⁶ Bernard and Stoler both point to the linguistic roots of 'archive' in Latin and Greek with the common meaning of 'seat of government' and expressing an associated mechanism of moral and political control.⁴⁷ Although there may seem no comparison between the coercive apparatus of the authoritarian state and the workings of an international organisation or a civil society body, they hold and develop archives in similar ways: as a confirmation of identity, an expression of values and for the production of social memory. What all archives have in common is the inevitably selective way in which documents and records are deposited, classified and catalogued. The Commonwealth Secretariat's archive tells the reader much about the nature of the organisation – how it is led, its varied staff, its sometimes-conflicting priorities, its value system, its sense of duty and mission. The archive also illustrates how the organisation is embedded in a mesh of pan-Commonwealth relationships that ostensibly dictate its existence but are also its source of sustenance and energy. In that respect its archival characteristics are predictable. At the same time, the Secretariat archives offer a discreet and inevitably partial qualification and muffled response to the public narratives created by national member governments. In many cases, this may remain unexplored and therefore of little consequence: in the case of South Africa and apartheid, uncovering that material opens up an important new dimension of understanding. Like its national and international counterparts, the Commonwealth archive is in some measure self-serving. However, taken together with other archival sources, and with biography and oral history, it achieves its potency, even in its absences, gaps and silences.

However formidable and ordered the archive is, it is never just a grouping of papers because, suggests Bernard, "the human subject and the bodily remnant (the traces

⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 4.

⁴⁷ Louise Bernard, "Unpacking the archive," *The Yale Review* (2011), 99(4), 97; Stoler, "Colonial Archives," 97.

left behind of a life lived) are ever discernible.”⁴⁸ Even in the most extreme of circumstances, such as the act of record destruction or criminal concealment, there is room to discern the human subject. President Nixon intended his notorious tapes to be a further instrument of his control, not damning evidence in his impeachment. When the British Colonial Office sought to destroy evidence of torture and abuse in Kenya, Uganda or Malaya, it did not expect some local colonial officers tasked with this duty to decide that some archives, including ‘dirty’ material, should be saved and repatriated to the UK because of their value to future historians.⁴⁹ As the Stasi moved to destroy its vast store of records on East Germany’s citizens, it did not anticipate a huge popular protest to surround its headquarters, frustrate its plans and thereafter expose the truth of its totalitarian repression. Harris comments that there is ‘poetic justice’ in the way that the records of the apartheid state have sometimes been used to expose human rights violations and support the claims of those seeking restitution and justice.⁵⁰

This common vulnerability in potentially the most impenetrable and shuttered archive is a cause for hope. Stoler concludes that colonial archives need to be read ‘with’ the archival grain, rather than against it, looking for “its regularities, for its logic of recall, for its densities and distributions, for its consistencies of misinformation, omission, and mistake – along the archival grain.”⁵¹ In this respect, context is all important, as is an appreciation of the influence of the appraiser of the material who, as Harris points out, creates archival value, particularly in what Harris describes as a transformational discourse.⁵² This study will probe the reasons for the Commonwealth’s seeming absence from South Africa’s metanarrative of resistance and liberation and, in so doing, will emphasise the importance of the sub- or even counter-narrative which may be uncovered across the ‘total’ archive.

A final issue which could affect the methodology of the thesis might be circumstances where the researcher has had a partisan commitment to, and a deep immersive experience in, a particular aspect of the historical research being undertaken. Will the

⁴⁸ Bernard, “Unpacking the archive,” 97.

⁴⁹ Shohei Sato, “Operation Legacy: Britain’s Destruction and Concealment of Colonial Records Worldwide,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45:4 (2017): 708.

⁵⁰ Harris, “The Archival Sliver,” 79.

⁵¹ Stoler, “Colonial Archives,” 100.

⁵² Harris, “The Archival Sliver,” 83.

researcher be *parti pris* when approaching the research topic and how it is interrogated, and will this lead to an unconscious bias in how primary research is conducted and evaluated? In my own case, I joined the Anti-Apartheid Movement in 1968 and was active in the UK in various campaigns over the two decades that followed. My involvement in the Commonwealth has spanned thirty-five years, sixteen of them as a Commonwealth diplomat, in part working on South Africa and apartheid.

I readily concede that my experience will have coloured my approach to my research. To expect a wholly unbiased observation of what could be portrayed as simple, raw evidence is illusory. My experiences and familiarity with at least a portion of the research area has made it easier for me to access relevant sources and individuals. It has helped me appreciate some of the tensions and internal dynamics within the Commonwealth which can uncover more profound questions. In striving to deliver sound historical analysis, what matters, however, is that a plausible hypothesis should be constructed, a full range of primary sources and other data examined and that this should be processed and analysed according to a suitable methodology.

Undoubtedly, my own view of the principal research question has been altered by the process of inquiry and as I encounter sources which challenged previously held assumptions. Above all, I strongly hold to the view that the imperative is to tell the story and test the hypothesis in a way that is faithful to the evidence before me. It is not my intention to recount a preconceived Commonwealth account or construct a self-serving personal narrative. In so doing, I hope I can make a historical contribution to what E.H. Carr called “an unending dialogue between the present and the past.”⁵³ As Richard Evans has put it: “Through the sources we use, and the methods with which we handle them, we can, if we are very careful and thorough, approach a reconstruction of past reality that may be partial and provisional and certainly will not be objective, but is nevertheless true.”⁵⁴

3. Literature review and historical context: The Commonwealth

There are a variety of accounts of the Commonwealth’s role in the international struggle against apartheid. Given the importance of the issue to Commonwealth

⁵³ Edward Hallett Carr, *What is history?* (London: Vintage Books, 1967), 30.

⁵⁴ Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London, Granta Books, 1997), 249.

mythology and the proportion of the Commonwealth Secretariat's human and financial resources spent on combatting racism in Southern Africa over the years, compared with other programme priorities, it is unsurprising that four former Commonwealth Secretaries-General have written about their experiences and recollections in some detail. Arnold Smith's account is largely confined to the Rhodesian crisis, though he also refers to the controversies in 1970-1971 about the UK's wish to resume arm sales to apartheid South Africa.⁵⁵ Shridath Ramphal and Emeka Anyaoku, in their collected speeches as well as their memoirs, give special prominence to racism, South Africa and apartheid.⁵⁶ Don McKinnon offers a more limited perspective, largely from the vantage point of being New Zealand's Foreign Minister (and Deputy Prime Minister) during the 1990s.⁵⁷ The Commonwealth Secretariat's own publication, released at the height of the sanctions campaign and well before apartheid's end, inevitably provides an incomplete and rather propagandist perspective.⁵⁸ Much more useful are the biennial reports of the Commonwealth Secretary-General.⁵⁹ Although the practice of issuing biennial reports has been disrupted in recent years, the reports between 1966-1995 are rich in detail. A number of general books about the Commonwealth covering the period of study (McIntyre, Mayall) include analysis of the Commonwealth's engagement with apartheid.⁶⁰

What should be the most authoritative external source for assessing the role of the Commonwealth during this period is South Africa's official history of the apartheid struggle, produced through the South African Democracy Education Trust at the behest of President Thabo Mbeki. Volume 3, which focuses on international solidarity, declares on its opening page: "It must be emphasised from the outset that not all countries, organisations and movements could be covered in detail in this volume.

⁵⁵ Smith, *Stitches in Time*, 204-220.

⁵⁶ Shridath Ramphal, *One World to Share: Selected Speeches of the Commonwealth Secretary-General 1975-1978* (London: Century Hutchinson, 1979); Ron Sanders (ed.), *Inseparable Humanity: An Anthology of Reflections of Shridath Ramphal* (London, Hansib Publications Ltd, 1988); Emeka Anyaoku, *The Missing Headlines: Selected Speeches* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), 143-184.

⁵⁷ Don McKinnon, *In the Ring: A Commonwealth Memoir* (London: Elliott and Thompson Ltd, 2013).

⁵⁸ Commonwealth Secretariat, *Racism in Southern Africa: The Commonwealth Stand* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1987).

⁵⁹ Copies of the Secretary-General's biennial reports to Commonwealth Heads of Government from 1966 are held at the Commonwealth library and archives in Marlborough House, London.

⁶⁰ Mayall, *The Contemporary Commonwealth*, 210-223; McIntyre, *Guide to the Contemporary Commonwealth*, 38-43.

Those chosen have a special significance.”⁶¹ There is no chapter or section on the Commonwealth, though some Commonwealth countries are covered individually.⁶² Chapters are also devoted to the part played by various other countries in the international campaign against apartheid. These include Austria, Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal and Greece, alongside more prominent contributors such as Cuba. While there are numerous references in the volume to the Commonwealth, these are scattered and often lacking in context. There are also several glaring omissions such as any reference to the 1986 mission to South Africa of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group. This fragmented approach is in contrast to the volume’s introduction, which states: “The most significant international organisations that supported the anti-apartheid struggle were the United Nations and its agencies; the Organisation for African Unity (OAU); the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) **and the Commonwealth...**” (my emphasis).⁶³

Audie Klotz has included the Commonwealth in her examination of three multilateral organisations (the others are the UN and the OAU) and their part in the anti-apartheid cause.⁶⁴ Her purpose is to place the multilateral pursuit of moral principles – in this case, opposition to apartheid – in contrast with the conventional theory that the foreign policies of sovereign nations are wholly driven by national interests. In the case of the Commonwealth, she analyses developments in the association leading to the break with apartheid South Africa in 1961, and then considers the Rhodesian rebellion and the emergence of a collective Commonwealth policy on the issue, independent of the British government. Her study concentrates on the Commonwealth’s adoption of various multilateral economic and financial sanctions on South Africa after 1985, in opposition to the United Kingdom. Her contention is that, in the case of apartheid, the advocacy of the moral norm of racial equality played a central role “in defining identity and interest” and creating “globalised concern over domestic discrimination,”

⁶¹ Gregory Houston, ‘Introduction,’ *The Road to Democracy in South Africa: International Solidarity* (Vol.3)

(Pretoria: South Africa Democracy Education Trust, University of South Africa, 2008), 1-40.

⁶² These are Canada, Australia, New Zealand and India.

⁶³ Houston, *The Road to Democracy*, 1-40.

⁶⁴ Audie Klotz, *Norms in International Relations: The Struggle against Apartheid* (USA: Cornell University Press, 2010), 55-72.

overriding strategic and economic interests.⁶⁵ She concludes that “the evolution of Commonwealth policies offers an example of successful multilateral sanctions.”⁶⁶

The reality may be more nuanced and will be explored in depth in the third case study, which addresses Commonwealth sanctions. Nevertheless, Klotz raises an important question, as does her focus on multilateralism as a distinct and effective form of international diplomacy. Kotz’s study of the Commonwealth and apartheid is not comprehensive, even though it is a rare example of serious analysis of the phenomenon. Much more widespread is the perception that the Commonwealth contribution was sporadic, of limited value or of no value at all. This last perspective is exemplified by Geoffrey Wandesforde-Smith who applauds the laying bare of “the myth that the Commonwealth has accomplished much of enduring significance since the end of the Second World War.”⁶⁷ Even contesting that prevailing viewpoint is suspect, argues Murphy, because “it tends to be [only] supporters who feel that it is actually worthy of study.”⁶⁸

The expectation of this research is that it will rise to this challenge and seek to fill a substantial gap in current knowledge, drawing on new areas of inquiry. It will address the central question: that the Commonwealth’s intense involvement with issues of racism in Southern Africa over four decades shattered original post-imperial perceptions of a non-interventionist and hegemonic ‘British’ Commonwealth. It will explore, and seek to measure, the impact and longevity of Commonwealth actions against apartheid. It will contend that this involved a unique multilateral diplomatic method, requiring an activist leadership, pursuing shared goals and in tune with mass protest and civil society action within individual Commonwealth countries. It will argue that the deeply contested challenge of race led the organisation to a resulting concentration on determining its shared fundamental values within the association more widely. It will conclude that the more rigorous application of those same values, of human rights, equality and democracy, within the membership effectively created a changed organisation. What was the legacy of the anti-apartheid struggle on internal Commonwealth reform and its contemporary claim to be a rule- and values-based

⁶⁵ Klotz, *Norms in International Relations*, 9.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶⁷ Wandesforde-Smith, “Taking the Measure of the Commonwealth,” 1.

⁶⁸ Philip Murphy, *The Empire’s New Clothes: The Myth of the Commonwealth*, (London: Hurst & Co, 2018), x.

association with an adopted Charter, common institutions and established conventions? The study will also probe whether the experience of a pro-active Commonwealth Secretariat – and an ‘activist’ Commonwealth Secretary-General, operating in partnership with member governments (as well as with the global anti-apartheid movement and unofficial Commonwealth organisations) – can offer new insights that might suggest a more complex theory of diplomacy beyond the nation state.

This study has also required familiarity with a variety of sub-literatures. The first of these concerns the Commonwealth itself, and its journey from post-imperial association to modern international organisation. Even without the exceptional challenge posed by apartheid, addressing questions of race, identity and equality would have been central to any successful organisational transformation. By the same token, once equipped with independent institutions and the ability to act on behalf of its members on international issues, the nature of the Commonwealth’s multilateral method has needed to be considered within diplomatic theory and within the historiography of mediation and conflict resolution, as well as by reference to the specific leadership attributes, outlook and skills of successive Commonwealth Secretaries-General. Additionally, a familiarity with the historiography of apartheid and South Africa has of course been essential, together with an appreciation of contrasting perspectives on the balance between internal and external factors in confronting the apartheid system.

A great deal has been written about the inter-war British Empire and Commonwealth and the development to statehood of those areas of historic white settlement that became the self-governing Dominions. This has been revisited by that prolific historian of the Commonwealth, David McIntyre.⁶⁹ In the immediate aftermath of global conflict, the prominence of the Commonwealth in the foundation of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions within the post-war settlement has been characterised by Mazower as ‘Imperial internationalism’.⁷⁰ Despite this (and notwithstanding the work of Smuts and Evatt in the drafting of the preamble to the UN Charter), the old

⁶⁹ W. David McIntyre, *The Britannic Vision: Historians and the Making of the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1907-48* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁷⁰ Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 37.

Commonwealth world of Dominions and colonies was fast disappearing.⁷¹ The seismic changes brought about by the Second World War also precipitated the widespread movement for freedom from colonial rule, including in the British Empire. War in 1947 between the new Dominions of India and Pakistan exposed how ineffectual were the old understandings, restraints and conventions. As a result, there was little confidence that Dominion status would be any more satisfactory a vehicle for other British colonies seeking freedom and statehood. As Nicholas Mansergh has observed: "Empire and Commonwealth represented incompatible and antithetical concepts comprehended for half a century or more within one polity."⁷²

What therefore was the characterisation of the Commonwealth at the start of the study period? Undoubtedly, the adoption of the 1949 London Declaration was, to many, the key that unlocked the door to a post-imperial Commonwealth. Most immediately, it produced a formula which allowed an independent India, intent on becoming a republic, to remain in the Commonwealth. With the demarcation lines of the Cold War beginning to spread across the globe, the British goal of keeping India at least anti-Communist (despite its emerging neutralism) was widely welcomed. But there was little appreciation of where this might lead, and what kind of a Commonwealth might eventuate as a result.

From a British point of view, some saw the immediate post-war years, and the London Declaration, as the final death convulsions of the British Commonwealth, and the end of the Imperial dream. Whatever the muscular spasms which might suggest life after the coup de grace, the head had clearly been severed from the body and therefore conscious movement and direction had ceased. This was true, such critics argued, both figuratively and in actuality. The removal of the link of common allegiance to a British crown had excised more than a common constitutional connection: it had accelerated an already fast-disappearing sense of shared 'Britishness.' It had further undermined any confidence that the UK and the new Dominions (much less those new Commonwealth members which were to follow) shared security, economic and foreign policy objectives. As Lorna Lloyd has argued: "The years when changes were being made to the Commonwealth's terminology and constitution were also ones which

⁷¹ David Tothill, "Evatt and Smuts in San Francisco," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 96:389 (2007): 177-192.

⁷² Nicholas Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience* (UK: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1969), 243.

witnessed the effective end of the Commonwealth as a coherent international unit.”⁷³ Her conclusion was: “The fact of the matter was that Britain was in decline, and the dilution and disintegration of the old Commonwealth was an inevitable function of that process.”⁷⁴ For David Cannadine: “The Empire had been about power: the Commonwealth was about sentiment – an alumni association of a university that seemed to be rapidly going under.”⁷⁵ For Hedley Bull, the Commonwealth was a ‘myth’, remaining only as a symbol “to disguise the disintegration of the British Empire, to prolong the spirit after life has departed from the body.”⁷⁶

However, if some in Britain viewed the Churchillian concept of ‘British Empire and Commonwealth’ as indivisible and incapable of reinvention, others embraced a new historical narrative, often described as the Whiggish, teleological view of imperial disintegration. As Cannadine put it: “This was the comforting and reassuring story which sought to present the end of the British Empire as the whole point of the British Empire – by calling it the Commonwealth.”⁷⁷ For a time, this view of Britain and the Commonwealth suited many on both the left and the right of the British political spectrum.

The Labour Manifesto at the 1959 General Election had declared: “The transformation of the old British empire into the first inter-racial Commonwealth of free nations was the supreme achievement of the Labour Government.”⁷⁸ The successful development of a multi-racial Commonwealth was the optimistic vision offered by Patrick Gordon Walker, a former Commonwealth Secretary and, later, Foreign Secretary.⁷⁹ However, the crisis over Rhodesia in 1965, brought home some of the realities of a no longer pliant organisation, precipitating a marked decline in Harold Wilson’s previous enthusiasm for the association.⁸⁰

⁷³ Lorna Lloyd, “Britain and the Transformation from Empire to Commonwealth,” *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 86: 343 (1997): 340.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁷⁵ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 190.

⁷⁶ Hedley Bull, “What is the Commonwealth?” *World Politics* 11:4 (1959): 582.

⁷⁷ Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, 189.

⁷⁸ Labour Party Manifesto 1959, *Britain Belongs to You*, accessed 23 January 2018, <https://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab59.htm>.

⁷⁹ Patrick Gordon Walker, *The Commonwealth* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1962), 381.

⁸⁰ Paul Foot, *The Politics of Harold Wilson* (UK: Penguin Books, 1968), 192-210.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 1950s, the 'new' Commonwealth, in Labour eyes, provided an important developmental focus to the decolonisation process, a practical economic dimension to the UK's Whiggish civilising post-imperial mission to bring liberal democracy, the rule of law and human rights to its erstwhile colonies. For Smith and Jeppesen, this was part of an "evolving discourse of humanitarian aid."⁸¹

On the right of British politics, the accommodation of India and Pakistan within the Commonwealth and the other far-reaching changes which followed were viewed as the required means by which the United Kingdom's global aspirations could be sustained. It was the continuation of imperial reach by other means. Necessary changes had to be made. Past certainties no longer held. Even Britain's first application to join the European Economic Community was explained by Alistair Horne thus: "(It was) only by extending Britain's leadership of the Commonwealth to Europe that she could bring to bear the influence in the world affairs that should be ours."⁸² Alec Douglas-Home, appointed in 1955 as Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, had a similar view of his responsibilities: "In 1955, Britain was expected to take a lead; and Britain's word counted in the Commonwealth for more than that of any other member, more indeed than that of all of them together."⁸³ As Ronald Hyam put it: "The Commonwealth was still at the core of British 'official mind' cosmology and of external activity".⁸⁴ He describes how officials wrestled to give the UK a renewed role in an organisation which was not significant in power terms but which "ought to give Britain enhanced standing in the world and it would have a valuable function keeping developing countries out of the Soviet bloc."⁸⁵

What would this new Commonwealth look like? In the early 1950s, the British Government was concerned with "the Gold Coast" question. It recognised that, within a few years, the Gold Coast colony would achieve 'independence within the Commonwealth' (which it did, as Ghana, in 1957). Should it be admitted as an equal, or was it time to implement a two-tier system of membership? While this solution had

⁸¹ Andrew Smith and Chris Jeppesen, "Britain, France and the Decolonisation of Africa: Future Imperfect?" (London: UCL Press, 2017), 7.

⁸² Alistair Horne, *Macmillan: Vol. 1, 1894-1956* (London, Macmillan, 1988), 313.

⁸³ Lord Home of the Hirsel, *The Way the Wind Blows* (London: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, 1976), 106.

⁸⁴ Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation 1918-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 328.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 312.

certain attractions, the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brook, laid out a series of practical difficulties. There was, in particular, the issue of race: "At the outset the lower tier would consist wholly of countries with coloured populations. It would be impossible to maintain the two-tier system if it could be represented as based on a colour distinction."⁸⁶ In speculating about future applicants for Commonwealth membership in the next ten or twenty years, the government hazarded that, as well as the Gold Coast, there were Nigeria, the Central African Federation, a Malayan Federation (including Singapore and Brunei) and a West Indies Federation which would definitely qualify. Others were less certain or deemed too small to be capable of achieving full independence (including a number of countries currently Commonwealth members, such as Malta, Cyprus, The Bahamas, Fiji, Mauritius and Seychelles). Brook concluded: "Africa's future presents a challenge to Commonwealth statesmanship. The forthcoming application of the Gold Coast for full Commonwealth membership will mark a decisive turning-point in the evolution of the Commonwealth connection."⁸⁷

This rapid growth on the Commonwealth was not to the liking of Macmillan. He complained that the Commonwealth had changed from "a small and pleasant country-house party into a sort of miniature United Nations," adding that it was no longer like "gaining admission to Brooks's but like joining the RAC."⁸⁸ Nonetheless, he saw continuing value in the Commonwealth as a "psychological cushion for the end of empire and an increasingly valuable instrument for keeping communism at bay."⁸⁹

Macmillan also was clear that the decolonisation process was unstoppable. As Iain MacLeod, his Colonial Secretary put it: "When we talk about changing an Empire into a family, we do not see the future as a series of Dunkirks, of gallant, prolonged, bitter rearguard actions. I believe it is our high destiny to help change and to sustain it."⁹⁰ The optimism and idealism of these early post war years were also captured by Mansergh, who said: "At a time when the liberal democratic world appeared so often

⁸⁶ Report to Cabinet, "The Future of Commonwealth Membership", 21 January 1952, TNA, CAB/129/71, 9.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁸ Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire*, 310.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁹⁰ Nigel Fisher, *Iain Macleod* (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd, 1973), 143.

on the defensive the Commonwealth, it seemed, had embarked on an experiment which had about it a quality of greatness.”⁹¹

What did other countries think about this experiment and why should full membership of the Commonwealth have attracted those about to throw over colonial subjugation for national liberation? Certainly, a few of those emerging into nationhood, such as Burma, lost little time in jettisoning their last links to the formal colonial power. Other non-members, such as Ireland, remained in the Sterling Area. Many more, however, saw the benefits of continuing association, especially if there were neighbouring countries at a similar stage of the decolonising process. As a pioneer in this process (and the co-architect of the formula adopted in the London Declaration) Nehru, as India’s Prime Minister, was forced to justify his faith in the organisation. He told the Constituent Assembly that “the fact we have begun this new type of association with a touch of healing will be good for us and good for them and, I think, good for the world.”⁹² However, Ingram points out that Nehru’s stance was far from popular in India and that he had to constantly “fend off demands for India’s withdrawal” from the association.⁹³ Similarly, Nkrumah declared: “Just as we, a young nation, are proud and jealous of our independence, so do we believe that the Commonwealth will gain its greatest strength and influence from an association of sovereign and independent nations which are totally free from any direction.”⁹⁴ Like other fiercely pan-Africanist new states, such as Sierra Leone and Nigeria, Ghana began independence in 1957 as a Dominion and therefore retained the British monarch as Head of State before becoming a republic in 1960.

Hedley Bull has suggested that by remaining in the Commonwealth the new African and Asian members “conceded to Britain the enjoyment of the symbolic prolongation of the British Empire.”⁹⁵ In return, Bull argued that they got ‘conveniences and services,’ the good will of the British government and some influence over British

⁹¹ Nicholas Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of wartime cooperation and post-war change 1939-1952* (London-NY-Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1958), 421.

⁹² Report in the *Hindustan Times*, 17 May 1949, annexed to a Memorandum by the Secretary of State on “The Commonwealth Relationship”, TNA CP (49), 139, Appendix IV.

⁹³ Derek Ingram, *Commonwealth for a Colour-Blind World* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1965), 100.

⁹⁴ L.A. Aduasi, “Commonwealth is colonialism through the back door,” *Modern Ghana*, <https://www.modernghana.com/news/895897/commonwealth-is-colonialism-through-the-back-door.html>.

⁹⁵ Bull, “What is the Commonwealth?” 583.

policy. If so, it would seem a poor trade-off, carrying with it high political risk domestically. More plausible is that the new generation of Commonwealth leaders were more than aware of those British advocates who saw the Commonwealth as the continuation of Empire by other means (in actuality, rather than symbolically). The new Commonwealth accepted the benefits of a British-assisted induction into nationhood in return for a series of practical benefits. “For leaders of newly colonised states”, contends O’Shea: “attendance at (Prime Ministers) Conferences had the dual benefit of acting as a marker of independence from Britain yet also a vehicle for making continued demands of it.”⁹⁶ The Commonwealth was also ‘family,’ and a safe half-way house on the path to international integration. In the Pacific, a number of newly independent islands joined the Commonwealth first but only some years later became members of the United Nations.⁹⁷ The Commonwealth’s new members also realised that British control of the Commonwealth was fast becoming a thing of the past. In the eyes of Mazrui, these were the beginnings of the ‘Third Commonwealth’, amounting to nothing less than an ‘African conquest of the Commonwealth’. The crucial moment was Nigeria’s independence in 1960. “Nigeria shifted the balance of racial composition in the Commonwealth in favour of the coloured members. This was a momentous development in terms of strengthening the principle of multi-racialism in the Commonwealth.”⁹⁸ Within a year, the apartheid state of South Africa would be out of the Commonwealth and, in the eyes of Mazrui, this new ‘bi-centrism’ in Commonwealth decision-making was weakening British control over the Commonwealth and its agenda. The agitation for an independent Commonwealth Secretariat, in which Nkrumah was prominent, began to intensify.

It is undeniable that for the first decade or so after the London Declaration, the Commonwealth remained a British and post-imperial construct. Whatever the high-minded and altruistic sentiments embodied in the Whiggish concept of Empire evolving into Commonwealth, the immediate post-war Commonwealth made sense for the UK because it was run by the British, in British interests and therefore distributing political and economic largesse to member countries solely in accordance with that narrow

⁹⁶ Robert O’Shea, “Not foreign to each other: Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conferences 1944-1969” (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2016), 11.

⁹⁷ Neroni Slade, (Secretary-General, Pacific Islands Forum), in telephone discussion with the author, January 15, 2010.

⁹⁸ Ali A. Mazrui, *The Anglo-African Commonwealth: Political Friction and Cultural Fusion* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1967), 2.

criterion. As J.D.B. Miller put it: “whichever way the matter was viewed, the Commonwealth looked like a British group.”⁹⁹ Given the fundamental global movements underway, this model could not be sustained.

A central issue involved the nature of the Commonwealth consultative process. By the early 1950s, the UK government was reaching the conclusion that this was one of the principal benefits of Commonwealth membership (along with attendance at Prime Ministers meetings and direct access to the Queen). And yet it was a process which was initiated by the British on behalf of the Commonwealth on a changing and often partial basis – and always according to British interests. Lord Swinton, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, revealed as much in September 1954, in a secret memorandum to the Cabinet. Speaking frankly, he said: “However uncomfortable it may be to have some of the emergent territories as full Commonwealth partners, we are quite clear that the wiser course is to admit them to a status of nominal equality, and seek from the start to ensure that, through sharing in that intimate exchange of views and information on foreign policy which marks relations between members of the Commonwealth, they will remain within our own sphere of influence.”¹⁰⁰ He continued: “If membership is further increased, we shall doubtless have to develop still further the existing practice of treating each country on its individual merits.”¹⁰¹

Derek Ingram remarked: “A great deal of nonsense has been talked in the past by Ministers about ‘consulting our Commonwealth partners’. What it really amounted to was that we consulted and cooperated when we chose. When it was inconvenient or downright embarrassing to ourselves to do so—which was often—we ignored them.”¹⁰² This reached its ultimate absurdity with the Suez crisis, where the British government made no attempt to consult Commonwealth members about possible military action, much less provide any forewarning of the Anglo-French operation. This was after the Queen’s Speech at the Opening of Parliament the year before when she had told MPs

⁹⁹ J.D.B. Miller, *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs: problems of Expansion and Attrition 1953-1969* (London-NY- Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1974), 14.

¹⁰⁰ Lord Swinton, *Memorandum on Commonwealth Membership for Cabinet*, 30 September 1954, TNA (54) 307 CAB/129/71, 2

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Derek Ingram, *The Commonwealth at Work* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1969), 133.

and peers: “My government will maintain and strengthen consultation within the Commonwealth for the fulfilment of our common aims and purposes.”¹⁰³

The formal application by the British government to join the European Economic Community (EEC) precipitated a crisis in the Commonwealth, although Macmillan vowed that the government would not become a member unless its obligations to the Commonwealth could be secured. Otherwise, he told MPs, “the loss would be greater than the gain.”¹⁰⁴ There was extensive consultation with Commonwealth members over the EEC application, including with some of the newest, but little feeling that the concerns raised would deflect Britain from its course if that is where it felt its interests lay.¹⁰⁵ The first Commonwealth Secretary-General, Arnold Smith, appointed in 1965, later wryly remarked: “I have found, not wholly to my surprise, that some of the larger countries are apt to be the least enthusiastic about consultation and the most in need of it.”¹⁰⁶

However, the evolution of the Commonwealth into something markedly different was not just a question of time and numbers, in tipping the balance between old and new Commonwealth. It was as much about the various crises over racism in Southern Africa, between 1960 and 1966, which cast the more prosaic issues of equality of treatment, policy-making and neutral operating institutions into stark relief. The debates about apartheid and South Africa in 1960-1961, about Rhodesia, particularly between 1964-1966, and about attitudes in the UK towards ‘new Commonwealth’ immigration, raised the question of whether blood was indeed thicker than water. Were the residual ties of ‘Britishness’ between the UK and its former white Dominions the visible manifestation of a much deeper difference, and one rooted in ethnicity? That certainly was the question some of the newer, particularly African, member countries asked, needing the reassurance that the Commonwealth’s identity, and its independent capacity to act, was real and no longer governed by the relationship with Britain.

¹⁰³ HM Queen Elizabeth II, “Queen’s Speech at the Opening of Parliament,” House of Lords, 9 June 1955, accessed 3 March 2019, <https://www.ukpol.co.uk/queen-elizabeth-ii-1955-queens-speech/>.

¹⁰⁴ Norman Shrapnel, “Britain will ask to join EEC”, *The Guardian*, 1 August 1961, accessed 25 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/01/eec-britain-european-economic-community-1961-archive>.

¹⁰⁵ Lindsay Aqai, “Macmillan, Nkrumah and the 1961 Application for EEC Membership,” *The International History Review* 39: 4 (2017): 581.

¹⁰⁶ Smith, *Stitches in Time*, 296.

This was not an easy question to answer with any finality and the angry and bitter words the debate generated had an impact, too, on the British public and on the Whiggish concept of the Commonwealth's evolution. For some in the UK, especially filtered through a largely partisan domestic press, the illusion of continuing British reach through a compliant Commonwealth had been shattered.¹⁰⁷ This accords with Mansergh's analysis that "for Britain the age of faith in Commonwealth had drawn to its close."¹⁰⁸ At the same time, whatever the legacy bequeathed to them by the former colonial master, the number of one-party states or military regimes that emerged in the years following independence undermined the promise of a liberal idyll fashioned from the Westminster Model. The 'concert of convenience' described by J.D.B. Miller was an increasingly discordant one.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, he argued that "convenience was still the keynote of Commonwealth diplomacy", even if a major unified effort was still absent.¹¹⁰ Emily Lowrance-Floyd, in examining British policy towards African decolonisation between 1959 and 1963, has argued without irony that "the Whiggish vision of Britain's Commonwealth transformation in some ways emerged even more potent after Hola and the Devlin Report."¹¹¹

If the Whiggish paradigm was fatally undermined as the new Commonwealth Secretary-General and his Secretariat grew in confidence and influence, it has returned in different forms over the decades. Krishnan Srinivasan, a former Deputy Secretary-General in the Commonwealth Secretariat and onetime Foreign Secretary of India, has argued that the post-war Commonwealth has essentially remained an instrument of British foreign policy interests.¹¹² More recently still, Philip Murphy has suggested that the UK is "locked in an apparently eternal dilemma": while it can seek to shape the organisation's goals behind the scenes, any overt attempt to lead will encourage accusations of "residual imperial hubris."¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ W. David McIntyre, *British Decolonisation, 1946-1997: When, Why and How did the British Empire Fall?* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998), 120.

¹⁰⁸ Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience*, 413.

¹⁰⁹ Miller, *The Commonwealth in the World*, 275.

¹¹⁰ Miller, *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs*, 525.

¹¹¹ Emily Lowrance-Floyd, "Losing an Empire, Losing a Role? The Commonwealth Vision, British Identity, and African Decolonisation 1959-1963" (PhD thesis, University of Kansas, 2012), 115.

¹¹² Krishnan Srinivasan, *The Rise, Decline and Future of the British Commonwealth* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

¹¹³ Murphy, *The Myth of the Commonwealth*, 227.

However, the bulk of the period of the study, namely from 1965 until 1995, offers little support for the Whiggish, or neo-whiggish, paradigm. Quite the opposite is the case. Not only did a distinctive Commonwealth policy position emerge over Rhodesia (becoming increasingly confrontational with the UK at the time of the British-run Lancaster House talks in 1979) but a similar divergence over apartheid and South Africa (and notably sanctions) developed after 1985. For five or six years in the latter part of the 1980s, the Commonwealth, over sanctions and apartheid at least, abandoned any attempt at unanimity; and policy statements simply recorded the dissenting note: "with the exception of Britain."¹¹⁴ The division between the UK and the rest of the Commonwealth, in the 'binary Commonwealth,' came to be about more than apartheid. The controversy reopened old wounds, particularly over race and equality, and soured relations generally.

While three of the four case studies presented in the thesis will test the specific relevance and effectiveness of the Commonwealth Secretariat and of the Commonwealth Secretary-General as a diplomatic actor, it is helpful to consider some of the broader literature analysing the role of the Secretariat during these early years. Groom and Taylor's study provided insights into the first decade of the Secretariat's life and tested its claim to be an international organisation.¹¹⁵ In Groom's view: "The Secretariat came through its cathartic experiences of birth and the Anglo-African confrontation over South Africa and helped to bring about the emergence of the modern Commonwealth."¹¹⁶ He concludes: "The Commonwealth is part of the nervous system of world society. It is not particularly salient but it usually manages to be a haven of sanity in a difficult and dangerous world. The world could survive without it, but not as well."¹¹⁷ Both Margaret Doxey and David McIntyre have provided detailed analysis of the workings of the Secretariat.¹¹⁸ William Dale and, later, Stephen Chan have each interrogated the Commonwealth's claim to be an international organisation. Dale concedes that insofar as the Commonwealth has an international legal personality it is incomplete and covers the Secretariat, rather than the association as

¹¹⁴ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.2), 8.

¹¹⁵ A.J.R. Groom and Paul Taylor (eds), *The Commonwealth in the 1980s* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1984).

¹¹⁶ A.J.R. Groom, "The Commonwealth as an International Organisation," in *The Commonwealth in the 1980s*, 297.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 303.

¹¹⁸ Margaret Doxey, "The Commonwealth Secretariat" in *The Commonwealth in the 1980s*; W. David McIntyre, *A Guide to the Modern Commonwealth*.

a whole.¹¹⁹ Some more recently have sought to provide the Commonwealth with greater international legal recognition.¹²⁰ However, Dale argues that the Commonwealth exhibits all the principal characteristics of an international organisation. He agrees that it is of an exceptional nature but concludes that “this is not a reason for failing to recognise it for what it is.”¹²¹ Hugh Craft agrees and rejects legal capacity as “a *sine qua non* of international organisations.”¹²² In classifying the Commonwealth as a non-dominant, soft-power international organisation, Craft argues that it should be judged on its “efficacy,” embodying both its functionality and its outcomes.¹²³ Chan also concurs that the Commonwealth is unquestionably an international organisation, with a “distinct international personality” and the ability to take independent initiatives “on behalf of its members and in its own name.” In this respect, for Chan, the debates on Rhodesia and South Africa have been of “critical importance.”¹²⁴ This has helped the Commonwealth grow as an organisation and “enlarge the functions and frontiers” of the office of the Secretary-General. As such, it has been a “multilateral force that has challenged and sought to constraint British policies towards southern Africa.”¹²⁵ Like Chan, Craft sees the diplomatic method which has emerged as a result being a hitherto neglected multilateral form, though driven by informal consultation, creative summitry (by political leaders at the highest level), consensus-driven collaboration and “an intrinsic flexibility and adaptability.”¹²⁶ Even the preeminent handbook of traditional interstate diplomacy, Sir Ernest Satow’s *Guide to Diplomatic Practice* (in its 6th Edition, edited by Ivor Roberts) recognises the dynamic interpretation of the Secretary-General’s role which “established the value of the Secretariat and played a prominent role in combatting racism in Southern Africa.”¹²⁷ More generally Roberts concludes that “multilateral diplomacy’s advantages

¹¹⁹ William Dale, “Is the Commonwealth an International Organisation?” *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 31:3 (1982): 472.

¹²⁰ Eminent Persons Group, *A Commonwealth of the People: Time for Urgent Reform* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2011), 106.

¹²¹ Dale, “Is the Commonwealth an International Organisation?” 473.

¹²² Hugh Craft, “Between the Idea and the Reality”, (PhD thesis: Australia National University, 2009), 83.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹²⁴ Stephen Chan, “The Commonwealth as an International Organisation,” *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 78:312 (1989): 393

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 409.

¹²⁶ Craft, “Between the Idea and the Reality,” 100.

¹²⁷ Ivor Roberts (ed.), *Satow’s Diplomatic Practice*, 7th Edition. (Oxford, OUP, 2016), 471.

will ensure that it survives and flourishes”, adding that “it is the nation state in its Westphalian form which faces an existential crisis.”¹²⁸

4. Literature review and historical context: South Africa

There is an abundance of literature and other material on South Africa and the origins and development of the apartheid state. This includes histories of British colonialism and its rivalry with Dutch settlers, as well as clashes with other migrant and indigenous peoples, and the emergence of the Afrikaner identity in the form of the republics, and the conflict which became the Boer War.¹²⁹ Later colonial history, and the formation of the Union in 1908, led to a recurring imperative to achieve the unity of English and Afrikaner whites, through ‘white fusion,’ and this had its repeated reiteration in the apartheid era. Afrikaner thinking and identity, and the emergence of the concept of apartheid, owed much to the turmoil of the mid-war and post-war years.¹³⁰ This included influences sympathetic to National Socialism.¹³¹ The triumph of Afrikaner nationalists at the 1948 elections and the creation of apartheid is sometimes characterised in opposition to a post-imperial liberal concept of enlarging freedom for all races but this idealised view is not supported by the firmly segregationist views and actions of the defeated Jan Smuts and many of his parliamentary colleagues, who were unable to comprehend the menace posed by apartheid.¹³² The history of the marginalised non-whites – of Black African, Indian and Coloured peoples – and their struggle against apartheid has only more recently achieved the recognition it deserves. Even so, William Worger warns that too often “Africans as historical actors are presented primarily as victims,” rather than having made a contribution to their own history.¹³³ Alongside the settler and ‘liberal’ interpretations of South Africa’s history have been radical economic and social analyses, including those built on Marxist

¹²⁸ Ibid., 22.

¹²⁹ Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London-NY-Sydney-Toronto: Weidenfeld & Nicholson Ltd, 1979).

¹³⁰ D.W. Kruger, *The Making of a Nation: A History of the Union of South Africa 1910-1961* (Johannesburg-London: Macmillan, 1969), 189-192, 226.

¹³¹ Alex Hepple, *Political Leaders of the Twentieth Century: Verwoerd* (England, USA and Australia: Harmondsworth, 1967), 88-97.

¹³² Saul Dubow, *Apartheid 1948-1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 31.

¹³³ William Worger, “Combining the History and Historiography of South Africa”, *The Journal of African History* 44:1 (2003): 154.

theory, which point to the development of 'racialised capitalism' and its adaptation to the apartheid era.¹³⁴

The growth of internal resistance to the apartheid regime in the 1970s and 1980s and the public recognition of those who suffered under apartheid (and some of those prepared to atone for their wrongdoing) through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process, has led to a new emphasis on 'struggle' literature. As well as offering a 'bottom-up' (as opposed to 'top-down') perspective this new literature has facilitated far greater attention to those whose stories have previously not been heard, particularly women and young people.¹³⁵

Lastly, the recognition in 1961 by the United Nations that apartheid was a *sui generis* system of racial oppression which exceptionally necessitated action by the international community, overriding any impediments to intervention under the UN Charter, also stimulated the growth of a global anti-apartheid movement. The part played by international protest, boycott and sanctions, military or other support to the liberation and democratic forces (and assistance in facilitating negotiations) also has a rich literature. As Rob Skinner argues: "It was in the intersections between networks of anti-apartheid and rights activists, state institutions and international organisations, from the Commonwealth to the United Nations, that a language of human rights would be formed."¹³⁶

The integration of these various narratives, however, is deeply contested. Twenty-five years after the end of apartheid South Africa is "set apart from most other nations by the intensity of its embrace of a future through the re-negotiating of its past."¹³⁷ In the eyes of Cuthbertson, South Africa is "imprisoned by its historiography."¹³⁸ In a post-conflict society like South Africa, Gary Baines suggests that the propagation of irreconcilable views of the past "has fuelled 'memory wars' in which self-appointed

¹³⁴ Among the best known is: Harold Wolpe, "Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: from Segregation to Apartheid," *Economy and Society* 1:4 (1972): 425-456.

¹³⁵ This includes: Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1982); Colin Bundy, "Street Sociology and Pavement Politics: Aspects of Youth and Student Resistance in Cape Town, 1985," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 13:3 (1987): 303-330.

¹³⁶ Robert Skinner, "The dynamics of anti-apartheid: international solidarity, human rights and decolonisation," in *Britain, France and the Decolonisation of Africa: Future Imperfect?* ed. Andrew Smith & Chris Jeppesen (London: UCL Press, 2017), 119.

¹³⁷ Harris, "The Archival Sliver," 82.

¹³⁸ Greg Cuthbertson, (Emeritus Professor, UNISA), in conversation with the author, June 21 2016, Pretoria.

custodians contest the meaning of history.”¹³⁹ Saul Dubow contends that the recent past is not yet properly historical, and that therefore “impulses to remember and to forget exist in tension with each other.”¹⁴⁰ The marking in 2016 of the 40th anniversary of the 1976 Soweto Student revolt was characterised by attempts to claim or apportion ‘ownership’.¹⁴¹ Much in the way of evidence has been lost or fragmented and decades of censorship have affected what little public information is available.¹⁴² Even so, Harris denies that what archives that remain are a quiet retreat for a few scholars and others. They are, on the contrary “a crucible of human experience, a battleground for meaning and significance, a babel of stories, a place and a space of ever-shifting power-plays.”¹⁴³ Coombs asks how new national histories might engage “larger structural narratives and material conditions *and* individual lived experiences.”¹⁴⁴

This is not only a question of competing and unresolved narratives. It is also about the impact of these historical legacies on present-day South Africa. Teresa Barnes points to the ‘applied history’ which contributes to policy-making.¹⁴⁵ Baines highlights some of the foundational myths “that legitimates ANC rule.”¹⁴⁶ Ellis also analyses how the ANC has learnt “to live by certain historical myths.”¹⁴⁷ Van Vuuren argues that apartheid South Africa’s corruption, its economic crime and its secretive international networks cast a long shadow over present-day South Africa.¹⁴⁸ In such a national environment, it is hardly surprising if the Commonwealth’s place in South Africa’s history is either automatically set within a British and colonial historical context or, in its more modern form, is poorly remembered or discarded.

¹³⁹ Baines, “Legacies of South Africa’s Apartheid Wars,” 10.

¹⁴⁰ Dubow, *Apartheid*, 2.

¹⁴¹ The author’s impressions of contemporary media coverage, Johannesburg, June 2016.

¹⁴² Stephen Ellis, *External Mission: The ANC in Exile, 1960-1990* (London: Hurst & Co., 2014), 310.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁴⁴ Annie Coombes, *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 10.

¹⁴⁵ Teresa Barnes, “The State of Academic Historiography in South Africa,” *Journal of African History* 48:3 (2007): 508.

¹⁴⁶ Baines, “Legacies of South Africa’s Apartheid Wars,” 11.

¹⁴⁷ Ellis, *External Mission*, 308.

¹⁴⁸ Van Vuuren, *Apartheid, Guns and Money*, 489.

5. Chapter overview

The four central case studies of the thesis, set out in chapters 1-4, have each been selected to reflect a specific decade of apartheid's existence chronologically. At the same time, the case studies cover a range of different interventions against apartheid by the Commonwealth at varying stages of the association's evolution. Though separated by time, these studies are connected by recurrent themes: changing perceptions of racism, the impact of isolation and ostracism on the apartheid regime, the contrasting effect of pressure and collaboration in encouraging change, the role of violence, and the contribution of conflict resolution, mediation and conciliation in securing a settlement. Throughout, the Commonwealth's often brittle relationship with Britain underlies all these issues, both as a limiting factor and as a pathway of potential influence.

Chapter 1, dealing with the first case study, addresses the Commonwealth's first major intervention in the anti-apartheid campaign, namely South Africa's forced exit from the organisation in 1961. Despite the significance of the 1949 London Declaration, the Commonwealth, for the decade which followed, remained very largely post-imperial in its leadership, structures and purposes. Although India had voiced its criticism of South Africa's racial policies from as early as 1946, the UK's significant economic and military links with South Africa and its perceived importance to the West in the new geopolitics of the Cold War created a growing ambivalence in attitudes to apartheid. Despite the influx of newer Commonwealth members, there was no discussion of South Africa's racial policies in the Commonwealth until after the 1960 Sharpeville massacre. The killings at Sharpeville and Langa had a transformative impact upon international and Commonwealth opinion. The chapter interrogates the sometimes conflicted approach of Dr Verwoerd and the impact of South Africa's 1960 republic referendum on the Commonwealth debate; the campaign by the non-white South African opposition, in partnership with some Commonwealth governments and with the emerging anti-apartheid movement, for the apartheid regime's Commonwealth exclusion; and the confused and uncertain signals from Commonwealth governments which eventually resolved into a clear view of South Africa's exit. The chapter concludes by assessing the impact of the decision on the Commonwealth, on the South African regime and by those opposed to apartheid, as well as on international opinion more generally.

Chapter 2 introduces the second case study which is on the Commonwealth's campaign against apartheid in sport. For many Commonwealth countries, including for South Africa, sporting links of one sort or another have long been an enduring legacy of an imperial past. As international hostility to apartheid increased, sporting connections with South Africa became a field of conflict involving governments and communities in the Commonwealth, some repeatedly riven by deep antagonism. Interwoven with the politics of sport were wider issues of race in Southern Africa. These included the ending of the Rhodesian rebellion and the birth of Zimbabwe as well as controversy over the UK's intention to resume arm sales to South Africa and the significance of the 1971 Singapore Declaration on Racial Prejudice. These wider issues helped shape the Commonwealth's response to apartheid sport and interposed at critical junctures to disturb its resolve in sustaining the sporting boycott.

The chapter will assess the importance of the election, in 1975, of the Commonwealth's second Secretary-General, Shridath 'Sonny' Ramphal, as a significant diplomatic actor. The study will explore growing turmoil in international sport over apartheid and the explosion of internal South African resistance, particularly the Soweto student revolt. In assessing the diplomatic methods which secured the adoption of the 1977 Gleneagles Agreement on apartheid in sport, the study will explore its impact in the Commonwealth and internationally. It will ask whether the Commonwealth's contribution to fighting apartheid in sport, including internationalising the Gleneagles Agreement, constituted a significant intervention against apartheid. It will also compare the Commonwealth's diplomatic methods over sport with the interventions the Commonwealth made in 1979-80 over the Rhodesian settlement and the birth of Zimbabwe.

Chapter 3, which addresses the third case study, traces the new impetus given to the Commonwealth's campaign against apartheid following peace in Zimbabwe. In considering the 1985 Bahamas CHOGM, and the adoption of the Nassau Declaration on South Africa, the chapter will explore the impact of the 1986 Commonwealth EPG Mission to South Africa to negotiate the end of apartheid. It will ask whether, in its discussions with Mandela from his prison cell as well as with the ANC in exile and with the government, the Commonwealth mission can now be seen as part of a pattern of largely covert pre-negotiations which took place from 1986-1989. The ostensible failure of the EPG's mission resulted in a critical report which became a penguin

bestseller and provided impetus to the widening campaign for economic sanctions. It will test the significance of the Commonwealth's attempts to 'internationalise' sanctions, including financial measures; and, in examining the Commonwealth's own actions, will ask if these were anything more than symbolic. It concludes by assessing whether, taken together, this twin-track approach, of sanctions and negotiations, constituted a significant contribution to the international anti-apartheid campaign.

Chapter 4 considers the fourth and final case study. It assesses the significance of the 1991 Harare CHOGM (which Mandela attended), not only in terms of the association's new strategic path in relation to South Africa but the internal structural changes which ended the 'binary' Commonwealth and sought a new unity based on the values adopted in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration. The chapter will examine the Commonwealth Secretary-General's mission to South Africa, in November 1991, to begin a new process of Commonwealth engagement with South Africa. It will discuss how this led the Commonwealth to adopt a new strategy of facilitation and conflict resolution, particularly in the face of alarming degrees of internal violence and the negative impact this had on the faltering negotiation process. The study will assess the role of international observers, especially from the Commonwealth, in addressing the violence, monitoring the 1994 elections and assisting change.

Specific issues raised by the chapter will be the Commonwealth's role in mediation and conflict resolution in this changed setting (of local, inter-party and inter-communal conflict) and how this relates to the diplomatic mediation practised in other aspects of the Commonwealth's involvement. The study will also interrogate South Africa's decision to re-join the Commonwealth (in 1994), after a break of over thirty years, exploring how this decision was made, for what reasons and with what expectations. In considering this final case study, there will be an assessment of the significance of the Commonwealth's assistance to the process of transition as one of the four key interventions tested by the study.

The Conclusion will draw together the analysis of each of the four case studies and an overall assessment will be made of the distinctiveness and significance of the Commonwealth's collective contribution to the international campaign against apartheid.

CHAPTER 1: AFRIKANER NATIONALISM, APARTHEID AND SOUTH AFRICA'S COMMONWEALTH EXIT (1960-1961)

"I personally could win over the Dutch in the (Cape) colony and indeed all of the South African dominions in my term of office...without offending the English..You have only to sacrifice the ('interests of black Africans') absolutely and the game is easy."¹⁴⁹

Sir Alfred Milner, Cape Town, 1897.

"Britain forgot that you cannot run a Commonwealth as you ran an Empire"¹⁵⁰

Mrs Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Delhi, 1965.

1. Introduction

My first case study, forming the substance of chapter 1, leads up to and explores in depth South Africa's departure from the Commonwealth in 1961. This is chosen for several reasons. First, the literature tends to record South Africa's exit in straightforward terms: that it represented a clash between deeply entrenched institutional racism and an increasingly multiracial organisation embracing values that were sharply at variance with those of the South African state. It is also presented as being the first time an international organisation had challenged the philosophy behind article 2(7) of the UN Charter (protecting domestic state actions from wider interference), thereby heralding a change of tone and purpose at the UN, a more engaged Commonwealth and South Africa's increasing pariah status. Reference is sometimes made to the unexpectedly warm reception that Verwoerd received on his return from London to South Africa and to the consolidation of Afrikaner power thereafter once its ultimate objective had been rather unexpectedly achieved. While I do not suggest that this overall view is invalid, I argue that the reality is more complex and nuanced than is generally perceived.

¹⁴⁹ Correspondence from Sir Alfred Milner to Herbert Asquith, 18 November 1897, The Milner Papers quoted in Janet Robertson, *Liberalism in South Africa 1948–1963* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), Introduction.

¹⁵⁰ Speech by Mrs Pandit, Lok Sabha, 24 September 1965, quoted in Nicholas Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience (Vol 2): From British to multiracial Commonwealth* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982), 241.

Second, the Commonwealth is keen to record South Africa's exit from the association as a signal triumph over racism. The Commonwealth's own version of events states: "At the 1961 summit...Commonwealth leaders confronted South Africa, bringing to a head many years of criticism and attempts to persuade it to reform its racial policies...The rest of the Commonwealth wanted nothing less than a willingness by South Africa to end apartheid." It concludes: "South Africa was, in effect, expelled, the first of many expulsions from international councils."¹⁵¹ This is undoubtedly the prevailing Commonwealth narrative, but closer interrogation reveals a much more nuanced perspective. Whatever the differing motivation of Commonwealth member countries, until 1961 their combined efforts did not suggest a concerted and determined assault on the growing apartheid state, as evidenced above. Nor would it be accurate to characterise South Africa as being 'expelled' from the organisation, although Verwoerd gloried in "the triumph of Commonwealth expulsion" which had created "a happy day for South Africa."¹⁵²

There is little evidence of collective Commonwealth action over apartheid before that date, although independent India, then a Commonwealth Dominion, had in the nascent United Nations vigorously opposed racial discrimination in South Africa even before the formal advent of apartheid in 1948. Even so, despite the growing opposition of India, Pakistan and Ceylon to apartheid, I point to evidence that they saw the UN, rather than the Commonwealth, as the appropriate forum for contesting the issue. It was only in 1960, after Sharpeville, that South Africa's racial policies were first discussed in the Commonwealth itself and only a year later, in 1961, that Commonwealth leaders pushed their criticisms of apartheid to a decisive conclusion.¹⁵³ I also refer to evidence that, despite the radical change in the Commonwealth initiated by the 1949 London Declaration (and the explicit rejection by the UK of a two-tier membership), Britain effectively operated a two-speed organisation, with the newer members denied military, intelligence and other information deemed too sensitive to be shared.

¹⁵¹ Commonwealth Secretariat, *Racism in Southern Africa: The Commonwealth stand* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1987), 6.

¹⁵² James Hamill, "South Africa and the Commonwealth," *Contemporary Review* 267:1554 (1995): 16.

¹⁵³ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 67.

A third reason to focus on South Africa's departure from the Commonwealth is to explore more deeply the perspective of other parties to these events. The Nationalists had long argued for an independent white South Africa, as an Afrikaner Republic outside the Commonwealth, as the ultimate ideal. One of the party's foremost ideologues was Hendrik Verwoerd and, on assuming the office of Prime Minister in 1958, he lost little time in setting out his ambition for a republic.¹⁵⁴ Even if there were more immediate objectives, "he had planted a seed and could afford to bide his time."¹⁵⁵ Why was he therefore prepared to offer South Africa's white electorate a republic *within* the Commonwealth, and how genuine was his commitment to South Africa's enduring Commonwealth membership?

The isolation of South Africa after 1961, as it was steadily ostracised internationally, is frequently presented as a key factor in hastening apartheid's demise. At the same time, there are those who argue that it had the opposite effect; that, in common with other totalitarian regimes of the century, external condemnation and the cutting of international linkages, merely served to bolster the regime and increase its psychological grip over its population. Indeed, a focus on this seemingly favourable outcome for Afrikaner nationalism appears to support this narrative. Vatcher argues that: "The establishment of the Republic and the departure of South Africa from the Commonwealth climaxed the development of Afrikaner nationalism as an organised political force."¹⁵⁶ While in the 1960 referendum campaign Verwoerd had been prepared to offer white English-speaking voters a continuing presence in the Commonwealth as the price for their support for a republic, there were aspects of membership which jarred. Apart from the pressure to recognise black diplomats from Africa's newly emergent nations, the connection to the British monarchy (with the Queen as Head of the Commonwealth) remained awkward. As some Afrikaners saw it: "For England, the Queen is a symbol of unity; for South Africa, disunity."¹⁵⁷ Verwoerd's triumph in the referendum and the break with the Commonwealth, argues Hepple, wrote "his name indelibly in South Africa's history."¹⁵⁸ Some suggest that these events therefore encouraged the development of a South African patriotism,

¹⁵⁴ Kruger, *The Making of a Nation*, 315.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 316.

¹⁵⁶ Henry Vatcher, *White Laager: The Rise of Afrikaner Nationalism* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1965), 177.

¹⁵⁷ Vatcher, *White Laager*, 170.

¹⁵⁸ Hepple, *Verwoerd*, 185.

despite the uncompromising racial context in which they were set. Today, in contemporary South Africa, there is evidence that the republic and the exit from the Commonwealth is widely characterised as the final break with British colonialism and imperialism. Van Vuuren's recent reference to "independence from the British Commonwealth in 1961" is a case in point.¹⁵⁹ Given this shared context, reference to these events in the literature of African liberation is often absent or presented in dismissive terms. However, while African leaders held no particular brief for the Commonwealth or the British monarchy, their involvement in the campaign against South Africa marked an important moment.

Undoubtedly, Verwoerd had hoped to enter the referendum campaign having resolved the technicality of lapsing Commonwealth membership. To this end, at the 1960 Commonwealth summit Verwoerd's foreign minister, Eric Louw, had tried to extract from Commonwealth leaders' confirmation of South Africa's membership in the event of a change in its constitutional status. Leaders dashed these hopes (faced with what they considered a hypothetical question) and it was clear that a protracted two-stage decision-making process would be necessary. First, the Commonwealth, in or out, would become a bitterly contested issue in the referendum itself. Second, only once a decision in favour of the republic had been reached could the procedures requiring reaffirmation of Commonwealth membership be triggered. A five-month period therefore opened up after the referendum result before matters could be brought to a conclusion. This was to mean that Verwoerd's sincerity in fulfilling his promise on South Africa's continuing Commonwealth membership would be tested in discussion with other Commonwealth leaders.

It also presented the non-white majority – black African, Indian and coloured South Africans, who had been excluded from the referendum - with a real opportunity to use the intervening months to extend their campaign. At home, they could seek to use the change to a republic to raise far more fundamental issues, about the rights and status of all South Africa's citizens. Abroad, the impending decision by the Commonwealth in London would provide the chance to work with newly independent African and Asian

¹⁵⁹ Van Vuuren, *Apartheid, Guns and Money*, 6.

Commonwealth countries, and with the emerging global anti-apartheid movement, to bring external pressure to bear.¹⁶⁰

In widening the scope of the inquiry to include the part the Commonwealth, as an issue, played in the Republic referendum campaign, and the implications of the two-stage decision-making process on South Africa's membership as it impacted on the eventual outcome, I hope to explore hitherto neglected aspects of the matter. This includes looking at the campaigning role of the African liberation groups (and the leadership of Nelson Mandela), and their links with emerging independent African nations in membership of the Commonwealth. My research also covers the links with the embryonic global anti-apartheid movement and its role in the campaign, including the testimony of some of those involved. Further, the chapter takes a much more critical view of the 1961 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting itself. Far from being a carefully prepared application of agreed principle, I argue that the Commonwealth's collective actions were disorganised, unpredictable and could so easily have turned out otherwise (with what would have been catastrophic consequences for the 'new' Commonwealth). I conclude that the 1961 outcome was not a product of the 'new' Commonwealth but rather the messy and dying convulsions of the old 'imperial' Commonwealth. Even so, it provided a pointer to the unique diplomatic method which the Commonwealth was to claim in the decades that followed.

Finally, the chapter seeks to analyse the impact of the outcome on South Africa's internal politics: principally, the triumph of Afrikaner ideals and the strengthening of the apartheid state which had unwittingly resulted. I also explore the disintegration of the English-Speaking White opposition and the consolidation of most white voters behind the Nationalists; the polarisation of internal conflict; and the disappearance of largely outdated concepts of the Commonwealth, held by many, which were now steadily discarded. Externally, South Africa had taken a step into the isolation which in the end it would find suffocating – even as British ambivalence over its relationship with white South Africa, and covert military, diplomatic and intelligence linkages, continued.

For this particular case study, there are no shared Commonwealth records as such for the period in question (given that it pre-dates the formation in 1965 of the principal

¹⁶⁰ Stuart Mole, "Mandela and the Commonwealth," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 106:6 (2017): 612-3.

Commonwealth institutions). I have therefore drawn on primary sources in the UK's National Archives for evidence of the approach of the British Government and its relationship with other Commonwealth governments. I have also examined material in the Anti-Apartheid Movement collection in the Bodleian Library, Oxford and included relevant testimony from the Commonwealth Oral History Project at London University. In South Africa, I have consulted official government papers in the national archives in Pretoria, and the private papers of a variety of South African political figures and organisations available through the William Cullen Library, at Witwatersrand University and the UCT archives at the University of Cape Town.

2. The post-war Commonwealth

In May 1944, as the allied forces prepared for 'Operation Neptune' and the invasion of Nazi-occupied France, Commonwealth Prime Ministers met in London. In addition to the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill (who was in the chair), those also present were John Curtin, of Australia; W.L. Mackenzie King, of Canada; Peter Fraser, of New Zealand; and Field Marshal Jan Smuts, of the Union of South Africa. Ireland was not represented, being neutral in the conflict and because, with the adoption of the 1937 constitution, many in Ireland considered that they were no longer part of the British Commonwealth¹⁶¹. British India, with 3.4 million personnel under arms, had as its spokesman General Sir Hari Singh, the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir. Sir Godfrey Huggins, the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, was also present at Churchill's invitation (notwithstanding the territory's status as a self-governing British colony).

The purpose of the meeting was to endorse the conclusions of the Moscow Declaration, laying out the war aims of the allies. The mood was upbeat. The five Prime Ministers signed a declaration which proclaimed: "Though hard and bitter battles lie ahead, we now see before us...the sure presage of our future victory."¹⁶² Their declaration concluded with the following stirring words: "We rejoice in our inheritance

¹⁶¹ While the British government took the view that Section 3 of Ireland's 1936 External Relations Act maintained a clear constitutional link with the British Crown, and therefore the Commonwealth, Irish political leaders expressed a different perspective. This is captured by an exchange between Viscount Jowitt, British Lord Chancellor, and Sean McBride, Ireland's Minister of External Affairs, at a Commonwealth meeting at the Palais de Chaillot, Paris, 16 November 1948, and contained in a Memorandum by the Lord Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations on Eire's future relations with the Commonwealth.

TNA, C.P. (48) 272, B.

¹⁶² Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 13.

of loyalties and ideals, and proclaim our sense of kinship to one another...We believe that when victory is won and peace returns, this same free association, this inherent unity of purpose, will make us able to do further service to mankind.”¹⁶³

Yet, as Kumarasingham points out, “the pre-1947 Commonwealth was unabashedly an imperial organisation concerned with defence obligations, (and) with an overarching Crown acting as the formal constitutional denominator.”¹⁶⁴ Although the Dominions were self-governing within a free association of nations, they shared with the United Kingdom and each other both common values and a rich historical experience. All had achieved statehood and their present form as a result of mass, white migration from the British Isles (though also from other European nations) to the ‘new’ world. These British white settler nations had sustained a formidable military alliance through two world wars. Although Vimy Ridge and Gallipoli had fired a growing sense of national identity and an increasing desire to direct their own destinies, the Dominions, almost without exception, also wanted to retain an overt connection to their British rootstock. This kinship sprang from a largely common, and certainly unmistakably white, source; notwithstanding the indigenous peoples that the nation-builders had encountered and largely suppressed in the course of their mission. Only in the case of the Union of South Africa was the reality rather different. There, the overriding preoccupation of its leaders had been with divisions and tensions between the white Afrikaans and white English communities, exacerbated by bitter memories of conflict and conquest. In truth, South Africa was no ‘white’ Dominion, since most of its citizens were ‘natives’ and non-whites – black Africans, Indians and those of mixed race, otherwise known as ‘Coloureds’.

None of this was generally apparent outside South Africa in the aftermath of an exhausting global conflict. Indeed, South Africa’s Prime Minister and war leader, Field Marshal Jan Christian Smuts, felt that the British Commonwealth had much to offer a post-conflict world and a nascent United Nations. “Elements of the future world government...are already in operation in our Commonwealth of nations”, he declared. It was, he argued, “the only successful experiment in international government”¹⁶⁵,

¹⁶³ Ibid., 14.

¹⁶⁴ Harshan Kumarasingham, “The ‘New Commonwealth’: A New Zealand perspective on India joining the Commonwealth,” *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 95:385 (2006): 443.

¹⁶⁵ Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, 37.

echoing Zimmern, Gilbert Murray and others who had seen the Commonwealth as ‘a world experiment.’¹⁶⁶

Barely a year after the end of hostilities in Europe and nine months since his own ejection from office as Prime Minister, Winston Churchill used a visit to Fulton, Missouri, in the United States to warn of the dangers of a new conflict. Speaking alongside President Harry Truman, who had introduced him, Churchill declared: “From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.”¹⁶⁷ Humanity, so recently emerged from a devastating global conflict, must be protected from the “two giant marauders, war and tyranny”, he argued. While this should be achieved through the United Nations and respecting its Charter, “neither the sure prevention of war, nor the continuous rise of the world organisation will be gained without...the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples,” Churchill affirmed.¹⁶⁸ Such an alliance was not, in his view, at variance with the need for overriding loyalty to the United Nations. Rather, it was, he argued, the means by which the world organisation would achieve its full stature and authority. The “sinews of peace” (the title of Churchill’s Fulton speech) comprised a good understanding of the Soviet Union under the auspices of the United Nations, which in turn would be underpinned by the combined strength and security of the English-speaking world.

Commonwealth countries played a significant part in the UN’s early beginnings. *The Round Table* commented: “What is important for British readers to consider is the markedly polyphonic contribution to the concert of nations which has been offered during 1946, not so much by the United Kingdom as by the members of the British Commonwealth. Both in the United Nations Organisations and in the Peace Conference of Paris the present year has seen the emergence of the British Dominions to unprecedented prominence on the stage of world affairs.”¹⁶⁹

That positive view was later echoed by John Holmes, the Director-General of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs. “The UN and the Commonwealth are the two institutions which have profoundly affected the history of the world since 1945,” he

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 85.

¹⁶⁷ Winston Churchill, “Sinews of Peace”, Speech at Westminster College, Fulton MO, 5 March 1946, accessed 19 June 2019, <https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/sinews-of-peace-iron-curtain-speech.html>.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ “Partnership and policy,” *The Round Table*, 3.

argued.¹⁷⁰ In his view, the Commonwealth, as a group, proved an active force during the first decade of the United Nations. First, there was an unofficial agreement at San Francisco that one of the six non-permanent seats on the Security Council should go to a Commonwealth member country (other than the United Kingdom). When the Security Council was expanded in the 1960s and a geographic basis established for the rotating membership, the Commonwealth continued to be well represented. As Ingram has argued: “The Commonwealth voice in the Council, therefore, in practice has not diminished; if anything, it has increased.”¹⁷¹ Second, there was also a provision for there to be a Commonwealth Vice-President of the General Assembly (a practice that lasted until the early 1960s). Third, while it did not claim to be an organised caucus, Commonwealth countries met as a group, and discussed the developing agenda, without necessarily arriving at common positions. It was thus perceived as a presence in the United Nations working for good. As Lord Greenhill, the former Head of the British Diplomatic Service, put it, the Commonwealth can be “the leaven in the lump.”¹⁷²

In the eyes of some (at any rate, before the intractable problems of the Rhodesian rebellion began to intrude) Britain also offered a model for how the de-colonisation might be achieved. In the view of Holmes: “As an institution, the Commonwealth set the pattern of the UN’s concept of colonial development and a model, imperfect but tangible, of interracial community.”¹⁷³ Iain Macleod, who became British Colonial Secretary in 1959, had much earlier set out the Doctrine of Lesser Risk: That it was dangerous for the de-colonisation process to go too fast – but still more dangerous for it to go too slow. As his biographer, Nigel Fisher, put it: “We could have postponed independence, but only by the rule of the gun and at the risk of bloodshed. As it was, we devolved power too quickly but with goodwill.”¹⁷⁴

In the immediate post-war years, an exhausted and bankrupt Britain had, in Palestine, Kenya and India, had a taste for just how costly and painful attempting to hold back nationalist forces might be, let alone in circumstances, such as in Palestine, where the

¹⁷⁰ John Holmes, “The Commonwealth and the UN,” in *A Decade of the Commonwealth 1955-1964*, ed. W.B. Hamilton, Kenneth Robinson and C.D.W. Goodwin (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1966), 16.

¹⁷¹ Ingram, *The Commonwealth at Work*, 33.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁷³ Holmes, “The Commonwealth and the UN,” 16.

¹⁷⁴ Nigel Fisher, *Iain Macleod* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1977), 143.

incompatibility of the United Kingdom's promises and commitments in various quarters made a peaceful resolution well-nigh impossible. The British Foreign Secretary, Ernie Bevin, whose reputation was damaged by his handling of the Palestine issue, later declared that it "all goes back to the 1917 dishonesty of inconsistent promises to the two sides."¹⁷⁵ The bombing of the King David's Hotel in Jerusalem (the administrative and military headquarters of the British mandate) on 22 July 1946 by the Irgun, with the loss of ninety-one lives (mainly local Arabs), and with forty-six injured, had a profound impact. It encouraged the United Kingdom in the belief that the Mandate was 'unworkable', and that the search for a solution should be entrusted to the UN. The withdrawal of British forces quickly followed. There was a diminishing appetite for holding down imperial possessions by force of arms. As it was, the British public's growing sense of unease about the imperial role was considerably aggravated by the 1959 Hola scandal during the Mau Mau insurgency in Kenya.¹⁷⁶ At the Hola detention camp, eleven Mau Mau prisoners had been beaten to death and many dozens more left with serious injuries. However, it was only in 2011, with the 'discovery' of a large cache of secret colonial files at Hanslope Park, near London, that the full scale of systematic colonial violence was laid bare. The files on Kenya documented "graphic accounts of torture, rape, and murder", as well as of extrajudicial hangings.¹⁷⁷ This led the British Foreign Secretary, William Hague, to admit to parliament in June 2013 that "Kenyans were subject to torture and ill-treatment", prompting the government's "sincere regret."¹⁷⁸ The 'migrated files', unearthed largely due to the tenacity and skill of David Anderson, revealed similar stories in Cyprus, Malaya and elsewhere. For Murphy, "at the heart of this bloody aspect of imperialism was a vacuum of legitimacy" which troubled many, including within the colonial system.¹⁷⁹

The viability of an expanded 'imperial' Commonwealth, blending old Dominions with new, also faced profound challenges in the post-war years. First, the 1947 Indo-Pakistan conflict, over the allegiance of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, confirmed the view that the concept of the Commonwealth as a military or defensive

¹⁷⁵ Cabinet Secretary's notebook, Meeting of the British Cabinet, 12 January 1949, TNA CAB 195/7.

¹⁷⁶ Susan Williams, *Colour Bar: The triumph of Seretse Khama and his Nation* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), 309.

¹⁷⁷ Caroline Elkins, "Looking beyond Mau Mau: Archiving Violence in the Era of Decolonization," *American Historical Review* 120:3 (2015): 854.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 856.

¹⁷⁹ Murphy, *The Myth of the Commonwealth*, 107.

alliance was increasingly problematic. A report of a Cabinet Committee, circulated in advance of a meeting of the British Cabinet on 28 October 1948, highlighted the issue: “In matters of defence, it is our hope that in war the self-governing members of the Commonwealth will usually be found fighting together on the same side and never be found fighting on opposite sides.”¹⁸⁰ The report, in acknowledging the reality of Ireland’s wartime neutrality, continued: “In recent months we have faced the possibility – hitherto regarded as even more unthinkable – of war between two members of the Commonwealth.”¹⁸¹ A Commonwealth relationship in defence terms could not therefore be defined in ways which would be generally acceptable, the report concluded. Indeed, Jammu and Kashmir was to be the cockpit for three further wars between Pakistan and India.

Secondly, the war in Kashmir tested the notion that the Dominions of the British Commonwealth were “united by common allegiance to the Crown.”¹⁸² Ever since the passing of the Statute of Westminster, the divisibility of the Crown had been conceded, with the British monarch given different legal expression in each of the Dominions. The conflict between the two new Dominions of Pakistan and India was therefore also a case of King George VI being at war with himself. This acute dilemma did not escape the attention of General Sir Douglas Gracey, the Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army. He refused the order of Muhammad Al-Jinnah (then Pakistan’s Governor-General) to send troops into Kashmir on the grounds that Indian and Pakistan forces had taken an Oath of Allegiance to King George VI, as had he, and that therefore conflict between the two was not possible. However, Gracey’s former Commander-in-Chief, Lord Mountbatten, by then Governor-General of India, had no such inhibitions in authorising the despatch of Indian forces, once Jammu and Kashmir’s new constitutional status in India had been proclaimed.

Third, India was embarking on the adoption of a new constitution which would make the country a sovereign, democratic republic. This was at variance with the Statute of Westminster which stated that “the Crown is the symbol of the free association of the Members of the British Commonwealth of Nations” and that the Dominions were united

¹⁸⁰ Third Report: “Commonwealth Relationship,” by Norman Brook, presented to Cabinet, 21 May 1948, TNA, CAB/129/30.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Annex 1, 1.

¹⁸² Preamble, Statute of Westminster (1931), accessed 5 May 2020, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1931/4/pdfs/ukpga_19310004-en.pdf, 1.

by a common allegiance to the British Crown. Despite this requirement, Nehru wanted India to remain in the Commonwealth as a republic.¹⁸³ Some wondered why India would wish to retain its membership. As Mansergh put it: “Certainly, the fact that South Africa, as a member of the Commonwealth, enforced racial segregation as a matter of political principle by itself, seemed to many leading Congressmen in 1947 why India should secede once the transitional advantages of membership had been reaped.”¹⁸⁴ It was a question which Jawaharlal Nehru was later to address directly in a debate, on 16 May 1949, in the Indian Constituent Assembly. He was asked: “How can you join a Commonwealth in which there is racial discrimination and there are other things happening to which we object?” He admitted that this was a fair and troubling question. But he explained: “When we have an alliance with a nation or group of nations, it does not mean that we accept their other policies. It does not mean that we commit ourselves in any way to something that they may do.”¹⁸⁵

In the course of 1948, the UK Government grappled with how the Commonwealth might reconcile allegiance to the Crown with republican status. It was clear that, with the Berlin blockade by the Soviet Union precipitating the first crisis of the cold war, the United Kingdom was anxious not to lose India and Pakistan from the Commonwealth.” If...India and Pakistan should feel compelled to withdraw from the Commonwealth, its prestige and influence in the world would be seriously impaired”, declared a note from the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brook. He continued: “And, internally, the effect might be, not to reinforce the cohesion of the remaining members of the Commonwealth, but to encourage the forces already working in the direction of separation and disintegration.”¹⁸⁶ Did the answer lie in creating a “Commonwealth of British and Associated Nations”? The advantages of such a scheme, in the eyes of the Committee on Commonwealth Relations, were that it would not tamper with the basic requirement of common allegiance to the Crown; it would retain the ‘British’ prefix to the Commonwealth, for those linked by ‘sentiment and emotion’; and it might bring a wider grouping of nations into some kind of association with Britain and the Dominions.

¹⁸³ Clement Attlee, Memorandum to Cabinet on “The Commonwealth Relationship,” 26 October 1948, TNA, CAB/129/30, 2.

¹⁸⁴ Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience (II)*, 146.

¹⁸⁵ Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, “The Commonwealth Relationship,” 16 June 1949, TNA, CAB/129/35, 15-16.

¹⁸⁶ Fourth Report: “Commonwealth Relationship,” by Norman Brook, presented to Cabinet, 21 July 1948, TNA, CAB/129/30, Annex II, 4.

On the other hand, the Committee were troubled by the fact that “a refusal to contemplate some alternative form of association other than that devised in the interests of a group of British communities is incompatible with the aims of our Colonial policy, which holds out to peoples who are largely non-European the ultimate goal of self-government within the Commonwealth.”¹⁸⁷ It was difficult to see how a two-tiered system would work in practice and there was concern less some ‘British’ Dominions (such as South Africa or even Canada) might prefer ‘associated’ status rather than remaining in the inner circle. There were, in any case, difficulties in offering the outer circle of associated states any material benefits not otherwise available to foreign states. There was the issue of Commonwealth consultation, long understood to be a defining feature of the association. However, the United Kingdom (responsible for the organisation’s administration) already consulted only when and with whom it chose to and feared greater definition. “The United Kingdom Government would still find it necessary to exercise discretion in deciding the basis of consultation with other Commonwealth countries.”¹⁸⁸ Even more alarming was the thought that a new association would have to be held together by some sort of defining charter, including a provision for the expulsion of those who abused its provisions (something which was finally achieved with the signing of the Commonwealth Charter by the Queen in 2013.)¹⁸⁹

With no clear alternative strategy, the Cabinet were left tinkering with a re-definition of ‘common allegiance’ to the Crown. This conclusion was reinforced by consultations with Canada, Australia and New Zealand. While all were ready to re-visit the nature of the Commonwealth relationship, “they were uneasy about the possible consequences for the Commonwealth of having admitted to full membership three Asiatic countries whose peoples do not share the common heritage and sentiment which are the strongest of the bonds uniting the older members of the Commonwealth”. New Zealand’s Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, who had enthusiastically welcomed India as an independent Commonwealth dominion in 1947, was now alarmed by these latest

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹⁸⁹ The Commonwealth Charter, setting out the core values of the association, including democracy, human rights and the rule of law, was adopted on 19 December 2013 and signed by Queen Elizabeth II, as Head of the Commonwealth, on 11 March 2013 (Commonwealth Day). Formal provision for the suspension or expulsion of a member country, for serious and persistent violation of the Commonwealth’s fundamental principles, was contained in the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme of 1995.

developments. Kumarasingham describes him as fearful of losing “a Commonwealth moored in defence ties and Crown collegiality to the bicephalous monster of Indian neutrality and republicanism.”¹⁹⁰

Nevertheless, leaders of the ‘old’ Commonwealth did not want to see these countries follow Burma in seceding from the association and agreed that “no effort should be spared to retain India, Pakistan and Ceylon within the Commonwealth...(and)...some constitutional anomalies would be a small price to pay” for their continuing involvement. Even so, whatever concessions these might be, they should “in no circumstances be allowed to impair or disturb the existing relations between the ‘central’ members of the Commonwealth (the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand).”¹⁹¹ Perhaps the ‘two-tier’ Commonwealth was alive and well after all.

The 1948 Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Meeting, hosted by the British Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, in No.10 Downing Street, saw the attendance for the first time of the Prime Ministers of India, Pakistan and Ceylon. The meeting’s final communiqué remarked that: “Their presence symbolised the extension of the bounds of democratic freedom which reflects the spirit and steadfast purpose of the Commonwealth.” It continued: “This blending of the West and the East in a lofty task of building a lasting peace on the foundations of freedom, justice and economic prosperity provides a new hope for harassed mankind.”¹⁹² Even so, pressure was mounting for some kind of solution to India’s looming republicanism, and Clement Attlee reported to his Cabinet: “During the past two weeks I and some of my colleagues have been discussing with Pandit Nehru the possibility of devising some satisfactory constitutional link, preferably through the Crown, which would be acceptable to public opinion in India.”¹⁹³

This was the task of the 1949 Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ meeting, gathered in London once more, barely six months from their last conference. Even so, it was clear that Nehru was the lynchpin in arriving at any solution. Referring to discussions in advance of the meeting, Nehru said: “I am afraid I am a bad bargainer. I am not used

¹⁹⁰ Kumarasingham, “A New Zealand Perspective on India Joining the Commonwealth,” 443.

¹⁹¹ Report by Cabinet Secretary on consultations with Canada, Australia and New Zealand, in “Commonwealth Relationship,” 14 September 1948, TNA, CR (48) 5, 13.

¹⁹² Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 26.

¹⁹³ Memorandum by the Prime Minister, “Commonwealth Relationship,” 26 October 1948, TNA, CP (48) 244, 2.

to the ways of the market place...I think it is far better to gain the goodwill of the other party, to come to a decision in friendship and goodwill, than to gain a word here or there at the cost of ill-will. So I approached the problem in this spirit.”¹⁹⁴ Despite this, it was clear that any solution involving a limitation on India’s national sovereignty, however notional, would be unacceptable. This scotched the hope of the UK and various Dominions that India might accept the King’s jurisdiction in its external relations.¹⁹⁵ But some recognition of the Crown as a symbol of unity and therefore as ‘head’ of the organisation had been mooted for some time.¹⁹⁶ That said, the British Cabinet appreciated the dangers of elevating the Crown into an obstacle, rather than an opportunity. Cabinet members recognised that “although the Crown had been the bond of unity in the Commonwealth, it would be a disservice to the Crown if Commonwealth Ministers allowed a position to develop in which the Crown was made to appear a stumbling-block to the continued cohesion of the Commonwealth.”¹⁹⁷

The eventual decision, which was unanimous, built upon the wording of common allegiance and free association contained in the Statute of Westminster, but with a twist. “The Government of India have, however, declared and affirmed India’s desire to continue her full membership of the Commonwealth of Nations and her acceptance of The King as the symbol of the free association of its independent member nations and as such Head of the Commonwealth.”¹⁹⁸ In emphasising the King’s symbolic role, the formulation appeared to deflect any suggestion that the arrangement impinged on India’s national sovereignty. Afterwards, Nehru explained to the Indian Parliament: “We would not deny that cooperation simply because in the past we had to fight and thus carry this trail of our past *karma* along with us. We had to wash out that past with all its evil...the fact that we have begun this new type of association with a touch of healing will be good for us and good for them and, I think, good for the world.”¹⁹⁹

Of course, the arrangement was framed as a response to India’s request alone and this immediately prompted a hostile reaction in large parts of Pakistan where many felt they had been ‘outmanoeuvred’ and that Pakistan should forthwith declare herself an

¹⁹⁴ Speech by Pandit Nehru in the Indian Constituent Assembly, 16 May 1949, in Brook, “The Commonwealth Relationship”, TNA, CAB/129/35, 17.

¹⁹⁵ Brook, “Commonwealth Relationship: Draft Principles,” 14 September 1948, TNA, CAB/129/30, 17.

¹⁹⁶ Brook, “Commonwealth Relationship” (Third Report), 5.

¹⁹⁷ Conclusions of Cabinet, 3 March 1949, TNA, CAB 128/15.

¹⁹⁸ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 29.

¹⁹⁹ *Hindustan Times* (17 May 1949), 18.

Islamic Republic.²⁰⁰ However the notion that the agreement was ‘not a precedent’ was clearly unrealistic. As Sir Peter Marshall, a former Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General put it, the use of any such disclaimer was “normally a sign that its disregard is accepted as inevitable.”²⁰¹



Fig.3 Commonwealth leaders meet George VI, Buckingham Palace, 1949. Commonwealth Secretariat.

The seeds of a new association had indeed been sown: the unspoken notion of ‘British’ rootstock as an essential pre-condition for ‘central’ members had been abandoned and with it the ‘British’ pre-fix to the now preferred title “Commonwealth of Nations.” The terminology of ‘Dominions’ began to be supplanted by the more neutral term, ‘Commonwealth member countries.’ Neither republicanism nor race would now be impediments to the growth of this new Commonwealth – though its Prime Ministers had not begun to consider the implications of what had been started in the adoption of

²⁰⁰ Brook, “The Commonwealth Relationship,” TNA, CAB/129/35, 7.

²⁰¹ Peter Marshall, “The Commonwealth at 60,” *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 98:404 (2009): 536.

the London Declaration. Many thought it an ingenious solution, and the agreement was widely welcomed in the United Kingdom as it was in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, India, and Ceylon. Others were more fearful of a formula that, legally, has been described as “pragmatic nonsense.”²⁰² Robert Menzies, the former Australian Prime Minister, told an Empire Day rally in Melbourne that the formula reduced the status of the Crown from “pulsing reality to a heartless lawyer’s document.” He felt Commonwealth Prime Ministers “had thrown away all the elements which made the British Commonwealth of Nations a united people.”²⁰³ This was echoed by those in the ‘old’ Dominions who deplored the loss of the ‘British’ prefix.

Was the adoption of the London Declaration therefore the start of the modern Commonwealth, as many have claimed? In the eyes of the Commonwealth Secretariat, the 1949 Declaration was when “the modern Commonwealth was born”, with the agreement’s formulation providing the “crucible” for its emerging character.²⁰⁴ Marshall agrees that the practice of dating the Commonwealth from 1949 has become widespread.²⁰⁵ Craft alights upon the concluding sentence of the Declaration which speaks of “free and equal members of the Commonwealth of Nations, freely cooperating in the pursuit of peace, liberty and progress.”²⁰⁶ Craft sees this as evidence of the organisation’s “norm and values-based institutional character” and sees ‘peace, liberty and progress’ as the three enduring areas of its “principle mandate.”²⁰⁷ It was, he argues, a “simple, modest statement of the Commonwealth’s *raison d’être*.”²⁰⁸ This is a tempting but illusory approach. First, the British government explicitly rejected the idea that the declaration covering membership should include any statement of shared principles. In stressing the loose and informal nature of the Commonwealth, the Cabinet Secretary counselled that it would be “inexpedient to confront the self-governing members of the Commonwealth with a formal definition of

²⁰² Geoffrey Marshall, *Constitutional Conventions: The Rules and Forms of Political Accountability* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 170.

²⁰³ Memorandum by Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, “Reactions to the 1949 Commonwealth Declaration,” presented to Cabinet on 16 June 1949, TNA, CAB 129/35.

²⁰⁴ Commonwealth Secretariat, “Commonwealth celebrates 60th anniversary,” 2009, accessed 7 May 2020, <https://www.thecommonwealth.org/history-if-the-commonwealth/commonwealth-celebrates-60th-anniversary>.

²⁰⁵ Marshall, “The Commonwealth at 60,” 536.

²⁰⁶ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 29.

²⁰⁷ Craft, “Between the Idea and the Reality,” 102.

²⁰⁸ Hugh Craft, (former Australian diplomat), interview with the author, 3 August 2018, London.

the principles of their association.”²⁰⁹ By the same token, there could be no provision for expulsion.²¹⁰ This general approach had the concurrence of the ‘central’ members of the Commonwealth.²¹¹ Second, many recognised that the less definition, the better. To the extent that Commonwealth co-operation should be built about the practice of consultation, military cooperation or mutual aid, complexities and anomalies abounded and were better left unstated and unresolved. As a result, McIntyre contends that “a de facto ‘two-tier’ system of consultation emerged, especially in defence matters.”²¹² Third, several Commonwealth figures were involved in drafting the Preamble to the UN Charter, most notably Jan Smuts. Coming into force in October 1945, the preamble spoke of “saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war” and the need to maintain international peace and security; it set out its faith in fundamental human rights, including “equal rights of men and women, and of nations large and small”; and agreed to promote the “social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom”, by creating international machinery for the “economic and social advancement of all peoples.”²¹³ Coming nearly four years later, the Commonwealth’s reference to ‘peace, liberty and progress’ could scarcely be considered a plausible elaboration of the global agreement in the UN charter, much less the foundational document of an entirely new international organisation. The London Declaration was not therefore the start of a new Commonwealth: but it did ensure that the death of the old ‘imperial’ Commonwealth would only be a matter of time.

Another key component in the disintegration of the old order was apartheid South Africa and the presence in London of its new Prime Minister, Dr Daniel Malan. In a statement to the House of Assembly on his return, Malan said that the loss of India to the Commonwealth would have been harmful to trade and to the anti-Communist cause. He was in favour of the agreement providing there was “no meddling in any way with (the) freedom and independence of the various members of the Commonwealth.”²¹⁴ In a taste of what was to come, he added: “My opinion has always

²⁰⁹ Brook, “Commonwealth Relationship,” Third Report, 4.

²¹⁰ Brook, Fourth Report, 11.

²¹¹ Brook, “Commonwealth Relationship: Consultations with Canada, Australia and New Zealand,” 14 September 1948, TNA, CAB 129/30, 14.

²¹² W.David McIntyre, “Canada and the creation of the Commonwealth Secretariat, 1965,” *International Journal*, 53:4 (1998): 754.

²¹³ Preamble to the United Nations’ Charter, October 1945, accessed 9 May 2020, <https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/preamble>.

²¹⁴ “Reactions to the 1949 Commonwealth Declaration”, 8.

been...that the greatest unity will be obtained in the case of South Africa, too, when we become a Republic.”²¹⁵ Field Marshal Jan Smuts, the once Commonwealth colossus and now Leader of the Opposition, voiced his disquiet. It was “a leap in the dark” and reduced the Crown to a vague symbol. He thought grave risks had been taken in agreeing the Declaration.²¹⁶

3. South Africa and the rise of apartheid

Four years before, at the end of the Second World War, Smuts’ reputation, at home and abroad, could not have been higher. He had confounded his Nationalist opponents and, on 6 September 1939, had brought South Africa into the war against Germany. After the shock of the fall of Tobruk (with the surrender of a substantial proportion of South Africa’s fighting strength), he had steadied the recovery and helped deliver the great Allied victory at El-Alamein. He had gained a resounding electoral victory in South Africa in 1943, winning a large parliamentary majority. As peace approached, he and other Allied leaders looked forward to “a World Organisation to maintain peace and security...endowed with the necessary power and authority to prevent aggression and violence”.²¹⁷ After final victory, Smuts led the South African delegation to San Francisco and the birth of the United Nations, having helped draft the preamble to the U.N. Charter. South Africa’s “grand old man” had shown “inspired leadership”, enthused *The Round Table*.²¹⁸ Indeed, it added that “by international consent (he) belongs to the world as much as to South Africa.”²¹⁹ Yet he was soon to receive a rude awakening at the hands of the UN General Assembly (UNGA). He had some inkling of what was to come once he had arrived in New York, telling Jan Hofmeyr, his faithful lieutenant: “There is a growing, widespread opinion adverse to us. South Africans are getting into ill-odour, owing to the colour bar and wrong native publicity...I fear our going will not be good (and) I see a worsening atmosphere.”²²⁰

UNGA’s opening session, held in its temporary home at Lake Success in New York State, delivered a rebuff to South Africa on two counts. First, it rejected a bid by Smuts

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

²¹⁷ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 14.

²¹⁸ “South Africa: The Political Scene,” *The Round Table: A Quarterly Review of the politics of the British Commonwealth* 35:140 (1945), 376.

²¹⁹ “Partnership and policy”, *The Round Table*, 3.

²²⁰ Alan Paton, *Hofmeyr* (Cape Town, London, NY, Toronto: OUP, 1971), 338.

for the incorporation of the mandated territory of South-West Africa into the Union. South Africa had administered the former German colony of South-West Africa under a mandate granted by the Treaty of Versailles and the victorious powers. In arguing for incorporation, Smuts cited a unanimous resolution of the Legislative Assembly (a wholly European body) and by 'an informal referendum of the natives' which he argued showed a majority in favour.²²¹ UNGA rejected that view, "considering that the African inhabitants of South West Africa have not yet secured political autonomy or reached a stage of political development enabling them to express a considered opinion which the Assembly could recognise on such an important question as incorporation of their territory."²²² Accordingly, UNGA declined the request and instead invited South Africa to propose a trusteeship agreement within the UN system.

Second, a newly independent India had reacted to South Africa's passing of the Indian Act by tabling a resolution in the Steering Committee. The Round Table agreed that the law, "whatever its merits or faults, discriminates against Indians on grounds of race."²²³ Despite protests from Smuts that this was interference in South Africa's domestic affairs and therefore not permitted under Article 2(7) of the Charter, a stronger resolution was eventually carried by the General Assembly by thirty-two votes to fifteen, with seven abstentions. This initiative, led by Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Nehru's sister, was accompanied by India's severing of trade and diplomatic links with the Union. It was, comments Vineet Thakur, "a spectacular diplomatic performance" which outwitted the South African delegation.²²⁴ It also led to some sharp exchanges between the Indian and British delegations. The UK felt that an important point of principle about the Charter was at stake, which as a permanent member of the Security Council necessitated its support for South Africa. India, expecting at least neutrality, was aghast at Britain's "double-dealing."²²⁵ In any case, India argued that, under international law, it could legitimately claim to speak for South Africa's Indian citizens

²²¹ "South Africa and the United Nations," *The Round Table: A Quarterly Review of the politics of the British Commonwealth* 37:146 (1947): 133.

²²² Resolution A/RES/65(1): "Future Status of South West Africa," UN General Assembly, 14 December 1946, accessed 12 May 2018, [http://www.undocs.org/en/A/RES/65\(1\)](http://www.undocs.org/en/A/RES/65(1)).

²²³ "Colour Policy in South Africa," *The Round Table* 37:145 (1946): 32.

²²⁴ Vineet Thakur, "Jan Smuts, Jawaharlal Nehru and the Legacies of Liberalism," 18 May 2016, *E-International Relations*, accessed 11 May 2020, <http://www.e-ir.info/2018/05/18/jam-smuts-jawaharlal-nehru-and-the-legacies-of-liberalism/>, 1.

²²⁵ *The Hindustan Times*, 5 December 1946.

because citizenship rights had been denied to them.²²⁶ It was an early sign of what was to come, even before the formal advent of apartheid.

Indeed, the United Nations became the arena for expressing the tensions and disagreements between Commonwealth members over South Africa, rather than in the formal councils of the Commonwealth. In the ten votes on South Africa and apartheid in the General Assembly between 1946 and 1960, the UK and Australia consistently supported South Africa, as did Canada and New Zealand (though to a lesser degree).²²⁷ India, Pakistan and Ceylon were equally consistent in taking the opposite view. The UK also failed to support Security Council resolution 134 (1960) condemning South Africa in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre. It was not until the following year that, for the first time, the British Government voted for a UN resolution condemning apartheid.²²⁸

In additions to the UK's protestations that the UN charter required the principle of non-interference, the British may have also been influenced by the prevailing Commonwealth convention that members refrain from criticising their colleagues. This was both to respect the norms of collegiality but also because such a step risked provoking retaliation in kind (a feature which was to become more pronounced in years to come). India was certainly wary of providing Pakistan with any opportunity to raise the issue of Kashmir. More importantly, India knew it could at least win votes on the floor of the General Assembly while, at that time, any similar move in the Commonwealth would have been clearly futile, as well as procedurally invalid. Indeed, as late as 1957 (with Ghana attending for the first time) the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting of that year declared that it was: "Not their function...to record agreed decisions or formal resolutions."²²⁹ Attempts by Ghana to raise the issue of South-West Africa the following year were firmly rebuffed and consequently the Commonwealth's newest member supported a legal challenge by African countries at the International Court of Justice.²³⁰ Indeed, in the nine Commonwealth summit

²²⁶ Jonathan Hyslop, "'Segregation has fallen on evil days': Smuts' South Africa, global war, and transnational politics, 1939-46," *Journal of Global History* 7 (2012):458.

²²⁷ Resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly (1946-1960), accessed 18 October 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/documents/general-assembly-resolutions/index.html>.

²²⁸ Saul Dubow, "Smuts, the United Nations and the Rhetoric of Race and Rights," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43(1) (2008): 46.

²²⁹ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 55.

²³⁰ Mole, "Mandela and the Commonwealth," 612.

meetings held since the end of the Second World War, between 1945 and 1957, no mention is made of South Africa, apartheid or racial discrimination, even though these meetings recorded wide-ranging discussions, including on non-Commonwealth countries such as Indo-China, Korea, Japan, Israel, the United States of America and Germany. The Commonwealth's silence on apartheid was no more than the unity of the graveyard. It certainly did not suggest an organisation in the forefront of the anti-apartheid struggle.

If Smuts had been humiliated at the United Nations, he hoped that within South Africa his reputation, and that of his United Party, would be lifted by the 1947 Royal tour. Without the alchemy of "the crown's charisma", Smuts, the British government and the royal family feared that South Africa might be lost to the Commonwealth.²³¹ Leaving behind a UK in the grip of a bitterly cold winter, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, accompanied by the two young princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret, arrived in Cape Town at the end of February. This was only the second visit by a British sovereign to a self-governing member of the Commonwealth.²³² As well as opening the South African Parliament in Cape Town, the King and his family travelled ten thousand miles in two months, across South Africa and beyond, at the height of a baking hot summer. In addition to visiting the self-governing colony of Southern Rhodesia, the party also went to the Protectorate of Northern Rhodesia and to the High Commission territories (Basutoland, the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland). During the visit, Princess Elizabeth celebrated her 21st birthday and delivered a memorable broadcast to the Empire and Commonwealth from Cape Town. In it, she made her 'solemn act of dedication' in which she pledged: "I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong."²³³

The royal visit attracted large and friendly crowds, at a multiplicity of events, even if it was "soaked in segregation."²³⁴ It appeared unaffected by a call for a boycott by the

²³¹ Hilary Sapire, "African loyalism and its discontents: The Royal Tour of South Africa, 1947," *The Historical Journal* 54:1 (2011): 222.

²³² Statement, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs (Viscount Addison), 28 January 1947, House of Lords, Hansard vol.145 cols 165, accessed 16 May 2017, <http://www.hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1947-01-28/debates/7aada0le-4e55-454a-a795-cc28e0b6c223/TheRoyalVisitToSouthAfrica>. The first visit was to Canada, in 1939.

²³³ Princess Elizabeth, "Broadcast to the Commonwealth", 21 April 1947, Cape Town, BBC archives, accessed 5 May 2020, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/the-21st-birthday-of-princess-elizabeth/zmq68xs>.

²³⁴ Sapire, "African loyalism and its discontents," 226.

Natal Indian Congress (the body founded by Mahatma Gandhi) in protest against discriminatory government legislation; and by the more restrained disengagement from key events by Afrikaner Nationalist politicians. In the latter respect, the King made his homage to a number of potent Afrikaner symbols, moving one commentator to argue, rather optimistically, that the monarch was aligning himself with a movement “on which the future greatness of the South African Union most clearly depends ... that may eventually fuse the cultures of the two white races into a wider culture that will be beyond race, though not beyond nationality.”²³⁵ Black Africans, by and large, resisted the call for a boycott, with the traditional notion that monarchy stood above the failings of governments having a powerful appeal. Sapire contends that “the royal family’s graciousness, apparent colour-blindness and genuine interest in Africans” was contrasted with the rigid etiquette of South African society.²³⁶ Demonstrations of loyalty by Africans also signified “a powerful rejection of the *herrenvolk* mentality associated with the Afrikaner nationalist movement.”²³⁷

Smuts was reported to be in his element and “everywhere.”²³⁸ However, whatever the royal visit did for the monarchy and the reputation of South Africa’s future Queen (or the chimera of white ‘fusion’), its success had no appreciable impact in lifting the popularity of Smuts’ United Party (UP). Indeed, there were increasing indications of political change among the white electorate, leading a commentator to observe: “The political tide in the Union is certainly flowing at present against the Government of General Smuts and the United Party.”²³⁹ Assessing the prospects for the elections, *The Economist* asked why Smuts, over a range of issues such as the United Nations, native or Indian policy, often seemed equivocal: “He is too much an international statesman not to realise how the tide is flowing in a world which is shortly to see an independent India. But his political acumen is too great for him to risk his leadership of his country by taking too pronounced a liberal line which would drive many of his Afrikaner supporters into the Nationalist camp.”²⁴⁰

²³⁵ “The Crown Itinerant”, *The Round Table: A Quarterly Review of the politics of the British Commonwealth* 37:147 (1947): 211.

²³⁶ Sapire, “African loyalism and its discontents,” 239.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ Paton, *Hofmeyr*, 350.

²³⁹ “The Crown Itinerant,” 207.

²⁴⁰ “Divided Dominion: South Africa and the British Empire,” *The Economist*, 10 May 1947, Economist Historical Archive, accessed 6 June 2020, <http://www.economist.com/unknown/2013/12/05/divided-dominion>.

As the general election approached, many predicted that the UP would slip from the commanding heights of its wartime victory of 1943. Even so, few expected this to result in a victory for the Nationalists. “There is a widely held opinion that General Smuts will be successful”, predicted *The Round Table* a month before polling.²⁴¹ The overriding message of the Reunited National Party (HNP), led by Dr D.F. Malan, was a racial appeal on the question of ‘native policy’. “*Swart gevaar*” (‘the black peril’) could only be contained by implementing the doctrine of apartheid (‘apartness’, or separation).²⁴² Nelson Mandela was then a young lawyer who, of course, as a black African had no vote. But he followed the course of the campaign with a deep and troubled interest. *Apartheid*, he recognised, was “a new term but an old idea...it represented the codification in one oppressive system of all the laws and regulations that had kept Africans in an inferior position to whites for centuries. What had been more or less *de facto* was to become relentlessly *de jure*.” He continued: “The often haphazard segregation of the past three hundred years was to be consolidated into a monolithic system that was diabolical in detail, inescapable in its reach and overwhelming in its power.”²⁴³

The HNP’s naked appeal to prejudice and fear had the desired result. To the shock of Jan Smuts and the UP, the HNP emerged as decisive winners, gaining twenty-seven seats. Together, the HNP and the Afrikaner Party had seventy-nine seats, and an overall majority over the seventy-four won by the UP and their Labour allies. More startling so, this parliamentary majority was won on a clear minority of votes cast, such were the vagaries of the First-Past-the-Post electoral system. Smuts’ popular vote of 524,230 was 11% more than the 401,834 votes gained by Dr Malan. The UP and its allies had piled up pluralities in well-populated urban seats while the Afrikaner parties had won more sparsely habited rural constituencies. This was not a cruel twist of fate but rather a culpable failure of Smuts and the United Party to put in place a fresh delimitation of constituency boundaries prior to the election. This failure to take “the most elementary political precautions” was estimated to have cost Smuts around

²⁴¹ “South Africa: The General Election,” *The Round Table: A Quarterly Review of the politics of the British Commonwealth* 151 (1948): 722.

²⁴² Other slogans used included ‘*Rooi Gevaar*’ (Red Peril), ‘*Die kaffir op sy plek*’ (The kaffir in his place) and ‘*Die koelies uit die land*’ (The coolies, or Indians, out of the country).

²⁴³ Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (London: Abacus, 1994), 127.

twenty seats, and certain victory.²⁴⁴ Damaged by incumbency and the privations of war, and unable to counter the strident racial message of the nationalists, the UP suffered the ultimate humiliation of the loss of Smuts' Standerton seat to a nationalist newcomer. "It was a tremendous blow to his self-esteem from which he never recovered. He was utterly crushed in spirit", writes Kruger. "In 1943 he had been placed on the highest pinnacle of political power, and a brief five years later he had been pulled down from the heights he loved to climb."²⁴⁵ A broken man, Smuts died barely a year later at Doornkloof, having lost his brilliant and liberal colleague, Jan Hofmeyr, six months earlier. For Mandela, the election result was also a shock. "I was stunned and dismayed", he wrote: "but Oliver (Tambo) took a more considered line. 'I like this', he said. 'I like this'. I could not imagine why. He explained, 'Now we will know exactly who our enemies are and where we stand.'" ²⁴⁶ Allister Sparks put it another way, describing the result of the 1948 elections as "the moment when South Africa parted company with the world."²⁴⁷

The incoming Nationalist government began the dynamic introduction of the policy of 'separate development', namely *apartheid*. Steadily, the residual rights of non-whites were removed. They were disenfranchised, including with the abolition of the Coloured roll and, some years later, the removal of the Native Representative Council and the limited right of black Africans to vote for four white parliamentary representatives. The Group Areas Act enforced geographic separation, reserving to whites the best land and restricting the movement of blacks through the pass laws. Mixed marriages and sexual relations across the races were forbidden and a system of racial classification established. Eventually, segregation was carried into all walks of life, including education and employment (though some of the churches resisted the division of their congregations and ministry).

To what extent can the foundation of the apartheid state be laid at the door of Smuts and previous segregationist policies? Was apartheid an inevitable manifestation of late colonialism or an aberrant, and abhorrent, mutation on a body politic otherwise

²⁴⁴ Shula Marks, "White Masculinity: Jan Smuts, Race and the South African War," Raleigh Lecture, 2 November 2000, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 87 (2001): 205.

²⁴⁵ Kruger, *The Making of a Nation*, 236.

²⁴⁶ Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 128.

²⁴⁷ Allister Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa: The Story of the Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1990), 183-4.

naturally evolving into a more rational form, driven by economic growth and rising prosperity? To what extent was the beginnings of the apartheid state rejected by the UK and by the Commonwealth more widely? Can 1949 therefore plausibly be regarded as the start of the Commonwealth's life-affirming crusade against apartheid?

The notion that the authoritarian, apartheid state was wholly an Afrikaner ideological construct provided some whites with the shelter of what is sometimes called 'the English alibi'. The basis of the alibi was as follows: While there had certainly been a 'colour bar' operating throughout the British Empire, which had separated colonists from native people, this was a near universal reflection of the times among the European powers. In any event, the situation in South Africa was compounded by the relationship of the descendants of Dutch settlement on the Cape, the Afrikaners, with white settlers of English origin who supported the British Empire (the Cape colony was ceded to Britain by the Netherlands in 1814). Although British policies in the Cape colony had reflected an 'enlightened' approach to other race groups (allowing non-whites to qualify for the franchise and stand for elected office), this had been strongly resisted by the Afrikaners. Conflict between the two white populations broke out in the First and Second Boer Wars, concluding, after heroic Boer resistance and brutal British suppression of its population, with victory by the imperial power. This was sealed by the Peace of Vereeniging (1902). Thereafter, and in the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, every effort was made to secure both a single state (as opposed to a federation) and the unity of the two white populations. No one better exemplified the conflicting pressures of trying to achieve reconciliation and unity between these two than Smuts. Coming from Afrikaner farming stock, he shared the Boers' pain of a 'century of wrong'.²⁴⁸ He joined the Boer cause and rode with the commandos, showing daring and courage. But he also persuaded the Boer generals to accept peace at Vereeniging (a treaty he himself helped draft) because he feared that the alternative would be "the destruction of the Afrikaner people."²⁴⁹ Thereafter Marks considers him "the architect of South African unification" through the 1910 constitution.²⁵⁰ Sauer, a liberal Cape colony MP and Minister, and like-minded colleagues, had tried to entrench a non-racial franchise into the constitution of the new

²⁴⁸ Paton, *Hofmeyr*, 14.

²⁴⁹ Marks, "White Masculinity," 202.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 202, 213.

Union. When this was rejected, he sought to extend the Cape qualified franchise to the whole of the Union. This would have seen the gradual enfranchisement of other races, including black Africans, as they became 'civilised'. This too failed, and only with difficulty was this arrangement retained for the Cape alone. Crucially, it was the intervention of Smuts that blocked the extension of the black franchise outside the Cape.²⁵¹ His life-long quest for the fusion of the two white 'races' was, as Dubow put it, "the language of common South Africanism, sufficiently capacious to unite Boers and British, not least in opposition to blacks."²⁵² As Sir Alfred Milner, then British High Commissioner for South Africa, said in 1897: "I personally could win over the Dutch in the Cape colony and indeed in all of the South African dominions in my term of office...without offending the English...You only have to sacrifice the ('interests of black Africans') absolutely and the game is easy".²⁵³ When eventually the moment came for the Bill to be presented to the British Parliament to ratify the Union, there was no attempt to re-open the question of the non-white franchise. On this, Herbert Asquith expressed regret, but the combined will of the colonial parliaments was allowed to prevail.

Both before the First World War and between the wars, the political rights of non-whites in all parts of the Union were not advanced but were further reduced. The 1913 Natives Land Act removed from black Africans the right to own land in 90% of the country reserved for whites and was a cornerstone of apartheid, only repealed in 1990. The Natives (Urban Areas) Act 1923 extended the requirement to carry passes to all those black Africans working in 'white' urban areas. Politically, the Representation of Natives Act 1936 removed the right of non-whites in Cape province to qualify for the common roll. Instead, a Native Representation Council was established. This therefore was the "framework of the segregationist state" to which Smuts contributed much.²⁵⁴

Nevertheless, proponents of 'the alibi' argue that, in the changed conditions in the aftermath of the Second World War, a more enlightened policy was beginning to develop under Smuts (despite his being a life-long segregationist committed to the

²⁵¹ Ibid., 202.

²⁵² Saul Dubow, "How British was the British World? The Case of South Africa," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37:1 (2009): 15.

²⁵³ Correspondence from Alfred Milner to Herbert Asquith, 18 November 1897, quoted in Janet Robertson, *Liberalism in South Africa 1948–1963* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), Introduction.

²⁵⁴ Marks, "White Masculinity," 203.

'paramountcy' of the whites). The first signs of this, it is argued, came in a speech by Smuts in advance of the 1943 elections. In it, he declared that "isolation has gone and segregation has fallen on evil days, too."²⁵⁵ Many have seen these remarks as political expediency, quickly forgotten. But some detected a change away, not from political segregation but, to a trusteeship based on 'welfarism', with major government interventions "to address the education, health and housing conditions of the African people."²⁵⁶ The Prime Minister now seemed to favour the relaxation of restrictions on black Africans recommended by the Fagan Commission.²⁵⁷ This had proposed that the existing laws which forced migrant black labour to live on native reserves be relaxed. It argued for a stable African workforce in the urban areas, both to respond to the needs of business and to stimulate consumer demand. Smuts accepted "the reality of permanent African urbanisation" and was increasingly sceptical of policies which kept black Africans on rural 'tribal' reserves.²⁵⁸ While showing little sign of responding to the political grievances then being expressed both through the Native Representative Council (the only representation, albeit indirect, that black Africans possessed within the white democratic structures) and directly through the ANC, the Transvaal Indian Congress and other bodies, Smuts encouraged substantial increases in black welfare, wages and working conditions in the period.²⁵⁹ Many felt that rising prosperity and increased demand for black labour, with greater skills, would in time make rigid racial segregation outdated and counter-productive.

This approach put Smuts at increasing odds with the HNP which wanted to intensify and formalise segregation into the apartheid system. For their part, the HNP responded with the Sauer Commission which arrived at diametrically opposite conclusions to Judge Fagan. The influx of black Africans into the towns and cities demanded a policy of 'total apartheid'. Racially segregated trading zones needed to be created to prevent white businesses being undermined by competition from cheap black labour. Separation in all aspects of life became the guiding vision, even if the immediate practicalities still made the use of African labour in the urban areas a

²⁵⁵ Speech by Jan Smuts, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1942, in Jonathan Hyslop, "Segregation has fallen on evil days," 439.

²⁵⁶ Willem Gravett, "Jan Christian Smuts (1870-1950) in Context: An Answer to Mazower and Morefield," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 106:3 (2017): 272.

²⁵⁷ The official title of the body was the Native Laws Commission.

²⁵⁸ Hyslop, "Segregation has fallen on evil days," 452.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 452; see also Gravett, "Jan Christian Smuts," 272.

necessity. “The cornerstone of the Nationalist doctrine of apartheid”, declared Dr Nicolaas Diederichs, a Nationalist MP and later ceremonial State President, “is that we are here dealing not merely with a group...but that we are dealing with two population groups and races that differ from each other radically, peoples and races who on account of their fundamental differences and natural limits must be kept apart from each other to the advantage of both.”²⁶⁰

Was Smuts ‘the founding father’ of apartheid? Smuts was undoubtedly imbued by a racism that was at times ‘visceral’.²⁶¹ Hofmeyr despaired of his leader’s equivocation leading up to the 1948 election and by some of his unreconstructed campaign speeches. But Smuts made Hofmeyr his deputy and heir apparent and defended him in the face of Nationalist demands that “Hofmeyr must be destroyed.”²⁶² Smuts’s casual racism and refusal to address the enormity of ‘the native question’ was inexcusable and diminished his reputation but this did not make him an advocate for the apartheid idea, which he “adamantly and vociferously opposed.”²⁶³

Apartheid was not inevitable and, as Dubow has argued, it was “only one of several competing visions of the future.”²⁶⁴ Muthien is clear that “apartheid is not simply an extension of old racial practices, but represents a distinctive form of racial domination.”²⁶⁵ With Wolpe, she recognises ‘historic discontinuities and differentiated continuities’. In any case, although Hyam describes the new regime as a ‘seismic’ change, the full articulation of apartheid took many years. In this respect, Deborah Posel sees a series of distinct phases as the system intensified, opposition fell away and formal separation and oppression covered all aspects of life.

While it is understandable to regard the 1948 elections as the ‘turning point’, the ‘English alibi’ would be more plausible if the United Party had not been so equivocal in the face of apartheid legislation. As it was, its failure to stand up to the Nationalist Government encouraged some on the liberal wing to break away. First, the multi-racial Liberal Party, founded in 1953, increasingly began to appreciate the need to resist

²⁶⁰ Nicolaas Diederichs referenced in “The Doctrine of Apartheid,” *The Round Table: The Quarterly Review of British Commonwealth Affairs* 39:153 (1948): 33.

²⁶¹ Marks, “White Masculinity,” 206.

²⁶² Paton, *Hofmeyr*, 329.

²⁶³ Gravett, “Jan Christian Smuts,” 271.

²⁶⁴ Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves (ed.) *South Africa’s 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities* (Cape Town, Juta, 2005), 2.

²⁶⁵ Yvonne Muthien, *State and Resistance in South Africa, 1939-1965* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1994), 3.

apartheid by more than engaging with the white electorate and advocating merely a qualified franchise for non-whites. As it was, its electoral appeal among white voters was limited at best, with the “Liberals pretty well wiped out” in the 1959 provincial elections.²⁶⁶ As it became radicalised, non-racial in its aims and began to work with non-white organisations, so its members were arrested, harassed and imprisoned. The Progressive Party proved to have rather greater impact, both internationally and in white politics. Even so, for many years (between 1961 and 1974) Helen Suzman was a lone voice: “When civil liberties and the rule of law were under assault from the apartheid government and the official opposition was either compromising or capitulating, Helen single-handedly stood up against detention without trial, spoke out against racial discrimination and fought for civil liberties and the rule of law.”²⁶⁷

It was the African National Congress (ANC) and the Communist Party (SACP) which provided the main resistance to the elaboration of the apartheid state, alongside Indian and coloured organisations. The ANC was originally founded, in 1912, as the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), to campaign against injustice and for the rights of black Africans. In 1923, SANNC became the ANC but it was not until the 1940s that the organisation became a mass movement. As the apartheid screw tightened, so the ANC stiffened its reaction, following the Youth League in a Programme of Action that included boycotts, strikes, protest demonstrations and passive resistance. As Mandela put it: “We in the Youth League had seen the failure of legal and constitutional means to strike at racial oppression; now the entire organisation was set to enter a more activist phase.”²⁶⁸ In December 1951, with Mandela now President of the Youth League, Walter Sisulu the ANC Secretary-General and Oliver Tambo on the National Executive, the Annual Conference in Bloemfontein launched the Defiance Campaign against unjust laws. Despite the misgivings of some (such as Mandela), the campaign united Africans, Coloured and Indians. In a statement the conference declared: “All people...who have made South Africa their home are entitled to live a full and free life. Full democratic rights with a

²⁶⁶ Margaret Ballinger, *Diaries*, 28 October 1959, UCT archives, Margaret Ballinger Collections, BC 345.

²⁶⁷ Colin Eglin, “Helen Suzman: An appreciation,” *The Journal of Liberal History* 66 (2010): 35.

²⁶⁸ Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 130.

direct say in the affairs of the government are the inalienable right of every South African.”²⁶⁹

In support of these principles, mass demonstrations were organised for 6 April 1952, to coincide with the 300th anniversary of white Dutch settlement on the Cape. Of the 10,000 taking part in the protest, over 8,000 were arrested, including Nelson Mandela. On 26 June, 1955, at Kliptown, the Congress of the People, attended by 3,000 people, officially adopted the Freedom Charter. Its opening demand was “The people shall govern!”, and the document set out the belief in non-racial democracy for all South Africans and articulated the other core principles of the South African Congress Alliance.²⁷⁰ Pointing to the involvement of white members of the banned South African Communist Party in the Alliance, the government claimed that the Freedom Charter was a communist-inspired document.

Early opposition also came from prominent priests such as Michael Scott, Trevor Huddleston and Ambrose Reeves. Huddleston, a member of the Community of the Resurrection based at Mirfield, West Yorkshire, had been sent out to Sophiatown in South Africa in 1943. As he set about his ministry, in what was then a multi-racial community outside Johannesburg, he increasingly found himself at odds with the government, as apartheid law began to bear down. In February 1955 he was among those who helped lead the opposition to the forced removal of 65,000 African, Coloured, Indian and Chinese residents of Sophiatown to Meadowlands in the satellite township of Soweto, and to other locations. Under the Group Areas Act, Sophiatown was designated a white residential area named Triomf (‘triumph’). A community established in 1904 was therefore destroyed (except for Huddleston’s church of Christ the King, in Ray Street). Also expunged were the rights of those who owned freehold property in the town (a right which black people had enjoyed prior to 1913). Most cruel of all, the government’s racial classifications (linked to separation into designated group areas) meant that families, as well as neighbours, were split up and forced to live in different locations.

²⁶⁹ Resolution of the ANC Annual Conference, 8 November, Bloemfontein, accessed 28 May 2020, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/report-joint-planning-council-anc-and-south-african-indian-congress-november-8-1951>.

²⁷⁰ Apart from the ANC, the other members of the alliance were the South African Indian Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats, and the Coloured People’s Congress.

Huddleston was unwavering in his opposition to the government and apartheid, declaring: "Any doctrine based on racial or colour prejudice and enforced by the state is therefore an affront to human dignity and 'ipso facto' an insult to God himself."²⁷¹ It was a theological perspective shared by Ambrose Reeves, the Bishop of Johannesburg: "It is not merely that apartheid is erroneous; it is a heresy, doing violence to the Christian faith in God and in the nature and destiny of man". He continued: "God has some better thing in store for all the peoples of this country than the way of apartheid, which has shown all too clearly that it is the way of death and not of life."²⁷² Debates about Queen, Commonwealth and a South African republic had little relevance. "There is no purpose in a loyalty to Queen or Commonwealth if neither meets your life at any point", explained Huddleston. "Commonwealth citizenship means nothing...except to accentuate the ugly fact that...his sovereign must condone the state of servitude in which he lives."²⁷³ Huddleston was to be recalled to the UK in 1955 from the Sophiatown he loved, and Ambrose Reeves was deported by the South African authorities in 1961. But it was a Christian message about apartheid later proclaimed no less fervently by Beyers Naude, Allan Boesak, Frank Chikane and Desmond Tutu, among many others.

²⁷¹Trevor Huddleston, *Naught for Your Comfort* (Glasgow: William Collins & Son Ltd, 1956), 16.

²⁷² Ambrose Reeves, *Shooting at Sharpeville: The agony of South Africa*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1960), 103.

²⁷³ Huddleston, *Naught for Your Comfort*, 116.



Fig.4. Africans demonstrate against the pass laws, 1960. Margaret Ballinger Papers, University of Cape Town.

4. Britain, South Africa and a changing Commonwealth

What of Britain and South Africa? Hyam expresses the dilemma facing Britain as being between “the demands of national interest and the necessities of international reputation.”²⁷⁴ Indeed, the relationship was a conflicted one in many ways. True, there were longstanding ties of kinship with the white English community and a shared history in the development of the Union. South Africa was one of the British Commonwealth’s ‘central’ Dominions. It had been a powerful, if slightly unpredictable, military ally in two World Wars and an important force not only in the Commonwealth but in the League of Nations and, certainly at the outset, the United Nations also. With the onset of the Cold War, the closure of the Suez canal and growing Soviet naval power, South African surveillance and support facilities (particularly at Simonstown) on the Cape route were seen as particularly important in meeting a “Soviet resolve

²⁷⁴ Ronald Hyam and William Louis, *The Conservative Government and the End of Empire (1957-1964)*, (London: TSO, 2000), 436.

(that) could become the gravest threat since Hitler to a free world order.”²⁷⁵ This was also true of air communications and overflying rights. Then there were extensive – and growing – economic and commercial interests. South Africa was a significant market for British goods and fertile ground for inward British investment. South African gold was largely traded through London and its supply offered the international financial system an important source of liquidity.

Set against that were uncertainties. A ‘white’ Dominion it may have been, but South Africa’s leadership was now predominantly Boer rather than English. “The fact that the Boers were not British”, commented Mazrui, “often made Britain more flexible in her relations with them and more wary of offending their sensibilities.”²⁷⁶ After all, there was a degree of unfinished business arising out of the Act of Union of 1910. Britain had acquiesced in the suppression of the aspirations for a non-white franchise across the Union and witnessed increasing racial discrimination and measures of segregation against the non-white majority populations, well before the advent of apartheid. Even then, such developments did not match the British commitment, to its colonies, for measured steps towards self-government within the Commonwealth. For Benson, Britain’s role in South Africa was nothing less than “a prolonged and profitable betrayal.”²⁷⁷ However, in 1910, the British had at least resisted the Union’s attempts to incorporate the three High Commission territories into the Union precisely because it felt a responsibility to the black population in those areas and an obligation to secure their eventual political emancipation. Equally, South Africa’s envious gaze never left these tasty morsels on its doorstep. Like the ‘mandated’ territory of South-West Africa, incorporation, legally or illegally, was a constant threat.

The UK also feared South African pressure further north. In 1951, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Jim Griffiths, and the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, Patrick Gordon Walker, together urged the Cabinet to counter South African pressure. “The danger is real and urgent”, the Ministers argued, and they set out some startling figures. “Afrikaner infiltration into both Southern and Northern Rhodesia is proceeding apace – at present the flow of immigration from the Union is almost double

²⁷⁵ Lionel Gelber, “Britain, Soviet Sea-power and Commonwealth connections,” in *Commonwealth Policy in a Global Context*, ed. Paul Street and Hugh Corbet (London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd, 1971), 43.

²⁷⁶ Mazrui, *The Anglo-African Commonwealth*, 30.

²⁷⁷ Mary Benson, *The struggle for a birthright* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1966), 10.

that from the United Kingdom.”²⁷⁸ Unless Britain takes steps to create a powerful central African federation (at that stage dubbed ‘British Central Africa’), the consequences would be serious. “If we do nothing, and so prevent the Southern Rhodesians from linking with their northern neighbours, they will inevitably tend more and more to look southwards. The absorption of Southern Rhodesia into the Union would then probably be only a matter of time.”²⁷⁹ If that happened, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland would both be vulnerable to ‘encroachment by the Union’. This would be disastrous for African interests, the Ministers believed.

It was also becoming increasingly obvious that the evolution of the Commonwealth as a multi-racial association would bring it into direct conflict with South Africa. “So far as South Africa is concerned”, Lord Swinton, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, told the Cabinet in 1953, “it is clear that the admission of territories governed by Africans would be unacceptable to the present (South African) government...this would probably apply equally in the case of any territory where the population has considerable admixture of African blood e.g. the West Indies.”²⁸⁰ Britain’s relationship with the Union of South Africa had been deeply ambivalent, treating it as “half-ally and half untouchable at the same time, (walking) the tightrope between provocation and conciliation.”²⁸¹ But the moment of truth was coming closer when a choice would have to be made. This was articulated as early as 1954 by a British spokesman: “If at any time Britain was compelled to choose between the white settlers, practising racial discrimination in Africa, and ‘Gold Coast democracy’, she would be bound in her own self-interest and in the interests of Commonwealth unity to come down on the African side.”²⁸² At the beginning of 1960, Harold Macmillan spent a month visiting a number of African countries and colonies. On 3 February, having arrived in South Africa, the British Prime Minister addressed members of both Houses of Parliament in Cape Town. His message to his silent and largely disapproving audience was an uncomfortable one. “The wind of change is blowing through this continent. Whether we like it or not, this growth in national consciousness is a political fact.” His speech

²⁷⁸ Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, “Closer Association in Central Africa,” 3 May 1951, TNA, CAB/129/45, 3.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸⁰ Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, “The Colonial territories and Commonwealth relations,” 8 April 1953, TNA, CAB/129/60.

²⁸¹ Hyam and Louis, *The Conservative Government and the End of Empire*, 469.

²⁸² Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience*, 183.

signalled that South Africa could no longer expect unquestioning British support at the United Nations, saying: "As a fellow member of the Commonwealth, we have always tried to give South Africa our support and encouragement, but I hope you will not mind my saying frankly that there are some aspects of your policies which make it impossible for us to do this without being false to our own deep convictions about the political destinies of free men to which, in our territories, we are trying to give effect."²⁸³ South Africa's premier, Dr Verwoerd, had not seen an advance copy of Macmillan's speech and was visibly shocked. But he responded: "There must not only be justice to the black man in Africa, but also to the white man. We see ourselves as part of the Western world – a true white state in Southern Africa, with a possibility of granting a full future to the black man in our midst."²⁸⁴ While some argue that: "the direction of the 'wind of change' was already set by the time the Conservative Party came into power in 1951", the speech drew as strong a disapproving reaction from the Conservative Right as it gathered plaudits from Liberals and the Left.²⁸⁵

Barely a month later came Sharpeville, with the killing of sixty-seven unarmed Africans and the wounding of one hundred and eighty-six. Of the fatalities, 70% had been shot in the back. At the subsequent Commission of Inquiry into the shootings, Colonel Pienaar, the police commander was questioned about his conduct. At the conclusion of his cross-examination, he was asked if he had learned any useful lesson from the evidence of Sharpeville. "Well ", he replied, "we may get better equipment."²⁸⁶ The shots at Sharpeville sounded across a horrified world. In vain did the government's defenders argue that the police were still infuriated by the killing of 9 young policemen in January 1960 at Cato Manor, near Durban, while searching for illegal beer brewing; or alleging that the crowd gathered at Sharpeville was in fact a 'threatening mob...unruly...armed with...some firearms.'²⁸⁷ An unrepentant South African government responded by declaring a State of Emergency and issuing emergency regulations. These allowed for the banning of processions and gatherings and permitted indefinite detention without charge. Around 1,900 people of all races were

²⁸³ Harold Macmillan, "Wind of Change" Speech report, *The Guardian*, Thursday 4 February 1960, accessed 28 May 2020, <http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/1960/Fb/04/great.speeches>.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ Horne, *Macmillan* (1), 313.

²⁸⁶ Reeves, *Shooting at Sharpeville*, 93.

²⁸⁷ Kruger, *The Making of a Nation*, 325.

immediately arrested and the ANC and the Pan-African Congress (which had organised the Sharpeville protest) were banned. As South Africa slipped further into darkness, the first international organisation to force South Africa from its membership had begun the necessary processes. A year later, South Africa would no longer be a member of the Commonwealth of Nations.

5. The Republic, the referendum and the Commonwealth

If many white political leaders had seen 'fusion' of the English-Speaking and Afrikaner white communities as a key component in nation-building (under white leadership), other, more ideological Afrikaner *Broeders*, took the opposite view. After what they saw as 'a century of wrong' and the absorption of the two Afrikaner republics into a British-devised Union in 1910, a young Hofmeyr thought "one did not have to kiss the enemy's hand because he took his foot off your kneck."²⁸⁸ Afrikaners agreed that the unity of the white races would undoubtedly be essential in sustaining white supremacy. But they were convinced that this needed to be achieved on Afrikaner terms, once the key elements of the Afrikaner republic had been realised. The Afrikaner people, in their eyes, had not only suffered deep injury, injustice and humiliation: they also had had to endure inequalities (within the white system) which they believed left them the minor white partner across many facets of life, including business, language and culture. In reaction to the merger of Smuts' South African Party and Hertzog's Nationalist Party in 1934, a desire for a 'purified' Afrikaner identity not only had its political expression but also led to much greater attention to constructing a vision of the ultimate Afrikaner state: the republic. Verwoerd was "one of the small group of *Broederbond* intellectuals who applied themselves...to working out their master plan which was to achieve Afrikaner unity and Afrikaner domination of South Africa."²⁸⁹ The onset of the Second World War threw these alternate visions of the future into sharp relief, to be recast in the changed circumstances of the war's aftermath.

However, even in the highly racially charged atmosphere of the white election of 1948, Malan chose not to highlight the republic issue. It remained an aspirational rather than a practical political aim. That was also the approach of Strijdom, his successor,

²⁸⁸ Paton, *Hofmeyr*, 14.

²⁸⁹ Hepple, *Verwoerd*, 86.

despite his earlier fierce advocacy of the issue. It was the party ideologue, Hendrik Verwoerd, who decided to press ahead with the republic, following his succession to the premiership in 1958.²⁹⁰ In January 1960, Verwoerd declared that a vote on the republic would be held in October of that year. This announcement came only weeks before the visit to South Africa of the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan. While Verwoerd did not know of the content of Macmillan's 'wind of change' speech, he was almost certainly aware that the British government was contemplating a shift in its hitherto uncritical support for South Africa at the UN.²⁹¹ If, as some argue, Verwoerd's intent in the timing of his announcement on the referendum was to create distance between the South African and British governments, then it is likely to have hardened British resolve over Macmillan's speech. For Verwoerd, it may have been a means of demonstrating the South African Government's independence, emphasising its attachment to the principle of 'non-interference' and reducing the possibility of pressure from the British and other international forces. For the UK, it was a further indication that change was needed, as continuing decolonisation accentuated growing tension between independent black Africa and the apartheid state.

From its first session, the issue of South Africa "became a test case of the United Nations' capacity to act as a moral agent on behalf of humanity."²⁹² Up until the Sharpeville massacre, however, the UN General Assembly's actions had been declaratory only. As previously observed, in those fifteen years, the UK and others had consistently supported South Africa on the grounds of non-interference in a matter of domestic jurisdiction, under Article 2(7) of the Charter. After Sharpeville, that stance was no longer credible. As Macmillan explained: "The dilemma is easy to state, but difficult to escape. If we rest too much upon the legal and constitutional position, we shall certainly please the old Commonwealth countries like Australia and of course South Africa itself, but we risk gravely offending the Asian and African members."²⁹³ He continued: "The rigidity, and even fanaticism, with which the Nationalist Government in South Africa have pursued the apartheid policy have brought about...a

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 142.

²⁹¹ Miller, *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs*, 141.

²⁹² Dubow, *Apartheid*, 278.

²⁹³ Harold Macmillan, *Pointing the Way (1959-1961)*, (Extract) Letter to HM The Queen, 3 April 1960, 486.

dangerous...situation in that country. How it will end, I cannot tell.” He concluded: “I fear...I see a very difficult period facing the Commonwealth.”²⁹⁴

What also changed after Sharpeville was the Commonwealth’s previous reluctance to debate apartheid at its periodic summit meetings, preferring instead that critics like India and Ghana should focus their criticisms at the UN. Malan, representing South Africa’s new nationalist government, had welcomed the 1949 London Declaration and the changes it had introduced because it seemed to offer a route to the Afrikaner republic. With the benefit of hindsight, the principal consequence of the agreement in London was a rapid growth in membership, particularly from Africa and Asia, and later from the Caribbean, the Pacific and the Mediterranean. This was to transform the Commonwealth and its attitude to international issues, not least to apartheid. It was also to bring the South African regime face to face with the external inconsistencies of apartheid’s relationship with its black neighbours in Africa. If the logic of apartheid was to lead the government to reject non-white visiting sportsmen and women, so too would it mean not accepting non-white diplomats and High Commissioners. As an academic commentator remarked of the Minister for External Affairs: “So Mr Louw will not exchange diplomatic representatives with the Black States of Africa...South Africa cannot ignore the march of African nationalism, nor resist it.”²⁹⁵

The equivocal approach of the British government did little to encourage a more accommodating attitude by the apartheid regime towards its neighbours, despite the UK’s changed stance at the UN. In January 1961 – ten months after Sharpeville – the goodwill visit to South Africa of the Royal Navy aircraft carrier, HMS *Illustrious*, revealed a long-standing ‘whites only’ practice for British naval crews visiting the country. Before reaching its destination, ‘*Illustrious*’ had called at Gibraltar and off-loaded its six non-white crew members, having earlier left three black ratings in Plymouth. “It has been the practice for some years not to send coloured personnel in Her Majesty’s ships visiting South Africa, except in special circumstances”, Ian Orr-Ewing, the Civil Lord of the Admiralty, told parliament.²⁹⁶ This was to protect crew

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Prof. Du Plessis, “Co-existence in Africa”, *The Cape Times*, 7 April 1959, UCT archives, BC 345 E6.36.

²⁹⁶ House of Commons Debate, HMS ‘*Victorious*’ (Visit to South Africa), 30 January 1961, *Hansard* Vol. 633, cc603, accessed 5 February 2018, <http://www.api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1961/jan/30/hms-victorious-visit-to-south-africa>.

from racial discrimination ashore, he explained. This drew a barrage of criticism from Labour and Liberal MPs, prompting Reg Paget MP to protest that “the world should at least realise that the ‘wind of change’ had blown through the British Admiralty.”²⁹⁷ Further controversy dogged ‘Illustrious’ when the ship’s Marine Band the next month gave a public performance in Cape Town from which non-whites were excluded (despite purchasing tickets). Under renewed pressure from MPs, Orr-Ewing, intentionally or otherwise, volunteered the government’s primary motivation: “I cannot get away from the fact that this is an extremely important strategic route for the British Commonwealth. It is that which dictates our visit to the Cape, not apartheid.”²⁹⁸

More than a decade before, such attitudes were commonplace. The British government’s banishment of Seretse Khama from Bechuanaland and as Kgosi of the Bamangwato people, after his interracial marriage to Ruth Williams, revealed “deeply felt racism” among British Ministers and officials.²⁹⁹ It also showed a readiness by the UK government to pander to South African pressure and the views of white settler regimes further north. South Africa still expected to secure formal control over the mandated territory of South-West Africa and continued to cast a covetous eye over the High Commission territories and Southern Rhodesia, where substantial post-war emigration from South Africa was having an effect.³⁰⁰ There were also important defence and economic links with South Africa which weakened the UK’s tenuous grasp on the principle of racial equality. In any case, the British Government, in administering the Commonwealth, had not decided its approach to a ‘post-Dominion’ model of membership. A ‘two-tier’ ranking of countries was seriously considered and at this point the British Government favoured granting independence only to much larger federated units, such as the Central African Federation, rather than to the much smaller nations that eventually emerged.³⁰¹ This obstacle would have made decolonisation seem a distant prospect. White South Africa was further buttressed by the reassuring presence of Portuguese colonial possessions further north, where talk of freedom was firmly rebuffed. Hyslop points out that “too often South Africa is seen

²⁹⁷ Ibid., cc608.

²⁹⁸ House of Commons Debate, South Africa (HMS Victorious) 1 March 1961, *Hansard* Vol.635 cc1575-7, accessed 5 February 2018, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1961/mar/02/south-africa-visit-of-hms-victorious>.

²⁹⁹ Williams, *Colour Bar*, 74.

³⁰⁰ Cabinet Paper, “The Future of Commonwealth Membership” by Sir Norman Brook, 21 January 1952.

³⁰¹ Memorandum by the Secretary of State, “Closer Association in Central Africa,” 3.

as exceptional within the empire” but this was certainly not evident in the early days of apartheid.³⁰² Dubow suggests that the Commonwealth was “a relatively protected space” for South Africa to be involved in international affairs.³⁰³ The reality at this time was that the Commonwealth was “a congenial place for South Africa”.³⁰⁴

In this context, it is scarcely surprising that the South African government should have seen the London Declaration not as a dangerous first step to a multi-racial Commonwealth but instead as an open door leading to the Afrikaner Republic. Of course, the Afrikaner leadership had repeatedly made it clear that the ultimate goal was a republic outside the Commonwealth: “Afrikaner hegemony in a white supremacist, apartheid, republic state.”³⁰⁵ This was an article of faith, though not necessarily practical nationalist politics at this stage. Whatever the optical importance of the severance of any formal link with the UK and its former imperial possessions, there were pressing reasons why the matter needed to be treated carefully. The foremost of these was that the white referendum needed to be won and, even with the addition of white voters from South-West Africa, the abolition of the coloured roll and the lowering of the voting age to 18, this was by no means certain. Nor was it just a matter of winning the vote: it was also a case of winning English-speaking hearts and minds, if ‘Afrikaner’ fusion could be achieved. The decade since the Nationalists’ assumption of power had seen a further chiselling away of the British connection, such as the removal of the Queen’s head from stamps and coins, and of the appeal to the Privy Council, the Union flag, and ‘God Save the Queen’.³⁰⁶ But residual loyalty to Crown and Commonwealth remained strong, especially in Natal, and not just among whites, as the Royal Tour of 1947 had demonstrated.³⁰⁷

Earlier in the decade, Patrick Duncan (the son of the former Governor-General and later a determined anti-apartheid activist and PAC ambassador) had lamented that English South Africans, since 1948, had to “reconcile themselves to being a subordinate and ruled minority in their own land”, conceding that in all the previous regimes of the Union “the English South African continued to run South Africa in fact,

³⁰² Hyslop, “Segregation has fallen on evil days,” 453.

³⁰³ Dubow, “The Commonwealth and South Africa,” 294-5.

³⁰⁴ Miller, *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs*, 132.

³⁰⁵ Hepple, *Verwoerd*, 167.

³⁰⁶ Miller, *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs*, 128.

³⁰⁷ Sapire, “African loyalism and its discontents,” 215-240.

if not in appearance.”³⁰⁸ Once the decision to seek a republic had been taken, Verwoerd wanted to establish that there would be no difficulty in South Africa remaining in the Commonwealth. Speaking in the white parliament, days before Sharpeville, he said: “Now I ask honourable members: Do they really think that if we want to be a member there will be anybody who would want to kick us out?”³⁰⁹ While this was assumed by South Africa to be a formality, it could only be determined by Commonwealth Prime Ministers according to established procedures.

A few months later, at the beginning of May 1960, Commonwealth Prime Ministers met in London. The Federation of Malaya, led by the father of its independence, Tunku Abdul Rahman, was the newest Commonwealth member. South Africa was represented by its external affairs minister, Eric Louw, following the assassination attempt on the Prime Minister in April. Louw duly gave notice that South Africa would shortly be holding a referendum on the question of republican status. He was reminded that, if South Africa voted to become a republic and wished to remain in the Commonwealth, it would have to follow the usual procedure and re-apply for membership. The Commonwealth could not offer any kind of guarantee based on a hypothetical question: it had to deal with the realities of changed circumstances.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Patrick Duncan, “The English in South Africa – a subordinate minority,” June 1953, *The Forum*, UCT archives, BC 668, C1.4, 22.

³⁰⁹ Hendrick Verwoerd, Speech in SA Parliament, Hansard 21 March 1960, Col.3779, quoted in a Progressive Party Briefing Paper: “South Africa and Commonwealth Membership,” UCT archives, BC 668, C1.4.4.

³¹⁰ Miller, *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs*, 157.



Fig.5. Harold Macmillan welcomes Archbishop Makarios, of Cyprus, to the Commonwealth, 1960. Commonwealth Secretariat.

The discussion thus far was constrained. But it was evident that Sharpeville had precipitated a sea change in attitudes. It was not long before anger over apartheid bubbled over, with Nkrumah, Diefenbaker and Nehru among South Africa's fiercest critics. The communiqué recorded: "While reaffirming the traditional practice that Commonwealth conferences do not discuss the internal affairs of member countries, Ministers availed themselves of Mr Louw's presence in London to have informal discussions with him about the racial situation in South Africa...Mr Louw gave

information and answered questions...and the other Ministers conveyed to him their views on the South African problem.” The statement concluded: “The Ministers emphasised that the Commonwealth itself is a multiracial association and expressed the need to ensure good relations between all member states and peoples of the Commonwealth.”³¹¹

With the date of the referendum later set for 5 October 1960 and the next Commonwealth summit not due until March 1961, the decision on republic and Commonwealth was bound to be a two-stage process, and a rather protracted one at that. On the face of it, this had advantages to the republican campaign, enabling it to argue that the changes were practical and procedural, an essential step in modernising the constitution but without disturbing the structure of South Africa’s external relations. There would be no departure from the Commonwealth, and nor would it open any rift in principle with the British. It would allow the retention of the diplomatic, military and economic alliances the Union enjoyed with the UK and with other former ‘dominion’ governments. It was, perhaps, inconvenient that the post-1949 Commonwealth involved recognition of King George VI, and later Queen Elizabeth II, as the Head of the organisation. But this was a voluntary external agreement and did not impact on South Africa’s constitution or its sovereignty. At the same time, it offered some reassurance to the Union’s English-speaking whites (as well as others) that the link to the crown would not be broken. Arguably, it also meant that there would be time for any passions aroused by the referendum to subside and wounds to heal.

But Verwoerd’s decision to retain Commonwealth membership was not unconditional. South Africa would remain a member ‘for now’. However, this was only so long as there was no interference in its domestic policies and no other threat from the newly multi-racial association. He had made little secret of the fact that, ultimately, the destiny of the South African republic would be outside, rather than within, the British-inspired Commonwealth of Nations. If the two-stage process facilitated the triumph of the Nationalists in the referendum, pushing the question of Commonwealth membership to a future date, it also gave the excluded opposition, namely black, Indian and coloured South Africans, the chance to campaign against the regime at a moment when it faced international exposure. As black opposition to the new apartheid

³¹¹ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 63.

state intensified, so contacts with neighbouring African countries increased. African nationalists saw the freedom of the oppressed in South Africa bound up with the liberation of Africans elsewhere in the continent. The 1955 Bandung Conference, in drawing delegates from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, pointed to a global anti-colonial movement and the desire to break free of the geo-political straitjacket of the Cold War. In 1957, Ghana (previously The Gold Coast) became the first black African member of the Commonwealth. A year later, it saw legal opportunities to bring pressure on South Africa for flouting its UN mandate over South-West Africa. This was a prelude to the case filed by Ethiopia and Liberia two years later in the International Court of Justice challenging South Africa's mandate. While this ultimately unsuccessful legal challenge did not directly involve the Commonwealth, it helped focus attention, after the Sharpeville massacre of March 1960, on calls for South Africa's expulsion from the Commonwealth.

1960 was proclaimed 'Africa Year' and the Second All-African Peoples' Conference (AAPC) met in Tunis on 25-30 January in a mood of optimism, as a succession of African nations achieved independence. The ANC had noted Harold Macmillan's 'wind of change' speech and the promise of British decolonisation for seventeen African countries but there was scepticism about whether the UK's support for South Africa at the UN would change.³¹² The 'outburst of horror' at Sharpeville and Langa increased internal unrest, accelerated white emigration and hit business confidence and foreign investment.³¹³ It also drew intensified repression from the apartheid regime. But it electrified the black opposition, already buoyed by the steady disintegration of the Treason Trial. In the view of Lodge: "All of these developments encouraged African and left-wing leaders in South Africa to perceive the authorities as vulnerable". Their ability to mobilise a mass following and generate large-scale protest led them to believe that "there was a substantial constituency ready for revolt."³¹⁴

At the same time, the departure of some 'Africanists' from the ANC in November 1958, over disagreements with the Freedom Charter and in protest at collaboration with 'non-African' organisations, led to a fissure in the liberation movement. The Pan Africanist Congress, formed in April 1959 and led by Robert Sobukwe, stole a march over the

³¹² Benson, *The Struggle for a birthright*, 220.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Lodge, *Mandela*, 89.

ANC by organising the protests at Sharpeville and Langa. Not only did the PAC's reputation in the townships rise substantially but the ANC leadership, including Mandela, were to find that weaning newly independent black African states from supporting the PAC was a challenging task. That said, both the ANC and the PAC expressed confidence that apartheid would be overthrown in a few short years or months, even.

Mandela, and London-based allies such as Dr Yusuf Dadoo, saw the political opportunity arising out of Verwoerd's determination to hold a referendum among South Africa's white electorate on the issue of republican status. They held no brief for the monarchy or for the 'imperial' Commonwealth for that matter. For the non-white citizens of South Africa, this was a vote about a 'white Boer republic'. It was an issue about which they had not been consulted and a decision from which they were excluded. For the ANC and others, they could not be passive bystanders: their rights and their future as South Africans were at stake. They would therefore campaign for an alternative constitutional settlement.

In its enabling legislation for the referendum, the Nationalist government had aimed for clarity and a minimum of state disruption. The vote itself, while aggregated according to provinces, would be counted as a whole, requiring a simple majority to effect change. The resulting constitutional amendments would also be kept to a minimum. The Queen would simply be replaced as Head of State by a ceremonial State President. In advocating a 'Yes' vote, the Nationalists argued that the republic was the only way to unite and entrench white hegemony. Verwoerd himself made a personal appeal to individual white voters in what appeared to be a hand-written, four-page letter from the Prime Minister's official residence, *Libertas*.³¹⁵ In it, Verwoerd invited voters to decide the future of the country and its people. "By answering 'Yes' through your cross on the voting paper, you become one of the founders of our Republic of South Africa ...a democratic republic within the Commonwealth." The alternative, he warned, would be dire: "If you do not take this step...we (and our children certainly) will experience the sufferings of the whites who have been attacked in, and driven out of, one African territory after another."³¹⁶ In particular, he cited the

³¹⁵ *Libertas*, in the suburb of Bryntirion in Pretoria, is now the official residence of the President of South Africa and has been renamed *Mahlamba Ndlopfu* (*New Dawn* in the Tsonga language).

³¹⁶ Hendrik Verwoerd, "Letter to voters", 21 September 1960, UCT archives, BC 347 B3V.1.5.

recent eruption of violence in the Congo. He continued: "Should South Africa remain a monarchy, it will suffer time and again, from instigated racial clashes and economic setbacks, since these are the weapons used to prevent the coming of the Republic." The Leader of the opposition United Party, Sir De Villiers Graaff, in advocating a 'No' vote, also cited stability and security. In his view, the 'British' Commonwealth offered economic protection, as well as a political defence against Communism and 'hot-eyed African nationalism.'

Nationalist campaigners argued that South Africa was merely seeking to continue its membership, not make a re-application, and that assent need not be unanimous.³¹⁷ Verwoerd pronounced that he was reassured by what he had heard from other Commonwealth Prime Ministers, particularly the British. "The most heartening feature", declared Coetzee, "is the clear desire to keep the Commonwealth together and the obvious belief of many members that nothing will be solved by merely ejecting us, which from the nature of things can be a 'gesture' only."³¹⁸ Zach de Beer, of the small Progressive Party, riposted: "What constitutes the threat to our membership is our identification with racialism which sets us apart from all other Commonwealth states and from the western world. Until we are prepared to abandon...race discrimination we cannot become a republic and be confident of staying in the Commonwealth."³¹⁹ Others used more colourful imagery. Clough warned that a vote for a republic would be to take "a dark, unknown and uncertain road."³²⁰ Nolteno warned that it would be a "step on the road to serfdom."³²¹

When the results emerged, it transpired that despite these dire warnings a narrow majority had voted for the republic, with 850,458 votes (52%) in favour, against 775,878 (48%) voting against. Of the four provinces of the Union, only Natal stood against the tide, mustering big majorities against the republic on an exceptionally high turnout. Douglas Mitchell, the inflammatory and 'crude white supremacist' leader of the UP in Natal, continued to stoke the secessionist fires for some months after the

³¹⁷ G.A..Coetzee, *The Republic: a Reasoned View* (Johannesburg-Cape Town: Afrikaanse Pers-Bockhandel (EDMS) BPK, 1960), UCT archives, BAP 320.968.

³¹⁸ Coetzee, *The Republic: A Reasoned View*, 53.

³¹⁹ Zach de Beer, Statement by the Chairman of the National Executive of the Progressive Party, 6 September 1960, UCT archives, C1.4.4.

³²⁰ Owen Clough, *Republicanism in South Africa: A Statement of Case* (1956), UCT archives, BAP 320.968, 31.

³²¹ D. Molteno, *A Republic of Serfs – Unless we get guarantees* UCT archives, BAP 320.968.31.

result.³²² He caused “a major sensation” in the parliamentary debate on the Republic Bill, declaring: “We live under a hostile Government and this is tyranny and rule by force”, warning “the day of reckoning is coming.”³²³ Privately, he even explored the possibilities of Natal detaching itself from the Union either to join with the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland to the north or reverting to British protection under the Crown.³²⁴ Mitchell’s ardour was effectively punctured by the British High Commissioner, Sir John Maud, who pointed out that any constitutional arrangement involving Britain would have to be on the basis of one man, one vote. Since Mitchell’s approach to racial issues was indistinguishable from those of the National Party (despite his vociferous opposition to Verwoerd on the monarchy and the Commonwealth), the idea of a Zulu majority in Natal had little appeal.³²⁵ By the end of the year, lingering resistance to the republic in Natal effectively fizzled out.

It was also clear that De Villiers Graaff would not challenge the legitimacy of the vote or the enabling legislation for the establishment of the republic. In a lengthy press statement, he began by saying that “by no stretch of the imagination can that slender majority be described as representing the broad will of the people”, but he conceded that nonetheless the government had a mandate for change but that it would be “a sectional Republic and not a South African Republic.”³²⁶ The British High Commission was sceptical, reporting to London that the “White electorate has given the Nationalists about the only genuine popular majority they have ever enjoyed”, not to rewrite the constitution but on the “indisputable fact that more South Africans want a President than a Governor-General.”³²⁷ Nevertheless, in declaring the UP “a Commonwealth Party”, Graaff argued that no steps should be taken to introduce legislation implementing the republican constitution “before we have the certain knowledge that

³²² Alex Mouton, “No Prime Minister could want a better Leader of the Opposition,” *African Historical Review*, 46(1), 48-69.

³²³ Correspondence from BHC Cape Town to Commonwealth Relations Office, London, 3 February 1961, TNA, SA 43/3 (DO 180/4), 13.

³²⁴ William Stewart, “Natal and the 1960 Republican Referendum,” (MA thesis, University of Natal, 1990), 163.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

³²⁶ De Villiers Graaff, Press Statement on behalf of the United Party, 8 October 1960, Johannesburg, reproduced in Stewart, “Natal and the 1960 Republican Referendum,” 189.

³²⁷ Correspondence from Peter Foster, BHC Cape Town to R.G. Britten, Commonwealth Relations Office, London, 4 February 1961, TNA, SA 43/3 (DO 180/4), 3.

we shall remain in the Commonwealth.”³²⁸ To that end, Graaff offered his services in securing the necessary Commonwealth support.

If Verwoerd felt disinclined to take up Graaff’s offer, there were others, most particularly, those excluded from the process of white consultation and decision-making, who again saw the potential for arraigning the apartheid regime in the court of world opinion. In May 1960, the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference took place barely a month after the massacre at Sharpeville. Nevertheless, newly independent African and other Commonwealth governments, backed by protests outside the London conference, forced a fractious debate on apartheid with South Africa’s foreign minister, Eric Louw. Now a new opportunity beckoned with, exceptionally, another Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ meeting a year after the last. The anti-apartheid coalition was also given precious months between the referendum result (in October 1960) and the summit itself (March 1961) to lobby governments and to organise protests. Indeed, in June of that year, the second Conference of Independent African States, meeting in Addis Ababa, adopted a resolution on South West Africa and on South Africa that, *inter alia*, invited “independent African states which are members of the (British) Commonwealth to take all possible steps to secure the exclusion of the Union of South Africa from the (British) Commonwealth.”³²⁹ The conference had also called for economic sanctions against South Africa.³³⁰

Verwoerd was aware of growing African hostility but he was optimistic that there would be no difficulty in South Africa retaining its Commonwealth membership now that it was transitioning to a republic. He would have been encouraged in this view both by media comment and by the public statements of Commonwealth leaders as they gathered for the 1961 Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference. Verwoerd duly informed his colleagues of the results of the referendum. He then told the meeting that it was South Africa’s desire to remain within the Commonwealth as a republic.

Macmillan, in the chair, sought to delink the formal approval of South Africa’s continuing membership from any debate on apartheid. One should follow the other. This device was resisted by leaders and undermined by Verwoerd himself, who readily

³²⁸ Stewart, “Natal and the 1960 Republican Referendum,” 190.

³²⁹ Peter Calvocoressi, *South Africa and World Opinion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 61.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

agreed that the two matters be debated together.³³¹ Even so, by the second day of the conference it seemed as though leaders would content themselves with a strong statement condemning apartheid. *The Times* headline declared: "S. Africa's Place Safe in Commonwealth", commenting that "it seems fair to say now that the issue is already decided."³³² A leaked draft communique seemed to confirm that view.³³³ However, as the conference entered the new week, criticism of South Africa's apartheid policy intensified. This time, the principal critics were joined by Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister of newly independent Nigeria, as well as Archbishop Makarios, President of Cyprus. In vain did the British Prime Minister and Robert Menzies of Australia attempt to stem the tide. South Africa's position had become untenable and a bruised and angry Verwoerd withdrew his country's application for membership. He declared that he was "amazed at, and shocked by, the spirit of hostility and even vindictiveness" shown towards South Africa. It marked, he believed, "the beginning of the disintegration of the Commonwealth."³³⁴ Two days later, he told the South African Club in London that "for South Africa and the United Kingdom and the other old friends this decision means new opportunity. We must seek to develop in other ways, untrammelled by the former problems."³³⁵

Macmillan had hoped for a compromise solution that would have kept South Africa within the Commonwealth but also recorded the detestation by all the other Prime Ministers of South Africa's racial policies. But he conceded that this might fatally undermine Balewa, and would not hold off an eventual motion to expel South Africa. Later that day, Lord Home wrote to Harold Macmillan, praising him for the "gallant way you have tried to save the day". It was, said Lord Home, a very sad day but he conceded that "the only alternative was the break-away of all the Asian and African members", adding: "That could not be faced."³³⁶

³³¹ Miller, *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs*, 155.

³³² J.D.B. Miller, "South Africa's Departure," *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies* ed. Kenneth Robinson and J.D.B. Miller, Vol.1, (1961): 61.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

³³⁴ Nicholas Mansergh, "The Commonwealth: A Retrospective Survey," in *A Decade of the Commonwealth, 1955-1964*, ed. W.B. Hamilton et al (USA: Duke University Press, 1966), 15.

³³⁵ Hendrik Verwoerd, Speech to the South African Club, 17 March 1961, London, accessed 9 November 2018, <https://www.hedrikverwoerd.blogspot.co.uk/2010/12/march-17-1961-prime-minister-verwoerd.html>.

³³⁶ Lord Home in conversation with Ayub Khan, quoted in Hyam and Louis, *The Conservative Government and the End of Empire*, 323.

6. South Africa's Commonwealth exit: the aftermath

Verwoerd returned to South Africa to a warm welcome. Margaret Ballinger recorded: "The press now reports that the Nats are closing their ranks and...Verwoerd is to be given a great reception."³³⁷ As Kruger put it: "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 from any further association with a Commonwealth which had utterly changed its character and with which South Africa had far less in common than with many other States outside."³³⁸ Observing the outcome, the British Ambassador, Sir John Maud reported that Verwoerd had returned to a 'hero's welcome', adding: "In his heart, I think, he really was delighted: the Commonwealth was no club for Verwoerd."³³⁹ Gillian Slovo, the daughter of Jo Slovo and Ruth First, both prominent Communist Party activists, had a similar view: "While most white people applauded this declaration by the apartheid state that it no longer cared what the world thought, my parents organised the General Strike which was the ANC's response."³⁴⁰

For the ANC and the burgeoning anti-apartheid movement in London the outcome was a triumph. A vigorous campaign had enlisted the support of some of the newer Commonwealth Prime Ministers and there was a wide degree of political, public and media support in the UK. The campaign had its roots in the All-African Peoples Conference and the formation, in 1959, of the Boycott Movement, led by Tennyson Makiwane, of the ANC, and Patrick van Rensburg, of South Africa's small Liberal Party. Support in the UK for the Boycott Movement spread to the Labour and Liberal parties and to the trade unions. The young Labour MP, Barbara Castle, who had risen to prominence with a passionate denunciation of colonial atrocities in the Hola camp in Kenya, was among the most prominent. Unusually among British politicians, she had met Nelson Mandela as early as 1956, in South Africa, impressed by his quiet authority which masked what she felt was 'a man of steel.'³⁴¹ It was Castle who, with Yusuf Dadoo, Vella Pillay and Abdul Minty, conceived the idea of a 72-hour continuous

³³⁷ Margaret Ballinger, *Diaries*, UCT archives, BC 345, B3.5.1.

³³⁸ Kruger, *The Making of the Nation*, 335.

³³⁹ Maud, *Memoirs of an Optimist*, 91.

³⁴⁰ Gillian Slovo, *Every Secret Thing: My Family, My Country* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1997), 77.

³⁴¹ Clarity Films, "Have you heard from Johannesburg?", documentary series, 10 December 2013, accessed 21 March 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgB7nHj6NyO>.

vigil outside Lancaster House, the venue of the 1961 Commonwealth Conference. “That was our first major campaign and we succeeded”, recalled Abdul Minty: “Nobody thought we would...but Barbara Castle was tireless.”³⁴² Minty’s organisational skills and Castle’s tenacity helped recruit a large band of prominent clergy, writers, actors and parliamentarians, each willing to take a two-hour slot on the picket line on the approaches to Lancaster House, standing in complete silence. The press suspected a hoax and visited the demonstration in the early hours but, as Castle said of the protestors: “We were there!”³⁴³ There was also a march through central London led by Oliver Tambo, Dadoo, Fenner Brockway and other African leaders.³⁴⁴

There was no doubting the international impact of the news. The ANC’s message from London (drafted by Dadoo) was that South Africa’s enforced withdrawal was “a resounding victory for our people, and marks an historic step forward in our struggle against apartheid.”³⁴⁵ In May, Mandela wrote to Sir de Villiers Graaff urging action to stop the inauguration of the republic, telling him: “We have been excluded from the Commonwealth and condemned 95 to 1 at the United Nations.”³⁴⁶ Later, Mandela spoke of the successful campaign to oust South Africa from the Commonwealth and praised the role played by Ghana, Nigeria, and Tanganyika.³⁴⁷ It was the first successful campaign by what had become the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the first in which its partnership with a coalition of Commonwealth countries was to prove such a potent force. Many years later, Castle mused that “the people of this country were ashamed of the fact that at the heart of what was a multiracial Commonwealth, of which we were proud, we had the absolute centre of apartheid. And people began to

³⁴² Abdul Minty, interviewed by Sue Onslow, *Commonwealth Oral History Project*, 12 February 2013, Geneva, Switzerland. Accessed 5 July 2019, [www.commonwealthoralhistories.org](http://sas_space.sas.ac.uk/6531/1/abdul_minty_transcript), http://sas_space.sas.ac.uk/6531/1/abdul_minty_transcript, 2.

³⁴³ “Barbara Castle talks about leading an anti-apartheid demonstration at Commonwealth Summit,” *Beastrabban’s Weblog*, 12 May 2016, accessed 26 May 2020, beastrabban.wordpress.com/2016/05/12/barbara-castle-talks-about-leading-an-anti-apartheid-demonstration-during-commonwealth-summit.

³⁴⁴ Picture, Commonwealth Conference March, 1961, accessed 25 May 2020, <https://www.aamarchives.org/archive/history/1960/Pic6103-commonwealth-conference-march-1961.html>.

³⁴⁵ Message to the South African people, “Forced withdrawal of South Africa from the Commonwealth,” March 1961, Pdraig O’Malley archives, accessed 3 February 2020, <https://www.omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site1q/031v01538/041v01600/051v01617/061v01620.htm>.

³⁴⁶ Correspondence from Nelson Mandela to de Villiers Graaff, 23 May 1961, Pdraig O’Malley archives, accessed 3 February 2020, <https://www.omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site1q/031v01538/041v01600/051v01617/061v01622.htm>.

³⁴⁷ Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 351.

think that this was wrong.”³⁴⁸ However, if this was a defeat for Verwoerd, it was not one which he and his supporters recognised. Contrary to Mandela’s hopes, South Africa’s increasing isolation and international ostracism made no observable impact on Verwoerd, the great architect of apartheid, who now set about destroying all opposition and consolidating the regime.

Margaret Ballinger, the Natives’ representative in the South African Parliament was on board ship, on route to Cape Town, when she heard the news. “It was like a physical blow – or a declaration of war which in effect it is...but no one had really foreseen what did happen.”³⁴⁹ She later wrote that the decision had “profoundly shocked overseas opinion everywhere – and now again White South Africans have become, in effect, one group in the eyes of the outside world...today, we are friendless indeed in a hostile world.”³⁵⁰ Quentin Whyte, the one-time Director of the South African Institute of Race Relations, uttered a great cry of despair which reflected his loss of identity, and his fear of growing isolation: “I feel cut adrift and there is no sub-conscious Commonwealth, British backing for my confidence...I must identify myself ever more completely with my country and must look inwards not outwards. I am deprived of the family and kinship of Commonwealth and cannot now derive from them the expansive, expanding outlook and creativity which could be harnessed for the greater good of my country for I am no longer acceptable; I am an outcast. I am a foreigner, a South African, identified only with South Africa and its presently deplorable policies.”³⁵¹ This was the reality of a second-class white citizenship where, as Keppel-Jones has observed, one portion has nationality, the other only language.³⁵²

What was the future for English-speaking Whites? Margaret Ballinger, removed from power by the abolition of the Native Representative Council and their white representatives in Parliament, became active in the small, multi-racial Liberal Party. A section of the discredited and disintegrating United Party broke away to form the Progressive Party but in the 1961 elections only one of their number, Helen Suzman,

³⁴⁸BBC News, Interview with Barbara Castle, 27 April 1994, London, accessed 14 July 2018, BBC Motion Gallery, <http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/videos/bbc-interview-barbara-castle-27-april-1994?collection=bba,bbr,bbe&phrase=BBC%20interview%20Barbara%20Castle%2027%20April%201994&sort=best#license>.

³⁴⁹ Ballinger, *Diaries*, B3.5.1.

³⁵⁰ Margaret Ballinger, *Sunday Express*, 16 April 1961, UCT archives, BC 345, B3.51.

³⁵¹ Quentin Whyte, “Withdrawal from the Commonwealth,” Draft article, not published, University of Witwatersrand archives, Alan Paton Papers, 2A, HPR, AD 1502, Bb2.59.

³⁵² Quoted in Dubow, “How British was the British World?” 16.

representing the Johannesburg constituency of Houghton, retained her seat. Although the new party polled well in some areas, Suzman was to be the sole liberal voice in parliament for the next thirteen years. Others, such as those in the Liberal Party, clung to pacifism and constitutionalism but were increasingly harassed by the state. In 1965, seven Cape Liberals were banned from political activity, prompting leading members of the party to protest: "You can ban us, gaol us and have your political police snoop on us, but you will never prevent us from continuing to hold our beliefs."³⁵³ Yet it was those liberal beliefs which, in the eyes of Afrikaner nationalists, was "evidence of disloyalty to the state."³⁵⁴ In 1968, legislation banning multi-racial parties finally forced the party's voluntary dissolution. The party declared that the new laws "make it impossible for the Liberal Party to continue without prostituting itself."³⁵⁵ The liberal *Cape Times*, writing on the 20th anniversary of the accession to power by the Nationalists, commented: "The Liberal Party is committing hari kiri as the most honourable way to react to the Bill forbidding 'political interference' across the colour line. One side of the political spectrum thrives; the other dies."³⁵⁶

In the face of increasing government repression after Sharpeville, including bannings, harassment and detention without trial, some white members of the Liberal Party and others contemplated violence against state infrastructure and services (while, initially, eschewing violence against people). Like the decision of the ANC to establish Umkhonto We Sizwe and to resist the state by violence, the National Committee of Liberation (later, the African Resistance Movement) began small scale acts of sabotage of powerlines, bridges and railways. Even as the security police were breaking up and arresting the group, in July 1964, one of their number, John Harris, placed a timebomb in Park Station in Johannesburg during the evening rush hour. A warning was telephoned to the authorities, but the device exploded, killing an elderly woman and seriously injuring 23 others. John Harris was later hanged, the only white South African to be executed for a political crime. The *Cape Times* condemned those

³⁵³ "Seven Cape Liberals banned," 13 March 1965, *The Guardian*, UCT archives BC 345, D5.14.

³⁵⁴ Dubow, "How British was the British World?" 16.

³⁵⁵ Editorial, *Transkei Liberal News*, April 1968, UCT archives, BC 345 D5.71.

³⁵⁶ Editorial, "One thrives, the other dies," 26 May 1968, *The Cape Times*, UCT archives, BC 345, D5.99.

who thought they could “solve human problems with dynamite”, declaring it “a silly, disastrous episode.”³⁵⁷

By 1965, many anti-apartheid activists had fled South Africa, with a considerable number of exiles settling in London. Those liberals that remained had little enthusiasm for the new Commonwealth and did not rejoice at the decision which precipitated their increased isolation. Whyte commented: “The major and salient fact is that our racial policies are quite unacceptable to the Commonwealth and the world. Externally, we face the probability of strong U.N. and other international pressures and actions. Internally, we must be prepared for greater friction and we must expect more control of aspects of our common life.”³⁵⁸

And the majority? After the proclamation of the republic, Ballinger had written: “Dr Verwoerd has apparently persuaded himself...that a change from monarchy to republic can and will effect some mystic change...if only the English people can be cut adrift from their old loyalties they will come together to help...the survival of the white man in this country.”³⁵⁹ And yet, mystical or otherwise, that was what happened. Verwoerd’s gamble had seemingly achieved the domestic effect he was seeking, at least in the short term. In white elections from 1961 to 1981, the National Party consolidated its dominance of white politics. In the eyes of the world, and within South Africa itself, it seemed that apartheid reigned supreme. White opposition, apart from the Progressive Federal Party, was equivocal and diminishing.

However, this apparent white fusion in support of apartheid, which reached its electoral peak in 1977, was not as complete as it seemed. Afrikanerdom itself was beginning to splinter, with defections on the right, first to the HNP and later to the Conservative Party. The divide between *verkrampste* and *verligte* had always been a facet of Afrikaner culture but now it was again being expressed in a political context. Equally, the support of many English-speaking white voters for the Nationalists in the high water of apartheid masked clear and persistent cultural, political and social differences among the younger generations, including contrasting degrees of identity with the South African state and nation. A study of Afrikaner and English-speaking students

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Whyte, “Withdrawal from the Commonwealth,” 4.

³⁵⁹ Margaret Ballinger, “The outlook for the South African Republic 1962,” *International Affairs* 38:3 (1962), UCT archives, BC 345 E2.23.

concluded: “Afrikaners and English-speaking South Africans may be citizens of the same nation-state, but in a social-psychological sense they inhabit two different worlds as far as national identity is concerned.”³⁶⁰ By the final days of apartheid, even these divisions were breaking down, as white voters adjusted to the new reality.³⁶¹

Finally, what of South Africa’s relationship with Britain? Confronted with the unenviable choice, the UK had chosen the Commonwealth rather than the apartheid state. However, it quickly became clear that in many respects it would be business as usual. As regards military cooperation, the Chiefs of Staff contemplated imminent South African withdrawal and concluded that “from a military point of view it is clearly desirable to preserve, as far as possible, the links between the UK and the South African Armed Forces.” The status of military missions would have to change but “special arrangements should be made for service liaison”, given the UK’s “considerable defence interest in South Africa.”³⁶² Even South Africa’s attendance at staff colleges should continue “though there were likely to be strong political objections to this, particularly from the new Commonwealth countries.”³⁶³ In introducing the UK government’s ‘standstill’ Bill in the House of Lords, the Duke of Devonshire spoke of South Africa’s departure as a “melancholy landmark” in the Commonwealth’s evolution but “a milestone and not a gravestone.”³⁶⁴ He confirmed that a country which moves outside the Commonwealth “can no longer expect to benefit from the same privileges as one which remains” but nor would the UK “needlessly destroy such bilateral relations as we might normally expect to enjoy with a friendly foreign power.”³⁶⁵ The Anti-Apartheid Movement later complained that “if the South Africans are able to retain the practical benefits of Commonwealth membership, or if we fail to snatch at this opportunity further to isolate the Nationalists, the victory will prove meaningless.”³⁶⁶ In

³⁶⁰ Stanley Morse, J. Mann and E. Nel, “National identity in a multi-nation state: a comparison of Afrikaners and English-speaking South Africans,” *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 5 (1978): 242.

³⁶¹ Peter Stewart, *Segregation and Singularity* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2004), 173.

³⁶² Chiefs of Staff Committee “Defence Implications of South Africa’s decision to leave the Commonwealth,” 11 May 1961, TNA, COS (61) 160, 3.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁶⁴ Duke of Devonshire, Statement by the Joint Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. Debate on Republic of South Africa (Temporary Provisions) Bill, 11 May 1961, accessed 25 May 2020, <https://www.api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1961/may/11/republic-of-south-africa-temporary>.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ AAM pamphlet, “South Africa out of the Commonwealth – What now?” accessed 25 May 2020, <http://www.aamarchives.org/archive/history/1960s/60s05-south-africa-out-of-the-commonwealth-what-now.html>.

1962, the AAM lobbied against the renewal of the South Africa Bill, pointing out that the system of Commonwealth preferences (worth some £51 million annually to South Africa) was unchanged and that “this devalues the worth of Commonwealth membership.”³⁶⁷ Close diplomatic liaison between South Africa and the UK continued at the highest level, particularly over action at the UN. In November 1963, the South African Ambassador in London called on the Foreign Office to say “that the UK had been very helpful at the UN by voting against oil sanctions.”³⁶⁸ A few weeks later, the Ambassador called again to be told by the Permanent Under-Secretary that the “position in New York was very difficult, but the alternative was likely to be something worse.” Britain’s overriding concern was “to avoid economic sanctions.”³⁶⁹ If politically British ambiguity was becoming tortuous, its economic relationship with South Africa flourished, as did continuing British immigration. Indeed, the five years following South Africa’s exit from the Commonwealth “were the most prosperous in South Africa’s history”, allowing Verwoerd to boast that the exit was “an act of providence.”³⁷⁰

7. Conclusion

It was by no means certain that the Commonwealth was bound to reach the view it did in 1961. Before the Prime Ministers’ conference, the position of many of the participants had not crystallised and Britain worked hard to keep South Africa inside the association. There was no Secretary-General and independent Secretariat to help channel opinions at an early stage, and the individual interventions of certain Commonwealth leaders, particularly Canada, proved crucial in shifting opinion, though so too did Verwoerd’s amiable obstinacy.

What would have been the consequences had the decision gone the other way? Sir John Maud is in no doubt: “Had the Republic been a member of the Commonwealth through the ‘sixties and ‘seventies, the prospects of peace in Southern Africa would now, I think, be worse than they are.”³⁷¹ It would certainly have changed the character of the Commonwealth and had profound repercussions. Rhodesian UDI, only a few years later, roused great passions and almost split the Commonwealth apart. How

³⁶⁷ Memorandum, “The South Africa Bill”, 22 February 1962, AAM archive, Bodleian Library, MSS AAM 818.

³⁶⁸ Telegram, Foreign Office to BHC, Pretoria, 19 November 1963, TNA, UN4/31/IA (DO 181/1), 82.

³⁶⁹ Telegram, Foreign Office to BHC, Pretoria, 2 December 1963, TNA, UN4/31/1A, 731.

³⁷⁰ Hepple, *Verwoerd*, 184.

³⁷¹ Maud, *Memoirs of an Optimist*, 92.

much deeper would those divisions have been had the British Government been flanked by an assertive apartheid regime, supporting white supremacy in Rhodesia, and without the restraining hand of a Commonwealth Secretary-General? This in turn would have encouraged a more equivocal British stance on Rhodesia and might have arrested the UK's decision to cease its steady support for South Africa at the UN. All this would have been more than enough for some of the newer members to walk out; and for a future generation of members not to join in the first place. The rupture with South Africa might have come later, in 1965, or in 1971; but it is inconceivable to imagine South Africa retaining membership after 1976, when Soweto's students lit the fires of internal revolt against the apartheid state. Whatever the timings, it would have left a much diminished, compromised and fractured Commonwealth.

In 1961, South Africa was not expelled from the Commonwealth, nor consciously excluded. Had the change to South Africa's constitutional status not presented its critics with a procedural opportunity, it is difficult to imagine Commonwealth leaders having the collective will to eject South Africa in 1961, or in the immediate years which followed. Rather, it was the actions of Verwoerd, in resolving that he would take no more criticism, which put the Commonwealth on the right side of history and hastened South Africa's isolation.

South Africa, by virtue of its decision, may have chosen the lonely path of the pariah but, to many whites, it was an act of liberation. After a period when the question of the republic was carefully disentangled and separately debated from the issue of Commonwealth membership, the two were once again conflated. All vestiges of British colonialism, and of monarchy, had now been exuberantly rejected. The proclamation of the Republic on 31 May 1961 became, for the Afrikaner, a decisive moment in nation-building and "the victorious end to the republican struggle."³⁷² The apartheid state stood supreme, its enemies scattered, imprisoned or in exile. The economy was booming and the pattern of relations that South Africa enjoyed with many in the world remained unaffected. The British government covertly ensured that its security and intelligence links were unaffected and economic and trading links flourished. The UK's new post-Commonwealth relationship with the apartheid state looked much like the old one.

³⁷² Hepple, *Verwoerd*, 165.

Indeed, paradoxically, the Commonwealth may have unwittingly contributed to what some have described as apartheid's 'golden age' – a decade or more of unchallenged supremacy stretching into the 1970s. Certainly, it allowed Verwoerd to confound his white parliamentary opposition. Verwoerd clearly had no real long-term commitment to the Commonwealth but was prepared to offer English-speaking whites continued membership 'for now' as a device for winning the referendum. Once achieved, South Africa's reapplication for membership, determined six months later, was free of any conditionality. In deciding to walk out of the Commonwealth in the face of a chorus of criticism, he turned an apparent defeat into a great Afrikaner victory. Verwoerd, at a stroke, also removed the UP's one claim to be a distinctive opposition, as the 'Commonwealth Party'. Now all that was left for Graaff's hapless party was a racial policy which dutifully followed in the Nationalist Party wake. Accused of pandering to his conservative and neo-nationalist wing (most of whom ended up in the NP in any case) and ignoring the remaining liberal elements his party became "stultified and directionless, making its eventual collapse inevitable."³⁷³

No wonder that the movement of increasing numbers of English-Speaking Whites into support for the Nationalist Party and apartheid accelerated. Cut off from their cultural ties and increasingly ostracised abroad, where their accent and skin colour would be enough to provoke instant negativity among many they might meet, the reassuring embrace of Afrikanerdom provided comfort and security. Whatever their previous attachment to the British Crown and to the 'imperial' Commonwealth, there was no meeting of minds with the new multiracial Commonwealth, and little prospect that there might be so. Even those remaining white liberal forces working fruitlessly for peaceful change felt international abandonment.

The Commonwealth thus became the first international organisation to drive South Africa from membership of a global body. But it was fortunate to be presented with a procedural opportunity to question South Africa's status, and it was only in the latter stages of the 1961 Commonwealth meeting that this chance was finally taken. Had the decision gone the other way, it is doubtful if the Commonwealth would have survived the turmoil which would have undoubtedly followed. As it was, the character

³⁷³ Book Review, "Div Looks Back – The Memoirs of Sir De Villiers Graaff," *South African Historical Journal* 30:1 (1994): 202.

and governance of the Commonwealth was to change radically and the informal and disorganised attempts of the 'new' Commonwealth to work and coalesce around issues of race became more substantial and effective in the years that followed. Gone too was the passive approach to apartheid. The Commonwealth, almost by accident, had begun its active contribution to the anti-apartheid cause.

South Africa's government was unperturbed. The Afrikaner ideal had been realised and a substantial proportion of English-speaking whites were forced to abandon an outdated attachment to an 'imperial' Commonwealth and chose to muster behind the Nationalists. In the short-term, the apartheid state had turned defeat into triumph. South Africa would not return to the Commonwealth fold for another thirty-four years: this time, as a free and democratic nation.

CHAPTER 2: THE GLENEAGLES AGREEMENT AND THE SPORTING BOYCOTT (1977–1982).

“Social mixing leads inevitably to miscegenation... If they mix first on the sports fields, then the road to other forms of social mixing is wide open.”³⁷⁴

‘Die Transvaler’, Johannesburg, 1965.

“To non-white South Africans, alone, isolated and forgotten, stripped of all their rights, the campaign was a clarion call in the wilderness – a flash of light into the darkness.”³⁷⁵

Peter Hain, London, 1971.

1. Introduction

This chapter has as its primary focus the campaign against apartheid sport. It examines the importance of sport to South Africans and questions the common assertion of the apartheid regime that participation in sport was only of interest to the white population. On the contrary, South Africa was arguably a key influence in globalising sport from the end of the nineteenth century, and issues of race were never absent from its sport, at home and abroad.³⁷⁶ Sport was also an important part of South Africa’s membership of the Commonwealth, though the country’s segregationist racial policies began to intrude internationally, even before the advent of apartheid. Notwithstanding initial gains in the first decade of apartheid by opponents of segregated sport, the chapter explores the development of international pressure against the participation of apartheid South Africa in international sporting events, and in particular the role of the Commonwealth in helping achieve South Africa’s near total sporting isolation. It asks why this form of boycott should have proved such a potent weapon against apartheid at a time, at least initially, when internal opposition to the regime had been all but destroyed, in the “nadir of the South African liberation struggle.”³⁷⁷ By contrast, apartheid seemed to be enjoying a ‘golden’ era of dominance

³⁷⁴ Paul Martin, quoting *Die Transvaler*, 7 September 1965, in “South African sport: apartheid’s Achilles heel?” *The World Today* June (1984): 236.

³⁷⁵ Peter Hain, *Don’t Play with Apartheid: The background to the Stop the Seventy Tour Campaign* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971), 211.

³⁷⁶ Chris Bolsmann, “White Football in South Africa: Empire, Apartheid and Change 1892-1977,” *Soccer and Society* 11:1-2 (2010): 31.

³⁷⁷ Christabel Gurney, “In the heart of the beast: The British Anti-Apartheid Movement 1959-1994,” in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, 287.

and prosperity.³⁷⁸ It suggests that, while originally conceived as a symbol of racial superiority and white hegemony, apartheid sport exposed a vulnerability in the regime and created a previously unanticipated theatre of opposition and resistance. In turn this led the apartheid state to use increasingly elaborate and ingenious counter-measures. Despite continuing repression within South Africa, the chapter discusses whether the regime's increasing international isolation, across all sports, was as a result of diplomatic pressure alone or whether this could only have been possible with mass public protest, including direct action to disrupt and harass South African teams touring internationally. This in itself involved tensions between the recently formed Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM), favouring conventional street demonstrations, and those who later advocated direct action, including physical disruption to matches, harassment of visiting teams and damage to property, as espoused by the Stop The Seventy Tour (STST) in the UK.³⁷⁹

In pursuing my central research question, I explore the Commonwealth's role in opposing apartheid in sport and ask how far the organisation's actions can be said to have made a significant contribution to the international campaign to end apartheid. What were the origins of the Commonwealth's adoption of the 1977 Gleneagles Agreement on apartheid in sport?³⁸⁰ What was the effect of the undertaking, both in discouraging contact with segregated South African teams and in promoting wider international action? In the latter respect, is the assertion of Shridath Ramphal that the Agreement "pioneered world action against apartheid in sport" justified by the evidence?³⁸¹

In considering this question fully, I examine two related issues. First, what were the origins of popular protest against apartheid in sport in the Commonwealth and the combination of mass protest and more targeted direct action that began in the UK, Australia and New Zealand in the late 1960s and early 1970s and which also took other, more localised forms, in other parts of the Commonwealth in later years. I also assess the role of civil society and mass protest and asks whether the awareness it created, and the divisions and passions that resulted, helped move Commonwealth

³⁷⁸ Thula Simpson, "Rethinking 'Apartheid's Golden Age': South Africa, c1966-1979," *South African Historical Journal* 69:2 (2017): 151-2.

³⁷⁹ Hain, *Don't Play with Apartheid*, 166, 196.

³⁸⁰ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit (Vol. 1)*, 198.

³⁸¹ Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*, 426.

governments to conclude an international agreement on the issue. Second, what prompted the Commonwealth to act collectively and why was it not until 1977 that a pan-Commonwealth agreement on apartheid in sport was brokered? Undoubtedly, a key motivation for Commonwealth governments to act against apartheid sport was the dawning realization that, unless governments acted together rather than relying on national responses alone, the Commonwealth Games, described as “the Commonwealth’s most popular event”, would be repeatedly and fatally undermined by boycott.³⁸² This reflected the growing willingness of African countries (many of them Commonwealth members) to use the boycott weapon, with the Commonwealth Games a more tempting and vulnerable target than the Olympics. In that respect, the Commonwealth could be said to be motivated as much by collective self-interest as by a principled response to apartheid.

At the same time, the issue of apartheid sport became entangled with wider issues of racism in Southern Africa (particularly the Rhodesian rebellion) and was driven by the Commonwealth’s development as a ‘post-imperial’ international organisation. While profound disagreements over the British government’s handling of UDI in 1965 aroused deep passions and brought the Commonwealth close to collapse, it encouraged the new organisation, and particularly the Secretary-General, to create collective and autonomous mechanisms and policies which were key to the association’s development. At the heart of this growth was the Commonwealth’s claim to possess a distinctive and effective diplomatic method. This will be a recurring theme in this research and will be tested by analysing the actions of Ramphal in the period. It raises the broader issue of whether the effectiveness of the Commonwealth’s operating processes was uniquely bound up with the leadership skills and other attributes of individual Secretaries-General, or whether the involvement of the office, as an initiating and coordinating mechanism, was sufficient in itself. This was the question posed by Chan in contemplating Ramphal’s retirement: “Can the Secretariat sustain itself as an international actor if...the Secretary-Generalship devolves upon a person of less capacious gifts?”³⁸³

³⁸² McIntyre, *The Significance of the Commonwealth*, 236; Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana and Barbados were among those Commonwealth countries threatening to boycott the 1970 Commonwealth Games over the planned South African cricket tour to England that year.

³⁸³ Chan, *The Commonwealth in World Politics*, 55.

In exploring the significance of Gleneagles in helping achieve South Africa's wider international isolation in sport, I argue that the sporting boycott played an important part in a pattern of escalation that led, a decade later, to widespread economic and financial sanctions against the apartheid regime, including by the Commonwealth. I contend that the conjunction of the Zimbabwe settlement in the same period (and the western boycott of the Moscow Olympics) provided the UK with 'cover' which otherwise might have encouraged greater boycott pressures on the 1982 Brisbane Games, with the UK as the principal focus of discontent.³⁸⁴ I maintain that the resolution of the Rhodesian/Zimbabwe crisis, far from being Thatcher's greatest foreign policy triumph, was rather a profound miscalculation which did not produce the consequences that the British Government's actions had intended and which as a result coloured Thatcher's dealings with the Commonwealth thereafter, including on sport.

The chapter concludes that it was the Commonwealth's sporting traditions, not least in rugby, cricket and field sports, which in a South African context proved to be so susceptible to boycott and isolation and which were so keenly felt by the South African white population. It also achieved a huge resonance among those outside the privileged white population. As Peter Hain put it: "To non-white South Africans, alone, isolated and forgotten, stripped of all their rights, the campaign was a clarion call in the wilderness – a flash of light into the darkness."³⁸⁵ This news did more than raise morale. In local South African communities, the rising clamour for non-racial sport presented a powerful counterpoint to the international sporting boycott, breaking down the apartheid structures by creating new practical realities.³⁸⁶

2. South Africa, sport and race

Although the British had introduced cricket in the Cape Colony after its repossession in 1806, it was the impact of the Second Boer War which, ironically, helped to cultivate an interest in the game among Afrikaners. At the Siege of Mafeking, the Boer commander, General J.P. Snyman, wishing to defend the sanctity of the Sabbath,

³⁸⁴ James Ivey, "Double Standards: South Africa, British Rugby, and the Moscow Olympics," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 36:1 (2019): 115.

³⁸⁵ Hain, *Don't Play with Apartheid*, 211.

³⁸⁶ Leaflets of the Western Province Council of Sport, UCT archives, Cape Town, Sport and Apartheid BAP 796.0968 SPOR.

threatened to shell the defenders as they played cricket on Sunday. Later, a fellow commander, Sarel Eloff, proposed to Colonel Baden-Powell, in charge of the British defences, that his Boer soldiers should join Imperial troops on the cricket field. 'B.P.', using a cricketing metaphor, courteously declined "until the match in which we are presently engaged is over". He told Eloff that his team had "so far scored 200 days not out against the bowling of Cronje, Snyman, Botha and Eloff, and we are having a very enjoyable game."³⁸⁷ This bears out Allen's assertion that "as sport was training for war, war would be the ultimate form of sport."³⁸⁸ The notion of sport as a metaphor for armed conflict is just one element of a complex and multifaceted relationship in colonial, segregated and apartheid South Africa. As Vidacs has commented "real life sports are deeply embedded in society and reflect larger social processes."³⁸⁹ Suppression and resistance, social control, identity and self-expression are all factors in South African sport in the apartheid era.

Undoubtedly, the introduction of British Victorian sports, particularly rugby union and cricket (and to a lesser extent association football) were part of the imperial project. In often hostile settings, sports grounds marked out a physical space that was quintessentially 'English', as well as demonstrating the social distance between coloniser and subjects (just as social distinction permeated these sports in much of the UK). Vidacs has argued that sports were introduced "with the purpose of satisfying colonial ideas of and needs for order and discipline among the dominated populations."³⁹⁰ Sport was also seen as an exemplar of British values and part of its national consciousness.³⁹¹ As a result of this development, modern sport in South Africa was to be riven by paradox and myth. First, while a significant section of the white population remained unreconciled to the British imperial state politically, sport was a different matter. As a result, South Africa played a prominent part in globalising the three sports of rugby, cricket and football, largely through imperial and British Commonwealth mechanisms. Thus, the Imperial Cricket Conference (ICC) was

³⁸⁷ Quoted by Dean Allen, "Bats and Bayonets": Cricket and the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902," *Sport in History* 25:1 (2005): 28.

³⁸⁸ Allen, "Bats and bayonets," 32.

³⁸⁹ Bea Vidacs, "Through the Prism of Sports: Why Should Africanists Study Sport," *Africa Spectrum* 41:3 (2006): 344.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 334.

³⁹¹ Bruce Murray and Christopher Merrett, *Caught Behind: Race and Politics in Springbok Cricket* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2004), 13.

formed in 1909, largely on the initiative of South Africa.³⁹² The first international rugby team to tour South Africa was from the UK in 1891.³⁹³ In 1926, the South African Football Association, reaffiliated to the English FA, proposed the formation of a British Commonwealth Association to arrange Overseas and Dominion tours on a uniform basis.³⁹⁴

Second, despite protestations that non-whites had no interest or aptitude for sports, the popularisation of cricket, rugby and football among all races in South Africa spread rapidly in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In 1899, a black football side, sponsored by the Orange Free State, toured the UK and France, the first South African team of any racial composition to play internationally.³⁹⁵ There was considerable enthusiasm for cricket among black communities, as well as white, and in the 1880s cricket pitches and clubs proliferated. Interracial matches were common, with black teams regularly beating white.³⁹⁶ Matters came to a head when the outstanding 'coloured' fast bowler, 'Krom' Hendricks, was recommended for inclusion in the South African national team, due to tour England in 1894. He was passed over, supposedly at the insistence of Cecil Rhodes, but not before he had agreed to the humiliating condition that he could only join the team if he was taken as a baggage-man and servant.³⁹⁷ Another outstanding mixed-race player, Charles Llewellyn, was later treated in a similar fashion. The barriers of racial segregation and prejudice were thus steadily put in place. Years later, under apartheid, government ministers would protest that there were no laws which actually prohibited interracial sport, while making clear that it was for the separate population groups to "control, arrange and manage their own sport matters."³⁹⁸

In the process, the values applied to sport which once underpinned an empire became a more explicit mutation of the doctrine of white racial supremacy. In the short term, it was obvious that excluding talented players like Hendricks and Llewellyn because of

³⁹² Ibid., 9.

³⁹³ Tony Collins, "The Oval World – Rugby and 'globalisation' in the Nineteenth Century," 24 January 2016, *The Oval World*, accessed 14 September 2019, <https://www.tony-collins.org/rugbyreloaded/2016/1/24/the-oval-world-thoughts-on-the-global-oval>.

³⁹⁴ Bolsmann, "White Football in South Africa," 33.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 31.

³⁹⁶ Murray and Merrett, *Caught Behind*, 10.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 15.

³⁹⁸ Cable from Cape Town to FCO, relaying the transcript of a message by Piet Koornhof MP, Minister of National Education, Sport and Recreation, 31 December 1978, TNA, FCO13/88/76-78.

their colour made the chances of a South African national team winning against international competition much less likely. But, came the response, South Africa should abjure the 'victory at any cost' attitude and "learn to take a licking like white men."³⁹⁹ In the longer term, as non-white players were excluded from competing with white teams (or with teams across different racial groups) and were denied facilities to train and play, the question of lost talent was no longer visible and therefore faded from white consciousness. By the 1920s, most of black cricket was "deliberately written out of South African sports history."⁴⁰⁰ The same was true of other sports. Even as late as the 1950s, all-white South African football teams were competing abroad, though sometimes against mixed black and white sides. This, says Bolsmann, revealed the contradiction that: "all-white South African club, provincial and national sides competed against racially mixed sides in front of mixed crowds abroad, but refused to do so at home."⁴⁰¹

At the same time, the incongruity of international sporting contact with a regime whose odious racial policies were increasingly apparent troubled many. For some, however, the impact of South Africa's racial policies on sport was already well appreciated. As early as 1956, the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) expelled the White South African body because of racial discrimination and recognised instead the South African Table Tennis Board which, while representing black South Africans, was nonetheless pledged to non-racialism. The South African regime responded to these early developments by hardening its approach and by making absolutely clear that its racial policies extended to the heart of sport. The Interior Minister, Dr T.E. Donges spelt out the key elements, which included:

- Whites and non-Whites should organise their sport separately;
- No mixed sport would be allowed within South Africa;
- International teams coming to South Africa to play against White South African teams should be all-White 'according to local custom';

³⁹⁹ Murray and Merrett, *Caught Behind*, 14.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁰¹ Bolsmann, "White Football in South Africa," 37.

- Passports would be refused for 'subversive' Black sportsmen seeking international recognition.⁴⁰²

The philosophy behind this approach was made clear a few years later by the Afrikaner nationalist newspaper, *Die Transvaler*. "Social mixing leads inevitably to miscegenation...If they mix first on the sports fields, then the road to other forms of social mixing is wide open. With an eye to upholding the white race and its civilisation, not one single compromise can be entered into – not even when it comes to a visiting rugby team."⁴⁰³

In the face of such intransigence, attempts at a gradualist approach to non-racial sport by the recently established coordinating body for black sports organisations, the South African Sports Association (SASA), were repeatedly frustrated. This stiffened the resolve of the leaders of non-racial sport to campaign for the total abolition of racism in sport and to seek international recognition for their campaign. In 1962, the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SAN-ROC) was formed, with the aim of supplanting the more limited objectives of SASA. Instead of acceptance or compromise, "peaceful resistance" was the goal.⁴⁰⁴ The driving force was Sam Ramsammy who was "a powerful agent in the evolution of global sports protest against South Africa" until victory was finally won.⁴⁰⁵ A breakthrough was achieved in 1963, with the suspension of South Africa from the Olympic Movement and, the next year, its removal from the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. It would ultimately be expelled from the Olympic movement in 1970. These developments galvanised international pressure in sports such as football, fencing, tennis and boxing. SAN-ROC, with most of its members in exile, in prison or otherwise restricted, decided to leave South Africa and base its operations in London. It also reorganised to concentrate on non-Olympic sports and "refocus the strategies of SAN-ROC upon the Commonwealth and the United Nations."⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰² Commonwealth Secretariat, *Apartheid and South African Sport* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1976), 2-3.

⁴⁰³ Paul Martin, quoting *Die Transvaler*, 7 September 1965, in "South African sport: apartheid's Achilles heel?" *The World Today* June (1984): 236.

⁴⁰⁴ Richard Lapchick, "South Africa: Sport and Apartheid Politics," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 445 (1979): 162.

⁴⁰⁵ Marc Keech, "At the centre of the web: The role of Sam Ramsammy in South Africa's admission to international sport," *Culture, Sport Society* 3:3 (2000): 43.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

Why should sport have been so important to the promoters of apartheid – and why did it prove such a powerful weapon in the anti-apartheid struggle? Peter Hain, who grew up in South Africa, explained: “I understood the white South African psyche: they were sports mad, Afrikaners especially fanatical about rugby.”⁴⁰⁷ It is an irony that while the quest of Smuts and others for white ‘fusion’ largely remained a chimera politically, the white population rallied as one to the cause of Springbok rugby and cricket, and to sport in general. Nixon sees it as “a crucial arena of white self-esteem” and contends that their obsession with the sports boycott was “rooted in an ethnic nationalist exasperation at being denied just such opportunities to compensate for the smallness of their population, their geographic marginality and their political ostracism.”⁴⁰⁸ Segregated sports grounds were not enough, especially in international matches where black spectators invariably cheered for the visitors, in the hope of seeing the all-white Springboks being beaten. In 1955, fear of this behaviour caused Bloemfontein City Council to ban non-white spectators from watching the British Isles play South Africa at rugby on the grounds that it would ‘cause friction’.⁴⁰⁹

If Trevor Huddleston had seen the value of boycotting apartheid sport, others dismissed such a campaign as being concerned with ‘petty apartheid’ and of only marginal significance.⁴¹⁰ Yet as the sporting boycott developed a high profile in the late 1960s, it exposed the tenets of apartheid to rigorous scrutiny in an arena where concepts like fair play, teamwork and respect were all important. Just such an illustration of the absurdities and injustices of apartheid as applied to sport was provided by the D’Oliviera affair. Basil D’Oliviera was a talented all-round South African cricketer who excelled with bat and ball. Born in Cape Town, to ‘Cape Coloured’ parentage, D’Oliveira went on to captain South Africa’s non-white national side, though excluded from ‘white’ cricket. With the help of the BBC cricket commentator John Arlott, D’Oliveira left South Africa in 1960, came to the UK and became a regular member of the Worcestershire County team. Before long, he was selected for the England side and was playing Test cricket. When the MCC announced that a cricket team would be touring South Africa in 1968, the South African

⁴⁰⁷ Hain, *Inside Out* (London: Biteback Publishing Ltd, 2012), 48.

⁴⁰⁸ Rob Nixon, “Apartheid on the Run: The South African Sports Boycott,” *Transition* 58 (1992): 72-3.

⁴⁰⁹ Martin, “South African Sport,” 235.

⁴¹⁰ Marc Keech & Barrie Houlihan, “Sport and the end of apartheid,” *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 88:349 (1999): 118.

Minister of the Interior stated that if D'Oliveira was selected, the team would be refused entry. When the team was announced, D'Oliveira was omitted, prompting many to believe that the England selectors were pandering to South Africa's racial policies as they had in the past.⁴¹¹ Amidst a furore, another player, Tom Cartwright, withdrew as a result of injury and D'Oliveira's inclusion became inevitable. With the MCC finally selecting D'Oliveira, it was now the turn of South Africa's Prime Minister, John Vorster, to rage: "For a government to submit so easily and so willingly to open blackmail is to me unbelievable."⁴¹² The MCC cancelled the tour but left open the possibility of future tours.

Outrage at the D'Oliveira affair had a powerful effect on British public opinion and helped generate a broad-based opposition to apartheid sport, involving the churches, trade unions, civic and community groups, students and politicians. John Arlott had visited an African township during England's tour of South Africa in 1948-1949 and was appalled by the desolate living conditions he witnessed. He now saw how the injustices of apartheid could be meted out to his sporting protégé. Despite his misgivings about sport as an arena for political action and his admiration for Springbok cricketers like Graeme Pollock, he told the BBC that he could not cover the impending South African tour of England in 1970. He explained: "A successful tour would offer comfort and confirmation to a completely evil regime."⁴¹³

Those campaigning against the 1970 cricket tour now had several opportunities, across several sports, to protest against racially-selected South African teams. If the D'Oliveira affair excited public opinion, there was also a fresh tactic, namely non-violent direct action, and new and energetic leadership, in the form of Peter Hain and the Stop the Seventy Tour Campaign. Hain, then a Young Liberal, and his fellow activists had first honed their tactics in the summer of 1969 at a Great Britain-South Africa Davis Cup match in Bristol. There were also protests against a touring South African cricket team, the Wilf Isaacs XI. Later in the year there were major protests

⁴¹¹ Guy Fraser-Sampson, *Cricket at the Crossroads: Class, Colour and Controversy from 1967 to 1977* (London: Elliott & Thompson Ltd, 2011), 86-96.

⁴¹² Martin Williamson, "When politics killed a tour," *ESPN Sports Media*, 14 July 2012, accessed 17 September 2019, <https://www.espn.com/magazine/content/story/571799.html>.

⁴¹³ John Arlott, "Why I'm off the air," *The Guardian* 17 April 1970, The Guardian archive, accessed 19 April 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/1970/apr/17/leadersandreply.mainsection>.

and disruption of the Springboks rugby tour of the British Isles, including sit-ins, pitch invasions and even the short-lived kidnap of several South African players.

What had changed? Undoubtedly, the issue of apartheid in sport had touched a public nerve and the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) estimates that some 50,000 were involved in protests of one sort or another.⁴¹⁴ For many, this took the form of conventional protests outside playing arenas. However, some turned to direct action within them. Such tactics continuously and effectively disrupted the sporting spectacle, diminished the enjoyment of spectators and undermined the performance of the players. It also markedly escalated the security costs and measures that needed to be put in place as a result. STST had managed to sustain their campaign across all 26 rugby fixtures, over a period of three months. It was a high-risk strategy and, as Gurney admits, “there were tensions between AAM and STST”.⁴¹⁵ Some in the AAM feared that direct action would be counter-productive. No doubt in some cases, this was so. But, in addition to generating much greater publicity and comment (not all of it positive), it raised the question of whether a cricket tour could be protected, and at what cost.

3. The Commonwealth, apartheid sport and the Gleneagles Agreement

There was early evidence that a barometer of Commonwealth opinion, and later a powerful means of influence, was the prospect of participation in the Commonwealth Games. In 1934, the second British Empire Games, due to be hosted by Johannesburg, was moved to London, principally because of concerns about the impact of South Africa’s colour bar on visiting athletes.⁴¹⁶ Exceptionally, the 1958 British Commonwealth Games in Cardiff attracted protests from South Wales miners and others against the inclusion of an all-white South African team.⁴¹⁷ By 1962 and the time of the next British Commonwealth Games in Australia, South Africa was out of the Commonwealth and therefore excluded from the Games. At the same time, traditional Commonwealth sports, particularly cricket and rugby union, were dominated by the old imperial arrangements for their administration. This served as

⁴¹⁴ “The Anti-Apartheid Movement in the 1960s,” accessed, 19 April 2020, <https://www.aamarchives.org/history/1960s/79-history/124-the-anti-apartheid-movement-in-the-1960s.html>, 6.

⁴¹⁵ Gurney, “In the heart of the beast,” 289.

⁴¹⁶ Philip Barker, “When South Africa gave up the 1934 Empire Games,” *BizNews*, 11 March 2017, accessed 9 September 2019, <https://www.insidethegames.biz/writers/24090/philip-barker>.

⁴¹⁷ Christabel Gurney, “A Great Cause: The Origins of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, June 1959 – March 1960,” *Journal of South African Studies* 26:1 (2000): 129.

an insulation from external political pressure. It also encouraged the various internal administrative bodies to skirt round the issue of apartheid sport, rather than confronting it directly. Matches between white South African and non-white Commonwealth teams were largely avoided, or alternatively there was an unspoken willingness to pander to the racial conditions clearly specified by the apartheid regime. Sport was not the only area where there were discreet steps taken in planning visits to South Africa to exclude any non-white participants and to 'respect the local culture'. This was also true of military exchanges and goodwill visits.⁴¹⁸

Trevor Huddleston, in saying his farewells to South Africa in 1956 after 12 years as a priest in Sophiatown, was one of the first to raise the spectre of a sporting boycott to bring South Africa to its senses. "Just because the Union is so good at sport, such isolation would shake its self-assurance very severely...it might be an extraordinarily effective blow to the racialism which has brought it into being".⁴¹⁹ Two years later, in 1958, Huddleston, Fenner Brockway and others formed the Campaign Against Race Discrimination in Sport, with the South African team at the Cardiff Games an immediate target.⁴²⁰ However, prior to the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, the newly formed Boycott Movement (later to become the AAM) called for the boycott of South African produce, like fruits, cigarettes and alcohol, rather than action against apartheid in sport. It was only after the fierce repression that followed Sharpeville, including the crushing of internal dissent and a decision by the ANC and PAC to turn to armed struggle, that the notion of a sporting boycott began to gather support. In 1965, the South African cricket tour of Britain attracted protests and neither the Queen nor the Prime Minister made their customary visits to the opening day's play at Lords.⁴²¹ The AAM, in encouraging a boycott of the tour, declared: "apartheid permeates every aspect of sporting life."⁴²² But it was only after the D'Oliveira affair in 1968, the barring of US tennis star, Arthur Ashe, and South Africa's continued rejection of Maori players in visiting All Blacks' teams up until 1970, did attitudes markedly change.⁴²³

⁴¹⁸ For further discussion, see pages 99-100.

⁴¹⁹ Huddleston, *Naught for Your Comfort*, 150.

⁴²⁰ Hakan Thorn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society* (Oxford: Springer, 2006), 62.

⁴²¹ AAM explanatory text for "It's Not Cricket" (1965), "The Anti-Apartheid Movement in the 1960s," accessed 20 April 2020, <https://www.aamarchives.org/history/1960s/po193-it's-not-cricket-1965.html>.

⁴²² AAM Leaflet, "Apartheid isn't Cricket," AAM archives, Bodleian Library, Oxford, L.Commonwealth 1960-85, MSS AAM 2227, 145.

⁴²³ Lapchick, "South Africa: Sport and Apartheid Politics," 162.

This is one of the contextual reasons why the Commonwealth collectively seemed slow to act on apartheid sport. Despite the widespread international publicity given to protests against the 1969 Springboks rugby tour to England, and the subsequent cancellation of the 1970 cricket tour, there is not a single reference to apartheid and sport in any of the Commonwealth's official summit communiqués between 1966 and 1975.⁴²⁴ Nor does the issue appear in any of the Secretary-General's biennial reports to Commonwealth leaders.⁴²⁵ The only reference in Arnold Smith's memoirs is to the Gleneagles Agreement, which was concluded two years after he had demitted office.⁴²⁶ Apart from some press cuttings, compiled for monitoring purposes, my search of the Commonwealth's archives found no other material on apartheid sport, prior to 1975.⁴²⁷

Some might argue that since South Africa was no longer a member of the Commonwealth, apartheid was less of a concern. This was not the case. Not only was Rhodesia a constant and major preoccupation but southern Africa more generally (including apartheid in South Africa and Namibia) was a regular feature of official Commonwealth pronouncements between 1966-1975. As Sonny Ramphal said of the period: "Over those years, the Rhodesia problem has come to be seen more clearly as the issue of liberation in southern Africa."⁴²⁸ This was also the approach of the AAM which lobbied the 1969 Commonwealth summit in opposition to Wilson's "Fearless" proposals, arguing that "four million Africans are being abandoned to apartheid."⁴²⁹

It was also the case that international sporting boycotts, though not unknown, were not particularly effective prior to the Montreal Olympics in 1976.⁴³⁰ In the 1970s, the Caribbean was conflicted by the actions of prominent cricketers playing and coaching

⁴²⁴ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 115-182.

⁴²⁵ Biennial Reports of the Commonwealth Secretary-General 1969-1975, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, COMSEC/CPAD/RSG, 1969-75.

⁴²⁶ Smith, *Stitches in Time*, 235.

⁴²⁷ Country monitoring began in 1973: "Apartheid in Sport" (6 February 1973–1 April 1977), Commonwealth archives 140/73/02.

⁴²⁸ Shridath Ramphal, *Report of the Commonwealth Secretary-General 1977* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1977), 4-5.

⁴²⁹ AAM Leaflet, "No Munich in Rhodesia, No Sell-Out to Smith," AAM archives, Bodleian MSS AAM 1231.

⁴³⁰ At the 1956 Olympics, Egypt, Iraq and the Lebanon withdrew, citing the Anglo-French attack on the Suez canal; Spain, Switzerland and the Netherlands boycotted the Games because of the Soviet invasion of Hungary; and China declined to take part in protest at the International Olympic Committee's continuing recognition of Taiwan.

in South Africa, leaving governments divided and lacking clear leadership.⁴³¹ Boycott as a weapon only became widespread after the call by the UN General Assembly, following the 1977 Gleneagles Agreement, for a shunning of apartheid South Africa by all sports bodies.⁴³² The other difficulty for those who wished to see more effective international action was that in many countries (particularly in the Commonwealth) sporting administration was decentralised and largely autonomous. It was not only the International Olympic Committee, the International Rugby Football Board or the International Cricket Council with some say over the conduct of their respective sports through international competition: the national administrators of the various games also had considerable influence and were not noted for their willingness to listen to politicians or to entertain radical ideas.

Harold Wilson's Labour Government was keen to demonstrate its anti-apartheid credentials over the D'Oliveira affair. However, direct action and mass protest against the 1969 Springboks rugby tour, coupled with the threat of a credible African and Asian boycott of a 'UK' Commonwealth Games (in Edinburgh), spurred the British Government to act by bringing maximum pressure on the Cricket Council to cancel the 1970 South African cricket tour. Wilson was acutely aware that his best opportunity to seek re-election before his five-year term expired was in the summer of 1970. The last thing he wanted were scenes of prolonged public disorder along with escalating policing costs, which would be a gift to the opposition Conservative Party. Further, nationalism was awakening in Scotland (after the election of Winnie Ewing in the 1967 Hamilton by-election). Damage to Scotland's first Commonwealth Games as host would do Labour's electoral prospects north of the border no good at all. While the Cabinet had secretly discussed prosecuting Hain (a future Labour Cabinet Minister) for conspiracy, the government decided to bring full pressure to bear to stop the tour. Within days of the first Test Match at Trent Bridge, Nottingham, the Cricket Council bowed to a formal request from the Home Secretary, Jim Callaghan, to withdraw the invitation to the South Africans. On 22 May, a statement calling off the tour declared: "with deep regret the Council were of the opinion that they had no alternative but to

⁴³¹ Aviston Downes, "Sport & International Diplomacy: The Case of the Commonwealth Caribbean and the Anti-Apartheid Campaign, 1959-1992," *Sports Historian* 22:2 (2002): 27-28.

⁴³² UN General Assembly, *International Declaration Against Apartheid in Sports*, 14 December 1977, accessed 19 September 2019, https://www.digital.library.un.org/record/624279/A_RES_32_105M_EN.pdf.

accede to this request.”⁴³³ In the view of Peter Hain, who inspired the anti-apartheid campaign in the UK from 1969, “it was African Commonwealth pressure linked to the campaign in Britain that was crucial to the stopping of the Seventy Tour.”⁴³⁴ There were also pressing electoral reasons why Wilson wanted controversy over cricket to end. With a general election underway a week later, Wilson might have hoped that England’s football team, winners of the 1966 World Cup, would help carry him to victory. Instead, Wilson went down to an unexpected general election defeat.

Commonwealth African members were therefore involved in the successful campaign to ‘stop the ’70 tour.’ However, there would have been little scope, and scant support from Commonwealth members generally, for Smith and his new Secretariat to seek a role in the events of 1969-1970. The Secretariat’s staff numbers and its budgets were at that stage modest. In 1968-1969, its total budget was £557,805 and there were 176 staff.⁴³⁵ It was in any case almost overwhelmed by a host of challenging international issues, from Rhodesia and Kashmir to Biafra and the bloody birth of Bangladesh. A Canadian commentator described Smith as “living in the eye of the hurricane.”⁴³⁶ There were also some official voices (predominately in the ‘old’ Commonwealth) who were suspicious of anything other than a strict and narrow interpretation of the 1965 Agreed Memorandum on the Commonwealth Secretariat.⁴³⁷ Smith, and his nascent Secretariat, were often in conflict with the former imperial power. “The Secretariat was immediately cordially disliked by Whitehall”, comments Verrier, “and every effort was made not merely to limit its effectiveness but to interfere with its tasks.”⁴³⁸ Smith singled out the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) as the arm of British Government which felt most threatened by him and his team, adding: “the larger and more active the Secretariat, the greater the perceived threat.”⁴³⁹ The British response was to limit Smith’s status and influence.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³³ BBC News, “1970: South Africa cricket tour called off,” *On This Day*, 22 May 1970, accessed 14 June 2018, https://www.news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/stories/may22/newssid_2504000/2504573.stm.

⁴³⁴ Hain, *Don’t Play with Apartheid*, 226.

⁴³⁵ Arnold Smith, *Third Report of the Commonwealth Secretary-General (November 1968–November 1970)* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1971), 51.

⁴³⁶ Blair Fraser, quoted in Smith, *Stitches in Time*, 20.

⁴³⁷ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 105-111.

⁴³⁸ Anthony Verrier, *The Road to Zimbabwe 1890-1980* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), 145.

⁴³⁹ Smith, *Stitches in Time*, 41.

⁴⁴⁰ Exchanges between L.E.T. Storar and A.L. Mayall (Protocol), 1972, TNA, FCO 68/471.



Fig.6. Arnold Smith (L.) meeting Commonwealth Law officers, London 1966. Commonwealth Secretariat.

In any case, with the cancellation also of the South African cricket tour to Australia in 1971, again after the intervention of the national government, Smith had every reason to believe that member countries individually would take care of sport and that the Commonwealth's primary contribution to the anti-apartheid cause would be to assist an acceptable solution in Rhodesia. However, Smith had reckoned without the marked change of tone coming from Downing Street. Calling on the new British Prime Minister some months after the election, Smith records that he "found his mood and attitude chilling."⁴⁴¹ While contemplating a new initiative on Rhodesia, Heath seemed to indicate that he would not be bound by previous British Government commitments to the Commonwealth and the UN and cast doubt on the need to involve the Commonwealth in the issue. This was in line with a reference to the Commonwealth in the recent Conservative Party election manifesto that: "The independence of each

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, 72.

of its members must be respected, and that their internal affairs and individual responsibilities are matters for their individual decision alone, and that jointly they should only consider those matters freely agreed upon as being of common interest.”⁴⁴² This warning was accompanied by the more alarming announcement by the Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, that the British Government would be resuming arms sales to South Africa. The Commonwealth and Smith would clearly have their hands full in trying to prevent the British Government from reversing its previous stance on South Africa and Rhodesia, with potentially disastrous consequences, far less develop a more ambitious approach on apartheid sport.

The election of Shridath Ramphal as the Commonwealth’s second Commonwealth Secretary-General, in 1975, provided new leadership and fresh impetus to the anti-apartheid cause. It also came at a time of far-reaching change. True, the Rhodesian issue seemed no nearer peaceful resolution, though an intensifying and increasingly bloody guerrilla war pointed to the gloomy conclusion that the black majority would only assert their democratic and human rights through violent struggle. Elsewhere in southern Africa, the geo-politics of the region had altered dramatically. From a position of apparently unchanging South African dominance, the outer bastions of the citadel were crumbling. The Commonwealth itself now had a ‘third world’ champion as its chief officer, backed by an established Secretariat, with expanding programmes and growing confidence. The Commonwealth’s membership had also changed beyond recognition. A majority had come to independence only in the post-war period, many recently. Their leaders were the heroes of an emerging new world: Nkrumah, Kenyatta, Nehru, Gandhi, Nyerere, Kaunda, Lee Kuan Yew, Michael Manley, Seretse Khama and others to come. Even the old ‘white’ Dominions were undergoing change, with the radical Gough Whitlam in Australia battling a conservative, Malcolm Fraser, whose own foreign policy approaches were distinctly liberal. ‘Trudeau-mania’ in Canada had left its mark on the Commonwealth in a variety of ways, with Canada stepping out of its imperial past and into its chosen destiny as a ‘middle power’ at the service of global order and justice. Even Harold Wilson and the Labour Party had survived the ‘swinging sixties’ and were now back in Downing Street.

⁴⁴² Conservative Party General Election Manifesto 1970, *A Better Tomorrow*, accessed 19 April 2020, <https://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1970/1970-conservative-manifesto.shtml>.

Ramphal was in temperament and outlook a man for such times. Coming from an Indo-Caribbean background in Guyana, he was keenly aware of the path his family had trod through the pillared institutions of slavery in the West Indies. His Indian great-grandmother had travelled across the oceans and into bondage as an indentured labourer on the sugar plantations of Demerara. Ramphal saw apartheid as slavery's modern-day equivalent. In the inhumanity and brutality of systemised 'otherness', and in the voices of those who were apartheid's apologists, he heard the echoes of an earlier crime against humanity.⁴⁴³ Its destruction became a driving passion from his earliest days as Foreign Minister of Guyana. Unless the new, multiracial Commonwealth could confront and vanquish this gross denial of difference, it would be exposed as an organisation without meaning or substance.

As planning began for the celebrations of the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977, it was Queen Elizabeth herself, as Head of the Commonwealth, who encouraged Wilson to propose that the United Kingdom should be the venue for the 1977 CHOGM. The summit had outgrown Marlborough House (used for the 1969 meeting) and Lancaster House, close by, was chosen as the venue for the five-day gathering. Another significant change since then was the innovation of a 'Heads Only' Retreat, with the Gleneagles Hotel, set in Perthshire's Ochill hills, as the 1977 venue. In the eyes of many contemporary commentators, the CHOGM did not seem particularly noteworthy. Peter Lyon remarked: "For all its festive setting, and the problem of Amin's Uganda, this meeting was a sober, low-key affair".⁴⁴⁴ The noted Commonwealth journalist, Derek Ingram, felt it had been "a rather quiet Heads of Government gathering".⁴⁴⁵ Interviewing Ramphal, he commented: "Seen in retrospect, it is difficult to pick out what were its highlights and achievements". Ramphal replied: "On the whole, I would rather Commonwealth Heads of Government Conferences be less headline catching and more practically orientated and substantive in achievement and I am glad that the London meeting qualified on that account".⁴⁴⁶ And yet it was the Gleneagles Retreat which would be the setting for a landmark Commonwealth agreement on apartheid in sport, with far-reaching political implications.

⁴⁴³ Ramphal, "Glimpses of a Global Life," 395-406.

⁴⁴⁴ Peter Lyon, "The Commonwealth's Jubilee summit," *The World Today* 33:7 (1977): 250.

⁴⁴⁵ Derek Ingram, "A Quiet Conference," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 268 (1977): 314.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 314.

By this point, the campaign for non-racial sport had seen South Africa challenged in virtually every international sporting arena. In 1970, in addition to South Africa's expulsion from the Olympic movement, thirteen of the country's white sporting organisations had been either suspended or expelled from international sport. A year later, South Africa had been virtually excluded from all international cricket. Even so, rugby, so beloved by white South Africans, proved more resistant to change. Following the significant protests in the UK during the 1969 Springboks tour, the South African rugby team met a similar storm in Australia, in 1971. Within a year, and the election of a new Australian government, an official policy of opposing apartheid sport was adopted. Despite periodic challenges, not least from individual sporting figures, the policy was sustained thereafter.

As a keen sporting nation, New Zealand had come face to face with some of these challenges. In particular, opposition had been growing to the proposed rugby tour of South Africa in 1970. This was aggravated by reports from within South Africa that Maori members of the All-Blacks might not be welcome. Dr Albert Hertzog, a right-wing Cabinet Minister, led the opposition, complaining that the Maoris would 'sit at the table with our young men and girls, and dance with our girls'. At the same time, the New Zealand Athletics Union withdrew an invitation to its White South African counterpart to tour the country in 1970, fearful that such an invitation might scupper New Zealand's participation in the 1970 Commonwealth Games. In the event, the All Blacks tour went ahead, after South Africa agreed to accept a mixed-race team. Chris Laidlaw, a talented half-back in that team (and later New Zealand's first resident High Commissioner in Zimbabwe) remarked: "I had resolved personally to go on the tour if New Zealand was able to take non-white players on the grounds that this was a step forward...Immediately after the tour I was pessimistic about the prospects of further reform and began to believe I had done the wrong thing. A decade later I realised that this tour had helped crystallise the whole issue".⁴⁴⁷

With a Springboks tour due in March 1973, the Commonwealth Games was again used as a lever of influence. India, and several Commonwealth African countries, announced they would boycott the 1974 Games, due to be held in Christchurch, South

⁴⁴⁷ Chris Laidlaw, (former All Black and diplomat), telephone interview from NZ with the author, 14 June 2012.

Island. The newly elected Labour Prime Minister, Norman Kirk, notwithstanding an election pledge to the contrary, persuaded the NZ Rugby Union that the tour had to be abandoned, infuriating the rugby fraternity. The Christchurch Games were saved and, in an outpouring of emotion and camaraderie, earned the four-yearly sporting event the enduring soubriquet of the 'Friendly Games'.

That mood was to be swiftly punctured by the election, in 1975, of the National Party Leader, Robert Muldoon. The pugnacious Muldoon had made the question of racist tours, politics and sport an election issue, arguing that "sportsmen should be free to play with whomsoever they wished."⁴⁴⁸ Emerging victorious, he promised the reinstatement of sports exchanges with South Africa. While Muldoon saw the issue as a domestic one, playing well to sections of New Zealand's electorate, its international implications were alarming. Despite a visit to New Zealand in May 1976 by Sonny Ramphal to head off the "total articulation" of New Zealand policy, a month later the National Government bade official farewell to the All Blacks team as they embarked on their tour of South Africa. The timing could not have been worse. The Soweto uprising by black school students had just begun and already nearly two hundred had been killed and many more injured. Against such a dreadful backdrop, twenty-eight African nations (eleven from Commonwealth Africa), along with Guyana and Iraq, announced that they would be boycotting the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal, beginning in July. Quite apart from New Zealand's plummeting international reputation, it was increasingly evident to other Commonwealth member governments, and to the Commonwealth Secretariat, that unless something was done, the impact on the 1977 Commonwealth summit, the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations, and the 1978 Commonwealth Games in Edmonton would be disastrous.

⁴⁴⁸ Nigel Roberts, "The New Zealand General Election of 1975," *The Australian Quarterly* 48:1 (1976): 108.



Fig. 7. Children protesting in defiance of the security forces. Commonwealth Secretariat.

This was the prelude to the Gleneagles Agreement. As the London CHOGM approached, Ramphal had boldly laid out two particularly pressing issues for the meeting. Writing in his biennial report to Heads, he pointed to General Idi Amin and the problem of human rights in Uganda, and also to Prime Minister Muldoon and New Zealand's policy on sporting contacts with South Africa. The juxtaposition of these two issues, wrote Anthony Payne, "was highly embarrassing to New Zealand and served to underline the seriousness with which Ramphal intended to force the Commonwealth to find a practical way of translating its rhetorical opposition to apartheid into a common policy on the matter of sporting contact with South Africa."⁴⁴⁹ Initially, any excitement at the opening of the CHOGM was consumed by the Ugandan issue, with rumours rife that Idi Amin would make a surprise appearance. Otherwise, five days of formal Executive Sessions proceeded at a pedestrian pace, with no mention of apartheid and

⁴⁴⁹ Anthony Payne, "The international politics of the Gleneagles Agreement," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 80:320 (1991): 420.

sport. Ramphal had his eye on the Retreat for what he subsequently described as “my first excursion into quiet diplomacy.”⁴⁵⁰

When Heads eventually decamped to the Gleneagles Hotel, Ramphal followed a pattern that he was to use at subsequent CHOGM retreats to great effect. Most Commonwealth leaders were encouraged on to the golf course or to relax in some other way. At the same time, Ramphal assembled a small group of Commonwealth Heads, under the leadership of Manley to try and find a way forward. Apart from Manley and Muldoon himself, there was Lee Kuan Yew, Trudeau, Shehu Musa Yar ‘Adua, of Nigeria; and Aboud Jumbe, the Vice-President of Tanzania. Although Muldoon was on his own, the tone of the discussion was about finding a solution rather than indulging in recrimination, working on a draft prepared by the Secretariat. In the end, it was left to Manley to close the deal, in a one-to-one meeting with Muldoon. The New Zealand Prime Minister later claimed that he and Manley had knocked up the agreement in a bar at Gleneagles.⁴⁵¹ Two final concessions had to be made. One was that they should draw “a curtain across the past” and the other was to blame past misunderstandings and difficulties in part on “inadequate inter-governmental consultations.”⁴⁵² Nevertheless, Ramphal felt this was a price worth paying. Beginning with the Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles of 1971, the Agreement reaffirmed the Commonwealth’s fundamental opposition to racism and to apartheid in sport. Second, it dealt decisively with the issue of sporting contact with apartheid South Africa, stating that such contacts “encourage the belief (however unwarranted) that they are prepared to condone this abhorrent policy or are less than totally committed to the principles in their Singapore Declaration.”⁴⁵³ Third, notwithstanding the past, it committed each and every one of its leaders to the “urgent duty” to combat apartheid “by withholding any form of support for, and by taking every practical step to discourage contact or competition by their nationals” with those who practise apartheid. Fourth, while acknowledging that it was for each government to determine implementation of the agreement “in accord with its law”, they warned that the

⁴⁵⁰ Shridath Ramphal, (former Secretary-General), in conversation with the author, 31 May 2012, London.

⁴⁵¹ Jeremy Pope, Email to the author, 3 June 2012, personal copy.

⁴⁵² Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Gleneagles Agreement on Sporting Contacts with South Africa*, 15 June 1977, accessed 19 September 2019, <https://www.thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/inline/Gleneagles-Agreement.pdf>, 1.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

“effective fulfilment of their commitment” was essential to the future harmony of Commonwealth sport. In that respect, they added that they did not expect to see in future any sporting contact “of any significance” with apartheid South Africa.⁴⁵⁴



Fig.8 – Commonwealth leaders, hosted by Jim Callaghan, at their Gleneagles Retreat, 1977. Commonwealth Secretariat.

By the evening, the draft had been circulated to all the other Heads, none of whom dissented from it. The next day, in London, the Agreement was swiftly adopted by consensus in formal session. The host of the summit, Jim Callaghan, commented: “This agreement was a victory for all Commonwealth countries since they had all agreed to use their best efforts...to break down the system of apartheid in sports”, adding that each country would work to “sustain and strengthen” the consensus brokered at the summit.⁴⁵⁵ Sam Ramsammy, for SAN-ROC, remarked: “The Gleneagles Agreement is a huge achievement for us. For the first time an international governmental organisation has signed up to our cause.”⁴⁵⁶ The 1978 Edmonton

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁵⁵ Commonwealth Secretariat, “From the archives: the Gleneagles Agreement on sport,” 9 November 2016, accessed 19 April 2020, <https://www.thecommonwealth.org/media/news/archive-gleneagles-agreement-sport>, 2.

⁴⁵⁶ Sam Ramsammy and Edward Griffiths, *Reflections on a Life in Sport* (Cape Town: Greenhouse, 2004), 75.

Games seemed secure. For Ramphal, the Gleneagles Agreement was one of “substantial achievement.”⁴⁵⁷ He added: “I believe it has a good chance of sticking.” In the immediate aftermath, this certainly seemed to be the case. In the eyes of the Commonwealth Secretariat, it had “an immediate and significant effect in diminishing sporting contact with South Africa.”⁴⁵⁸ On the 14 December that year, the UN General Assembly, which had called for a sporting boycott of South Africa as early as 1968, adopted the International Declaration against Apartheid in Sport.⁴⁵⁹ It was then adopted – or at least imitated – by the OAU, and also the Council of Europe, in 1978; by Nordic countries in 1979; and by many other individual countries thereafter. As Anthony Low put it: “The Commonwealth’s Gleneagles Declaration of 1977 against sporting links with South Africa managed over the years to grow some remarkably strong teeth.”⁴⁶⁰ It was, thought Peter Hain, “a major advance.”⁴⁶¹ However, there were to be fierce disputes over the implementation of Gleneagles with various Commonwealth countries, most notably New Zealand and the UK. Both were later accused of contravening Gleneagles and both protested that they had sought “the effective fulfilment” of their commitment to halt racist tours, in the absence of legal powers to prohibit sporting exchanges by their independent games organisations.⁴⁶²

Given his previous record on sporting exchanges with South Africa and his initial scepticism about Commonwealth collective action, New Zealand’s premier might have been among those baulking at the full implementation of the Gleneagles Agreement. However, in February 1979, with several New Zealand rugby players invited to tour South Africa with a multinational team, Muldoon wrote to Ramphal reassuring him that “the responsibilities the Gleneagles Agreement places on governments to give a lead are clear. We have observed them meticulously and we will continue to do so”. He added a caveat: “It would, however, be wrong in principle and contrary not only to Gleneagles but also to everything the Commonwealth stands for to allow a sporting tour undertaken by a few individuals against their Government’s counsel to embitter

⁴⁵⁷ Ingram, “A Quiet Conference,” 321.

⁴⁵⁸ Commonwealth Secretariat, *Racism in Southern Africa*, 16.

⁴⁵⁹ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 32/105M 14 December 1977, accessed 12 February, 2020, <https://www.research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/32>.

⁴⁶⁰ Anthony Low, *Eclipse of Empire* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), 334.

⁴⁶¹ Peter Hain, *Inside Out*, 76.

⁴⁶² Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 199.

the relations between states and peoples.”⁴⁶³ Within a few months, a change of government in the UK would have a dramatic impact on the Commonwealth agenda and an intertwining of the Rhodesian crisis, and its resolution, with the implementation of Gleneagles and the campaign against apartheid in sport. The election of Margaret Thatcher, with her provenance in right-wing politics, promised a markedly different approach to both issues.

4. Gleneagles and problems of implementation: from Rhodesia to Moscow

For over twenty years, the crisis over Rhodesia, precipitated by UDI on 11 November 1965, remained unresolved. The British Government’s failure to use military force to quell the rebellion had also precipitated a crisis in the Commonwealth. Many, especially in Africa, saw this reluctance to move against “kith and kin” as tantamount to racism, arguing that the former imperial power would not have hesitated for a moment had the racial components of the problem been inverted.

The crisis, which brought the Commonwealth close to dissolution, was in any case one of the first to confront Arnold Smith and the Commonwealth Secretariat. Both Secretary-General and Secretariat were required to be the impartial servants of all member governments. In that sense, they were also guarantors of the equality of all member states, regardless of size, wealth or historic importance. Arguably, without this new multilateral dimension to Commonwealth affairs, the Commonwealth might not have survived. As it was, Smith was at pains to point out that recurrent threats by Britain’s critics to leave the Commonwealth were misplaced.⁴⁶⁴ The association was no longer the ‘British’ Commonwealth and no longer a personal Britannic fiefdom. Withdrawing from a body of largely non-white developing countries would be to undermine one of the few international forums for North-South dialogue. A more effective and appropriate pressure (though not advocated by Smith) would be for Britain’s critics to break off bilateral diplomatic relations with the UK, as some later did.

Second, the crisis also changed the Commonwealth’s approach to how it should meet and consult. The specially convened meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers, held in Lagos in January 1966, was a hasty response to the Rhodesian crisis and was

⁴⁶³Correspondence from Robert Muldoon to Shridath Ramphal, 13 February 1979, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, 2010/055,1.

⁴⁶⁴ Smith, *Stitches in Time*, 30-33.

convened in an atmosphere of anger and frustration with the British Government. Coincidentally, it was the first summit to be convened by the Secretary-General and serviced by the Secretariat. But its location in Nigeria, rather than in the UK, was quite deliberate. While the original intention might have been to break with the tradition of a British host only for one meeting (and for specific political reasons), the idea of rotating the summit around the Commonwealth quickly took hold. The communique of the meeting declared: "Observing that this was the first meeting to be held in Africa, they agreed that to assemble from time to time in a different Commonwealth capital would underline the essential character of the Commonwealth as a free association of equal nations, spanning all races and continents".⁴⁶⁵ This reflected the growing reality of a Commonwealth with 'no centre and no periphery'.⁴⁶⁶ The 1971 Singapore meeting officially established the practice of continuous rotation and was the first to be described as a 'CHOGM'. It was also confronted with the desire of the incoming UK Conservative government, under Ted Heath, to resume arms sales to South Africa. While this dispute poisoned the atmosphere of the 1971 Singapore CHOGM and left the collective Commonwealth largely impotent, the summit did agree the landmark Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles.⁴⁶⁷ Abdul Minty, in Singapore to lobby Commonwealth leaders against arms to apartheid, described the Declaration as "an eloquent expression of commitment to act against racism and in favour of human dignity and democracy."⁴⁶⁸ This important addition to the Commonwealth's core values would be augmented in future by other declarations of shared values, as the association grew. In so doing, as perceived through the Stultz/Donnelly framework referred to earlier, the Commonwealth would be building its 'human rights regime' through what Chan describes as its "dynamic constitutional structure."⁴⁶⁹

Third, Commonwealth countries, whatever the degree of their frustration, had accepted that Britain possessed "the authority and responsibility for guiding Rhodesia to independence". But they were also keen to establish a distinct role for the Commonwealth, independent of British interests. The problem of Rhodesia, they

⁴⁶⁵ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 117.

⁴⁶⁶ Emeka Anayoku, (former Secretary-General), in conversation with the author, 8 December 1988, London.

⁴⁶⁷ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 156-7.

⁴⁶⁸ Abdul Minty, "South Africa and the Commonwealth" in *The Commonwealth in the 21st Century*, ed. Greg Mills and John Stremlau (Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs, 1999), 56.

⁴⁶⁹ Chan, *The Commonwealth in World Politics*, 48-50.

argued “was of wider concern to Africa, the Commonwealth and the world.”⁴⁷⁰ In that sense, member countries saw themselves as guarantors of a settlement that would deliver justice, as well as peace.

Thatcher’s electoral triumph presented the Commonwealth with an immediate challenge on Rhodesia. In line with the Conservative’s manifesto commitment, she wished to move to early recognition of Bishop Muzorewa’s government of ‘Rhodesia/Zimbabwe’, after an internal settlement and elections which many internationally considered to be ‘flawed’. In the eyes of the UN, it was an agreement which was “illegal and unacceptable.”⁴⁷¹ At the same time, it had become abundantly clear that a prolonged and bruising guerrilla war and Rhodesia’s virtual encirclement rendered military resistance ultimately futile. A decisive factor was South Africa’s unwillingness to commit to all-out conflict on Rhodesia’s behalf.⁴⁷² All this had helped move the Smith regime towards a negotiated outcome, though not necessarily one based on the principles which British, Commonwealth and international opinion had deemed essential. The question was: would Thatcher’s commitment to the ‘internal settlement’ prevail – or would a more inclusive, and internationally acceptable, agreement be possible?

There is a body of literature which argues that a constitutional settlement was achieved through three factors. First, that there was a significant change of mindset within the British Foreign Office which in turn changed the thinking of the new Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington. This was based on the argument that the UK alone needed to take the lead in delivering a solution in negotiation with the principal parties, rather than through a multilateral framework. Second, that securing Commonwealth support for this approach was successfully achieved by Thatcher in charming Commonwealth leaders at the Lusaka 1979 summit. Third, that it was the skill and persistence of Lord Carrington alone which secured a constitutional settlement at Lancaster House; and that it was the diplomacy and leadership of Lord Soames, as the temporary Governor of ‘Southern Rhodesia’, that managed to keep together all the parties through the process of demilitarisation and largely peaceful elections to the ultimate goal of

⁴⁷⁰ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 117.

⁴⁷¹ UNSC Resolution 423, 14 March 1978, accessed 2 June 2020, <https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/423/1978>.

⁴⁷² Chris Saunders, “The Cold War in southern Africa 1976-1990,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, Vol.III (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 222-243.

independence and an end to colonial rule.⁴⁷³ It is thus frequently presented as a British triumph and, more personally, as contributing to the view that “Thatcher qualifies as an international statesman of the first rank.”⁴⁷⁴

There are several reasons to challenge this prevailing Anglocentric discourse and to give far greater weight to the role of the Commonwealth in these events. The Commonwealth’s first formidable task was to dissuade the newly elected Conservative Government from implementing its manifesto commitment to recognise the Smith-Muzorewa government and the ‘internal settlement’.⁴⁷⁵ From May 1979 until the opening of the Commonwealth summit in August, the issue of apartheid sport became secondary and all Commonwealth effort was thrown into this immediate task. Initially, Carrington seemed at one with his prime minister in wanting to recognise Muzorewa’s mandate, stating that “it would be morally wrong to brush aside an election in which 64% of the people cast their vote”.⁴⁷⁶ He was therefore minded to accept the judgement of his political colleague, Viscount Boyd of Merton, that the elections were free and fair. By contrast, the Liberal Peer, Lord Chitnis, who had also been present in a separate group, declared the elections “fraudulent.”⁴⁷⁷ Thatcher herself was convinced that “the UK no longer had any basis for maintaining the illegality of Rhodesia’s situation.”⁴⁷⁸ Indeed, on a visit to Australia in June she came close to public recognition of the interim government.⁴⁷⁹

However, Carrington’s early enthusiasm began to subside. He told the Cabinet that moving too quickly could have “adverse consequences for our international interests”. While the Prime Minister accepted this approach, she added: “We should not assume that we had much time before we would need to reach and announce a firm decision on recognition.”⁴⁸⁰ Nonetheless, Carrington argued that it was the British Government’s duty “to achieve a return to legality in conditions of the widest possible

⁴⁷³ Farley, *Southern Africa in transition*, 448.

⁴⁷⁴ Paul Sharp, *Thatcher’s Diplomacy: The revival of British Foreign Policy*, (London, Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997), 35, 41.

⁴⁷⁵ The Conservative Party, *1979 General Election Manifesto*, 11 April 1979, Margaret Thatcher Foundation archive, accessed 19 April 2020, <https://www.margarettatcher.org/document/110858>.

⁴⁷⁶ Peter Carrington, *Debate on the Address*, House of Lords, 22 May 1979, HL Deb 22.5.79 Vol.400 cc 241, accessed 19 April 2020, <https://www.api.parliament.uk/historic.hansard/sittings/1979/may/22>.

⁴⁷⁷ Pratap Chitnis, *Debate on the Address*, cc 294.

⁴⁷⁸ Minute of the Prime Minister’s meeting with Roy Jenkins, 21 May 1979, TNA, CAB/128/66.

⁴⁷⁹ Stephen Chan, *Southern Africa: Old treacheries and new deceits* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 15.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

international recognition.” He added: “I attach special importance to the closest possible consultations with our partners in the Commonwealth.”⁴⁸¹ In turn, Ramphal was quick to point out to Carrington the shortcomings of the internal settlement constitution, arguing that “at best, the Constitution is a ‘transitional’ document, but no end to the transitional period is assured or predictable.”⁴⁸² It therefore became increasingly unlikely that Carrington would be able to secure the widespread recognition for Muzorewa he had sought. Much more resistant to persuasion was the Prime Minister herself but she was at least encouraged to take no precipitous action, such as recognition or promising to lift sanctions, that might have caused difficulties at the impending Commonwealth summit.⁴⁸³ The other aspect of preventing recognition of a flawed ‘internal settlement’ lay in seeking to neutralise the lobbying of Bishop Muzorewa. Despite this, on 15 July, Muzorewa confided that he thought his government was “close to recognition.”⁴⁸⁴ By then, the Lusaka CHOGM was a mere two weeks away and any statement of recognition by the British Government would have been highly provocative.

There was also the question of what role, if any, the Lusaka summit might play in shaping British policy. A succession of British prime ministers since Harold Wilson had discovered the uncomfortable realities of the modern Commonwealth. Many had seen the CHOGM as an occasion to be endured. Accordingly, Carrington warned Thatcher that Lusaka would be “a damage-limitation exercise.”⁴⁸⁵ Thatcher feared for her personal safety and was also concerned about “provocative action” by KGB agents believed to be in the Zambian capital.⁴⁸⁶ Ramphal helped allay these concerns and he urged Commonwealth leaders to surprise Mrs Thatcher with their ‘calm reason’. In turn, he assured the British Prime Minister that there would be no ‘ganging-up’ by other Heads and he advised her to send them a ‘positive signal’. With the FCO team (particularly Anthony Duff and Robin Renwick) urging an approach that would see responsibility for agreement returning to Britain and being accompanied by

⁴⁸¹ Carrington, *Debate on the Address*, cc 249.

⁴⁸² Memorandum from Jeremy Pope to the Secretary-General, 22 May 1979, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, 2011/120 (Rhodesia).

⁴⁸³ Philip Murphy, *Monarchy and the end of Empire: The House of Windsor, the British Government and the Post-War Commonwealth* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 139.

⁴⁸⁴ Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*, 340.

⁴⁸⁵ Robin Renwick, *A Journey with Margaret Thatcher: Foreign Policy under the Iron Lady* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2013), 33.

⁴⁸⁶ Correspondence from Bryan Cartledge to John Hunt, Cabinet Secretary, “Briefs for PM for Lusaka CHOGM”, 31 May 1979, TNA, PREM 19/9.

negotiations on a new constitution in line with other independence settlements, some sort of all-party constitutional conference became increasingly likely.

In the event, that appeal to positivity triumphed, with a mood of conciliation and a desire to find a workable solution apparent at the conference's opening session at Mulungushi Hall. Thatcher assured her colleagues that her government was "wholly committed to genuine black majority rule in Rhodesia", adding: "The aim is to bring Rhodesia to legal independence on a basis which the Commonwealth and the international community as a whole will find acceptable; and which offers the prospect of peace for the people of Rhodesia and its neighbours."⁴⁸⁷ Malcolm Fraser declared: "As formidable as the differences on some issues are...they are differences about means and timing, not about ends. We must not allow means to dominate ends."⁴⁸⁸ Members of the accompanying British press corps were struck by the British Prime Minister's moderate tone, following as it did the absence of the expected recognition of Bishop Muzorewa. *The Observer* ascribed this shift to the influence of Lord Carrington, saying: "The voice was Mrs Thatcher but the guiding hand was unmistakably that of Lord Carrington".⁴⁸⁹

After a productive debate, Ramphal drew on the discussion to identify areas of agreement and give shape to a draft 'Heads of Accord'. He then convened a small and carefully balanced group of key Heads – Kaunda (with Mark Chona), the Zambian host; Nyerere, of Tanzania; Fraser, of Australia; Manley, of Jamaica; Adefope, representing Nigeria; and Thatcher and Carrington. After intensive work, what was to become the Lusaka Accord was born. It was, judged Ramphal, "a monumental achievement for the Commonwealth", adding: "The Commonwealth accomplished more in three hours than in nearly twenty years of often bitter argument."⁴⁹⁰ Despite a flurry of final difficulties, the draft Accord was approved by Heads of Government as a whole before being released to the waiting media. "When the crunch came to save the Lusaka Accord", declared Ramphal, "it was Mrs Thatcher's nerve that held."⁴⁹¹ Indisputably, the Zambian summit was a personal triumph for Thatcher. "We knew

⁴⁸⁷ Margaret Thatcher, Speech, Lusaka CHOGM: 5th Session, 3 August 1979, Margaret Thatcher Foundation and TNA, HGM(979), 91.

⁴⁸⁸ Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*, 353.

⁴⁸⁹ Colin Legum, "The gentling of Mrs Thatcher," *The Observer*, 5 August 1979, UCT archives, Colin Legum Papers, BC 1329 06.1.7.

⁴⁹⁰ Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*, 362,359.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 364.

what we wanted and we got it”, recorded Carrington.⁴⁹² Thatcher was no less definitive: “Many had believed that we could not come out of Lusaka with an agreement on the lines we wanted. We had proved them wrong.”⁴⁹³

But the Lusaka Accord was also a Commonwealth triumph. While it was clear that it was the constitutional responsibility of the British government to give legal independence on the basis of genuine black majority rule, the imprint of the Commonwealth in framing the context of that task was unmistakable. The internal settlement constitution was dismissed as “defective in certain important respects”.⁴⁹⁴ It was recognised that “the search for a lasting settlement must involve all parties to the conflict”, including the liberation forces of the Patriotic Front, despite Thatcher’s earlier description of them as “terrorists” with whom she would not do business.⁴⁹⁵ The independent government that emerged would need to be chosen by free and fair elections “properly supervised under British Government authority, and with Commonwealth observers.”⁴⁹⁶ A cessation of hostilities and an end to sanctions would be linked to the implementation of a lasting settlement. Such a settlement would come, urged Commonwealth leaders, from the British Government calling a constitutional conference involving all the parties, and this the British Government now intended to do. The Lusaka CHOGM therefore extracted a range of concessions from the British Government. But in return it provided the international legitimacy for the process which Carrington sought. On 9 August, fresh from Lusaka, he wrote: “I believe that we must now move quickly to take advantage of the agreement reached at Lusaka. We have been in close touch with Bishop Muzorewa throughout and he already knows, from his talks with the Prime Minister in London, what we have in mind.”⁴⁹⁷

The next day, Carrington told the Cabinet: “The Bishop would be expected to attend the conference and the Patriotic Front would probably do so, under pressure from the Front-Line Presidents. At the conference, agreement with the Patriotic Front might well not be reached, but if so they would appear in a bad light and we could hope to carry

⁴⁹² Carrington, *Reflecting on Things Past*, 300.

⁴⁹³ Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), 76.

⁴⁹⁴ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 205.

⁴⁹⁵ Annotations by Prime Minister on correspondence from J.S. Wall, FCO, to B.G. Cartledge, No.10, 29 May 1979, TNA, PREM 19/106.

⁴⁹⁶ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 205.

⁴⁹⁷Memorandum on Rhodesia from the Foreign Secretary to the UK Cabinet, 9 August 1979, TNA, CAB/129/207/3 - C (79)33.

moderate international opinion with us over independence arrangements we would then reach with Bishop Muzorewa". Carrington went on to acknowledge that if agreement was reached with all the parties "there would be even greater difficulties to be overcome as regards the transitional arrangements, including the elections to which it has been necessary to agree in the Lusaka document as the natural corollary of the new constitution, but these would be under British supervision and would be a price worth paying in order to end the war."⁴⁹⁸ At the end of August, Mrs Thatcher reinforced this dual approach: "The Prime Minister, summing up a short discussion, said that while the chances of reaching agreement all round at the Constitutional Conference were not good, we should be well placed to convince moderate international opinion that any breakdown was the fault of our opponents."⁴⁹⁹

The first four months of Thatcher's premiership had passed and the issue of the UK government's approach to Gleneagles and to sporting links with South Africa had not registered in Commonwealth circles as a matter of immediate concern. It had not been flagged by Ramphal as an item for discussion at the Lusaka CHOGM in his annotated agenda letter to all Heads of Government in June.⁵⁰⁰ To the surprise of the British Government, the implementation of the Gleneagles Agreement did not even arise in August in Lusaka, though British officials recognised the issue as "very much a matter of Commonwealth concern."⁵⁰¹ Clearly, Commonwealth leaders had more immediate pressures on their minds.

In September 1979, at the opening of the Lancaster House conference in London, Carrington gave generous recognition to the Commonwealth's contribution. "The agreement reached at Lusaka", he said, "has made it possible for the British Government to convene this Conference with the very real hope that it will lead to an internationally acceptable settlement". He continued: "I would like to pay tribute to the Commonwealth Heads of Government and the Commonwealth Secretary-General, all of whom worked so hard at Lusaka to establish an agreed position."⁵⁰² But he also

⁴⁹⁸ Conclusions of Cabinet, 10 August 1979, TNA, CAB/128/66/13 – CC (79)13.

⁴⁹⁹ Conclusions of Cabinet, 30 August 1979, TNA, CAB/128/66/11.

⁵⁰⁰ Correspondence from Shridath Ramphal to all Commonwealth Heads of Government, 13 June 1979, TNA, PREM 19/9.

⁵⁰¹ Departmental Memorandum by Roger Barltrop, Commonwealth Coordination Department, on the Lusaka CHOGM, TNA, HCM 021/38, DS(L)1388, 8.

⁵⁰² HMSO, *Report of the Constitutional Conference on Southern Rhodesia*, Lancaster House, London, September-December 1979, Cmnd 7802, 3.

made it clear that this was not a Commonwealth initiative. No Commonwealth delegation was invited to attend and, in the eyes of the UK government, the Commonwealth's work was now done. In any case, as Carrington privately confided, given the Commonwealth's robust support for the Patriotic Front, Ramphal had "no credibility as an impartial observer."⁵⁰³ How therefore could the Commonwealth hope to contribute to the successful conclusion of the Lancaster House talks?

If the Commonwealth was not permitted to be in Lancaster House, its presence in proximity to the conference, based at Marlborough House, was constant, vocal and visible. Ramphal saw the association as collectively responsible for the proper implementation of the Lusaka Accord, and he used all the means at his disposal to give substance to the viewpoint of the Commonwealth and the active pressure it could therefore bring to bear. He arranged for a senior FCO official to brief Commonwealth High Commissioners daily, if necessary, on progress in the conference. By the time the negotiations had been concluded, around thirty such meetings had been held. They served as an immediate channel of intelligence from the London diplomatic representatives of Commonwealth member countries to their capitals and governments. Ramphal also convened regular meetings of the recently established Commonwealth Committee on Southern Africa. This body, which had replaced the Commonwealth Sanctions Committee and was similar in composition to the High Commissioners' briefings, provided a forum for developing Commonwealth policy and exerting suitable pressure as the conference progressed.

The other crucial channel of communication between Ramphal and the Commonwealth was with Heads of Government themselves – in particular, African leaders such as Kaunda, Nyerere and Olusegun Obasanjo (of Nigeria), as well as Manley and Fraser. Ramphal was constantly on the telephone to leaders who in turn instructed their representatives on what should be said in London; to which the Secretary-General could then respond. Ramphal's mandate as the Commonwealth's public servant was thus the product of a living, vibrant and symbiotic relationship. Chan, who witnessed these events at first hand, remarked: "Ramphal's role, both at the Lusaka summit and throughout the Lancaster House talks, significantly extended the role of the Commonwealth Secretary-General. His was an activist role, played from

⁵⁰³ Carrington, *Reflecting on Things Past*, 300.

the position of a responsive servant of the Commonwealth.”⁵⁰⁴ Like at the Retreat in Gleneagles in 1977, Ramphal proved adept at overcoming obstacles and moving forward by marshalling multiple points of diplomatic pressure.

There were three key issues on which Commonwealth intervention proved to be decisive. First, the Commonwealth had taken upon itself the role of being the principal supporter and resource of the Patriotic Front parties and it insisted that the PF could not be excluded from any viable solution. This was in opposition to Lord Carrington’s approach of ‘divide and rule’. In a time-honoured imperial tactic, Carrington would play off one party against the other, reaching agreement with one, only for this ‘solution’ to be presented to the other, with a deadline for its acceptance. At times, Carrington seemed quite prepared to accept the second-best option, of an agreement concluded by only some of the parties. Driven by his bottom line of ‘ABM’ (‘Anyone But Mugabe’), Carrington was suspected of manoeuvring to secure for Bishop Abel Muzorewa (or perhaps a Muzorewa/Nkomo coalition) that outcome which the late ‘internal settlement’ could not.⁵⁰⁵ Whether in dialogue with the British Government or, sometimes, with the Patriotic Front, the Commonwealth insisted that the Conference hold on to the Lusaka principle of ‘inclusivity’: that, in the words of the Lusaka Accord, “the search for a lasting settlement must involve all parties to the conflict.”⁵⁰⁶ In the end, that view prevailed.

Second, the Commonwealth argued forcefully for a solution to the land issue, which the liberation forces and many others in Africa saw as central to any lasting solution. In the opening speeches at the start of the Lancaster House conference, Joshua Nkomo asked rhetorically: “What will be the future of the people’s land?”⁵⁰⁷ It was clear that the British Government had no answer to that question or plans to address the land issue, other than to enshrine property rights in the Independence Constitution, which would be protected from amendment for the ten-year transitional period. It took the intervention of Ramphal with the U.S. Government to help establish a fund for land redistribution under the Constitution. Once the British Government had been

⁵⁰⁴ Stephen Chan, *The Commonwealth Observer Group in Zimbabwe: A personal memoir* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1985), 12.

⁵⁰⁵ Matthew Neuhaus, “The Commonwealth in Contemporary Crises: Britain and the Commonwealth with special reference to Rhodesia,” (MPhil Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1986), 46.

⁵⁰⁶ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 205.

⁵⁰⁷ HMSO, *Report of the Constitutional Conference on Southern Rhodesia*, 9-12.

encouraged to participate in this multinational donor fund, the way was clear to keep the Patriotic Front on board. In Ramphal's view it "saved the conference."⁵⁰⁸

Third, the Commonwealth resisted attempts to dilute any role the organisation might have in the observation of the elections and the monitoring of the transition. The Lusaka Accord had spoken of the new Zimbabwean government being chosen "through free and fair elections properly supervised under British Government authority, and with Commonwealth observers."⁵⁰⁹ The presence of Commonwealth observers had only been accepted by the UK with some reluctance, the British Government preferring a reference to 'international observers'. At Lancaster House a row now broke out about the interpretation of this commitment. Did it mean, as the British maintained, that observers would be invited from individual Commonwealth countries, to be embedded into the arrangements organised by the Governor, Lord Soames, the sole authority in the transition period? Or was it to be a collective Commonwealth presence, aiming to operate independently, with its own advisers and support staff, and seeking to deliver a unified Commonwealth view on the validity of the elections (rather than having its voice fragmented, uncoordinated and diminished in possibly contradictory national viewpoints). In the end, and marshalling all the Commonwealth strength he could muster, Ramphal's interpretation of the Accord prevailed. "The Commonwealth Observer role which assisted in confirming the validity of those elections would be a seal of assurance of great importance to Zimbabwe's future", he declared.⁵¹⁰ By 3 December, Nkomo confided that he was 'on the bus' and a more reluctant Mugabe was expected to follow.⁵¹¹ The British Government's tenacity and patience had been rewarded and a historic settlement achieved.

Another three months had gone by in the life of the new British government and the Commonwealth had continued to be consumed by its decades-long concern with the Rhodesia/Zimbabwe issue. However, while the Lancaster talks had proceeded at a pedestrian pace, signs of fresh attempts to 'normalise' South Africa's sporting links with the UK were becoming evident, in a direct challenge to the Gleneagles

⁵⁰⁸ Martin Plaut, "U.S. backed Zimbabwe Land Reform," *BBC News*, 22 August 2007, accessed 19 April 2020, <http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/africa/6958418.stm>.

⁵⁰⁹ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 205.

⁵¹⁰ Minutes of the Commonwealth Committee on Southern Africa, 23 November 1979, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, 2011/120, 6.

⁵¹¹ Record of a meeting between Shridath Ramphal and Margaret Thatcher, 3 December 1979, London, TNA, PREM 19/116.

Agreement. Encouraged by a rugby tour of South Africa in May-June by six British rugby clubs, the four Home Rugby Unions issued an invitation to a South African Barbarians team to undertake a countrywide UK tour in October 1979. Danie Craven was among those who created an overseas touring squad which, for the first time in South Africa's rugby history, was notionally multi-racial, containing eight white, eight coloured and eight black players. Despite this, Stop All Racist Tours and the AAM condemned this as a "stooge tour", declaring: "White South Africa is trying to hoodwink us into believing that the tour is multiracial. It is not."⁵¹² However, despite pitch invasions and protests at the various tour venues, the numbers demonstrating against the tour were relatively modest. At the final match, at Newport, over 500 marched through the town and nine were arrested.⁵¹³ Ivey has argued that the tour "sparked an international crisis."⁵¹⁴ If so, it was a crisis of modest proportions. True, letters of protest were received, including from some Commonwealth governments. There were threats of retaliation, including a possible boycott of the UK's participation in the 1980 Olympic Games. Hector Munro, the UK sports minister, insisted that the government had condemned the tour and had done all in its power to press for its cancellation. Ivey speculates that the tour not only threatened British international sporting contacts but also the UK's foreign policy aims in southern Africa, specifically the prospects for a settlement in Rhodesia.⁵¹⁵ In reality, controversy about the tour left the negotiations at Lancaster House untroubled. As the conference inched to a successful conclusion at the beginning of December, Ramphal met Thatcher and Carrington to discuss outstanding issues but the subject of apartheid sport was not raised.⁵¹⁶ The Lancaster House Agreement was finally signed on 21 December.⁵¹⁷ Four days earlier, the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa, meeting in Yaoundé, Cameroon, had passed a resolution which threatened to "break off all bilateral sporting relations with Great Britain", along with other measures, until the UK adhered fully to the Gleneagles

⁵¹² Leaflet, Stop All Racist Tours (SART), MSS AAM 1438, accessed 2 June 2020, <https://www.aamarchives.org/archive/campaigns/sport/spo09-stop-the-barbarians.html>.

⁵¹³ BBC News, "Anti-Racists tackle South African rugby tourists," 3 October 1979, *BBC ON THIS DAY*, accessed 2 June 2020, https://www.news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/October/3/newsid_2486000/2486623.stm.

⁵¹⁴ Ivey, "Double Standards: South Africa, British Rugby, and the Moscow Olympics," 107.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁵¹⁶ Record, Ramphal and Thatcher, TNA, PREM 19/116.

⁵¹⁷ Report, *Southern Rhodesia Constitutional Conference*, Lancaster House, September-December 1979, accessed 2 June 2020, https://www.sas-space.sas.ac.uk/5847/5/1979_Lancaster_House_Agreement.

Agreement.⁵¹⁸ While deciding against an African boycott of the Moscow Olympics if Great Britain attended, the SCSA warned that this position would change if the proposed Lions tour of South Africa went ahead.

Despite these ominous developments, Thatcher and Carrington, visiting New York and Washington, basked in international adulation. On 18 December, Ambassador Salim Salim, President of the UN General Assembly, offered his “profound congratulations” on the successful conclusion of the conference. He told the British Prime Minister that when the initialling of the ceasefire was announced the previous day, UNGA broke into “spontaneous applause”, adding that this was “a rare accolade.”⁵¹⁹ Later in the day, the British pair met the UN Secretary-General, Kurt Waldheim, who was fulsome in his praise.⁵²⁰ On their return to the UK, Thatcher told the Cabinet that they had been “most warmly received during their recent visit”.⁵²¹ Waiting for the Prime Minister was a letter of congratulations from Ramphal expressing his “deep sense of gratification.”⁵²²

Looming difficulties over the Gleneagles Agreement, with a renewed challenge from British and Irish rugby beginning to gather pace, had been smothered by the good news from Lancaster House. At last it seemed that the long-running Rhodesian rebellion would be ended with the birth of a new African nation: Zimbabwe. Both the UK government and the Commonwealth had been absorbed by the all-party negotiations – neither had paid too much attention to the South African Barbarian’s tour which, in any case, had aroused only modest public interest. However, by the end of 1979, it was becoming clear that the Barbarians tour had been only a prelude to a far more ambitious undertaking: an imminent British Lions rugby tour of South Africa and, potentially, a resumption of full sporting links with the apartheid state.

Some have speculated that a Conservative Government under Margaret Thatcher would never have assented to the Gleneagles Agreement.⁵²³ At the same time, while

⁵¹⁸ Ivey, “Double Standards: South Africa, British Rugby and the Moscow Olympics,” 109.

⁵¹⁹ Record of a meeting between Margaret Thatcher and Salim Salim, 18 December 1979, New York, TNA, PREM 19/116.

⁵²⁰ Record of a meeting between Margaret Thatcher and Kurt Waldheim, 18 December 1979, New York, TNA, PREM 19/116

⁵²¹ Conclusions of Cabinet, 20 December 1979, TNA, 128/66.

⁵²² Correspondence from Shridath Ramphal to Margaret Thatcher, 19 December 1979, TNA, 19/116.

⁵²³ Matthew P. Llewellyn and Toby C. Rider, “Sport, Thatcher and Apartheid Politics: the Zola Budd affair,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 44:4 (2014): 578.

she never disavowed the agreement in office, her approach was often lukewarm at best. Later in her premiership, she was asked to approve a draft letter, to be signed by her, to Raman Subba Row, the Chairman of the Test and County Cricket Board (TCCB), about a 'rebel' cricket tour to South Africa. The draft set out the full commitment of the British Government to the Gleneagles Agreement, stated that its policy was to discourage sporting contact by both teams and individuals with South Africa and concluded: "I must make our position clear on this matter which could go far wider than the immediate issue."⁵²⁴ This was presented to her by her Private Secretary, Charles Powell, under a handwritten note which read: "Prime Minister - I think this is probably right. We write stating the Government's position but not trying to exercise any pressure. Agree?"⁵²⁵

Her first challenge on Gleneagles was the 1980 British Lions Tour to South Africa. In November 1979, the Four Home Unions committee organising the tour decided to go ahead as planned, and the individual rugby unions of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales all subsequently gave their assent. Thatcher's decision to act in conformity with the Gleneagles Agreement and 'discourage' the Lions tour came towards the end of 1979. The Lancaster House conference was reaching its successful conclusion and the transition to an independent Zimbabwe was therefore at a delicate stage. Sporting contact with South Africa was clearly a matter of considerable concern to Commonwealth countries, particularly in Africa, and the UK would need to be seen to be upholding the organisation's opposition to apartheid in sport. However, the context dramatically changed at the end of December 1979 as Soviet forces intervened in Afghanistan, displacing and executing the country's head of state and taking control of the country with 100,000-strong army of occupation.

The fortunes of the UK changed dramatically, in a matter of days. In the middle of the month, the SCSA had threatened Britain's involvement in the 1980 Moscow Olympics, invoking the spectre of an African-led boycott. By the end of the month, the UK was among those Western countries which quickly supported the US-led boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics. The timing of the Lions tour and the Summer Olympics, if not overlapping, were in close sequence. Inevitably, in two instances of 'politics intruding

⁵²⁴ Draft correspondence from Margaret Thatcher to Raman Subba Row, 1, August 1989, TNA, PREM 19/3568/125.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

into sport', the British Government had to be seen to be acting consistently and, in that respect, Gleneagles could be viewed as providing the government with additional 'cover' in its approach to the Soviet boycott. This standpoint was captured in a letter from the Prime Minister to Mrs Glen Haig, of the Amateur Fencing Association, in May 1980, assuring her that sport should operate in the UK with the minimum amount of interference. Thatcher continued: "Very occasionally – particularly in international affairs – sport and politics come together, and decisions have to be made for political reasons. The Summer Olympics and the Gleneagles Agreement are two such cases."⁵²⁶

This was the public case for equivalence between the two issues. But what was the reality in the application of the government's policies? Government records reveal a marked difference in approach. In the case of the British Lions Tour, Thatcher allowed her Minister for Sport, Hector Munro, to undertake the task of persuasion with the RFU. After lobbying from several African Heads of State, Thatcher responded to Abraham Ordia, President of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa, assuring him that the British Government was against apartheid and fully accepted the Gleneagles Agreement. She told Ordia that Munro had both spoken and written to the chairman of the organising committee "asking that the invitation to the British Lions should not be accepted." She added: "I have made clear in Parliament that Mr Munro was acting for the Government as a whole and with my personal support." After this less than ringing call to action she explained that passports could not be withdrawn from players and that therefore "there is nothing more that I, or the government, can do to prevent the tour."⁵²⁷

This detached approach was in marked contrast with the pressure the British Government brought to bear on potential British participants in the Moscow Olympics. In an article prepared for the *Daily Express*, shortly before the opening of the Summer games, Douglas Hurd wrote: "In the past six months the Government has had a long argument with sporting organisations in Britain", adding that "those who think that sport has nothing to do with politics don't know anything about the Soviet Union." He also

⁵²⁶ Correspondence from Margaret Thatcher to Mary Glen Haig, 27 May 1980, TNA, PREM 19/376, 3/98.

⁵²⁷ Correspondence from Margaret Thatcher to Abraham Ordia, 12 May 1980, TNA, PREM 19/3568/243.

revealed that the government had used trade pressure as well, remarking “There are firms and workers in Britain today who are worse off because of what has been done.”⁵²⁸ In a direct appeal to sporting organisations, the Prime Minister used strong language, saying: “I have advised British sportsmen and women and their sporting federations that it would be against British interests and wrong for them to compete in Moscow.” They were being asked, she said, “to do something difficult for their country and for the peace of the world.”⁵²⁹ While some organisations had withdrawn from participation, those that still intended to go to Moscow (including the British Olympic Association and its Chairman, Sir Denis Follows) were subject to relentless pressure, including repeated meetings with Lord Carrington, the Foreign Secretary, and other ministers.⁵³⁰ In a letter to Malcolm Fraser, the Australian Prime Minister, Thatcher revealed something of her own involvement in the boycott campaign: “We too remain firmly in favour of a boycott”, she told him, adding that, “I and my Ministers have been urging sportsmen and women, through meetings, letter and broadcasts, not to go to Moscow. The House of Commons has supported the boycott by a large majority. I myself have now written four letters to the Chairman of the BOA on this subject.” Their unwillingness to bow to pressure, she said, “frustrate the interests of Britain.”⁵³¹ At the same time, officials in Downing Street and the FCO kept the Prime Minister informed of a steady stream of anti-Soviet material which was being “fed to the press”, both in the UK and overseas.⁵³²

Thatcher received enthusiastic support for the Moscow boycott from Robert Muldoon, of New Zealand. In May 1980, Muldoon met Thatcher in London and reported that “New Zealand sports bodies were pulling out of the Olympic Games one by one.” He added that: “Although the New Zealand Olympic Committee had refused to bow to pressure from his Government, public opinion was now substantially against participation in the Games.”⁵³³ On 6 June, the New Zealand Government informed their British counterparts of further withdrawals of athletes from New Zealand’s

⁵²⁸ Douglas Hurd, Text of article for the *Daily Express*, Friday 27 June 1980, TNA, PREM 19/376.

⁵²⁹ Correspondence from Margaret Thatcher to sporting organisations, 16 June 1980, TNA, PREM 19/376/32.

⁵³⁰ Correspondence from P. Lever (PS to Lord Carrington) to M. Alexander (Prime Ministers’ Office), 10 June 1980, TNA, PREM19/376/46.

⁵³¹ Correspondence from Margaret Thatcher to Malcolm Fraser, 4 June 1980, TNA, PREM/376/76,77.

⁵³² Correspondence from Lever to Alexander, 9 June 1980, TNA, PREM19/376/69.

⁵³³ Record of a meeting between Margaret Thatcher and Robert Muldoon, 31 May 1980, TNA, PREM 19/376.

Olympic team and the decision of the Olympic Committee not to use government or private donations to send athletes to Moscow. "Sports associations will now have to find NZ \$1,200 per head", declared the cable.⁵³⁴ However, despite intense political pressure, both New Zealand and the UK sent much depleted teams to Moscow where they competed under the Olympic flag in protest at Soviet action. Sixty-six countries joined the boycott. Only eighty countries took part in the Olympics (some under the Olympic flag), the smallest attendance since 1956. While many African countries travelled to Moscow, "Fifteen sub-Saharan African countries stayed home", records Ivey, including Ghana and Kenya.⁵³⁵ But this did not "abate their frustrations over the absence of decisive action against South Africa."⁵³⁶

Both sporting events went ahead. On the Olympics, Thatcher had brought all her legendary passion and energy to bear: on the British Lions tour there had been lip service only. This was all too evident to Abraham Ordia, Secretary-General of the Nigerian Olympic Committee, who wrote to the Commonwealth Games Federation complaining: "If the British Government had spent one tenth of the time it spent persuading the British Olympic Association to boycott the Moscow Olympic Games with the British Rugby Union, the Union's decision might have been different."⁵³⁷ Downes adds: "Such hypocrisy incensed the African and Caribbean representatives."⁵³⁸ Indeed, as regards the Commonwealth, Mrs Thatcher's instincts in the summer of 1980 were to respond to those on the right-wing of the Conservative Party lobbying for a relaxation of the Gleneagles Agreement boycott (on the dubious grounds that South African sport was appreciably changing).⁵³⁹ Criticism of the UK's handling of the Lions tour had been masked not only by the boycott of the Moscow Olympics. It had also been lost amidst the final days of Rhodesia and, in the first three months of 1980, the gripping denouement of Zimbabwe's birth.

Once more, there were good reasons why Ramphal's immediate preoccupations were to be with Zimbabwe, rather than British and Irish rugby. Lancaster House had

⁵³⁴ Cable from Smedley, FM Wellington, to FCO, 6 June 1980, TNA, PREM 19/376.

⁵³⁵ Ivey, "Double Standards: South Africa, British Rugby, and the Moscow Olympics," 115.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵³⁷ Correspondence from Abraham Ordia to K.S. Duncan, 20 November 1980, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, London, 2011/118/1, 86.

⁵³⁸ Downes, "Sport and international diplomacy," 32.

⁵³⁹ John Carlisle, "How the West has been fooled in South Africa," *The Guardian*, 9 June 1980, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, 2012/074/1, 46.

delivered an inclusive constitutional settlement but the final outcome would be determined by elections overseen by a British governor and by the temporary reversion of 'Southern Rhodesia' to the status of a crown colony.

During the Lancaster House talks the suspicion had arisen that the Commonwealth's strenuous attempts to prevent the Patriotic Front leaving the conference were actually frustrating a covert aim of British policy. Declassified papers later revealed that on 1 November, Carrington told the Cabinet: "If the PF withdrew, we would carry out our transitional plan in agreement with Bishop Muzorewa. We could not then expect much general international support...independence would be conferred at the end of the transitional period."⁵⁴⁰ Lord Luce, then a junior Foreign Office Minister recounts that Duff and Renwick "contributed to the influence on Carrington at a certain stage that we should do a deal just with Joshua Nkomo and exclude Mugabe".⁵⁴¹ When Luce and his ministerial colleague, Ian Gilmour, got wind that this was Carrington's intention they both threatened resignation and the matter was dropped.⁵⁴²

Even so, the British Government seemed to have a fall-back position. Carrington had conceded that Muzorewa should step down from office to contest the elections, to the Bishop's evident dismay. The British Foreign Secretary had also eventually accepted proposals for a collective and independent Commonwealth monitoring presence at the elections (making the electoral disqualification of Mugabe and ZANU-PF far less likely). But, despite this, there was a universal British view, also supported by Rhodesian and South African intelligence forces, that even if Muzorewa and Sithole were not able to win outright, the most likely result would be one resulting in a Muzorewa/Nkomo coalition.⁵⁴³ In vain did Commonwealth opinion attempt to persuade the British Government otherwise. Indeed, so strong was the British view, it probably served to neutralise any pre-emptive military action by General Peter Walls, who

⁵⁴⁰ Minutes of Cabinet, Thursday 1 November 1979, TNA, CAB/128/66/19.

⁵⁴¹ Richard Luce, (former UK Minister), interviewed by Sue Onslow, for "The Road to Settlement in Rhodesia," 25 January 2006, *CCBH Oral History Programme*, 16.

⁵⁴² Richard Luce, interviewed by the author, 14 March 2017, which corroborates Onslow's interview on the same point; Richard Luce, *Ringing the Changes: A Memoir* (Norwich: Michael Russell Publishing, 2007), 89.

⁵⁴³ Luce, Onslow CCBH interview, 27.

seemed convinced that Thatcher could be trusted to frustrate a Mugabe victory.⁵⁴⁴ Once the election result was known, it was far too late to mount a successful coup.

The triumph of Mugabe and the parties of the Patriotic Front, while no surprise to the Commonwealth, came as a devastating blow to Thatcher and Carrington. As Hugo Young put it: “Robert Mugabe...was not meant to win the election.” He continued: “The British expectation, and certainly hope, was for a more malleable independent government, formed by an alliance between Joshua Nkomo and Bishop Muzorewa.”⁵⁴⁵ Former Conservative Minister, Mark Robinson, remarked: “It was a gigantic miscalculation.”⁵⁴⁶ Lord Carrington confided to his diaries this masterly understatement: “I cannot say that the Election’s results...were exactly what we had anticipated or that they gave to the British Government undiluted pleasure.” He later spelt out the domestic hazards the British Government faced: “Politically, we stood to suffer a lot of criticism – a misconceived settlement, an inappropriate election, a corrupt result, a betrayed kith and kin. I was unrepentant at our efforts but I can’t pretend I was happy.”⁵⁴⁷ His intentions had thus been the complete opposite of those sometimes ascribed to him.⁵⁴⁸ As for the Prime Minister, far from being her greatest foreign policy triumph, Thatcher had reason to rue the smooth blandishments she received from the Foreign Office and privately regretted that “we have given it to the Communist.”⁵⁴⁹

Zimbabwe’s joyous independence celebrations took place on 18 April, presided over by the Prince of Wales and in the presence of many international leaders who had helped the new country’s birth. The initial mood of reconciliation, particularly with Zimbabwe’s whites, extended to sport. The new nation had no difficulty in sending a partially-integrated national rugby team to tour the UK, while simultaneously being involved in a regional boycott of the Lions tour to South Africa.⁵⁵⁰ It did not join the boycott of the Moscow Olympics and its (all-white) women’s field hockey team caused

⁵⁴⁴ Record of a meeting between Margaret Thatcher and Peter Walls, 6 December 1979, TNA, CAB/128/66.

⁵⁴⁵ Hugo Young, *One of Us* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 182.

⁵⁴⁶ Mark Robinson, (former MP and Minister), in conversation with the author, 31 January 2017, Bristol.

⁵⁴⁷ Carrington, *Reflecting on Things Past*, 303.

⁵⁴⁸ Julia Langdon, “Lord Carrington’s Obituary,” 10 July 2018, *The Guardian*, accessed 9 June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/july/10/peter-carrington-lord-carrington-obituary>.

⁵⁴⁹ Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*, 362.

⁵⁵⁰ James Ivey, “Double Standards: South Africa, British Rugby, and the Moscow Olympics,” 116.

a major upset by winning the gold medal, Zimbabwe's first in any category. It seemed that the UK had been fortunate not to attract greater criticism. A report to Carrington after the tour had ended mused: "Superficially at least, the 1980 Lions' tour did the morale of white South Africans no end of good". The official concluded his report by stating that although the government had opposed the tour, it had gone ahead and "in the context of South Africa today I believe both decisions were right."⁵⁵¹ If that assessment captured the dominant political mood, it was certainly not the approach of the FCO generally.

In September 1980, the developing threat to the Gleneagles Agreement intensified when the New Zealand Rugby Union, against the advice of the New Zealand Government, invited the Springboks to tour the following year. The Deputy Prime Minister, Brian Talboys, made strong representations to the NZRFU urging cancellation, arguing that such contact would be seen as condoning apartheid and would affect "how New Zealand is judged in the international arena."⁵⁵² Muldoon reasoned that once he had asked the NZRU to cancel the tour, his responsibilities under the Gleneagles Agreement were fulfilled and "any further measures on his part would interfere with the Rugby Union's right to invite whoever it wished."⁵⁵³

Once again, the looming Commonwealth Games, this time taking place in Brisbane in 1982, became the target. "Twelve months out from the Games, a boycott was being rumoured by African, Caribbean and Asian countries", recalled the Games' organisers, "the threat for Brisbane was real."⁵⁵⁴ Recently released Australian cabinet papers reveal that the option of banning New Zealand from the Games was seriously considered.⁵⁵⁵ The diplomatic exchanges between Ramphal and Muldoon became increasingly heated, especially after the Secretary-General began consulting member governments on a proposal from Nigeria that the 1981 Commonwealth Finance

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 115.

⁵⁵² "From Montreal to Gleneagles," *NZ History*, Accessed 5 June 2020, <https://www.nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/1981-springbok-tour-battle-lines-are-drawn>.

⁵⁵³ Donald Macintosh and Michael Hawes, *Sport and Canadian Diplomacy* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 111.

⁵⁵⁴ AUS Commonwealth Games website, "Brisbane 1982: Patriotism, Moments and Matilda", accessed 19 April 2020, <https://www.commonwealthgames-com-au/Brisbane-1982-patriotism-moments-and-matilda/>.

⁵⁵⁵ Radio New Zealand, "Australia considered option of NZ Games ban," 13 June 2012. accessed 19 April 2020, <http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/108121/australia-considered-option-of-nz-games-ban>.

Ministers' Meeting, due to be held in September in Auckland, be shifted to an alternative venue. This, insisted Ramphal, was because "Commonwealth Governments felt that their own stand against apartheid would be compromised were they to do otherwise."⁵⁵⁶ In response, Muldoon declared that such a decision would be "an insult to New Zealand: a country which has a better record in human rights than any other member of the Commonwealth."⁵⁵⁷ If that happened, warned Muldoon, "I shall recommend to my Government and my Government Party in Parliament that we regard the Gleneagles Agreement as being at an end as far as New Zealand is concerned."⁵⁵⁸ The Commonwealth did not waver in the face of this threat and the Commonwealth Committee on Southern Africa issued a further statement which: "records its extreme regret that the proposed Springbok tour has not been cancelled..(it)..would amount to a devastating setback to Commonwealth and wider efforts against sporting contacts with South Africa."⁵⁵⁹ The decision to consider switching venues for the Finance Ministers' Meeting remained in the event of the tour proceeding.

Later in July, the tour began and the Springboks were met by a wave of protests, involving marches, pitch invasions and acts of civil disobedience. Two of the matches were called off for security reasons. Around 2,000 people were arrested during the eight weeks of the tour but the protests had a global impact. Ramphal remarked: "The people of New Zealand indeed provided one of the most massive demonstrations ever given in any part of the world in support of the international campaign against apartheid."⁵⁶⁰ Even so, it left families, and New Zealand itself, bitterly divided.⁵⁶¹ Muldoon protested that the Gleneagles Agreement "had fallen on evil times". He accused Secretary-General Ramphal of encouraging an interpretation of Gleneagles "which is not in accordance with either its letter or the spirit and understanding in which

⁵⁵⁶ Circular Letter from Shridath Ramphal to Commonwealth governments, "Venue of Commonwealth Finance Ministers' Meeting 1981," 20 June 1981, Commonwealth Secretariat archives c/on I 40/73/2.

⁵⁵⁷ Correspondence from Robert Muldoon to Shridath Ramphal, 21 June 1981, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, c/on I 40/73/2 32b.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁵⁹ News Release by the Commonwealth Secretariat, "Springbok Tour of New Zealand," 13 July 1981, Commonwealth Secretariat archive APP/81/11.

⁵⁶⁰ Shridath Ramphal, "A time to be forward looking," Opening remarks, Special Meeting of the Commonwealth Games Federation, Marlborough House, London, 5 May 1982, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, 2014/093, 2/2, 4. 4.

⁵⁶¹ Donald McKinnon, "Mandela and the Commonwealth: Identifying and Upholding Commonwealth Values," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 106:6 (2017): 648.

it is drafted.”⁵⁶² Ramphal, in a robust reply, made clear that it was Muldoon who had let the side down by failing to stand up for the Commonwealth’s highest principles. There was nothing wrong with Gleneagles, he argued, “its language is not ambiguous, nor is its intent; it does not imply weasel words designed to mean all things to all leaders. It is a clear statement of political commitment deeply rooted in principle.”⁵⁶³

Many expected an escalation of the row at the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Melbourne. Curiously, this did not happen, even though the dust from the disastrous Springbok tour had scarcely settled and the Finance Ministers’ Meeting had indeed been relocated to the Bahamas. While Muldoon arrived for the Australian summit in a typically combative mood, his speech to the CHOGM was well-crafted and well-received. Colin Legum thought it ‘a remarkable performance’, which won praise from no less an adversary than Nyerere, the Chairman of the African Front-Line States. Legum remarked: “Although Muldoon defended his stand in refusing to ban the tour after his government had declared itself against it, he then went on to make a profound attack on South Africa and its apartheid system.”⁵⁶⁴ Significantly, he signalled that if sanctions were imposed on South Africa, New Zealand would support the decision. In so doing, he joined Australia and Canada in developing a differentiated position on apartheid from the UK. Many considered that “the withdrawal of the Finance Ministers’ Meeting was a sufficient statement of protest.”⁵⁶⁵ On apartheid and sport, Commonwealth leaders made only a glancing reference, reaffirming their commitment to Gleneagles and to fulfilling their obligations under it. But, noting development at the UN on widening measures to prevent sporting contact with South Africa, Heads agreed to “redouble their own efforts.”⁵⁶⁶

This apparent tranquillity masked continuing anxiety about a possible boycott of the Brisbane Games. Muldoon, who had left the summit early, before the conclusion of the final communique, had quickly regained his customary irascibility. Complaining to Fraser, the summit host, that several key statements of his had been left out of the communique, he remarked: “I am afraid that I have been too long in politics to be

⁵⁶² Robert Muldoon, “Why my small country is now being rent asunder,” *The Times*, 28 July 1981, London.

⁵⁶³ Shridath Ramphal, “How Muldoon let the side down,” *The Times*, 5 August 1981, London.

⁵⁶⁴ Colin Legum, “Muldoon Silences African Critics,” *The Observer Syndication Service*, 2 October 1981, Melbourne, UCT archives, Colin Legum Papers, BC 1329 06.1.7.

⁵⁶⁵ Macintosh and Hawes, *Sport and Canadian Diplomacy*, 111.

⁵⁶⁶ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 225.

impressed by the tactics used by the Secretary-General.” He continued: “Both at Lusaka and in Melbourne, there has been an intrusion of the methods which some of our Commonwealth colleagues use in their own countries but which are entirely alien to countries such as Australia and New Zealand. These things can only damage the Commonwealth in the long term and I believe that it is the countries of the old Commonwealth who must resist such methods and gradually educate our newer colleagues in the ways of democracy and the rule of law.”⁵⁶⁷ Little over a month later, Muldoon won re-election in New Zealand’s general election, though with a reduced majority.

For a variety of reasons, including tumultuous events in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, the start of the Soviet-Afghan war and the Moscow Olympic boycott, the UK Government’s lukewarm implementation of Gleneagles and the British Lions tour of South Africa was shielded from more damaging retribution. At the height of the 1981 controversy, Muldoon protested that “the British Government places exactly the same interpretation as I do on the Gleneagles Agreement, namely, that governments have undertaken to try and persuade sporting bodies not to have contact with South African teams but that the final decision will be left to the sportsmen and the sporting bodies.”⁵⁶⁸ This was fair comment and it begs the question: why was New Zealand criticised so heavily for its stance on the Gleneagles Agreement in relation to the 1981 Springboks tour while the United Kingdom received far less attention and opprobrium for its approach to the Lions tour of South Africa a year earlier? Partly the answer lay in the fortunes of timing and the confluence of circumstance, as events unfolded in Lusaka, Lancaster House and Kabul. But it was also true that Muldoon had adopted a far more pugnacious approach to boycotts and sporting relations (Moscow excepting) which, until 1981 in any case, served as a dog-whistle issue for his electoral base. The visibility of the two sporting events was also markedly different. The injury-hit Lions tour was relatively low-key outside South Africa and was soon eclipsed by the Summer Olympics. The Springboks tour the following year became a protracted global event. In Hamilton protestors chanted “the whole world is watching” and Mandela later revealed that when he heard, in prison, that the Hamilton match had been cancelled it was as “if the sun

⁵⁶⁷ Correspondence from Robert Muldoon to Malcolm Fraser, 27 October 1981, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, 2012/074/1, 102.

⁵⁶⁸ Text of Robert Muldoon’s television address, 6 July 1981, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, APP/81/11.

had come out.”⁵⁶⁹ John Minto, HART’s National Organiser, said afterwards that the protests against the tour “didn’t stop it. But the cost has been so high that it should ensure that this is the last tour by a racist South African team.”⁵⁷⁰

Members of the UK’s Conservative Government (conscious that Scotland would host the 1986 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh) realised that it would be folly to push for a relaxation of Gleneagles. As Hector Munro, in his last days as Minister of Sport, explained to Carrington: “While many of our supporters in the House and in the country would like to see some relaxation of Gleneagles, in practical terms this seems likely to be very difficult. Events over the last month in New Zealand add to that conclusion.”⁵⁷¹

There had also been consternation among the British delegation at the Melbourne CHOGM at news reports that a South African provincial rugby team was about to tour the UK. The Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robert Armstrong, accompanying Thatcher, fired off an immediate cable to the Home Secretary, Leon Brittan, (then acting Prime Minister), urging action: “Very important that HMG should be seen to take every possible step open to it to discourage the sport authorities concerned from proceeding.” He added: “Much of the criticism of Muldoon, both in NZ and outside, is that he did not himself try hard enough to prevent the Springbok tour of NZ.”⁵⁷² This inevitably begged the question of Thatcher’s own leadership on the issue if the UK was to avoid what Carrington warned was “the growing risk of Britain’s isolation in sport.”⁵⁷³

If this was the view of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, quite different guidance was coming from Downing Street. The new Minister of Sport, Neil McFarlane, had spoken to Ian Gow MP, Thatcher’s Parliamentary Private Secretary (and her close confidant) who was also with the Prime Minister in Melbourne. Macfarlane’s Private Secretary wrote to his counterpart in No.10 with an account of the conversation. His Minister and Gow had agreed that the right amount and type of publicity had now been

⁵⁶⁹ “1981 Springbok Tour: Impact,” *NZ History*, accessed 5 June 2020,

<https://www.nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/1981-springbok-tour/ompac-if-the-tour>, 8.

⁵⁷⁰ Alastair Carthew, “New Zealand-South Africa rugby: no-win situation for both countries,” 14 September 1981, *The Christian Science Monitor*, Accessed 2 June 2020, <https://www.csmonitor.com/layout/1981/0914/091433.html>.

⁵⁷¹ Correspondence from Hector Munro to Lord Carrington, 8 September 1981, and attached Memorandum: *Sport in South Africa: Towards non-racialism*, TNA, PREM 19/3568/224.

⁵⁷² Cable from Robert Armstrong to Leon Brittan, 1 October 1981, TNA, PREM 19/3568/216.

⁵⁷³ Telegram from Lord Carrington to Margaret Thatcher, TNA, PREM 19/3568/212-214.

achieved, he recounted, and to do more might “create hostility amongst the rugby world and indeed the Government’s own supporters. The Government had broken a precedent in its implementation of the Gleneagles Agreement by dealing directly with clubs and it was now best to sit pat.”⁵⁷⁴

Ramphal had taken a bold step in encouraging Commonwealth governments to strip New Zealand of the hosting of the 1981 Finance Ministers’ Meeting. This was as much about preventing significant collateral damage to Commonwealth intergovernmental relations as it was inflicting a sanction on New Zealand, even if Muldoon viewed it as the latter. The FMM, an annual meeting, was the most important of the Commonwealth’s ministerial meetings, chiming with the annual meetings of the World Bank and the IMF, and at that time carrying forward several important Commonwealth initiatives. A meeting derailed by boycott and acrimony would do these other significant causes no good at all. By the same token, whatever his private sympathies for those tempted to boycott the Commonwealth Games over apartheid, the Games were a major Commonwealth institution and its greatest source of public exposure. As the Commonwealth’s principal servant, he was duty bound to do all he could to protect the Games.

While Ramphal told Macfarlane that shifting the FMM had ‘saved the Brisbane Games’ he realised that more needed to be done.⁵⁷⁵ Ramphal had a considerable ability for spotting and recruiting rising talent across the Commonwealth to work in the Secretariat, sometimes at salaries well below the jobs they had left. Among these were two New Zealanders deeply immersed in sport who would prove to be invaluable to the cause. One was Chris Laidlaw (a former All Black) who became his Special Assistant, and the other was Jeremy Pope (a lawyer who had left New Zealand in 1976 after incurring the displeasure of Muldoon) who became Ramphal’s principal legal adviser.⁵⁷⁶ Pope in particular was responsible for liaison with Sam Ramsammy, of SAN-ROC, and bodies like HART in New Zealand, as well as the anti-apartheid movement generally. Ramphal was aware of the shortcomings of the Gleneagles

⁵⁷⁴ Correspondence from W.L. Smith, PS to Minister of Sport, to Willie Rickett, PS No.10, 2 October 1981, TNA, PREM 19/3568/206.

⁵⁷⁵ Minutes of a meeting between Neil Macfarlane and Shridath Ramphal, 20 September 1982, TNA, PREM19/3568/171.

⁵⁷⁶ When Ramphal next met Muldoon, following Pope’s recruitment, he informed the New Zealand premier of the appointment, in line with the usual Commonwealth protocol. “You can keep him!” was Muldoon’s reported response. (Email, Max Gaylard to the author, 23 June 2020).

Agreement. At the time, Ramsammy conceded: “There is no doubt that we would have preferred a firm commitment to stop all sporting contact with South Africa.”⁵⁷⁷ Trevor Richards, of HART, who was frequently in touch with Ramphal’s Private Office, described Gleneagles as “a barely adequate compromise document drawn up to settle an urgent dispute. Like many such documents, it is open to a wide range of interpretations. Much of the document is vague and non-specific.”⁵⁷⁸ Nonetheless, Richards had used the Commonwealth agreement to advise the UN on its own International Declaration Against Apartheid in Sport, adopted by the General Assembly in December 1977. The OAU Council of Ministers had also adopted its own declaration in July 1977, and the Commonwealth presence in both the leadership and the membership of the OAU was always strong. This meant that African Commonwealth members would naturally work through the OAU, and its successor body, in the anti-apartheid campaign. In sport, however, its primary weapon was in promoting the boycott of events, such as the Olympic or Commonwealth Games, as a way of bringing pressure to bear on those perceived as bringing comfort to Pretoria.

Compared with Gleneagles, the UN Declaration was undoubtedly a stronger document but, as Canada (one of the promoters of the draft) conceded, individual countries differed widely in their approach to sport and its organisation, as well as to tourism, visas and the free movement of their citizens. The Canadian representative argued that the declaration should be regarded as ‘a framework’ and hoped that Member States would not decline to support the UN resolution “as a result of a narrow or too exclusively legalistic interpretation.”⁵⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the UK, New Zealand (and Ireland) were unconvinced and among the fourteen abstentions when it came to the vote.⁵⁸⁰

It therefore seemed to Ramphal and his advisers that it was only by getting into the heart of Commonwealth co-operation in sport, and in particular the organisation and regulation of the Commonwealth Games, that further pressure could be brought to bear and the Games themselves protected from the blunt instrument of repeated

⁵⁷⁷ Ramsammy and Griffiths, *Reflections*, 74.

⁵⁷⁸ Report by Trevor Richards, “The International Campaign Against Apartheid in Sport: Policy and Organisational Requirements,” January 1979, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, 2010/055/1, 8.

⁵⁷⁹ Official Records of the UN General Assembly, Thirty-Second Session, Wednesday 14 December 1977, accessed 7 September 2019, https://www.research.un.org/A_32_PV.102-EN (1).

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Resolution 32/105M/212.

boycott. However, Ramphal was aware that he could not rely on the CGF alone to be the vehicle for change. It was, at that stage, a rather old-fashioned organisation with antiquated procedures. Some of its members exhibited racist attitudes, such as Arthur Tunstall, the Australian sports administrator, who advocated a one-metre springboard diving event for 'black folks'.⁵⁸¹ Generally, it was not an organisation equipped to deal with the high-pressure politics of apartheid and the sporting boycott, despite the best efforts of its benign Chairman, Sir Alexander Ross.⁵⁸²

In encouraging the CGF to adopt a Code of Conduct tightening up Gleneagles, Ramphal went to extraordinary lengths to make sure that the necessary changes were adopted. A Special Meeting of the CGF was needed to propose changes which could be adopted by the CGF General Assembly (to be held in the wings of the 1982 Brisbane Games). Ramphal offered Marlborough House (the site of the Secretariat's offices) as the venue and wrote to all Heads of Government, ensuring that attendance would be high and that participants would be in no doubt about the political significance of the event or the proposed changes.⁵⁸³ He inserted his own staff, including Jeremy Pope, to deal with legal and drafting issues. It led the British government to comment: "Mr Ramphal and his staff effectively ran the Special Assembly."⁵⁸⁴ In so doing, the meeting delivered a recommended Code of Conduct which would allow the CGF to police the agreement (rather than member governments) and deal with any national member association, if necessary, by suspension, which stood accused of 'gross non-fulfilment'. Despite continuing reservations by the British and New Zealand governments, the constitutional changes were approved at the CGF General Assembly in Brisbane and the Games protected from boycott.

It was not to last. If Ramphal thought that the Code of Conduct would be sufficient to insulate the Games from boycott in future, he was being unduly optimistic. Earlier in 1982, a further challenge to Gleneagles had emerged in the shape of a tour of South Africa by a 'rebel' English cricket team, led by Mike Gatting. The English Test and County Cricket Board took swift and firm action, banning the players concerned from

⁵⁸¹ Correspondence from Ordia to Duncan, 2.

⁵⁸² Sir Alexander Ross was Chairman of the CGF 1968-82. A New Zealand-born banker and rower, he had won a bronze medal in New Zealand's Coxless Fours at the British Empire Games in 1930.

⁵⁸³ Circular letter from Shridath Ramphal to Commonwealth Heads of Government, 22 April 1982, TNA, PREM19/3568/179,180.

⁵⁸⁴ Correspondence from W.L. Smith to M.A. Arthur, 23 September 1982, TNA, PREM 19/3568/169.

Test match selection for three years. However, Thatcher once again appeared equivocal, being accused of being 'mealy-mouthed' and prompting the resignation of the black campaigner Paul Stephenson from the Sports Council because of her reluctance to personally condemn the tour.⁵⁸⁵ This Thatcher denied, though she annotated Ramphal's letter to her with the comment: "The fact is that our capacity to stop people going to South Africa is very small indeed." (Her emphasis)⁵⁸⁶

Two years later, a wholly different challenge emerged in the shape of a 17-year-old white South African athlete, Zola Budd. Budd had shown world class promise as a long-distance runner but failed to get international recognition because of the sports boycott of South Africa. In a grotesque parody of the D'Oliveira affair, David English, the Editor of the *Daily Mail*, brought Budd to the UK and pressed the British Government to grant her immediate UK citizenship so that she could compete in the British team in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. While Budd had grounds to claim British citizenship through her British grandfather, her sincerity in embracing her new mother country was unconvincing and the speed with which she was granted citizenship was quite exceptional. Consideration of her case also coincided with the decision of the Rugby Football Union to send an international side to South Africa. In vain did the Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, urge the Home Secretary, Leon Brittan, to delay his approval and consider the wider implications: "I think we need to be careful to avoid giving the appearance of an unseemly rush...The whole question of sport and South Africa is, as you know, a political minefield", and he warned that there might be "serious practical implications for the 1986 Edinburgh Commonwealth Games."⁵⁸⁷

The Anti-Apartheid Movement condemned Budd's "passport of convenience" and protests and disruption dogged her attempts to train and compete in the UK.⁵⁸⁸ Ramsammy declared: "Our opposition to Budd lies in the fact that, by steadfastly refusing to denounce apartheid, she has allowed herself to become generally

⁵⁸⁵ Correspondence from Paul Stephenson to Neil McFarlane, 8 March 1982, TNA, PREM19/3568/199.

⁵⁸⁶ Correspondence from Shridath Ramphal to Margaret Thatcher, 11 March 1982, TNA, PREM19/3568/188.

⁵⁸⁷ Memorandum from Geoffrey Howe to Leon Brittan, 23 March 1984, TNA, PREM 19/3568/157.

⁵⁸⁸ Annual Report of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, September 1984, accessed 3 June 2018, Aluka Digital Library <http://www.aluka.org/action/showMetadata?doi=10.5555/AL.SFF.DOCUMENT.aam00062>.

portrayed as a symbol of the system.”⁵⁸⁹ Although she took part in the 1984 Olympics in the 3,000 metres, she collided with her US rival, Mary Decker, earning the hostility of the crowd and finishing seventh in the race. Later, she and Annette Cowley (a South African swimmer who had also acquired British citizenship) were banned from the 1986 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh, in a vain attempt to stave off a major boycott. Budd later returned to South Africa and competed in the 1992 Olympics as part of the South African team. Llewellyn and Rider (2018) argue that Thatcher’s stance on the Budd affair should be seen as part of her developing policy of ‘constructive engagement’ with South Africa, in partnership with Ronald Reagan.⁵⁹⁰ In June 1984 Thatcher controversially received the South African State President, P.W.Botha, though the content of the meeting was later revealed as far more nuanced than her critics suspected.⁵⁹¹ This followed the England Rugby tour of South Africa, by an inexperienced team, in May-June. Once again fall-out from the English tour seem to have been diminished by a retaliatory socialist nations’ boycott of the 1984 summer Olympics in Los Angeles. However, Thatcher’s barely concealed disdain for Gleneagles had not gone unnoticed and the rift with the Commonwealth steadily widened, particularly after the 1985 Nassau CHOGM and the disagreement over sanctions. As it was, retribution was comprehensively visited on the 1986 Edinburgh Games, though by then Thatcher’s implacable opposition to sanctions on South Africa also drove the boycott.

The actions of both Muldoon and Thatcher illustrate the strengths, and the weaknesses, of a Commonwealth approach that relies on achieving consensus on key issues, rather than by making international policy through the voting systems of the United Nations. Bourne points out that “if consensus-building is difficult, it is also essential especially in a fractious and heterogeneous family like the Commonwealth.”⁵⁹² Consensus requires all to be drawn in to a commitment to a specific course of action, with the expectation that this will be wholly honoured by the group. It can therefore be superior to a majoritarian voting system where the minority

⁵⁸⁹ Ramsammy and Griffiths, *Reflections*, 95.

⁵⁹⁰ Llewellyn and Rider, “Sport, Thatcher and Apartheid Politics,” 576.

⁵⁹¹ Martin Plaut, “What really happened when Margaret Thatcher met South Africa’s P.W. Botha,” *New Statesman*, 3 January 2014, accessed 19 April 2020, <https://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2014/01/what-really-happened-when-margaret-thatcher-met-south-africas-p-w-botha>.

⁵⁹² Richard Bourne, “Forging Commonwealth consensus: the buck stops with the Secretary-General,” *Opinions*, Commonwealth Advisory Bureau, Institute of Commonwealth Studies (London: CAB, 2012), 4.

simply refuse to abide by the outcome, and where deadlock and inaction is the result. The weakness of a consensual approach lies in the power given to the most reluctant participant in effect to reduce action to “the lowest common denominator.”⁵⁹³ Furthermore, on the most contentious issues, that minimal benchmark will almost certainly be achieved only by masking difference with the language of ambiguity and nuance, rather than by any legalistic clarity. In the case of Gleneagles, this vulnerability allowed Muldoon and Thatcher to protest that they remained faithful to upholding the Agreement.

New Zealand could, with some justification, complain that Ramphal was less than even-handed in relation to those countries that violated the spirit of Gleneagles. Although he differed with Thatcher on many issues, Ramphal knew that he needed to work with her wherever he could, bound not only by duty to a prominent Head of Government but drawn by the necessities of *realpolitik*. He saw this as a Manichean struggle to engage her formidable intellect and to suppress her natural instincts. He was also aware that confrontation with Thatcher, and her isolation, though sometimes necessary, was not the best ways of winning her round. In Lusaka and at Lancaster House, as in the early days of the sporting boycott, Ramphal had found this approach had worked well. However, after Zimbabwe’s independence and as the Commonwealth’s campaign against apartheid gathered strength, the relationship became much more strained.

As disputes over the sporting boycott turned to disagreements over economic and financial sanctions, Ramphal saw that holding to consensus in all circumstances might not only seriously weaken the Commonwealth’s ability to act, it might also profoundly damage its credibility. The question, asked Ramphal, was if the Commonwealth would be served by settling for “the lowest common factor of agreement when that means inviting everyone else to acquiesce in what they see as the misguided and, in some respects, contradictory position of a single member.”⁵⁹⁴ When the single dissenting member is also the one with the most political and economic leverage, the dilemma becomes acute.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁹⁴ Shridath Ramphal, “Preserving the Commonwealth heritage,” Address to the Diplomatic and Commonwealth Writers Association, 15 July 1986, London, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, C.152-40/3/2 HGM (1986) COMGEP, 2.

The other area of growth after Gleneagles was in 'third party' boycotts. This involved not merely shunning exchanges with South Africa but also those teams and individuals who collaborated with apartheid sport. A principal initiator of such actions was the Jamaican Prime Minister, Michael Manley. Shortly after hosting the 1975 Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, he argued that the UN should adopt an international convention against apartheid in sport, though it was not until 1985 that an international convention was finally agreed and adopted.⁵⁹⁵ By then, a Register of Sports Contacts with South Africa had been introduced and proved to be a potent device for influencing sporting figures, administrators and promoters. By the mid-1980s, the inclusion of blacklisted players in touring cricket teams was enough to threaten third-country boycotts, making the prospect of a black-white split in international cricket much more likely.⁵⁹⁶

Naturally, the apartheid regime did all it could to counter the sporting boycott. Pretoria's propaganda offensive included a range of financial and other inducements offered to those who might be encouraged to break the boycott.⁵⁹⁷ Sporting contact continued at individual level and, in a new tactic, with the growth of lucrative 'rebel' tours. In 1985, 2,807 sports competitors and coaches visited South Africa, with 1,691 South Africans competing abroad. As late as 1990, Mike Gatting was leading the "rebel" England cricket team to South Africa, even as apartheid had finally begun to disintegrate. The South African government also sought to exploit known differences between foreign governments and thereby weaken the resolve and unity of the international forces ranged against the apartheid state. For example, in 1983 the Ambassador of South Africa in London conveyed an invitation from Dr Viljoen, South Africa's sports minister, to Neil Macfarlane, his British counterpart, to visit the Republic and "acquaint yourself with the latest developments in sport in South Africa." This invitation, the ambassador assured the minister, was given "in the spirit of constructive dialogue and...ensuring objectivity", while adding, disingenuously, that "sport is autonomous in South Africa."⁵⁹⁸ In 1982, the Tonga High Commission reported the

⁵⁹⁵ Resolution 40/64G of the United Nations General Assembly, 10 December 1985, accessed 12 February 2020, <https://www.research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/40>.

⁵⁹⁶ Murray and Merrett, *Caught Behind*, 209.

⁵⁹⁷ Conference Paper from the African National Congress, "Apartheid Propaganda Offensive," Commonwealth Media Workshop on Countering Apartheid Propaganda, 20-22 May 1985, Marlborough House, London, 10-21.

⁵⁹⁸ Correspondence from Marais Steyn, Ambassador for South Africa, to Neil McFarlane, 30 August 1983, TNA, PREM 19/3658, 168.

covert recruitment of three Tongan nationals for an unofficial rugby tour of South Africa, sponsored by a Hong Kong insurance company.⁵⁹⁹ Caribbean cricket was also a natural target for South Africa, with a 'rebel' West Indies tour arranged in 1983. This, contends Downes, was "more than an expensive buy-out from sporting isolation...it represented a serious destabilising insurgency."⁶⁰⁰ It would therefore be wrong to conclude that challenges to the boycott were solely in the 'old' Commonwealth, though, individually and collectively, UK sports players were by far the most numerous of those transgressing the boycott.

At the same time, in some sports, such as cricket, there were open attempts in South Africa, both official and unofficial, to remove apartheid structures and promote multiracial teams in the quest for international acceptability.⁶⁰¹ This in turn drew the response that there could be no normal sport in an abnormal society.⁶⁰² Some developments in non-racial sport were closely aligned with the popular resistance to apartheid, under the slogan: "One struggle for one democratic nation."⁶⁰³ In some areas, Sport Action Committees were formed to demand the right to play non-racial sport.⁶⁰⁴ Even so, in apartheid's final years a clear ambiguity became apparent. The UN sought to strengthen the boycott and in 1988 established a UN Commission against Apartheid in Sports, six months after the International Convention against Apartheid in Sport had been ratified.⁶⁰⁵ In October of the same year, a secret meeting took place in Harare between Danie Craven and others from South African rugby and a top ANC team, led by Thabo Mbeki. After two days of talks, it was agreed that the ANC would press for the ban on the Springboks to be lifted if South African rugby were reorganised on a non-racial basis. "From now onward", remarked Peter Hain, "sport – instead of being an important means of confronting whites with the realisation that they had no alternative but to change – became a means of offering them a glimpse of a

⁵⁹⁹ Correspondence from Inoke Faletau, High Commissioner for Tonga, to Shridath Ramphal, 9 August 1982, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, 2014/093, 66.

⁶⁰⁰ Downes, "Sport and International Diplomacy," 35.

⁶⁰¹ Martin, "South African sport: apartheid's Achilles heel?" 242-3.

⁶⁰² Douglas Booth, "Hitting Apartheid for Six? The Politics of the South African Sports Boycott," *Journal of Contemporary History* 38:3 (2003): 492.

⁶⁰³ Leaflet by Western Province Council of Sport (supporting SACOS), UCT archives, BAP968/19a.

⁶⁰⁴ Leaflet by SACOS, "Sports Action Committees: Why They Are Necessary," UCT archives, BAP968.

⁶⁰⁵ By 1990, fifteen Commonwealth countries were among the sixty states ratifying the Convention, accessed 19 April 2020, <https://www.whatconvention.org/en/ratifications/303>.

new post-apartheid South Africa in which their beloved sports tours could resume.”⁶⁰⁶ Some Commonwealth countries and civil society organisations continued to resist but the British Ambassador in South Africa assured London: “If we keep up the pressure, the boycott will crumble.”⁶⁰⁷ In September 1991, at a time when the ANC continued to oppose any lifting of international sanctions against South Africa, its President, Nelson Mandela, wrote to the International Cricket Council supporting the application of the United Cricket Board of South Africa to be allowed to participate in the 1992 Cricket World Cup.⁶⁰⁸ South Africa thus returned to international cricket and to other sports thereafter. In 1987, South Africa had suffered the humiliation of being excluded from the first Rugby World Cup. Less than ten years later, after Mandela’s election as President of a non-racial and democratic ‘rainbow’ nation, the Springboks success at winning the 1995 World Cup became a source of unity for the re-born nation.

5. Conclusion

The chapter’s primary focus has been on the Commonwealth’s role in the sporting boycott of apartheid. But its actions also became intertwined with other dimensions of racism in Southern Africa, including the end of the Rhodesian rebellion and the eventual emergence of an independent Zimbabwe. The Commonwealth was also affected by non-Commonwealth issues, such as the Soviet-Afghan war and the boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics. Nevertheless, support for the sporting boycott had grown after the visiting All Blacks attempted to complete their 1976 South African tour against the backdrop of widespread township violence, including the killings of school students.⁶⁰⁹ The Gleneagles Agreement followed and the Commonwealth’s diplomatic methods, and its capacity for influence, steadily expanded during the period.⁶¹⁰

Keech and Houlihan have argued that the impact of Gleneagles was modest, and that the Agreement “represented the limit of its capacity rather than a first step on a rising scale of sanctions.”⁶¹¹ McIntyre considers that Gleneagles “became the yardstick for

⁶⁰⁶ Hain, *Inside Out*, 77.

⁶⁰⁷ Cable from Robin Renwick to FCO (Commonwealth posts), February 1991, TNA, PREM19/3568, 120.

⁶⁰⁸ Correspondence from Nelson Mandela, President ANC, to Colin Cowdrey, Chairman ICC, 25 September 1991, TNA, PREM 19/3568, 016.

⁶⁰⁹ McIntyre, *The Significance of the Commonwealth*, 102-3.

⁶¹⁰ Chan, *The Commonwealth in World Politics*, 41.

⁶¹¹ Keech and Houlihan, “Sport and the end of apartheid,” 119.

governing sporting contacts”, though the elaboration provided by a Code of Conduct became necessary.⁶¹² This shifted responsibility for policing sporting contact with South Africa from governments and to sports bodies themselves. Overall, I contend that the sporting boycott was part of a pattern of escalation which intensified into widespread economic sanctions after the Commonwealth’s Eminent Persons Group mission to South Africa, and the publication of its influential report in 1986. Excluding South Africans from international sport was not in itself what brought down apartheid, but it did contribute to the general isolation of South Africans from international contact of any kind. Gleneagles also helped settle the argument that ‘sport should be kept out of politics.’ In the case of apartheid, the system of ‘separate development’ had been deliberately entrenched in South African sport from 1956 onwards. This had made the injustice and inhumanity of the system all the more visible, particularly internationally. In the view of Ramphal, to talk of not bringing politics into sport at that point, when sport was already politicised, was “an alibi for perversity.”⁶¹³ Conversely, as popular internal resistance increased after 1976, the non-white majority took heart from the humbling of Afrikanerdom on the sporting field.

Clearly, the actions taken by the Commonwealth were part of an international response, most notably expressed through the United Nations. While the UN Special Committee against Apartheid played a pivotal role across a range of organisations in encouraging action, much attention was focussed on specific South African rugby and cricket tours between 1969 and 1985. The battleground was not only Britain, Australia and New Zealand, but the Caribbean, Ireland, France and the USA also.

In all these conflicts, sympathetic governments maintained close contact with the anti-apartheid movement. After 1977, the Commonwealth Secretary-General and the Secretariat were frequently contacted by anti-apartheid groups around the Commonwealth concerned about breaches of the agreement. At first, no formal powers existed to police the agreement but the perennial threat to disrupt the Commonwealth Games and other international sporting events proved to be a powerful weapon. The British Anti-Apartheid Movement, two years after the adoption of the agreement, said: “The Gleneagles Agreement ... (has been) ... welcomed by all

⁶¹² McIntyre, *The Significance of the Commonwealth*, 103.

⁶¹³ Ingram, “A Quiet Conference,” 322.

opponents of apartheid as a positive contribution to the international campaign against apartheid.” But it urged: “More determined and vigorous action by the British Government and any other governments which have failed to secure the effective implementation of the Agreement.”⁶¹⁴ This mounting criticism eventually contributed to a large-scale boycott of the 1986 Commonwealth Games.

As ‘official’ exchanges across the major sports dried up, the emphasis for anti-apartheid campaigners turned to ‘third party’ boycotts. This involved not merely shunning official sporting exchanges with South Africa but also those unofficial teams and individuals who collaborated with apartheid sport. A prime initiator of such actions was the Jamaican Prime Minister, Michael Manley, but the Caribbean itself was sometimes conflicted both in regard to government policy and in the attitudes to erring, sometimes high-profile, sporting figures. As Aviston Downes concludes: “West Indians and their governments were often divided and confused in their responses to the anti-apartheid campaign.”⁶¹⁵ Nevertheless, the contribution of the Caribbean as a whole to the international anti-apartheid sport campaign was significant, argues Downes.

As the former colonial power, Britain had special connections to South Africa, both historic and contemporary, which provided opportunities for influence over the apartheid regime. This included cultural links with the English-speaking white population (which continued to expand in the post-war years with continuing emigration from the British Isles). These cultural ties were also true of India and South Africa’s Indian population, though India’s relationship with South Africa was much more detached and confrontational after 1945. In the same way, the geographic proximity of neighbouring African Commonwealth countries gave rise to similar linkages, particularly through migrant labour. But it was the Commonwealth’s sporting traditions which opened the way to boycott and international isolation and which had such an effect on the South African white population. Unsurprisingly, it was the ‘old’ Commonwealth members of Australia, New Zealand and the U.K. (though not so much Canada, with its rather different sports) which were in the firing line of the sporting

⁶¹⁴ Report by the Anti-Apartheid Movement, “Britain and apartheid sport,” to the 1979 CHOGM, Zambia, Anti-Apartheid Movement archives, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MSS AAM 1297.

⁶¹⁵ Downes, “Sport and International Diplomacy,” 40.

boycott. It was the Commonwealth Games which repeatedly offered ideal leverage in upholding Gleneagles.⁶¹⁶

The techniques, structures and diplomatic methodology which first began to emerge in the 1960s over the Rhodesia crisis and at the 1971 Singapore CHOGM over arms sales to South Africa came to be refined and extended at Gleneagles in 1977 and at Lusaka and Lancaster House in 1979. The Sanctions Committee (and the programme of support for Zimbabwean exiles) was institutional recognition of a distinctive Commonwealth interest. It was to become the Commonwealth Committee on Southern Africa, which was to have a particularly important role in co-ordinating the input of Commonwealth governments alongside the Lancaster House negotiations. The Secretary-General, and his senior Secretariat team, engaged with Heads of Governments at the highest level, beyond what might have been envisaged in 1965.⁶¹⁷ But Ramphal, rather as Arnold Smith had done before him, always presented publicly as the servant of member governments, responsive to their wishes and impartially guarding the association's core values and established conventions. The biennial CHOGM experimented with an 'in camera' session in 1971, and Trudeau developed this into a full-blown 'retreat' at the Ottawa CHOGM in 1973.⁶¹⁸ The Retreat would become the space where Ramphal's inner and outer circles of conciliation and consensus-creation could operate unhindered by civil servants and advisers. Commonwealth policymaking was also accompanied by agreed declarations or statements expressing the values and principles on which all were approaching the issue in question. In an organisation of such difference, these were the essential building blocks of its unity and mission (to be codified in a Charter only in 2012).

If the Secretary-General's relationship with Heads (directly, as and when needed) and with Commonwealth High Commissioners in London (on a day-to-day basis) was a crucial element, so too was the connection to the global anti-apartheid movement. Roger Fieldhouse, an AAM activist, concludes: "For a quarter of a century, between 1964 and 1990, AAM lobbied and pressurised the Commonwealth Secretariat and conferences and its various sub-groups and committees in an effort to strengthen its

⁶¹⁶ Donald Macintosh, Donna Greenhorn and David Black, "Canadian Diplomacy and the 1978 Edmonton Commonwealth Games," *Journal of Sport History* 19:1 (1992): 51.

⁶¹⁷ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 105-111.

⁶¹⁸ Minutes of a meeting with Edward Heath, 19 January 1971, Singapore, TNA, PREM 15/277.

actions against apartheid.”⁶¹⁹ Gurney argues that the resolution of conflict in Rhodesia and the experience of the sporting and other boycotts enabled the anti-apartheid movement to respond to the new conditions of the 1980s. As a result, it was able to “create a coalition of anti-apartheid forces and reach out to people who had never been involved in a formal political organisation, but who wanted to express their instinctive feeling that apartheid was wrong.”⁶²⁰

Were these various ingredients uniquely given form, energy and direction by the alchemy of ‘Sonny’ Ramphal? While Ramphal’s ‘capacious gifts’ were difficult to match, his lieutenant, Emeka Anyaoku, was to become Secretary-General in 1990 and to use these same methods and techniques in the final stages of apartheid’s demise. This will be further elaborated in the chapter which follows.

⁶¹⁹ Roger Fieldhouse, *Anti-Apartheid: A history of the movement in Britain* (London: Merlin Press, 2005), 242.

⁶²⁰ Gurney, “The 1970s: The Anti-Apartheid Movement’s Difficult Decade,” 487.



Fig.9 - "Time to Choose" AAM Rally, Trafalgar Square, London, 1982. Anni Silverleaf, AAM Archives, Bodleian Library.

CHAPTER 3: NEGOTIATIONS AND SANCTIONS: THE COMMONWEALTH’S MISSION TO SOUTH AFRICA AND ITS AFTERMATH (1985-1986)

“We face a catastrophe in this land and only the action of the international community by applying pressure can save us.”⁶²¹

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Cape Town, 1986.

“Economic sanctions are not the way to promote peaceful change. Sanctions do not work. Indeed, they make problems worse.”⁶²²

Margaret Thatcher, London, 1985.

1. Introduction

The third chapter explores the 1986 mission to South Africa of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group (EPG) and its part in seeking a negotiated internal settlement. The EPG resulted from an intensification of the Commonwealth’s campaign against apartheid and the adoption of the 1985 Nassau Accord on Southern Africa.⁶²³ This agreement, made at the Commonwealth summit of the same year, is often seen as a compromise between the many Commonwealth voices calling for economic and other sanctions against South Africa and the firm opposition to sanctions articulated by the UK Government led by Margaret Thatcher. While all Commonwealth governments agreed at Nassau to a modest set of sanctions (or ‘signals’, as Thatcher preferred to call them), this was accompanied by approval for a diplomatic mission to South Africa. This was given the daunting task of negotiating an end to apartheid; or at least facilitating the conditions which might allow all-inclusive negotiations to begin. I will examine the differing perceptions of the mission which threatened the viability of the

⁶²¹ Desmond Tutu, Press Conference St George’s Cathedral, Cape Town, 2 April 1986, reported by David Crary, “Tutu Calls for Economic Sanctions against South Africa,” *Associated Press*, 3 April 1986, accessed 14 September 2019,

<http://www.apnews.com/9657ea631dc8cd6ae090453489e61591>.

⁶²² Margaret Thatcher, Speech at Lord Mayor’s Banquet, London 11 November 1985, “Margaret Thatcher on apartheid,” *politicsweb*, 8 April 2013, accessed 24 June 2020,

<https://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/margaret-thatcher-on-apartheid-sixteen-quotes>.

⁶²³ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 267-269.

initiative from the outset. Was it, as Bob Hawke advocated, a genuinely 'dual' approach – an offer to facilitate an internal process of authentic negotiations as an alternative to the progressive tightening of the sanctions ratchet?⁶²⁴ Or was it, as Huddleston feared, a ruse to stave off Commonwealth and international sanctions which might become a near-permanent delaying mechanism, rather as the Contact Group of Western nations on Namibia had been portrayed?⁶²⁵ Once permitted entry to South Africa and neighbouring states and provided with extraordinary access to all shades of opinion, the chapter then assesses the significance of the mission in its stated aim of achieving a negotiated end to apartheid.

I continue by considering the ostensible failure of the diplomatic mission, the speedy publication of its report and the effect that this had on Commonwealth governments and on the international campaign for economic and financial sanctions against South Africa. I also analyse the marked disagreements with the UK Government which were to plague the Commonwealth for the next four years.

Some specialist Commonwealth writers have touched upon the EPG initiative in detail. David McIntyre provides one of the fullest accounts, though this is largely descriptive and draws widely on secondary sources, rather than Commonwealth and other archives.⁶²⁶ Major Commonwealth figures like Emeka Anyaoku and Shridath Ramphal, who were deeply involved in the process, provide valuable insights.⁶²⁷ For Ramphal, it was "the most ambitious and delicate undertaking the Commonwealth had ever managed."⁶²⁸ He did not join the EPG in the field, remaining mostly in London so that he could play a wider role as needed. He continued to be deeply sceptical about the good faith of the apartheid regime and some FCO sources privately, if unjustly, suspected him of wanting the mission to fail.⁶²⁹ Anyaoku successfully insisted to Ramphal that he should head the Secretariat's support team, rather than Moni

⁶²⁴ Peter Limb, "The anti-apartheid movements in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand" in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, ed. Sifiso Ndlovu, Vol.3, International Solidarity, Part II, 943; Bob Hawke, *The Hawke Memoirs* (Australia: William Heineman, 1994), 318.

⁶²⁵ Correspondence from Trevor Huddleston to Shridath Ramphal, 9 January 1986, AAM Archives, Bodleian Library, Oxford L: CW 1960-1994, MSS AAM 1301.

⁶²⁶ McIntyre, *The Significance of the Commonwealth*, 117-120. See also W. David McIntyre, *A Guide to the Contemporary Commonwealth* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001), 40-43.

⁶²⁷ Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*, 431-449.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, 434.

⁶²⁹ For fuller details and reference, see page 17

Malhoutra, and was therefore closely involved in the negotiations.⁶³⁰ As an African, his feelings about apartheid were profound but his diplomatic style was less flamboyant than Ramphal's. An important perspective has also been provided by Hugh Craft, a key member of the EPG support team, who gives prominence to the mission in his doctoral thesis.⁶³¹ Craft places his critique of the EPG within the thematic context of conflict resolution. For Craft, the EPG "acted as a circuit-breaker in the process of achieving a lasting settlement."⁶³² He quotes the South African activist, Mkhusele 'Khusta' Jack, who told him that "the Commonwealth gave us the language of negotiation".⁶³³ Although Craft draws on his extensive interviews rather than primary archival sources, he provides a thorough assessment of the context for negotiations and the particular aspects of the Commonwealth's diplomatic method. This was centred around the EPG's mandate and purpose, its operational principles, its specific time frame, its confidence-building procedures and its legitimacy as a mediator. In this respect, Craft carries forward earlier work by C.R. Mitchell.⁶³⁴

A number of apartheid scholars, such as Saul Dubow, also cover the mission. Dubow judges it "a long-term success" because it gave impetus to a 'possible negotiating concept' for direct negotiations between the principal parties, including Mandela.⁶³⁵ Alistair Sparks judged it "the most remarkable attempt at foreign mediation in the South African conflict so far undertaken."⁶³⁶ Some analysed the initiative at the time, including a confidential study prepared by various South African and foreign academics for the South African Institute of International Affairs.⁶³⁷ Adrian Guelke uses Deon Geldenhuys's framework for assessing the different methods by which the international community sought to influence the South African government.⁶³⁸ Of Geldenhuys's four categories of external action, Guelke argues that mediation only

⁶³⁰ Anyaoku, *The Inside Story of the Modern Commonwealth*, 92-3.

⁶³¹ Craft, "Between the Idea and the Reality," 103-160.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, 104.

⁶³³ *Ibid.* 103

⁶³⁴ C.R. Mitchell, "Conflict Management in the Commonwealth," in *The Commonwealth in the 1980s: Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. A.J.R. Groom and Paul Taylor (London: Macmillan, 1984).

⁶³⁵ Saul Dubow, "The Commonwealth and South Africa: From Smuts to Mandela," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45:2 (2017): 302.

⁶³⁶ Alister Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa: The Story of the Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (UK: Mandarin, 1990), 352.

⁶³⁷ Special report for SAIIA Members, *Implications of the Report of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons' Group: June 1986* (Braamfontein, Johannesburg: Jan Smuts House, 1986).

⁶³⁸ Adrian Guelke, *South Africa in Transition: The Misunderstood Miracle* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 137.

arose towards the end of the apartheid era but nonetheless “had a profound impact” on South Africa’s transition.⁶³⁹ In this he accords early prominence to the EPG, within a mediation process which culminated in 1994. Generally, however, the EPG intervention is either misrepresented, fragmented or largely ignored by the literature, with suggestions that its impact has been exaggerated.⁶⁴⁰

Surprisingly, South Africa’s own official history of the struggle, commissioned by President Mbeki, and in particular the volume dealing with international solidarity, makes no mention of the EPG mission in its brief summary of Commonwealth activities against apartheid.⁶⁴¹ Abdul Minty, a veteran anti-apartheid campaigner and, after 1994, senior South African diplomat, has written a tribute to the Commonwealth’s ‘major role’ and its ‘remarkable achievement’ in the struggle against apartheid but does not refer to the mission of the Eminent Persons Group.⁶⁴² Christabel Gurney, the AAM activist and historian, mentions the EPG but emphasises the AAM’s conviction that ‘there was no prospect of any meaningful dialogue’ and that the ‘visit’ would merely give credibility to the Botha government’s controversial reforms.⁶⁴³ Worden records that: “In May 1986, a high-ranking Commonwealth delegation (a concession granted to Thatcher by Commonwealth leaders) arrived in South Africa to investigate the situation and talk to the government.”⁶⁴⁴ Tim Shaw, a former Director of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in London, refers only to the ‘innovative’ EPG and its task “to visit and report in the late 1980s.”⁶⁴⁵ Even the distinguished Commonwealth analyst and academic, Stephen Chan, seriously undervalued the work of the EPG by saying that the group “reported on a sensitive and specific issue of international relations”, adding his view that this was ‘one step up’ from a consultative group and ‘a few steps up’ from an expert group.⁶⁴⁶

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 143.

⁶⁴⁰ Dubow, “The Commonwealth and South Africa,” 303.

⁶⁴¹ Enuga Reddy, “The United Nations and the struggle for liberation in South Africa” in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, 111-112.

⁶⁴² Abdul Minty, “South Africa and the Commonwealth: Assessing the Challenges Ahead” in *The Commonwealth in the 21st Century*, ed. Greg Mills and John Stremlau (Johannesburg and London: South African Institute of International Affairs, 1999), 57-61.

⁶⁴³ Christabel Gurney, “In the heart of the beast: The British Anti-Apartheid Movement, 1959-1994” in *The Road to Democracy*, 330.

⁶⁴⁴ Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 135-136.

⁶⁴⁵ Timothy Shaw, *Commonwealth: Inter- and non-state contributions to global governance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 40.

⁶⁴⁶ Chan, *The Commonwealth in World Politics*, 71.

The chapter challenges this prevailing discourse and provides a more significant and complex interpretation. This is possible by drawing extensively from a range of occasionally contrasting primary archival sources, rather than relying on sometimes flawed secondary sources alone. Archival evidence is also useful in challenging, confirming or prompting oral histories or biographical accounts. The resulting analysis supports a more extensive and multi-layered assessment of the mission. First, the thesis argues that this was an intensive and multifaceted diplomatic demarche, beyond the scope of any individual government and on a scale unusual for a multilateral, global organisation, outside the United Nations itself. Certainly, in size, cost and difficulty, it was unique in the Commonwealth's experience. No mission of this kind had previously been granted access to South Africa by the apartheid regime. Second, the chapter points to the hitherto unparalleled access the group obtained to all shades of political opinion, both within South Africa and within the region (including to groups engaged in the armed struggle). This involved unprecedented access to Nelson Mandela in Pollsmoor prison. Third, it is clear that the 'Possible Negotiating Concept' developed by the EPG in the course of its consultations (and later put to the principal parties) in fact provided the basis on which future multi-party negotiations were to begin some four years later. In that respect, Mandela's involvement in the Commonwealth initiative can be said to mark the start of a sustained period of covert negotiation and confidence-building. These secret tripartite consultations invariably involved Mandela, from his prison cell; key figures within the South African Government; and the ANC leadership outside South Africa. There were also other, lower-level contacts. In this context, it is difficult to see the EPG, as it is often characterised, as an isolated, brief and one-off initiative. Finally, it is argued that despite its failure to achieve its primary objective - namely, a negotiated end to apartheid - the report of the mission and the widespread dissemination of its findings nonetheless provided a powerful boost to the international campaign for increased sanctions on South Africa. This served to undermine the position of the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and the US President, Ronald Reagan, challenging their joint policy of constructive engagement. In all, I concur with Craft's conclusion that the three enduring outcomes of the EPG initiative were to deepen South Africa's isolation; galvanise the imposition of further sanctions; and lay the groundwork for a negotiated solution.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁷ Craft, "Between the Idea and the Reality," 150-6.

2. After Zimbabwe: The Commonwealth, the UK, and Southern Africa

The genesis of the EPG was at the Nassau CHOGM and it arose out of a crescendo of voices demanding sanctions against South Africa, despite the fervent opposition of Thatcher and the British Government. The proposal that a programme of sanctions be linked to a diplomatic mission, probing the prospects for negotiations, was advanced by Australia, rather than Britain, and formed a distinct dual strategy around which the association could unite. Furthermore, deep tensions evident at Nassau, and conflicted approaches to dealing with apartheid, paradoxically made the work of the EPG mission possible, providing it with breadth and reach, securing it unparalleled and untrammelled access to all parties, and bringing it close to success. It is therefore important to trace the development of the apartheid issue within the Commonwealth in the years after the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980. In particular, how could obvious differences in policy and method become the basis for common endeavour?

If the UK's relations with South Africa during the apartheid era were riven by ambiguity, this ambivalence was also true of the British relationship with Commonwealth Africa. This suggests that the attitude of Thatcher's government towards Zimbabwe, and to its African neighbours, was consistent with her policy of 'constructive engagement' towards apartheid South Africa and symptomatic of Thatcher's developing partnership with Reagan after 1980. Seen, inevitably, through the prism of the Cold War, such an approach saw Southern Africa as an important cockpit of conflict, particularly in Namibia and Angola, and in the other border lands of the apartheid state. The veteran right-winger, Julian Amery, was speaking for a vocal section of the Conservative Party in urging the Prime Minister to "halt the tide of Soviet imperialism in Southern Africa."⁶⁴⁸ For their part, the newly independent African nations of the region had found common cause against the apartheid enemy along a new frontier. They saw apartheid as the root cause of violence and instability in the region. Resistance was, in their eyes, a political and moral imperative. However, these frontline states faced an unenviable choice between economic co-option and coercion, or subversion and conflict. These were the twin prongs of South Africa's "Total Strategy": to offer trade and prosperity in

⁶⁴⁸ Note of a Meeting between Margaret Thatcher and Julian Amery, 24 July 1979, TNA, PREM 19/108 f.71.

the region, though on Pretoria's terms; or to destabilise its neighbours through cross-border attacks, covert action and the use of locally created proxy forces.

The Frontline States (FLS) had been formally recognised as a separate entity in 1975, at that stage comprising Botswana, Tanzania and Zambia. By 1980, their ranks had been swollen by the addition of the former Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique, by Malawi, Swaziland and Lesotho and by newly independent Zimbabwe. In April 1980, their attempts to loosen South Africa's economic grip on the region led to the formation of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference, later to become the Southern African Development Community and including post-apartheid South Africa. But in 1980, the region was beset by conflict. Many FLS countries provided operational and training bases for the ANC and the PAC and, while the impact of the liberation forces on South Africa was limited, these were more than matched by SADF cross-border raids. Far more sustained fighting took place in Namibia, Angola and Mozambique.

The FLS had other avenues for exercising their new-found muscle, including the Non-Aligned Movement; their parent body, the Organisation of African Unity; and of course the United Nations. While the UN provided a constant focus on apartheid, particularly through the work of the Special Committee, and was a powerful forum for articulating the policies and norms of the international community, it had its practical limitations. As Reddy has acknowledged, the leaders of the liberation movement did not expect it "to deliver freedom and democracy to South Africa."⁶⁴⁹ The role of the international community was in that respect "secondary and supportive."⁶⁵⁰ Its capacity to give voice to the totality of world opinion on apartheid was no guarantee that its policies could be implemented. For example, in 1985 Malcolm Fraser became chairman of the UN Panel of Eminent Persons on the Role of Transnational Corporations in South Africa but the panel members were denied access to South Africa and the panel's New York hearings were largely boycotted by the corporations they were hoping to influence.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁹ Reddy, "The United Nations and the struggle for liberation," 42.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁵¹ UN Chronicle, "End Apartheid by 1 January 1987, Panel of Eminent Persons Asks," Nov/Dec 1985, *Questia*, accessed 28 April 2020, <http://www.questia.com/read/1G1-4003584/end-apartheid-by-1-january-1987-panel-of-eminent>.

Similarly, in March 1988, a draft resolution of the UN Security Council seeking selective mandatory sanctions on South Africa was vetoed by the USA and the UK.⁶⁵²

While not an alternative to the UN, membership of the Commonwealth offered African (and other) countries a particular opportunity to work on what had been coined the “We-They” frontier.⁶⁵³ The organisation was in any case very different from the ‘imperial’ Commonwealth of the immediate post-war years, and the leverage that Commonwealth Africa could now bring to bear on the UK and its policies towards apartheid made it a tempting prospect.

The UK had long-standing links with white South Africa (including around 800,000 ‘English’ whites with residency rights in the UK), as well as significant economic investments and a substantial trading relationship.⁶⁵⁴ Since 1960 and Macmillan’s ‘wind of change’ speech, the UK had publicly parted from South Africa on apartheid and ceased to defend the regime’s policies at the United Nations. It professed to an approach which avoided violent change and economic disruption, but which also brought about reform of the apartheid state and an end to institutionalised racism. Nevertheless, together with the USA, it still saw South Africa as an important strategic ally in the final stages of the Cold War. As international and regional pressure on South Africa intensified after the resolution of the Rhodesian conflict, the UK Cabinet needed to respond to the rising clamour for economic sanctions against the apartheid regime. The conclusion of the Foreign Secretary was that in defending its interests the UK should do “all in our power to avoid the choice between applying or vetoing sanctions.”⁶⁵⁵ It would prove to be an impossible balancing act.

Prior to Thatcher’s first CHOGM, Lusaka in 1979, Ramphal as Secretary-General had urged other Heads of Government not to provoke the new British prime minister. It proved to be an effective approach. By 1983, however, the relationship between Thatcher and Ramphal was becoming more strained. Ramphal, a former Foreign Minister of Guyana and a voice from the ‘South’, offered a radical and activist leadership which was attracting a new generation of Commonwealth leaders, such as

⁶⁵² Meeting of the UN Security Council, 8 March 1988 (PV.2797), Dag Hammarskjold Library, accessed 28 April 2020, <http://www.undocs.org/en/s/PV.2797>.

⁶⁵³ Arnold Smith, “The We-They Frontier: from International Relations to World Politics” (37th Montague Burton Lecture, 1 November 1982) *University of Leeds Review* (1983): 87-106.

⁶⁵⁴ Sharp, *Thatcher’s Diplomacy*, 229-230.

⁶⁵⁵ Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*, 416.

Bob Hawke of Australia, Brian Mulroney of Canada, and Rajiv Gandhi of India. As Hawke put it: “We had a very good relationship. I liked him. I thought he was a genuine man.”⁶⁵⁶ Unsurprisingly, there were some in the British government who took a different view. Lord Carrington, the former Foreign Secretary, had been so irritated by what he saw as Ramphal’s interference in the 1979 Lancaster House negotiations that he later said he would ‘swim the Atlantic twice over’ to frustrate Ramphal’s ambitions to become UN Secretary-General.⁶⁵⁷ Douglas Hurd, who served under Carrington and was himself to become Foreign Secretary also, described Ramphal as “a loud mouth. He talked a lot. He blew his own trumpet anywhere he could and, in a way, I think that reduced the total of good that he did.”⁶⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Ramphal’s was a voice the British government could not ignore. His help was invaluable, for example, on the UK’s approach to the Gleneagles Agreement on sport and apartheid, and in mustering Commonwealth support for the UK in the Falklands War.

However, as the issue of further measures against South Africa, including sanctions, rose to the top of the Commonwealth’s agenda, there were signs that Ramphal’s patience was wearing thin. As he later reflected: “Mrs Thatcher was much less receptive to the demand for change in South Africa ... she never seemed to see apartheid as the transcendent evil it was.”⁶⁵⁹ Defenders of Thatcher insist that she repeatedly made clear her opposition to apartheid.⁶⁶⁰ President Nyerere was among those who accepted the sincerity of her stated position.⁶⁶¹ Her difficulties in likewise persuading all her critics were two-fold. First, for every clear statement expressing her personal opposition to apartheid, there were other comments which seemed to be luke-warm or equivocal on the issue. This was in marked contrast to her condemnation of Communism and the Soviet Union and was apparent in her differing approaches to the 1980 Moscow Olympics and the British Lions Tour of South Africa the same year.⁶⁶² Her legendary passion was much more evident in her robust rejection of

⁶⁵⁶ Bob Hawke, interviewed by Sue Onslow, 31 March 2014, *Commonwealth Oral History Project*, London, 31 March 2014, accessed 5 July 2019, <http://www.commonwealthoralhistories.org, 2015/interview-with-bob-hawke>, transcript, 6.

⁶⁵⁷ Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*, 386.

⁶⁵⁸ Lord Hurd, interviewed by Sue Onslow, 26 October 2013, *Commonwealth Oral History Project*, London, 26 October 2013, accessed 5 July 2019, <http://www.commonwealthoralhistories.org.2015/interview-with-douglas-hurd>, transcript, 8-9.

⁶⁵⁹ Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*, 327.

⁶⁶⁰ Sharp, *Thatcher’s Diplomacy*, 227-228.

⁶⁶¹ Correspondence from Julius Nyerere to Margaret Thatcher, July 1986, TNA PREM 19/1644, F169.

⁶⁶² See 126-158.

economic and financial sanctions, her argument that they would bear disproportionately on the black majority and her belief that the apartheid system was unsustainable economically in the long-term. Liberal economies would, in time, change illiberal states, she thought. Even if the South African economy could be described in those terms, the problem, argues Sharp, was that “it depended on seeing the operation of the market economy as the principal engine of social change in South Africa, rather than as the principal beneficiary of racial oppression.”⁶⁶³

The second argument explaining Thatcher’s equivocation on apartheid was presented in terms of her vigorous pursuit of ‘constructive engagement’. If she resisted public denunciation of apartheid, it was so that she could maximise her private leverage with President Botha. In this task she had an ally in President Reagan, with whom she forged a particularly close personal and ideological relationship. This was despite the hiccup to their relationship caused by the 1983 US invasion of Grenada, about which the British prime minister was not properly consulted. She hoped it would be treated as “a difficult but isolated incident, rather than a new departure”, and this indeed turned out to be the case.⁶⁶⁴

In 1984, Thatcher created considerable controversy by receiving President PW Botha on a state visit to the UK. This was met with condemnation and protest and Botha saw this as a good opportunity to press his new ally on the presence and activities of South African exiles in London which were a constant source of irritation to the apartheid regime. On the contrary, while Thatcher remained implacably opposed to sanctions on South Africa and looked for a working relationship with Botha, in the privacy of her Chequers study she took Botha to task. There was no question of the British government moving against anti-apartheid activists in the UK; South Africa must stop its covert and illegal actions against UK residents; apartheid must go; and Nelson Mandela must be released. This powerful message was not apparent or appreciated at the time: Archbishop Huddleston had condemned constructive engagement as “double-talk and hypocrisy.”⁶⁶⁵ However, by the end of the visit even Huddleston and

⁶⁶³ Sharp, *Thatcher’s Diplomacy*, 230.

⁶⁶⁴ Note by David Barclay to Bernard Ingham, 31 October 1983, recording a telephone conversation between the Prime Minister and Charles Douglas-Home on 29 October 1983, TNA, PREM 19/1983/1049.

⁶⁶⁵ Fieldhouse, *Anti-Apartheid*, 157.

other campaigners privately realised that on this occasion Thatcher's robust dealings with Botha had been positive.⁶⁶⁶

By 1985, the apartheid regime in South Africa was increasingly engulfed in crisis. It faced growing resistance internally, with rent boycotts and uprisings in the townships, and little support for its apartheid 'reforms'. In August 1985, President Botha addressed the National Party Congress in Natal. The speech had been widely anticipated and was expected to usher in far-reaching change to the apartheid system, perhaps involving the release of Nelson Mandela. Despite being billed as the 'Rubicon' speech, Botha made a partly impromptu and wholly defiant speech, declining to cross the point of no return. He declared: "I am not prepared to lead White South Africans and other minority groups on a road to abdication and suicide. Destroy White South Africa and our influence, and this country, will drift into faction strife, chaos and poverty."⁶⁶⁷

Privately, Thatcher was deeply disappointed by Botha's failure to embrace change, though publicly she argued that the speech indicated a willingness to negotiate an end to apartheid.⁶⁶⁸ This was not the view of her Commonwealth colleagues. For Ramphal, the campaign against apartheid had become a "virtual crusade".⁶⁶⁹ In preparation for the 1985 Nassau CHOGM he set out the case for sanctions, arguing: "It is irrefutable that the conjunction of a rising tide of anger within South Africa and a rising demand for economic sanctions is making Pretoria pause." He added the thinly veiled warning that: "It is unthinkable that any Commonwealth country should offer comfort to South Africa at this time."⁶⁷⁰ Shortly before the summit, Thatcher wrote to Botha. She began by providing evidence of South African collusion with RENAMO in fomenting conflict in Mozambique, in breach of the Nkomati Accord. She continued: "You will appreciate that this episode has been a further embarrassment...to those of us in the West who wish to maintain sensible policies towards your country and the region's problems. Turning to the future, she remarked on "the increasing drift towards economic

⁶⁶⁶ Martin Plaut, "What really happened when Margaret Thatcher met South Africa's PW Botha?" *New Statesman*, 1 January 2014, accessed 14 September 2019, <https://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2014/01/what-really-happened-when-margaret-thatcher-met-PW-botha-?>

⁶⁶⁷ P.W. Botha, Opening Address, National Party Natal Congress, Durban, 15 August 1985, Pdraig O'Malley archives, Nelson Mandela Foundation, accessed 5 July 2019, <https://www.omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q>.

⁶⁶⁸ Anyaoku, *The Inside Story of the Modern Commonwealth*, 89.

⁶⁶⁹ McIntyre, *Guide to the Contemporary Commonwealth*, 40.

⁶⁷⁰ Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*, 426.

sanctions.” While firmly opposed to economic sanctions and trade boycotts, pressures for such measures were bound to increase and she warned Botha that his government “should take no action which would undercut our efforts to resist these pressures.”⁶⁷¹

At the same time, Nyerere was among leaders who privately appealed for her support. Admitting that he knew Thatcher would not agree to full, mandatory economic sanctions, Nyerere instead urged her backing for “a meaningful package of selective sanctions.”⁶⁷² President Masire, of Botswana, also wrote from the perspective of one of South Africa’s closest neighbours. Agreeing that meaningful dialogue between the South African government and the authentic representatives of black organisations should be encouraged, Masire warned that the situation was ‘explosive’ and that he feared the consequences of inaction. “Botswana is held hostage by South Africa”, he explained, adding: “We have been threatened and attacked for no reason. Following such traumatic events, we cannot be expected to defend South Africa’s position.” At the same time he appealed to the British to help minimise the adverse effects on Botswana of any Commonwealth measures against South Africa and help it to withstand any punitive measures that the apartheid regime might take against its neighbour.⁶⁷³

The characterisation of a ‘binary Commonwealth’ suggests an implacable UK facing the unified opposition of the rest of the Commonwealth. Furthermore, there is more than a hint that the divide was between those countries which saw their nation’s interests as paramount and those which were responding to a higher moral purpose, riding above national interest. The truth is less stark. In the case of the rest of the Commonwealth, Austin argues that most were willing to approve a policy of sanctions “since the price demanded was either negligible or even favourable.”⁶⁷⁴ More specifically, he suggests that these countries divided into four broad categories. First, there were those far removed from South Africa which were “not directly concerned”, such as Malta, Cyprus, Singapore and the Pacific Islands. The second category included countries like India and Malaysia, and those in West and East Africa and the

⁶⁷¹ Correspondence from Margaret Thatcher to P.W. Botha, 4 October 1985, Thatcher Foundation, accessed 5 July 2019, <https://www.margarethatcher.org/document/111647>.

⁶⁷² Correspondence from Julius Nyerere to Margaret Thatcher, 7 October 1985, TNA, PREM 19/1644/270.

⁶⁷³ Correspondence from Quett Masire to Margaret Thatcher, 11 October 1985, TNA, PREM 19/1644/175.

⁶⁷⁴ Dennis Austin, *The Commonwealth and Britain* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1988), 39.

Caribbean, which were “very much concerned” but not likely to be affected, since they had already terminated their trade with South Africa. Third, there were some countries, such as the former Dominions (Australia in particular), which might actually benefit from sanctions, given that their economies were competitors of South Africa in mining and agriculture. Finally, there were the front-line states who supported sanctions but feared the consequences and required compensation and protection, Botswana in particular.⁶⁷⁵ Such a perspective may be unduly cynical but it does bear out the far more nuanced nature of the division on sanctions than is sometimes presented.

The Nassau CHOGM is often described in unduly confrontational terms. Some claim that there was ‘deadlock’ in the plenary sessions.⁶⁷⁶ Others that the exchanges were ‘acerbic’ and outraged.⁶⁷⁷ Yet others saw the CHOGM as a ‘watershed’ and “a historic break in the evolution of the Commonwealth on a matter of global significance.”⁶⁷⁸ This is to equate the storm raised afterwards in the media with an internal Heads’ debate which was largely good natured and positive and which eventually led to an agreed position. The policy positions of most governments were largely well understood beforehand. Australia and Canada were among Commonwealth countries who had already announced economic and other measures against South Africa, mirroring developments in the USA, the EEC and Scandinavia.⁶⁷⁹ The Heads of several African countries had been in private correspondence with Thatcher, urging compromise. During the debate, King Moshoeshoe, of beleaguered Lesotho, movingly appealed for help for his people, while Malaysia’s Mahathir pointedly said that sanctions by small countries were an “exercise in futility” and that to be effective they had to be applied by rich countries which did the most trade and financing with South Africa.⁶⁸⁰ Thatcher told her colleagues that “she hated apartheid” but set out her opposition to mandatory sanctions and instead argued for negotiations.⁶⁸¹ But the loophole she offered the

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., 39-40.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., 39.

⁶⁷⁷ Sharp, *Thatcher’s Diplomacy*, 232.

⁶⁷⁸ S.K. Rao, “Shridath Ramphal and his struggle for peaceful change in South Africa,” in *Shridath Ramphal: The Commonwealth and the World*, ed. Richard Bourne (London: Hansib Publications, 2008), 63.

⁶⁷⁹ Commonwealth Secretariat, *Report of the Commonwealth Committee on Southern Africa*, October 1983-September 1985, presented to the Nassau CHOGM 1985 as HGM (85)5 and annexed to *Minutes of Sessions and Memoranda*, personal papers, 279-280.

⁶⁸⁰ Commonwealth Secretariat, *Minutes of Sessions and Memoranda*, Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Nassau, 16-22 October 1985, personal papers, 98,100.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 104-5.

meeting was her willingness to send Pretoria 'signals', on top of what the UK had already done in banning arms sales, nuclear and defence cooperation, North Sea oil exports, the supply of computer equipment for security use and government loans.⁶⁸² David Lange, the New Zealand prime minister, seized on this, suggesting that "the precise terminology of the message was irrelevant", because "one man's sanctions were another's signals."⁶⁸³ Furthermore, while Thatcher spoke in general terms about negotiations, it was Bob Hawke, the Australian premier, who the day before had set out detailed proposals for a Group of Eminent Persons "to initiate and encourage a process of dialogue."⁶⁸⁴ Hawke returned to the debate after Thatcher had spoken. While welcoming her remarks, he emphasised that his proposal for a negotiating initiative was not a substitute for addressing the question of "restrictive measures or sanctions or signals, or whatever they might be called."⁶⁸⁵



Fig.10 Drive-by Shooting. Nicholas Garland, *Daily Telegraph*, 18 October 1985.

Ramphal became converted to the idea of the EPG but admitted that "for the Commonwealth generally it involved a major strategic change from a policy of Pretoria's isolation to one of dialogue." Maintaining the pressure of sanctions would

⁶⁸² Ibid., 107.

⁶⁸³ Ibid., 117.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., 83.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., 109.

be essential. Even so, he knew there would be many, whether in Africa or in the anti-apartheid movement, who would have deep misgivings and would need to be won round. It was therefore at the leaders' retreat at Lyford Cay that a small group of Commonwealth Heads of Government, convened by Ramphal, and including Thatcher, began the search for an agreement. The debate was at times brusque and Thatcher's private secretary was dismissive of the other leaders. Their approach, he reported, was "naïve", their knowledge of South Africa "slim" and their drafting skills "rudimentary", revealing the persistence of the FCO's colonial mindset.⁶⁸⁶ Nevertheless, as the retreat progressed the leaders were able to grind out a consensus which later proved acceptable to all. In return for agreement on dialogue with South Africa, the United Kingdom reluctantly signed up to a number of additional 'measures' (the term 'sanctions' was eschewed) and the summit adopted the Commonwealth Accord on Southern Africa. In declaring that apartheid must be dismantled immediately, the Accord called on Pretoria to take five key steps "in a genuine manner and as a matter of urgency". These included declaring an end to apartheid; releasing Nelson Mandela and other detainees; unbanning the ANC and other political parties and allowing political freedom; terminating the state of emergency; and, in the context of a suspension of violence on all sides, beginning a process of dialogue with all parties with a view to establishing a non-racial and representative government.⁶⁸⁷ To this end, the Accord also set out its decision: "to establish a small group of eminent persons to encourage through all practicable ways the evolution of that necessary process of political dialogue".⁶⁸⁸ The situation would be reviewed after six months and, if adequate progress had not been made by then in meeting the objectives set out in the Accord, the adoption of "further effective measures" would have to be considered.⁶⁸⁹

3. The mission of the Eminent Persons Group

The aims of the EPG mission were extraordinarily ambitious. So too was the expectation that the South African government would accept such a mission and allow it free and unaccompanied access to opposition leaders over an extended period,

⁶⁸⁶ Correspondence from Charles Powell to Anthony Acland, 21 October 1985, TNA, PREM 19/1688.

⁶⁸⁷ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit*, 267.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 269.

anywhere in the country. Even more unlikely was that an imprisoned Mandela would be visited on three occasions and would thereby be part of a dialogue about South Africa's post-apartheid future. How could the Commonwealth's disparate diplomatic coalition hope to achieve such a process, let alone a positive outcome?

For her part, back in London, Thatcher wrote confidentially to Botha, giving an account of the Commonwealth summit. She reported somewhat disingenuously that the debate on South Africa "was a highly unpleasant and bitter one; and there is no doubt that the issue of sanctions will not go away, despite my success in preventing the Commonwealth from adopting them at this meeting". Her other main purpose at the meeting, she said, "was to secure Commonwealth backing for dialogue between the South African Government and representatives of the black community in the context of a suspension of violence by all sides". She added: "I hope you will agree that it is no small achievement to have persuaded the Commonwealth to put its name to a suspension of violence." In urging Botha to receive the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) and allow it to contact various communities, the Prime Minister added: "I can well imagine that you will find this tiresome to say the least. I am under no illusion that much of what it will say and do will be distasteful to you."⁶⁹⁰ But the alternative – of refusing to see the EPG altogether – would be much more damaging, she argued. Botha responded that he was "gratified by the strong, principled stand that you have taken against economic sanctions and also by your refusal to meet with the ANC for so long as that organisation remains committed to violence." He continued: "I must however tell you – informally and confidentially since we have not been officially approached to date – that my government will find it impossible to cooperate with the Commonwealth initiative."⁶⁹¹

Meanwhile, Ramphal lost no time in constituting the EPG. Thatcher decided that the British nomination ought to be the Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe. "She suggested to him", wrote Powell: "that the other nominations made it likely that the group would be difficult for the South African Government to accept and do business with. We should need to be able to exercise a strong influence on it. She thought that the Foreign Secretary himself would be the most effective spokesman and the person

⁶⁹⁰ Correspondence from Margaret Thatcher to P.W. Botha, 31 October 1985, TNA, PREM /1644, 26.

⁶⁹¹ Correspondence from P.W. Botha to Margaret Thatcher, quoted in Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*, 433.

best able to keep some control of the Group's activities."⁶⁹² When Howe demurred, pleading he would have insufficient time to undertake the mission alongside his duties as Secretary of State, Thatcher reportedly offered to take over as Foreign Secretary in his absence. This can only have increased his anxieties.

A few days later, the Foreign Secretary submitted a formal memorandum to the British Prime Minister on the Commonwealth's EPG initiative (and his own personal involvement). He began by posing a rhetorical question: should the UK government take the proposal seriously, or instead treat it as a damage-limitation exercise, as part of their opposition to pressure for further sanctions on South Africa? Howe's answer was: "I believe we should approach the Group with the intention of trying to make it work."⁶⁹³ Even so, he foresaw a host of difficulties. First, there was "a high risk that the South African Government would refuse to receive the group at all" and cited the negative reaction of the South African Ambassador in London. Second, he felt the group was bound to want to see Mandela, with some reluctant to travel to South Africa otherwise, even though access had been refused to the EC Troika. Third, the Commonwealth's commitment to a future South Africa where there would be one person, one vote in a unitary state was "totally unacceptable to the South African Government". Finally, he reflected on his own position. There were "serious disadvantages to my participation", he suggested, both because he couldn't spare the time and because it was necessary for the UK government to keep some distance from the work of the Group and any of its likely recommendations. Instead, he proposed the names of Lord (Anthony) Barber, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the FCO and UN diplomat, Sir Anthony Parsons.⁶⁹⁴ Thatcher was having none of it. In a letter the next day, her Private Secretary wrote to Len Appleyard at the FCO in robust terms: "She remains convinced that the Foreign Secretary should be our nominee for the group. She believes that otherwise the conclusion will be drawn that we are not trying and that the whole exercise will in consequence fail." He added: "The Prime Minister does not consider that either Lord Barber or Sir Anthony Parsons would be suitable."⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹² Correspondence from Charles Powell to Len Appleyard, 22 October 1985, TNA, FCO 105/2034.

⁶⁹³ Correspondence from Geoffrey Howe to Margaret Thatcher, 27 October 1985, TNA, FCO 105/2034.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁵ Correspondence from Charles Powell to Len Appleyard, 28 October 1985, TNA, FCO 105/2034.

By now, however, Thatcher's attempts to nominate the Foreign Secretary and her ambition that he should also chair the group had become public knowledge, following a front-page article in *The Observer*. The reaction was immediate. Tanzania, Zambia and Nigeria publicly declared their opposition to any such plans and moved to disassociate themselves from the EPG initiative. Ramphal, seeing that matters were at a critical juncture, contacted his Nigerian deputy secretary-general, Emeka Anyaoku. Anyaoku saw that the British move to appoint Howe could not be "anything other than disastrous."⁶⁹⁶ He later wrote: "Ramphal asked me to go to Africa to attempt to salvage the initiative by persuading the three Heads of Government to change their minds".⁶⁹⁷ While Anyaoku worked to bring the African Commonwealth back into balance, Ramphal contacted other EPG Heads to clarify the understanding (in the minds of the Secretary-General and others, at any rate) that the EPG members "would carry out this task not as representatives of their governments but on behalf of the entire Commonwealth."⁶⁹⁸ The Australian premier, Bob Hawke, also told the UK government that it would be "contrary to the spirit of the discussions in Nassau to appoint someone currently in Government to the committee."⁶⁹⁹

Anyaoku accordingly worked on Nyerere and Kaunda, in the expectation that this would open the way for Nigeria to reverse their opposition to the initiative.⁷⁰⁰ Ramphal prepared to pre-empt the British and announce that General Olusegun Obasanjo, the former Head of Nigeria's military government between 1976-1979, and Malcolm Fraser (the former Prime Minister of Australia) would be co-chairs of the EPG. On 18 November, Akinyemi, the Nigerian Foreign Minister, declared that Nigeria would after all participate in the mission and that Obasanjo was their nominee.⁷⁰¹ The deal on the leadership of the group was quickly done, leaving Ewen Fergusson, the FCO Deputy Under-Secretary of State, to ruefully observe that it was clear that Ramphal "had cooked up this choice of joint chairmanship in his negotiations over membership of the

⁶⁹⁶ Emeka Anyaoku, (Commonwealth Secretary-General), in conversation with the author, December 5, 2016, Travellers Club, London.

⁶⁹⁷ Anyaoku, *The Inside Story of the Modern Commonwealth*, 89.

⁶⁹⁸ Message from Shridath Ramphal to Margaret Thatcher, conveyed through Sir John Thomson, 28 October 1985, TNA, FCO 105/2034.

⁶⁹⁹ Cable from FM Canberra (Leahy) to Foreign Secretary, 28 October 1985, TNA, FCO 105/2034.

⁷⁰⁰ Anyaoku, *The Inside Story of the Modern Commonwealth*, 89-92.

⁷⁰¹ Cable from FM Lagos to FCO, 19 November 1985, TNA, FCO 105/2034.

group as a whole. On balance, I suggest we accept the choice of Obasanjo and Fraser as a *fait accompli*. We would gain little or nothing by being difficult.”⁷⁰²

With the chairmanship settled, the names of the other members were made public. These were Dame Nita Barrow, a leading civil society activist from Barbados; two former Foreign Ministers, John Malecela, of Tanzania (who later became its Prime Minister) and India’s Swaran Singh; Archbishop Ted Scott, from Canada; and, from Britain, Lord Barber. Denied the opportunity to nominate Howe, Thatcher reconsidered her earlier rejection of Barber. His solid Tory background and wide commercial interests in Africa made him ideally suited to support her policies on South Africa (or so she thought).

However, the diplomatic prospects for the mission continued to hang in the balance. Many in Africa, including the leadership of the ANC, perceived the EPG as a British device to stave off economic sanctions. This was also the initial view of the anti-apartheid movement. The noted anti-apartheid campaigner, Dr Allan Boesak, expressed his distrust of the mission: “I’ve cautioned my people not to rush in and give credibility to the group simply to help South Africa out of a difficult situation.”⁷⁰³ They now felt somewhat reassured by the participation of the front-line states and by the leading role taken by Nigeria. The rest of the Commonwealth approved of the composition of the group, which had been carefully selected to be as broad-based and balanced as possible. It encompassed the five regions of the Commonwealth (as usually defined); it blended old and new Commonwealth; it contained the Commonwealth’s largest economies, as well as some of the smallest, a matter of relevance to the sanctions debate; and, in a concession to gender sensitivities, it included a solitary woman.

On the other hand, some of these elements of reassurance for those outside South Africa seemed to be having the opposite effect within it. The British Ambassador in South Africa, Sir Patrick Moberly, sent London a gloomy assessment: “I have yet to meet anyone in the government or among ordinary South Africans who relishes the prospect of a Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group coming to South Africa. There

⁷⁰² Correspondence from Ewen Fergusson to the PM’s Private Secretary, 20 November 1985, TNA, FCO 105/2034.

⁷⁰³ Broadcast transcript, Allan Boesak interviewed by Graham Leach, 6pm News Bulletin, *BBC Radio 4*, 4 January 1986, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, COMGEP/40/4/1-B(iii).

are widespread reservations about a team of outsiders thinking they can help in a situation of which they have no first-hand experience. Less polite critics describe it as unwarranted interference which is liable to increase the difficulties.”⁷⁰⁴ Malcolm Fraser, who had made very public comments on South Africa earlier in the year, attracted much criticism.⁷⁰⁵ Sir John Hoskyns reported to the FCO on his meeting with President Botha on 4 November. Botha had described Fraser as “utterly biased”, adding that “there was no way the South African Government would accept that Fraser had a useful contribution to make.” An exasperated Moberly later cabled the FCO, saying: “Has Ramphal any idea of the fiercely low opinion in which Fraser is held by the great majority of the whites?”⁷⁰⁶

There was little British optimism about the South Africans accepting the EPG mission. President Botha had consistently dismissed the Commonwealth plan as unwarranted and unacceptable interference in South Africa’s internal affairs. On 12 November, Botha told Thatcher: “My government will find it impossible to cooperate with the Commonwealth initiative. Were it not for your admirable efforts, I would have no hesitation in rejecting the Nassau initiative outright.”⁷⁰⁷ On 20 November, Moberly reported that the Foreign Minister, Pik Botha, was “extremely negative.”⁷⁰⁸ FCO officials considered the initiative was “on a knife edge” and one went as far to suggest that “there is some circumstantial evidence that Mr Ramphal is playing for a South African rejection.”⁷⁰⁹

Thatcher, reputedly with the support of Pik Botha, made a final effort to persuade the State President.⁷¹⁰ In a letter of 17 November, she told him: “I am convinced that it would be infinitely more damaging to South Africa’s future interests were you to refuse to have anything to do with the Group.” She continued: “May I ask you to consider for a moment the full implications if your government were to reject co-operation with the

⁷⁰⁴Cable from Patrick Moberly, FM Pretoria, to FCO, 6 November 1985, TNA, FCO 105/2034.

⁷⁰⁵ Malcolm Fraser had been Chairman of the UN Panel of Eminent Persons on the Role of Transnational Corporations during 1985.

⁷⁰⁶ Cable from Patrick Moberly, FM Pretoria, to FCO, 23 November 1985, TMA, FCO 105/2034.

⁷⁰⁷ Correspondence from P.W. Botha to Margaret Thatcher, 12 November 1985, TNA, FCO 105/2034.

⁷⁰⁸ Cable from Patrick Moberly to FCO, 20 November 1985, TNA, FCO 105/2034.

⁷⁰⁹ Handwritten annotation by Ewen Fergusson on correspondence from Anthony Reeve to the Private Secretary/Permanent Under-Secretary, 20 November 1985, TNA, FCO 105/2034.

⁷¹⁰ Pik Botha, interviewed by Sue Onslow, *Commonwealth Oral History Project*, London, 16 February 2015, accessed 5 July 2019, <http://www.commonwealthoralhistories.org>, 2015/interview-with-rf-pik-botha/11.

Group. Your enemies in the Commonwealth would be delighted. We and others who had hoped for progress through dialogue will be told that we should have known better. The international pressure for sanctions against South Africa will fast gather momentum again. Most of the value of my having held the line in Nassau will be lost. My ability to help preserve the conditions in which an internal dialogue of the sort you are seeking has a chance of success will be critically, perhaps fatally, weakened.” She concluded: “In short I can see no need for you to take a decision about cooperation with the Group now, let alone reject it publicly. If you value my continuing help, I urge you most strongly not to do so. I do not think I could be plainer.”⁷¹¹

Within days, a breakthrough had been achieved, with the FCO reporting a surprisingly compliant response from South Africa and observing: “Had it not been for the Prime Minister’s intervention with President Botha, the Eminent Persons Group would have been rejected out of hand.”⁷¹² A formal statement from the South African Government followed, though its acceptance of the Commonwealth mission was expressed in rather grudging terms. “It is obvious that the great majority of Commonwealth members is ill-informed or not informed at all of the South African Government’s reform programme and of the current situation in South Africa”, declared the regime, “the South African Government has nothing to hide. Should the Commonwealth group be genuinely interested in acquainting themselves with the prevailing circumstances in this country, the South African Government is prepared to consider ways and means of making this possible without conceding the right of intervention in the country’s internal affairs.”⁷¹³ There were still sensitive issues to be resolved, such as access to Nelson Mandela, but Thatcher responded: “You know how much importance I attach to this initiative and I am therefore much encouraged by the positive tone of your response.”⁷¹⁴ The mission was on its way, despite the deep reservations of some in the anti-apartheid movement, including its UK President, Trevor Huddleston. He privately confessed that it was only his high regard for Ramphal that prevented him from denouncing the group.

⁷¹¹ Correspondence from Margaret Thatcher to P.W. Botha, 17 November 1985, quoted in Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*, 433.

⁷¹² Correspondence from Anthony Reeve to the Private Secretary, 26 November 1985, TNA, FCO 105/2034.

⁷¹³ Press Release, by the South African Government, 26 November 1985, Pretoria, TNA, FCO 105/2034.

⁷¹⁴ Correspondence from Margaret Thatcher to P.W. Botha, 9 December 1985, TNA, FCO 105/2034.



Fig.11. The Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group with Shridath Ramphal, Marlborough House, 1986. Commonwealth Secretariat.

The EPG, or 'COMGEP' as it became known in the Secretariat, held its first meeting in Marlborough House, London on 12-13 December 1985. Its task, set out under the Nassau Accord, was to encourage political dialogue and advance by all practical means the fulfilment of the Accord. Quite how that was to be done was left to the EPG. Establishing the group's credibility and securing acceptance of its mission had required sensitive and sustained diplomacy on all sides, but now its work could begin in earnest. This it did without delay, in the full knowledge that the situation would be reviewed after six months, with a report by the group to a special review meeting of Heads of Government on the progress made. Within its Terms of Reference, the group determined that it would work in discreet and non-public ways and would keep all its discussions confidential. It would operate independently of the South African Government, and of foreign diplomatic missions, and travel anywhere and meet whosoever it wished. Several members of the group, including Obasanjo, insisted that a meeting with Mandela was essential.

Why should the Commonwealth have been effective as an interlocutor? As the formation of the group illustrated, selecting its membership proved to be a considerable challenge, and was linked to the equally troubling issue of securing

access to all shades of opinion. However, the disparate and haphazard distribution of Commonwealth membership, largely resulting from historical chance, fortuitously gave it a stake in virtually every continent and region of the globe. It was therefore able to use its breadth of connection to maintain good relations with contrasting constituencies and work for consensual positions. This was particularly true of African, Asian and western interests in the case of the EPG. Second, the Commonwealth was careful to 'deploy its diversity' within the membership of the EPG. This provided a visual reminder of its commitment to racial equality and demonstrated the relative ease with which people from very different backgrounds could work together. This was important in South Africa, where the Commonwealth could mirror the diversity of the country's emerging 'rainbow society'. That said, it was instructive that it was the Nigerian soldier, Olusegun Obasanjo, who seemed to strike the best relationship with his white interlocutors, rather than the lanky Australian, Malcolm Fraser.⁷¹⁵ Third, the close links most Commonwealth countries maintained with the former colonial power placed them in a specially privileged position of intergovernmental influence with the UK (and, through Britain, to the United States). Fourth, those same links also provided valuable connections to opposition political leaders in the UK and to the heart of the global anti-apartheid movement (in the UK and Ireland). This enabled many countries to work with civil society, as well as through diplomatic and governmental channels, in pursuing the anti-apartheid cause.

After their first meeting, all seven members of the EPG gathered at Downing Street for a discussion with the British prime minister. Thatcher's Private Secretary recorded that the Prime Minister had spoken of an "historic opportunity", adding that she was "encouraged by her meeting with the Group. She was under no illusion about the difficulty of their task. But they were off to a good start. She would certainly do her best to influence President Botha in a sensible direction."⁷¹⁶ The next day, true to her word, she wrote again to Botha, telling him of "the generally sensible, level-headed and helpful approach of the Group", adding: "I hope you will agree that it is worth an effort to preserve this."⁷¹⁷ At the EPG's second meeting, on 12-13 February 1986, the group finalised arrangements for the visit of three of its number to South Africa the following

⁷¹⁵ Anyaoku, *Inside the Modern Commonwealth*, 94-5.

⁷¹⁶ Note by Charles Powell of a Meeting between the Prime Minister and Members of the EPG, Friday 13 December 1985, TNA, FCO 105/2034.

⁷¹⁷ Correspondence from Margaret Thatcher to P.W. Botha, 14 December 1985, TNA, FCO 105/2034.

week. Accordingly, Fraser, Obasanjo and Barrow visited Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and Port Elizabeth to prepare for the visit of the full group. Among those they met were five government ministers, Bishop Tutu, and UDF leader, Dr Allan Boesak. At Port Elizabeth, Fraser and Obasanjo demonstrated that a picture can be worth a thousand words by strolling, hand in hand, on a 'Whites-Only' beach.

Following this preliminary visit, five members of the group (Barber, Malecela, Scott, Barrow and Fraser) visited Botswana, Lesotho and Zimbabwe before proceeding to the Zambian capital, Lusaka. They met President Quett Masire of Botswana, President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, and King Moshoeshe II of Lesotho, along with Lesotho's military leader, Major-General Lekhanya. In Zambia, the group met President Kenneth Kaunda, and engaged in dialogue with the ANC leadership, headed by Dr Oliver Tambo. They were joined by the two remaining EPG members, Singh and Obasanjo, and by Ramphal, who also visited Zimbabwe. Before returning to South Africa, the EPG flew to Luanda for talks with Angola's President Dos Santos. By this stage, the group had met the leadership of most of the front-line states and of the ANC outside South Africa, as well as with many other key figures within South Africa itself.

The Group had determined early in its planning that it should meet Nelson Mandela, if possible. His release, along with other political prisoners, was a key demand set out in the Nassau Accord; and Mandela's towering authority, even after the isolation of many year's imprisonment, would be a key component in any process leading to genuine negotiations between the government and the full spectrum of opposition groups. Besides, the release of Mandela and his colleagues, the unbanning of the ANC, the PAC and other political parties and free political activity would be likely to create a highly volatile situation and his presence might reassure the government and South Africa's whites that political chaos would not be the result. That was certainly the fear of the South African government, even while it contemplated Mandela's release. In February 1985, PW Botha had offered Mandela his freedom, but only if he agreed to unconditionally reject violence as a political weapon.⁷¹⁸ Mandela's response was uncompromising, rejecting Botha's offer in a statement read out publicly by his daughter, Zindzi and declaring: "What freedom am I being offered while the

⁷¹⁸ Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 620-621.

organisation of the people remains banned? Only free men can negotiate. A prisoner cannot enter into contracts.”⁷¹⁹

In 1982, Mandela and other senior ANC leaders had been moved from Robben Island to Pollsmoor Prison, in Tokai outside Cape Town.⁷²⁰ This made discreet contact rather easier. Even so, very few international figures had managed to visit Mandela over the years, apart from humanitarian visits from the International Committee of the Red Cross.⁷²¹ Some foreign and local journalists had also been given access, largely for propaganda purposes.⁷²² In the main, applications to visit him were regularly rejected.⁷²³ At first, the EPG’s request to meet Mandela, conveyed to the Minister of Justice, Kobie Coetsee, seemed likely to be refused. But there were powerful figures in the government, including the Foreign Minister, Pik Botha, who lobbied the Minister of Justice and, later, the State President, in support of the EPG’s request. He explained: “I went to PW. I said to him ‘You can forget about any further positive results from the EPG if we don’t do this. They are here as a result of Margaret Thatcher’s intervention’. I used her name.”⁷²⁴ The visit was approved.

In all, the EPG, in various guises, met Mandela in Pollsmoor three times. The first of these encounters took place in February 1986 during the EPG’s preliminary visit to South Africa. Only Obasanjo saw Mandela at this point, and no official Commonwealth record of his meeting exists, though there are newspaper reports.⁷²⁵ The next meeting, on 12 March, took place with the EPG as a whole, during the group’s first substantive visit. Again, no Commonwealth record is available, although Mandela provided his own account.⁷²⁶ For the EPG, Archbishop Scott made notes which he wrote up afterwards. He describes Mandela’s “immaculate appearance ... He stands over 6 feet tall, very

⁷¹⁹ Ibid., 623.

⁷²⁰ Also transferred at the same time were Ahmed Kathrada, Raymond Mhlaba, Andrew Mlangeni and Walter Sisulu.

⁷²¹ Andrew Thomson, “‘Restoring hope where all hope was lost’: Nelson Mandela, the ICRC and the protection of political detainees in apartheid South Africa,” *International Review* 98:903 (2017), 799-829.

⁷²² Martha Evans, “News from Robben Island: Journalists’ Visits to Nelson Mandela during his imprisonment,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 45:6 (2019): 1116-1129.

⁷²³ Pik Botha, interviewed by Sue Onslow, *Commonwealth Oral History Project*, London, 16 February 2015, accessed 5 July 2019, <http://www.commonwealthoralhistories.org>, 2015/interview-with-rf-pik-botha/11.

⁷²⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁷²⁵ Dimeji Kayode-Adedeji, “My encounters with Mandela – Obasanjo,” *Premium Times of Nigeria*, 6 December 2013, accessed 23 June 2020, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/150982-encounters-mandela-obasanjo.html>.

⁷²⁶ Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 628-630.

upright with clear piercing eyes looking in extremely good health.” Asked by Obasanjo how he saw himself, Mandela replied: “as a deeply committed South African nationalist”, though he added that nationalists came in more than one colour. Asked to comment on the charge that the ANC was Communist controlled, Mandela “affirmed immediately that he was not a Communist and Oliver Tambo and many others were not Communists. There were Communists in the ANC and at one time in the early years of the Congress”, he said, adding that “he and Oliver Tambo had led an attempt to expel those who were Communist and this had been defeated by the Executive.” He added that: “If he had been in prison for 24 years and had not changed his position, he did not think that the Communists would be able to change him if he was allowed out of prison.”⁷²⁷ The meeting ranged over a number of issues, including his possible release from prison. He confirmed that he was not prepared to accept a conditional release nor release on humanitarian grounds. He also indicated that, if a free man and in the leadership of the ANC, he felt he would be able to work with people like Chief Buthelezi and with the growing group of younger leaders of the UDF.

The question of violence was of particular interest to the group. It would be crucial to the viability of the ‘Negotiating Concept’ later developed by the EPG. Mandela began by explaining why the ANC had reluctantly taken up arms against the apartheid state. In 1985, he had written to President Botha clarifying his position. A copy of his letter should be held in the President’s office, though Mandela had not been permitted to retain a copy. However, he went on to emphasise that: “violence was never an ultimate solution and (the) working of human relationships required negotiation”.⁷²⁸ He added that the ANC had always been anxious to negotiate. In practical terms, it would be impossible for the ANC to defeat the South African government by military force and violence was only useful if it helped to lead to “a point of negotiation”. As the EPG members took their leave, Mandela told Scott that the visit had meant a great deal to him and that he believed that what was happening with the visit of the Group to himself, to South Africa and the Front-Line States “was perhaps the most important thing that had happened in the history of South Africa for some decades.”⁷²⁹ All this was rather

⁷²⁷ Ted Scott, “Reflections on the visit of the COMGEP on Nelson Mandela,” 12 March 1986, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, 40/4/1-6, 3.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

different in tone to the response so far from the ANC leadership in Lusaka and, indeed, from Mandela's own wife, Winnie Mandela.

All the members of the EPG (except for Obasanjo, who arrived later) met with the Executive of the ANC in Lusaka on 28 February 1986. Accompanying the EPG on this occasion was Secretary-General Ramphal, who had flown in from London. The ANC delegation was led by Oliver Tambo and included Thomas Nkobi, Mac Maharaj, Joe Nhlanhla, James Stuart, Pallo Jordan and Thabo Mbeki (who was then the ANC's Director of Information). Initially, the ANC struck a sceptical note with Tambo telling the EPG that "their immediate reaction to the setting up of COMGEP was that this put the Commonwealth on the side of the oppressor as COMGEP could contribute to the relief of the pressure on the South African regime which had been building up at the time of the Nassau Heads of Government meeting."⁷³⁰ After a full explanation of the EPG's role by Malcolm Fraser, Tambo spoke in more conciliatory terms. "The Commonwealth", he said, "was known to people in South Africa as a body which had consistently taken strong positions on the apartheid question and at no time had these attitudes been more strongly expressed than at the Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in The Bahamas. The ANC therefore saw the mission of the Group as being an elaboration of the strong lead given at Nassau."⁷³¹ He accepted that COMGEP "was part of a major international effort to bring an end to apartheid"⁷³²

Nevertheless, Tambo was deeply sceptical about the sincerity of the South African Government and its willingness to negotiate seriously. He was particularly concerned that, if no progress was made, the regime might nonetheless play a delaying game and attempt to string out the process. There should therefore be "no attempt to extend the mandate."⁷³³ Tambo, in setting out the historical background which had led the ANC to take up arms against the apartheid state, also made clear the ANC's reluctance to accept any cessation of violence, until after serious negotiations had delivered positive outcomes. Pressed by Lord Barber on whether the ANC might temporarily suspend violence if it was clear that meaningful negotiations were

⁷³⁰ Oliver Tambo, speaking at a meeting between the Executive of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons, at the Mulungushi Hall, Lusaka, Friday, 28 February 1986, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, COMGEP (SR) 40, 2.

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷³² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷³³ *Ibid.*, 7.

possible, Tambo remained reluctant, saying the ANC could not act unilaterally, and that there were many examples of negotiations which had occurred without the cessation of violence. The EPG left Lusaka grimly aware that much more work would be needed before the ANC could be brought into a possible agreement.

Winnie Mandela had met the EPG at the time of the preliminary visit and before the group's meeting with the ANC leadership. She had told the three members of the EPG present that the country's crisis was deepening from day to day.⁷³⁴ The government had lost control: it knew where the solution lay but refused to face facts and kept looking for artificial answers. She felt that the group would not find many doors open. Nothing less than the complete dismantling of apartheid would be acceptable. All else would be "a waste of time."⁷³⁵ Asked about Mandela's release from prison, she said it was inconceivable that he should be released into anything other than a free political atmosphere. But she feared that the government wanted to push him into "a highly volatile political atmosphere and, by so doing, destroying the myth that they believed had built up around him."⁷³⁶ Mrs Mandela also argued that the government was attempting to 'Muzorewarise' Chief Buthelezi and project him as a future leader of the country. She warned that if the Group contacted "the puppets, it would be difficult to justify in the community. Emotions were now so brittle, and Blacks who had collaborated with the government were now seen as part of the government apparatus itself. Buthelezi fell into this category." If the EPG were to see such people, it would be at great cost to their status and credibility with the black community, and "it was really not negotiable."⁷³⁷ Winnie Mandela met the group again, on at least one other occasion. But it was an impromptu speech she made in Munsieville, near Krugersdorp, on 13 April 1986, which caused widespread concern. "We have no guns", she told the crowd, "we have only stones, boxes of matches, and petrol. Together, hand in hand, with our boxes of matches and our necklaces we shall liberate this country."⁷³⁸ A draft

⁷³⁴ These were Rt. Hon. Malcolm Fraser, General Olusegun Obasanjo and Dame Nita Barrow.

⁷³⁵ Record of a meeting between the Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons and Winnie Mandela, Wednesday, 19 February 1986, Sandton, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, COMGEP/40/3-B, 2.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷³⁸ Emma Gilbey, *The Lady: The Life and Times of Winnie Mandela* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993), 145-6.

letter to Malcolm Fraser cataloguing Mrs Mandela's various reported comments, and the press reaction to them, was drawn up within the Secretariat but was never sent.⁷³⁹

The EPG's third meeting with Mandela took place on 16 May. By then, the groups proposals had been crystallised into a short document entitled "A Possible Negotiating Concept". This had been debated and refined when the EPG met, for a third time, in Marlborough House on 30 April – 1 May. It had then been put to the principal parties. The proposals were designed to provide the basis for the start of negotiations between the South African government and black and other opposition leaders. It called on the government to remove troops from the townships, release Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners, unban the ANC, PAC and other political parties and permit normal political activity. For their part, the ANC and the other parties representing the black majority would enter negotiations and suspend violence.

Some days before the last meeting with Mandela, Ramphal had sent a secret message to the EPG following a meeting he had had in Kuala Lumpur with Tambo. It read:

- (A) "The ANC's preference will continue to be for at least initial talks preceding a ceasefire arrangement, but alternative COMGEP concept could have a change (*chance?*) provided, repeat provided, there is range of matters in preamble. Without clear agreement on this from SAG no/no deal is likely.
- (B) There is uneasiness about lack of communication between Mandela and Tambo etc prior to an agreement for negotiations. COMGEP intermediation will help but may not/not suffice. There will be need for inventiveness on this.
- (C) There is a basic worry about a double-cross and anxiety lest without sufficient assurances COMGEP puts pressure on ANC to go along with what turns out to be major tactical setback. I have emphasised COMGEPs awareness of all dangers and that it will not/not itself recommend arrangements without being satisfied SAG will deliver."⁷⁴⁰

Clearly, the leadership of the ANC outside South Africa was coming around to accept COMGEP's formulation of a suspension of violence, in return for the South African government fulfilling the key steps set out in the negotiating concept. But there was

⁷³⁹ Draft telex to Rt.Hon. Malcolm Fraser, initiated by Dominic Sankey and Hugh Craft, 21 April 1986, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, COMGEP/ 40/3-B, ANC 6.

⁷⁴⁰ Message from Sonny Ramphal to COMGEP (via Ambassador Lee) marked SECRET for meeting of 13 May 1986, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, COMGEP 40/4/1-B(i).

also unease that Mandela might agree something out of step with his colleagues, as well deep distrust of the South African Government.

It was not yet 9 a.m. when Mandela welcomed the EPG to the Guest House within the Pollsmoor prison compound. Greeting Fraser, he asked him to compliment Bob Hawke on the suggestion that the Group be constituted. "It was a very good idea", he added.⁷⁴¹ They were joined, on the South African side, by the Minister of Justice, Kobie Coetsee, the Commissioner of Prisons, General Willemse, Brigadier Munroe, the Commandant of Pollsmoor Prison, and Mr J. Heunis, a Legal Adviser to the State President. After about ten minutes of informal discussion over coffee, Coetsee and Willemse withdrew, despite Mandela's protestations that they should stay. He emphasised that he would still have spoken perfectly freely and the Minister would have had a measure of how he viewed things. He added: "The fact of talking would build mutual confidence...and it was this lack of confidence that was leading to a serious wastage of the country's human and other resources." If the Minister wished not to be present, he appreciated the reasons but hoped it would not be the last time that they would see each other.⁷⁴² Mandela went on to say that "it was his deep wish to organise discussions with the government in order to allay their fears and assure them of his cooperation, not just as an individual but as a member of the ANC. His view could carry weight only if expressed as part of the ANC. One of the difficulties in Pollsmoor was that he was not in contact with the ANC, either with fellow members of the party in Pollsmoor and other prisons, or out of jail."⁷⁴³

The group then presented Mandela with a copy of the 'Possible Negotiating Concept'. Mandela read the paper and then returned it to Obasanjo. Pressed for his reaction, Mandela said that he had no problem with the document. Although he had not studied it closely, he was already conversant with its general tenor from some press reports he had seen. "The only problem", he added, "was that the Group was interested in his views not just as an individual but as a member of the organisation to which he belonged." He needed to consult his colleagues but "he did not think he would have many problems in persuading his colleagues to use the Group's ideas as a starting

⁷⁴¹ Record of a meeting between COMGEP and Nelson Mandela, Friday, 16 May 1986, Pollsmoor Prison, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, COMGEP (SR) 122 (ANC) 4/1-B(i), 1.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2.

point.”⁷⁴⁴ Surprisingly, and contrary to the views of others in the ANC, he counselled the group not to insist on a strict timetable for decisions: the South African Government needed to be given a reasonable chance. He was also asked to comment on the view that Chief Buthelezi should be excluded from any negotiations. Mandela said that “his position was very clear. Buthelezi was a freedom fighter in his own right. Although he differed from the ANC and had said harsh things about it, he was a force who could not be ignored.”⁷⁴⁵ Obasanjo then asked Heunis, the President’s legal adviser, if he wished to ask a question. Heunis said that he wanted to clarify Mr Mandela’s position on the group’s negotiating concept. Was he right in assuming that Mr Mandela regarded it as an acceptable starting point and that if the Government accepted it, he would accept it too? Mandela replied that he accepted it whether the South African Government accepted it or not. However, he wanted his views to be those of his movement, not just of an individual.

The EPG’s meetings with Mandela revealed several important features. First, for the first time, Mandela had, from his prison cell, opened a dialogue about change in South Africa which involved both the South African government and a third party (in this case, the Commonwealth). Second, he had made clear that his responses were inseparable from those of the ANC leadership outside South Africa and emphasised that no agreement could be reached which did not recognise that reality. Third, that notwithstanding, his personal approach appeared to be one of extraordinary flexibility and openness, including on violence and on the inclusivity of any negotiations. Read with other accounts, the use of Commonwealth records and memoirs demonstrate the methodological value of a triangulated approach to key research issues.

While Mandela’s influence helped move the ANC to accepting the suspension of violence, in the context of the negotiating concept, Mandela also emphasised the importance of synchronising responses from both the government and the ANC. At the same time as the ANC suspended violence, the government should also pull out the army and the police from the townships. It was also clear that, while many in the South African Government had concluded that these actions were necessary, they feared the unknown circumstances of normal political activity, with Mandela and other

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., 9.

political leaders out of jail and free to operate politically. Some continued to argue for a cessation, rather than a suspension, of violence. This would be completely unacceptable to the ANC.

The EPG had presented its proposals to the government during its third visit to South Africa. The 'Possible Negotiating Concept' was neither accepted nor rejected and it became clear that the Cabinet was divided on the issue and that a struggle for ascendancy was in process. Early on the morning of 19 May, news reached the EPG in Cape Town that units of the South African Defence Force (SADF) had earlier attacked three neighbouring Commonwealth countries, namely Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe.⁷⁴⁶ Du Toit commented: "The targets held little military significance but the attack was intended to demonstrate the State's military strength and to symbolise the resolve of the PW Botha government not to be dictated to by outsiders."⁷⁴⁷ The hardliners had won and the group had received its answer in dramatic and brutal terms. Kaunda declared the raids: "a dastardly, cowardly action" and Ramphal branded them "a declaration of war."⁷⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the group decided not to withdraw at once but to conclude all its scheduled meetings, including with the Cabinet's Constitutional Committee where a formal response had been expected to the Commonwealth's proposals.

⁷⁴⁶ The Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg records the 19 May attack but provides no context and makes no mention of the Commonwealth's EPG initiative.

⁷⁴⁷ Pierre du Toit, *South Africa's Brittle Peace: The Problem of Post-Settlement Violence* (Basingstoke, UK and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 76.

⁷⁴⁸ BBC News, "South African raids wreck peace bid," *BBC ON THIS DAY*, 19 May 1986, accessed 4 March 2018, http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/19/newsid_3030000/3030995.stm.



Figure 12. The failure of the EPG. Kevin Kallauger (KAL), *Today*, 21 May, 1986.

The EPG's eventual failure as an exercise in negotiation and conflict resolution proved to be its greatest political success. Admittedly, there were some who have argued that its work was terminated prematurely. Stremlau, while accepting that the initiative was "a politically influential act", concludes that "the Commonwealth lacked the capacity and resolve to gain quick acceptance of the formula" and thus had to wait until local conditions ripened for its voluntary acceptance four years later.⁷⁴⁹ It was clear that the British government would have wished the EPG to continue its work.⁷⁵⁰ More intriguingly, Mandela in his later exchanges with the EPG appeared to be open to the mission continuing, despite setbacks.⁷⁵¹ However, this would not have been acceptable either to key parties, most notably the ANC, or feasible practically. Desmond Tutu, the new Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, described Pretoria's actions as "a slap in the face" for the EPG. He warned that the group would have "no credibility whatever with blacks if it continues to talk with Pretoria." He added: "Only a robust call from the EPG for economic sanctions against South Africa would justify the

⁷⁴⁹ John Stremlau, "The Commonwealth contributing to Civility on the Eve of the Citizen Century" in *The Commonwealth in the 21st Century*, 65-66.

⁷⁵⁰ Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister's Questions, 20 May 1986, *Official Record* (98/174-78), accessed 12 February 2018, <https://www.api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1986/may/20/engagements>.

⁷⁵¹ Record of a meeting between Nelson Mandela and the Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons, 16 May 1986, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, COMGEP (SR) 122, 4/1-B(i), 7-8.

Commonwealth's effort and vindicate the trust reposed in it."⁷⁵² The South African regime made outward protestations of its wish to keep talking. However, Guelke concludes that Pretoria had decided that "the continuation of the mission was no longer in its interest."⁷⁵³ In all, there was no prospect that the mission might have been rescued without damaging the Commonwealth's credibility or discrediting the prospects of genuine negotiations. Paradoxically, the rejection of the EPG's proposals convinced many that the last days of the apartheid system had now come. In the view of veteran journalist John Battersby, it was "the beginning of the end." At that moment "everything conflicted – sanctions were inevitable, apartheid was shown in its full horrors .. and there was only one way out now, which was negotiations."⁷⁵⁴

As an attempt at negotiations, the initiative clearly failed. However, it left an important legacy, not only in terms of the framework of issues involved in the 'Possible Negotiating Concept'. It also fostered contacts and relationships which were to contribute to a series of other, largely covert, meetings. These included gatherings in Dakar and Senegal, as well as Leverkusen in Germany, facilitated by the Institute for a Democratic Alternative (IDASA), where figures in the ANC met prominent Afrikaners for informal discussions.⁷⁵⁵ These were designed to explore common ground and to move the public discourse away from confrontation and division and towards engagement and potential accommodation. The Mells House talks, initiated in late 1987 by senior staff in the mining giant Consolidated Goldfields and partly taking place in a stately home in Somerset, had a similar purpose, though its activities were spread over several years and were more covert.⁷⁵⁶ Harvey claims that this "prolonged dialogue", that at times included Thabo Mbeki and Willie de Klerk, the elder brother of the future president, was the beginning which led to "the constitutional agreement between Cyril Ramaphosa and Rolf Meyer in 1993."⁷⁵⁷ Others were less sure, with

⁷⁵² Notes of a telephone conversation between Desmond Tutu and Shridath Ramphal, 29 May 1986, from Janet Singh to Moni Malhoutra, of the same date, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, COMGEP 40/4/1-E,1.

⁷⁵³ Guelke, *Rethinking the Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 202.

⁷⁵⁴ John Battersby, Remarks to a Witness Seminar on "Negotiating with Apartheid: The Mission to South Africa of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group 1986", University of London, 13 June 2011. Unpublished report, personal papers, 43.

⁷⁵⁵ Patrick Salmon (ed.), *The Unwinding of apartheid: UK-South African Relations 1986-1990*, Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series III, Vol. XI (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), xii-xiv.

⁷⁵⁶ Robert Harvey, *The Fall of Apartheid* (Basingstoke & NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, xv.

Robin Renwick insisting it was “not a negotiation.”⁷⁵⁸ In all, Niel Barnard has estimated that between 1983 and 1990 about 1,200 South Africans met representatives of the ANC in exile, in 167 gatherings and meetings.⁷⁵⁹ Unsurprisingly, Barnard has a low opinion of “these amateur negotiators...these self-appointed mediators”.⁷⁶⁰ His correspondingly high opinion of his own role seems equally misplaced: “Perhaps it was the deep emotional connection we both had with South Africa that brought home both Mandela’s and my realisation that negotiations, like a healthy marriage, had no room for outsiders.”⁷⁶¹ It is certainly the case that Mandela saw the visit of the Eminent Persons Group visit as an opportunity to advance his desire for ‘talks about talks’. After the EPG’s third call on him in jail, he felt optimistic and believed that “the seeds of negotiations had been sown.”⁷⁶² That was not to be but instead Mandela was able to utilise his growing relationship with the Justice Minister, Kobie Coetsee. In 1988, this personal contact was superseded by a committee of senior officials, including Niel Barnard.⁷⁶³ This new arrangement lasted until Mandela’s release and involved many meetings, but these were more about building confidence and allaying government concerns, in preparation for a meeting with PW Botha and, later, de Klerk, rather than substantive negotiations. At the end of the process, Barnard rather plaintively remarks of Mandela that he did not “hold him to statements he had made during our secret talks...nor raise it when he took a different stance from that adopted in discussions.”⁷⁶⁴

The point has been made earlier that as a diplomatic initiative the EPG’s mission was significant, sustained and far-reaching. It is also apparent that the ‘Possible Negotiating Concept’ provided a substantive contribution to the all-party negotiations that began after 1991, as Pik Botha and others have recognised.⁷⁶⁵ The unresolved issue in 1986 was the suspension of violence in the context of the release of Mandela, the unbanning of prohibited parties, and free political activity. The apartheid regime needed time and the closing of other options to grasp this nettle, but there was little more any external actors could have done at that stage to facilitate further

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid., 178.

⁷⁵⁹ Niel Barnard, *Secret Revolution: Memoirs of a Spy Boss* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2015), 191.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., 192.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid., 193.

⁷⁶² Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 630.

⁷⁶³ Ibid., 636.

⁷⁶⁴ Barnard, *Secret Revolution*, 265.

⁷⁶⁵ Pik Botha, interviewed by Sue Onslow, *Commonwealth Oral History Project*, London, 13 December 2012, accessed 5 July 2019, <http://www.commonwealthoralhistories.org>, [http://sas_space.sas.ac.uk/5806/i/Pik Botha transcript](http://sas_space.sas.ac.uk/5806/i/Pik%20Botha%20transcript), 3.

negotiations. Only now, with the availability of hitherto classified documents, can the EPG mission, and its follow-up, be seen in its full context. In terms of process as well as content, the Commonwealth mission should therefore be viewed as a groundbreaking and important contribution to the process of multi-party negotiations that began in Mandela's prison cell in February 1986.

Mrs Thatcher considered the collapse of the initiative a 'disaster'. The day after the SADF raid which aborted the Commonwealth's mission, she told the House of Commons: "I totally and utterly condemn the raid by South Africa into the three countries. The Group has now left South Africa because the members of the group thought that that stage of their proceedings was over. It is just possible that they may continue their work."⁷⁶⁶ Pressed by Neil Kinnock, the Leader of the Labour Opposition, on the adoption of "effective sanctions" against South Africa, she replied: "I do not believe that sanctions and the isolation of South Africa are any more likely to achieve the desired negotiations after the raid than they were before."⁷⁶⁷ She added that the UK government was continuing its efforts to secure dialogue and discussion, and hoped that the EPG would persist in its work, despite its 'setback'. As the EPG met in Marlborough House on 5 June, to finalise its report, the UK Cabinet was clutching at straws. Sir Geoffrey Howe told his colleagues that the EPG "had not yet reached any conclusion. The British member of the Group, Lord Barber, was working hard to keep the Group in being, so that it could carry forward the attempt to engage South Africa in dialogue. The Australian member of the Group, Mr Malcolm Fraser, was giving some support."⁷⁶⁸ After this over-optimistic gloss, Howe continued in a more realistic vein: "COMGEP might not decide to give up its work immediately, but the prospects for its further efforts were not good."⁷⁶⁹

Thereafter, it was clear that the UK government's approach was two-fold. First, to keep in being the notion of dialogue and negotiation, either through the Commonwealth or, increasingly, through some other channel; and, second, to resist the calls for economic sanctions on South Africa. In the latter respect, a semantic argument developed over

⁷⁶⁶ Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister's Questions, Tuesday 20 May 1986, *Official Record*, 98/ 174-178, accessed 12 February 2018, <https://www.api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1986/may/20/engagements>.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 174-178.

⁷⁶⁸ Minutes of a Meeting of Cabinet, Thursday 5 June 1986, TNA, CAB 128/83/22, 6.

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

what the EPG had meant by its call for 'further effective measures'. The veteran Labour MP, Peter Shore, had quoted the phrase at Mrs Thatcher and remarked: "If that is not equivalent to sanctions, I do not know what is."⁷⁷⁰ For her part, Mrs Thatcher responded by quoting the report, in saying: "We are not determining the nature or extent of any measures which might be adopted, or their effectiveness."⁷⁷¹ Mindful that the Commonwealth review meeting (of seven Heads of Government, including the UK) was due to convene at the beginning of August to consider the EPG report and consequential measures, the British then sought to pursue both themes. This involved trying to persuade western allies not to pursue economic sanctions, as well as investing effort in Sir Geoffrey Howe's ill-timed and humiliating demarche to South Africa on behalf of the European Council of Ministers.

Following the failure of its mission, the EPG's next task was to report its findings to the Commonwealth, and to the world. An agreement had already been reached that its report would be published as a Penguin Special. Working through the night under the direction of the Assistant Secretary-General, Moni Malhoutra, a writing team in Marlborough House set about preparing a draft report for the Secretary-General. With his own changes and additions incorporated, Ramphal then presented the draft to the EPG, who finalised the text in a formal session from 4-7 June. The finishing touches to the document took place over the following weekend, with the typed manuscript arriving with the Penguin editor on the morning of Monday 9 June. Design, typesetting and proofreading took place at breakneck speed. With the cover and illustrations complete, printing of the book started on Wednesday evening, with binding beginning during the night. A Secretariat officer, Clive Jordan, was present throughout to advise where necessary. Finished copies left the printer in Suffolk at 9 a.m. on Thursday 12 June, arriving at Marlborough House in time for its noon launch. Copies were in bookshops the same day.

It was reputedly the fastest book ever published and it quickly became a best-seller, supplanting *The Hunt for Red October* in popularity. Penguin's original 55,000 copies sold out in one week, and another 10,000 were printed, followed by a further 4,000 in

⁷⁷⁰ Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister's Questions, Thursday 12 June 1985, *Official Record* 99/491-496, accessed 12 February 2018, <https://www.api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1986/june/12/engagements>.

⁷⁷¹ The Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group, *Mission to South Africa: The Commonwealth Report* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin books, 1986), 140.

mid-July. In all, over 80,000 copies were printed in English, though it was also translated into French, Dutch, Japanese and Greek. John Mortimer described it as 'a miracle of publishing at the moment of truth'. David Astor, the newspaper publisher and editor of *The Observer*, wrote to Ramphal, calling the report "magnificent...it is a thrilling document and I am certain that it must help the situation". He congratulated Ramphal "on the initiative that you personally took in promoting this great mission which will certainly find its place in the history books."⁷⁷² Anthony Sampson, the writer and biographer of Nelson Mandela, wrote in similarly effusive terms: "It is a publishing feat. Its publication is a major political event. It is a document that will change history; every country's view of South Africa will be changed by it. The report is enormously readable. Its original fresh style gives it enormous impact."⁷⁷³

More significant still was the political impact of the report. Bob Hawke, the Australian Prime Minister, declared: "The report is a powerful and compelling account of the daily agony brought about by the apartheid system in South Africa, of the conscientious and dedicated attempts of the seven members of the group to carry out the Commonwealth's mandate from Nassau, and of the obduracy and intransigence of the South African regime."⁷⁷⁴ James Callaghan, the former Labour Prime Minister, added: "I do not think I have ever seen a more damning document prepared by such a diverse group, all of whom are in agreement."⁷⁷⁵ Copies (in French) were rushed to the World Conference on Sanctions against South Africa in Paris on 16 June, where it was presented by Ramphal. The final resolution of the conference, inter alia, noted "with appreciation the efforts of the Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons to provide a just and peaceful solution to South Africa." A Commonwealth Secretariat officer reported: "There were frequent references to the EPG Report as well as SG's speech ... there was also great demand for the EPG Report and the available copies had to be carefully rationed!"⁷⁷⁶ It was a message carried to all parts of the world and picked up by civil society campaigners and the global anti-apartheid movement. It was

⁷⁷² Correspondence from David Astor to Shridath Ramphal, 18 June 1986, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, COMGEP /40/6.

⁷⁷³ Correspondence from Anthony Sampson to Geraldine Cooke, 16 June 1986, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, COMGEP/40/6.

⁷⁷⁴ Bob Hawke, Statement on "Mission to South Africa," 12 June 1986, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, COMGEP/40/6.

⁷⁷⁵ Correspondence from James Callaghan to Sonny Ramphal, 12 June 1986, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, COMGEP/40/6.

⁷⁷⁶ Memorandum, "World Conference on Sanctions on South Africa," from S.K. Rao to Shridath Ramphal, 4 July 1986, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, COMGEP, I/40/5/34A, 2-3.

particularly influential in the decision of the US Congress to pass sanctions legislation in defiance of President Ronald Reagan's threat of veto.

The report's description of apartheid was striking: "None of us was prepared for the full reality of apartheid. As a contrivance of social engineering, it is awesome in its cruelty. It is achieved and sustained only through force, creating human misery and deprivation, and blighting the lives of millions. Black and white live as strangers in the same land".⁷⁷⁷ But it also chronicled the EPG's attempts to pursue political dialogue and achieve a negotiated end to apartheid. It concluded that, in rejecting the negotiating concept, the South African Government was not yet ready to negotiate genuinely the establishment of a non-racial and representative government in South Africa. The group concluded that "it is not sanctions which will destroy the country but the persistence of apartheid and the government's failure to engage in fundamental political reform". In recommending further measures against the regime, the group concluded: "The question in front of Heads of Government is in our view clear. It is not whether such measures will compel change; it is already the case that their absence and Pretoria's belief that they need not be feared, defers change. Such action may offer the last opportunity to avert what could be the worst bloodbath since the Second World War".⁷⁷⁸

All seven members of the Eminent Persons Group signed the report. This included Lord Barber, Thatcher's nominee, who wrestled with duty and conscience and eventually joined the call for further sanctions. Barber, a former UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, had been chosen by Mrs Thatcher partly because of his extensive business interests in South Africa. As Chairman of Standard Chartered Bank, he had travelled to South Africa many times. He had begun his involvement with the EPG faithfully pursuing the role given to him by his patron and mentor. But the work of the group exposed him to a side of the country he had not seen before, and to people and opinions beyond his previous experience. In the end, and despite the counterclaims in

⁷⁷⁷ The Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons, *Mission to South Africa*, 23.

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

one of his obituaries, he found he could not dissent from his Commonwealth colleagues about the need for further sanctions.⁷⁷⁹

As Thatcher struggled to contain the demands for sanctions, new impetus was given to those advocating a boycott of the 1986 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh. Warnings of action over the XIIIth Games had been building for some time. At the Nassau CHOGM the previous year, the leader of the Nigerian delegation, Commodore Ukiwe, had put on record that the Games: “might be a source of conflict, if all those who had continued to interact with South Africa in sport ignored the call by Heads of Government.”⁷⁸⁰ The original motivation for such a move, by African and Asian nations in particular, was therefore to protest against the UK’s equivocal attitude to the Gleneagles Agreement on apartheid in sport. However, it was the sanctions row, rather than apartheid in sport, which precipitated the effective collapse of the Games as a multi-racial contest. Nigeria and Ghana withdrew at the beginning of July and others quickly followed. By the end of July, only 26 nations and territories remained in a distinctly monochrome competition. Worse, the Games were the first to be tasked with finding all their funding from commercial sources (with Thatcher confirming that there would be no financial support from the UK government). With the Games already showing a £4m deficit (on a budget of £14m) the organisers found an unlikely saviour in the considerable shape of Robert Maxwell, the former MP, publisher and newspaper baron. Proclaiming that “there is no shortfall”, Maxwell steadily propelled the Games into insolvency.⁷⁸¹ Ramphal did his best to prevent the boycott but the tide was too strong. He appealed for Thatcher’s help in saving the Games but she replied: “They’re not my Games: they’re yours.”⁷⁸² Bateman and Douglas concluded: “There has never been a Games so battered and bruised by conflict, by accountants and by politicians.”⁷⁸³ It was an inauspicious omen for the looming special Commonwealth summit beginning on 3 August.

⁷⁷⁹ Dennis Kavanagh, “Lord Barber: Reluctant and Unhappy Chancellor,” Obituary in *The Independent*, 19 December 2005, accessed 5 July 2019, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/lord.barber.520040.html>.

⁷⁸⁰ Commonwealth Secretariat, *Minutes of Sessions and Memoranda*, 96.

⁷⁸¹ Derek Bateman and Derek Douglas, *Unfriendly Games: Boycotted and Broke, The Inside Story of the 1986 Commonwealth Games* (London: Mainstream PP Ltd, 1986), 53.

⁷⁸² Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*, 449.

⁷⁸³ Bateman and Douglas, *Unfriendly Games*, 124.

Only days after the disastrous large-scale boycott of the 1986 Edinburgh Commonwealth Games, seven Commonwealth leaders gathered at Marlborough House to consider the report of the Eminent Persons Group and its recommendations. Chaired by the host of the Nassau summit, Lynden Pindling, the other Heads of Government present were Gandhi (India), Hawke (Australia), Kaunda (Zambia), Mugabe (Zimbabwe), Mulroney (Canada) and Thatcher (Britain). They were joined at the table by Ramphal. The night before, all eight had been at Buckingham Palace, at a private dinner hosted by the Queen. Ramphal recalls that this was a working dinner, rather than a social occasion, and that the Queen left a clear impression that the summit should find unity and not fail in its task.⁷⁸⁴ It was one of several reports that suggested that the Queen, as Head of the Commonwealth, was unhappy with the approach of the British prime minister.⁷⁸⁵

Certainly, as they began their work, most leaders were mindful of the overwhelming concern of the Nassau CHOGM that there should be further speedy and effective action against the South African regime if it had failed to make adequate progress in dismantling apartheid and finding a negotiated solution. For most, that much seemed beyond doubt.

However, unlike Nassau, the debate was fractious and difficult from the outset. Mugabe told Thatcher that he found the British position “a little disappointing, to say the least.” He “appealed to Britain to demonstrate its leadership role in the Commonwealth.”⁷⁸⁶ Thatcher responded by accusing Mugabe of suggesting to the meeting “a proposal to give arms to the ANC.” This accusation triggered general protests that Mugabe had not made such a proposal but the British prime minister was in no mood to back down, declaring that “the difference between Mr Mugabe and herself was that she rejected violence whereas he did not.”⁷⁸⁷

⁷⁸⁴ Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*, 444; Hardman, *Queen of the World*, 398-9.

⁷⁸⁵ Jason Beattie, “Queen’s fury at Margaret Thatcher for ‘damaging the Commonwealth’ revealed in declassified documents”, *Daily Mirror*, 29 December 2017, accessed 19 September 2019, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/queens-fury-margaret-thatcher-damaging-11765243>; Robert Hardman, *Queen of the World* (London: Century, 2018), 390-1.

⁷⁸⁶ Record of Proceedings, Heads of Government Review Meeting, 3-5 August 1986, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, COMGEP 40/4/1-A, 37.

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 37-38.



Fig.13. -The CHOGM Review meeting, Marlborough House, August 1986. Commonwealth Secretariat.

Listing the assistance the UK had given to Africa and the frontline states in particular, she regretted that “Britain rarely received any thanks”, and hoped that in future she could attend meetings: “without having to listen to some of the unfounded criticisms she has heard.”⁷⁸⁸ Pressed on the question of further sanctions, she declared that she saw “no proof to convince her that sanctions would bring about internal change within South Africa and, indeed, everything pointed to the contrary. Sanctions had never brought about a change and never would.”⁷⁸⁹ When her colleagues suggested a ban on air links and the import of iron ore and coal, as well as agricultural products, she protested: “it would be ridiculous to allow the business to pass to someone else.”⁷⁹⁰ The morning session ended with an appeal from Mulroneu. Confirming that Canada would support whatever measures the meeting agreed upon, he said that “he did not want the Commonwealth to look preposterous and ludicrous and be seen to be backing away from the fundamental issue.” On the contrary, it was essential that the Commonwealth should do the right thing.⁷⁹¹

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid., 40.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid., 50.

In the afternoon, Geoffrey Howe substituted for his Prime Minister and brought a more emollient approach to the conference table. Nevertheless, the UK's policy approach remained broadly unchanged. At the end of the meeting, six of the leaders agreed on a package of eleven sanctions against the apartheid regime. These included those envisaged at the Nassau summit the previous year as well as several additional measures. The UK, the seventh country, stood aside from the agreed sanctions but announced that it would accept and implement any decisions by the EEC to ban the import of coal, iron and steel and gold coins from South Africa. It also agreed a 'voluntary ban' on new investment in South Africa, and on the promotion of tourism to it.⁷⁹² This then marked the emergence of a 'binary Commonwealth'. All Heads regretted the absence of full agreement but recognised, more in hope than in expectation, that "the potential for united Commonwealth action still exists."⁷⁹³ The six leaders, excluding Britain, concluded their decisions with an appeal for a concerted programme of international action and announced that they would embark on intensive consultations to that end.⁷⁹⁴ But they protested that the aim of sanctions was not punitive, as Thatcher feared. As the Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke had put it (quoting his foreign minister, Bill Hayden): "We want to bring them to their senses, not to their knees."⁷⁹⁵

The ANC and the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) were relieved that the EPG remained impervious to the blandishments of the apartheid state and that its conclusions were clear and boosted the sanctions campaign.⁷⁹⁶ In turn, pressure for economic and financial sanctions grew, through a widening network of support, though the campaign failed to move significantly its principal target, the UK Government. Archbishop Trevor Huddleston, AAM's President, casting aside his previous scepticism, greeted the report with these words: "I wholeheartedly welcome the report. The policies of the AAM on which we have campaigned for a quarter of a century have been absolutely vindicated. The report is a devastating condemnation of President Reagan's constructive engagement policy and the Prime Minister's servile acceptance of it."⁷⁹⁷ He later wrote: "The Commonwealth initiative and the report Mission to Africa

⁷⁹² Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 293.

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁷⁹⁵ Bob Hawke, *The Hawke Memoirs* (Australia: William Heineman, 1994), 317.

⁷⁹⁶ Gurney, "In the heart of the beast," 331.

⁷⁹⁷ Trevor Huddleston, Statement on the release of the EPG report, 12 June 1986, Commonwealth

(sic), of the Eminent Persons Group, was of the utmost importance. Just because the authority of the representatives of the Commonwealth was unquestionable, the strength of their recommendation carries immense weight.”⁷⁹⁸ But there were more critical voices. Helen Suzman, the veteran anti-apartheid campaigner and for many years the sole embodiment of South Africa’s liberal conscience, told protestors against her anti-sanctions stance in New York: “I understand the moral abhorrence and pleasure it gives you when you demonstrate. But I don’t see how wrecking the economy of the country will ensure a more stable and just society.”⁷⁹⁹

The Commonwealth can justifiably claim that the EPG’s report and the fierce disputes about sanctions which followed enlarged the debate and helped encourage the imposition of further international sanctions. The report also painted a vivid picture of a racially oppressive and intransigent regime, continuing to incarcerate the world’s most famous political prisoner. The promotion of the EPG report and the measures agreed at the Commonwealth’s special summit in London, in August 1986, should therefore be intrinsically linked to the EPG’s efforts to seek a negotiated solution and the conclusions the group drew once that initiative had broken down. Together, this had “a catalytic effect”, argued Ramphal.⁸⁰⁰ However, some do not make this connection, preferring to see the mission in isolation from its report and aftermath.⁸⁰¹

4. Internationalising sanctions

But what could the Commonwealth hope to achieve in the absence of British support? Ramphal argues that the Commonwealth was successful in setting “the benchmark for international sanctions.”⁸⁰² Within a few days of the Commonwealth summit, the US Senate voted by a large majority for a package of sanctions, including many of those adopted in London. The imprint of the Commonwealth was clear. After the return of the EPG from South Africa and the launch of its report, the Obasanjo, Fraser and

Secretariat archives, COMGEP/40/06.

⁷⁹⁸ Trevor Huddleston, “Introduction,” *Annual Report of the Anti-Apartheid Movement 1985/6*, October 1986, AAM archive, Bodleian Library, B.1.1., MSS.AAM, 13, 2.

⁷⁹⁹ John Burns and Alan Cowell, “Helen Suzman, Relentless Challenger of Apartheid System, is Dead at 91,” *The New York Times*, 1 January 2009, 3, accessed 3 March 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/02/world/africa/02suzman.html>.

⁸⁰⁰ Shridath Ramphal, *Biennial Report of the Secretary-General 1987* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1987), 6.

⁸⁰¹ David Welsh and J.E. Spence, *Ending Apartheid* (Harlow: Longman, 2011), 57.

⁸⁰² Shridath Ramphal, “Mandela’s Freedom, the Commonwealth and the Apartheid Axis,” *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 106:6 (2017): 625.

Ramphal had embarked on a range of visits to key capitals. At the beginning of June, prior to the release of the EPG report, the co-chairmen had written to Senator Edward Kennedy about his Anti-Apartheid Bill, recently introduced into the US Congress. They suggested that they might “comment on the sorts of measures which we believe might be most effective.”⁸⁰³ They concluded that their recommendations “probably represents the minimum programme that would carry real weight with the South African Government.” They recognised that some would argue for comprehensive sanctions but warned that it would be “far more difficult to get the international community to accept such an approach.”⁸⁰⁴

A month later Obasanjo and Fraser were in Washington and lobbying Congress at a time when Reagan’s faltering South Africa policy was causing widespread concern. On 23 July, Senator Edward Kennedy announced that he and Senator Weicker were tabling an anti-apartheid amendment to the Debt Ceiling Act. He said: “The amendment we propose contains a series of economic and diplomatic sanctions that we believe have broad support. In essence, they are the proposals endorsed by the Eminent Persons Group of the Commonwealth of Nations.”⁸⁰⁵ While conceding that these measures fell short of the full divestment and total trade embargo adopted by the House of Representatives, Kennedy urged: “These are still far-reaching and effective sanctions.”⁸⁰⁶ The amendment was passed by a large majority.

⁸⁰³ Correspondence from Olusegun Obasanjo and Malcolm Fraser to Edward Kennedy, 10 June 1986, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, COMGEP/40/4/2-A, 1.

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁰⁵ Edward Kennedy, Statement on the anti-apartheid amendment to the Debt Ceiling Act, 23 July 1986, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, I40/5 Part A.

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.



Fig.14. 'Test Your Strength!' Leslie Gibbard, *The Guardian*, 14 August 1986.

In Europe, there was a similar EPG demarche during June 1986, particularly to Bonn, Paris and the EEC, prior to the European summit in The Hague and the UN Sanctions conference in France. The failure of Howe's mission to Southern Africa in July (in his capacity as President of the Council of Ministers) persuaded the European Community to agree on further sanctions (as envisaged in June). The imposition of sanctions by the Nordic countries and by Japan followed, though the response was not only from governments. As Ramphal adds: "Within a month of the London meeting, 21 American states and 65 American cities had taken disinvestment action, and some US\$30 billion of pension fund investments were up for imminent withdrawal."⁸⁰⁷ In the UK, there was a surge in local authority action against apartheid, including cutting financial links to South Africa or Namibia through divesting contracts or investments. However, this was severely constrained in 1988 by the passing of legislation making it illegal for local councils to boycott South African products or suppliers.⁸⁰⁸ Nevertheless, student pressure in boycotting Barclays Bank proved increasingly effective. In 1986, Barclays admitted that they had achieved 'poor results' the previous year, largely as a result of

⁸⁰⁷Ramphal, "Mandela's Freedom," 625.

⁸⁰⁸ Fieldhouse, *Anti-Apartheid*, 368.

“intensive anti-Barclays activity, accentuated by the extensive media coverage afforded to South Africa.”⁸⁰⁹

For the Commonwealth, the question was how, without British support, the organisation could now drive the sanctions agenda forward. The 1987 Vancouver CHOGM saw a deepening rift in the ‘binary Commonwealth’ and acrimonious exchanges. Both sides had reason to argue that the rift suited them: Thatcher, because she was free of the Commonwealth’s shackles and therefore able to articulate the breadth of UK policy more clearly; Ramphal, because the Commonwealth had upheld its credibility and integrity and no longer needed to be constrained by the need to accommodate the British viewpoint. Neither benefited from the division in the longer term. An unfortunate side-effect was that British diplomatic staff in the Commonwealth Secretariat were on occasions suspected of divided loyalties, with their skills under-utilised as a consequence.⁸¹⁰ The mood of the Vancouver CHOGM worsened when, at a summit press conference, Thatcher declared the ANC a “typical terrorist organisation.”⁸¹¹ This was despite the low-level dialogue her government had been conducting with the movement since 1986.⁸¹² The summit produced the Okanagan Statement and Programme of Action on Southern Africa, albeit punctuated by British dissent.⁸¹³ McIntyre described it as “a somewhat vague document, laced with the rhetoric of urgency but much less specific than the Nassau Accord.”⁸¹⁴ Unlike the previous year, no new sanctions were agreed. At the same time, under the Okanagan Statement, a Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa (CFMSA) was established, under the chairmanship of Canada. Designed to “sharpen the focus of Commonwealth sanctions and sustaining

⁸⁰⁹Circular letter No.239/86, from S.H. Fortescue, General Manager Barclays Bank plc, to undisclosed recipients, 14 July 1986, personal papers, 1.

⁸¹⁰ Interview with former member of Commonwealth Secretariat staff, 14 July 2019.

⁸¹¹ Robin Renwick, “Margaret Thatcher’s Secret Campaign to End Apartheid,” *Daily Telegraph*, 11 February 2015. Accessed 6 August 2020, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/MargaretThatcher/11403728/margaret-thatcher’s-secret-campaign-to-end-apartheid.html>.

⁸¹² Andy McSmith, “Margaret Thatcher branded ANC ‘terrorist’ while urging Nelson Mandela’s release”, *The Independent*, 9 December 2013, accessed 12 July 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/margaret-thatcher-branded-anc-terrorist-while-urging-nelson-mandela-s-release-8994191.html>.

⁸¹³ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit, 1987-1995* (Vol.2) (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1997), 7-12.

⁸¹⁴ McIntyre, *The Significance of the Commonwealth*, 120.

the political momentum”, the CFMSA, Ramphal pronounced, was “a major evolution of Commonwealth practice.”⁸¹⁵

Working with the Secretariat, CFMSA was charged with coordinating the implementation of Commonwealth sanctions and safeguarding their effectiveness. The Commonwealth (the UK excepted) also agreed to evaluate the impact of sanctions on a continuous basis and to explore the possibilities of financial measures. What was remarkable about this work (headed by Dr Joseph Hanlon and an independent Study Group) was that it had not been done before. In 1988, as Hanlon began his task, he discovered that there was no directory of sanctions imposed on South Africa, and no detailed trade statistics. Without these, Hanlon wondered how the effectiveness of current sanctions could be assessed or how new forms of pressure could be exerted.⁸¹⁶ Their work, Hanlon argued, also “demonstrated that certain other approaches would be less fruitful.”⁸¹⁷ This necessarily selective and targeted approach was to create tension with the ANC whose unchanging mantra was ‘comprehensive and mandatory sanctions.’

At the 1989 CHOGM, Hanlon’s report enabled Commonwealth leaders (and others beyond the organisation) to look dispassionately at the effect of sanctions imposed on South Africa by its major trading partners. At that point, there were 27 countries with economic, financial and other links with South Africa. The bulk were European, others were Commonwealth countries, and the remainder comprised the USA, Japan, Argentina and Brazil, together with the Nordic countries.⁸¹⁸ Van Vuuren contends that sanctions were widely evaded, not only in the West but “by the liberation movement’s traditional allies in the Eastern bloc, including Russia and China.”⁸¹⁹ While patterns of implementation therefore varied, it was financial sanctions which offered the most scope for further pressure. That was the message coming from Bob Hawke and the Australian Government. They financed a further independent report by two Australian economists, Keith Ovenden and Tony Cole, on apartheid and international finance which recommended further sanctions, to widespread approval. All this was too much

⁸¹⁵ Shridath Ramphal, *Biennial Report of the Secretary-General 1989* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1989), 8.

⁸¹⁶ Joseph Hanlon (ed), *South Africa: The Sanctions Report – Documents and Statistics* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat & James Currey, 1990), 1.

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-8.

⁸¹⁹ Van Vuuren, *Apartheid, Guns and Money*, 11.

for Thatcher who publicly repudiated a Commonwealth consensus painstakingly negotiated at the summit by her Foreign Secretary, John Major.

However, by the late '80s, economic pressure on South Africa was now coming from multiple sources: individual and collective, private and public. "It is the action of both formal and informal sanctions which determine the balance of South Africa's economic equation", declared the AAM.⁸²⁰ Robin Cohen, among many others, has argued that 1985 proved to be a turning point for South Africa. The precipitous fall in the value of the Rand, capital outflows and the drying up of foreign investment, coupled with persistent internal unrest and the government's imposition of a state of emergency called into question those such as Adam (1971), Gann and Duignan (1983) and Schlemmer (1983) who confidently predicted apartheid's survival. On the contrary, "The apartheid ship of state has sailed permanently into an angry hurricane of protest", thought Cohen. It had reached "a new state of unstable equilibrium."⁸²¹

In addition to mounting economic pressures, South Africa's once-fabled military reputation had been dealt a severe blow at Cuito Cuanavale in 1988. The costs of policing the townships and fighting beyond South Africa's borders was becoming prohibitive, even as its effectiveness diminished. Circumventing the oil embargo was essential but it came at a hefty price. In 1986, PW Botha put the additional cost of buying oil on the black market at R22 billion (nearly R300 billion at 2017 values) in the ten years since 1975.⁸²² Most importantly, deprived of foreign investment and long-term credits, South Africa had to finance its expenditure by generating a current account surplus. In 1989, the UK Ambassador to South Africa, Robin Renwick, reported that the new Governor of the Reserve Bank, Chris Stals, was hoping to achieve a current account surplus of Rand 4 billion in 1989, adding: "While South Africa is not yet out of the woods, the net outflow of capital in the third quarter had diminished."⁸²³ Dr Desmond Krogh, a key figure in South Africa's attempts to counter sanctions, told the FCO that: "As long as sanctions remained selective, non-standardised and non-mandatory, their effect would be limited". However, financial sanctions were a different matter if it deprived South Africa of long-term credits. "There

⁸²⁰ Lynda Loxton, "Paying the price of hanging on to apartheid," *Financial Mail*, TNA, FCO 105/3575.

⁸²¹ Robin Cohen, *Endgame in South Africa* (Paris & London: UNESCO Press and James Currey Ltd, 1986), 88.

⁸²² Van Vuuren, *Apartheid, Guns and Money*, 103.

⁸²³ Cable from Robin Renwick to Priority FCO, October 1989, TNA, FCO 105/3575.

is no prospect of South Africa handling the urbanisation process, achieving economic development and tackling regional problems without long term external finance”, admitted Krogh. He continued: “There would be a sharp recession in the first half of next year: the government was already cutting back sharply on spending plans.”⁸²⁴ Privately, the FCO’s economic assessment admitted that the Commonwealth’s Ovenden & Cole report “makes the case, which no one seriously disputes, that financial pressures have harmed the South African economy and further financial sanctions could inflict further damage.”⁸²⁵ The key question for the FCO was what the political effect of such sanctions might be and, even as apartheid began to crumble, the UK held to the judgement that sanctions had no effect on the political process and might well be counter-productive. In assessing the broad mix of pressures which, after 1985, helped edge the South African regime to negotiation and apartheid’s disintegration, it is important to apportion some weight to sanctions, and especially financial ones. In that respect, Hawke was largely justified in his conviction that “the investment boycott was the dagger which finally immobilised apartheid.”⁸²⁶ The EPG initiative therefore contributed both to negotiations and to the sanctions campaign. It also considerably raised the profile and the credibility of the Commonwealth as a modern, international organisation.

5. Conclusion

At the conclusion of the EPG’s mission, it could show an impressive reach. It had met with the South African government on 22 occasions; visited Mandela on three occasions in Pollsmoor prison; and had held talks with all the main opposition leaders in South Africa, across the spectrum, as well as with prominent academic, religious and community figures. It had also consulted the leaders of the Frontline States and the leadership of the ANC outside South Africa. It had held many other meetings with governments in Africa, Europe, the USA and elsewhere.⁸²⁷ In all, the EPG mission lasted from December 1985 until August 1986 and was funded by a special

⁸²⁴ Correspondence from R.J. Sawers (British Embassy, Pretoria) to Geoffrey Berg (FCO), quoting Dr Desmond Krogh, 28 July 1989, TNA, FCO 105/3575, 1-2.

⁸²⁵ G. Gantley (Economic advisers) to G. Berg (FCO), Memorandum on “Ovenden & Cole: Apartheid and International Finance,” 7 August 1989, TNA, FCO 105/3575, 78, 2.

⁸²⁶ Georgia Hitch, “Bob Hawke looks back at Australia’s involvement in the downfall of apartheid,” *ABC News*, 27 April 2016, accessed 14 June 2017, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-27/bob-hawke-opens-apartheid-exhibition-in-canberra/7364762>.

⁸²⁷ Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons, *Mission to South Africa*, 150-156

Commonwealth Secretariat budget of £1 million, to which the UK was the largest contributor.⁸²⁸ The Canadian Government also made a substantial in-kind contribution, providing an executive Challenger jet and crew, through the Royal Canadian Air Force, so that the EPG could conduct its shuttle diplomacy across Southern Africa. It was indisputably a significant and sustained exercise in conflict resolution and the largest single initiative of its kind ever mounted by the Commonwealth. As a comparison, the budget for the Mells House process was between £500,000 to £1 million, described by Harvey as “an astonishing figure.”⁸²⁹

It was to be nearly four years before a newly released Nelson Mandela, after 27 years’ imprisonment, could declare that South Africa’s long march to freedom was now irreversible. As negotiations began on South Africa’s democratic future, it was clear that much in the EPG’s original ‘Negotiating Concept’ remained valid. More to the point, the enforced conclusion of the mission laid bare the true nature of the apartheid regime and ensured that the EPG’s report would reach a receptive global audience, galvanising calls for full economic and financial sanctions against the South African state.

The failure of the mission, however, did nothing for the Commonwealth’s relations with its most influential member, the United Kingdom. Over the next three years, the Commonwealth’s differences with Mrs Thatcher and the British government seemed to grow wider. That said, without her links to PW Botha and her influence, the EPG mission would never have been granted entry to South Africa, or the freedom to travel wherever, and meet whoever, it pleased.⁸³⁰ She repeatedly called for the end of apartheid and for the release of Nelson Mandela. Although she was still Prime Minister in February 1990, when Mandela was finally released after 27 years in prison, her resignation followed some months later.

The 1986 mission of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group, its report and the part the Commonwealth subsequently played in the developing international sanctions campaign is not widely recognised. Yet the evidence is clear that the organisation made a distinctive and significant collective contribution to the international campaign

⁸²⁸ In terms of 2019 values, this equates to a sum of between £3-5 million

⁸²⁹ Harvey, *The Fall of Apartheid*, 20.

⁸³⁰ Anyaoku, *The Inside Story*, 103.

against apartheid in South Africa in this instance. This was recognised at the time by various international organisations, national governments, and commentators: and the initiative generated legacies which proved useful at a further stage in the international campaign against apartheid. It was also a timely reminder of the strengths that the Commonwealth could offer in the service of the world - and in the application of its own distinctive 'healing touch'.

CHAPTER 4: ASSISTING TRANSITION – FROM CONFRONTATION TO ENGAGEMENT (1990-1994)

“You bloody Commonwealth peacemongers. You’re wasting your time and ours.”⁸³¹

White passer-by, East Rand, 1994.

“We expect that in some cases the number [of votes] will not balance. We are not running a fast food operation here.”⁸³²

Ron Gould, Independent Electoral Commission, 1994.

1. Introduction

The fourth and final chapter deals with the dramatic circumstances of apartheid’s end and the decisive shift in the Commonwealth’s approach, away from confrontation and South Africa’s isolation and towards a process of engagement in support of peaceful transition. This followed the release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990, the unbanning of the ANC, PAC and other proscribed parties and the first steps of what can now be viewed as an irreversible process of change.

These momentous events, which seemed to fulfil the Commonwealth’s long-held objectives for ending apartheid, meant that the association had to respond to these changed circumstances by fundamentally rethinking its approach. If it was to have a continuing contribution to make, the association now had to seek engagement with all the parties, including the South African government, and find specific ways in which it could assist transition. This included mediation, peace-making, capacity-building, conflict resolution and other support for the negotiation process. In doing so, the Commonwealth also needed to reinvigorate its relationship with the UK.

Apart from one or two biographies, oral histories and relevant journal articles, this aspect of the Commonwealth’s relationship with apartheid has been particularly neglected in the historiography. It is a contribution which, for all its three years in

⁸³¹ Peter Lyon, “South Africa’s April 1994 elections in PVW and especially in the Vaal triangle,” *The Round Table* 83: 331, (1994): 312.

⁸³²R.W. Johnson, quoting Ron Gould, IEC International Commissioner), “How Free?, How Fair”, in *Launching Democracy in South Africa The First Open Election, April 1994*, R.W. Johnson and Lawrence Schlemmer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 323. (Johnson mistakenly attributes the quote to *Brian* Gould).

length, merits a single line in Enuga Reddy's summary of Commonwealth programmes in his comprehensive account of the role of the UN in the anti-apartheid struggle.⁸³³ While Reddy cross-references the Commonwealth to some degree in describing UN programmes and concludes that the UN worked collaboratively with other international organisations in helping end apartheid, he is otherwise silent on the substance of the Commonwealth's role. Spence mentions the assistance of "monitors and observers" at the elections but, in listing international groups, omits the Commonwealth.⁸³⁴

These are omissions which this research seeks to rectify by having been granted special access to still classified Commonwealth records in the archives held in the Commonwealth Secretariat. These archives revealed a sustained period of engagement by the Commonwealth with South Africa during the transition from apartheid. This was no less significant than earlier periods of Commonwealth action involving, for example, the sporting boycott, the EPG initiative and negotiations, or the sanctions campaign (notwithstanding differences with Britain).

The chapter therefore considers the circumstances which enabled the UK and the rest of the Commonwealth to find common cause at the 1991 Harare CHOGM. It explores why the search for a new facilitative and supportive role for the Commonwealth in the transition process was initially greeted by de Klerk and his government with scepticism and some hostility. However, an assessment of the 1991 special mission to South Africa, led by the new Commonwealth Secretary-General, Emeka Anyaoku, supports the Commonwealth's claim that it was instrumental in opening the door to an international dimension in the multi-party talks. The chapter then examines the two major in-country deployments that grew out of the Commonwealth's re-engagement and which built upon the idea of an international observer presence.

The first of these had its genesis in the upsurge in violence in 1992 which included the Boipatong massacre of 17 June that year. This precipitated a breakdown in the multi-party talks and the withdrawal of the ANC from negotiations.⁸³⁵ The impact of violence

⁸³³ Reddy, "The United Nations and the struggle for liberation," *The Road to Democracy*, Vol.3, pt.1, 112.

⁸³⁴ J.E. Spence (ed.), *Change in South Africa* (London: RIIA, Pinter Publishers, 1994), 12.

⁸³⁵ Bill Keller, "Mandela, Stunned by Massacre, Pulls Out of Talks on Black Rule," 24 June 1992, *The New York Times*, accessed 30 September 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/06/24/world/mandela-stunned-by-massacre-pulls-out-of-talks-on-black-rule.html>.

on the prospects for a peaceful settlement, and on the 1994 elections themselves, is represented in the literature by writers such as Guelke, Kynoch, Welsh, Kane-Berman and Spence. Their perspectives provide a useful framework in which to interrogate the Commonwealth's own analysis of the issue of violence and to explore the significance of its actions.

Whatever the causes of the violence ripping through the townships of the Vaal and of Natal, its effect was to wreck the chances of multi-party negotiations and threaten peace. Further repression and a return to the status quo on the part of the government, or a mass rising by the ANC and its allies by taking the 'Leipzig Option' were unthinkable, even if accidental civil war was not.⁸³⁶ Anyaoku, in his discussions with the principle protagonists, argued that the Commonwealth and international effort should now be directed at "preventing violence from obliterating the prospects of a peaceful solution."⁸³⁷ Accordingly, he put forward the idea of international observers who could be deployed to the 'hotspots' to seek to contain the violence. Was this, as Anyaoku claims, the origin of the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 772, on 17 August 1992, with its recognition that violence, if it continued "would seriously jeopardise peace and security in the region" and its authority for the deployment of international observers, including from the Commonwealth?⁸³⁸ How effective were the four international observers missions which resulted, from the UN, the OAU, the EC and the Commonwealth? Was their contribution "rather limited", as Abdul Minty has maintained?⁸³⁹ Or did the Commonwealth mission (COMSA), in particular, make a contribution through conflict resolution and mediation which was distinctive and significant?

The voice at the start of this chapter decrying "Commonwealth peacemongers", supposedly on a mission to nowhere, came from a white male passer-by. His angry tone suggested a belief that any attempt to bridge the racial divide would be fruitless.⁸⁴⁰ His likely attachment to white supremacy, and hint of the disasters which would mark its passing, might have implied support for the *volkstaat*. But only 424,00 of the

⁸³⁶ David Welsh and Jack Spence, *Ending Apartheid* (Harlow, England: Longman/Pearson, 2011), 131.

⁸³⁷ Anyaoku, "The Commonwealth, Mandela and the Death of Apartheid," 640.

⁸³⁸ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 772 (1992), 17 August 1992, accessed 3 July 2017, <https://www.digitallibrary.un.org/record/148221?ln=en>.

⁸³⁹ Abdul Minty, "South Africa: From Apartheid to Democracy," *Security Dialogue* 24:1 (1993): 80.

⁸⁴⁰ Lyon, "South Africa's April 1994 elections," 312.

2,930,000 whites who voted in the 1994 elections supported the Freedom Front in that policy objective, around 2% of the electorate as a whole.⁸⁴¹ Most voters, of all communities and colours, supported a negotiated settlement and welcomed international observers, seeing their presence as reassuring and largely impartial.

The chapter will therefore examine whether the presence of international observers in South Africa by 1992 made it easier for the transitional structures to invite foreign observers for the 1994 'freedom' elections; and for international and regional bodies, and international faith and civil society organisations, to respond positively and deploy effectively. There is no doubt that, in preparing for the elections "the challenges facing the IEC (Independent Electoral Commission) were formidable."⁸⁴² How did the Commonwealth, and other international observers, help in the successful conclusion of the elections where, in the words of Anyaoku, "a series of major obstacles melted away"?⁸⁴³ Did the eventual outcome owe more to behind-the-scenes compromise and negotiation (including by turning a blind eye to electoral malpractice) than the foundational mythology of a 'miracle' election? Is David Welsh correct to accuse "sanctimonious foreign observers" of falling about themselves to accept the validity of an election marred by flaws they would never accept in their own countries?⁸⁴⁴

Finally, the chapter considers South Africa's return to Commonwealth membership in 1994, after an absence of 33 years. South Africa's departure from the organisation in 1961 was seen by many of its citizens as a necessary part of its new republican identity and a final severance from its colonial past. That perception has become ingrained in a present-day narrative which both black and white South Africans share in describing their journey to a non-racial and inclusive democracy. Minty has suggested that "for the people of South Africa, the Commonwealth never left them".⁸⁴⁵ However, a return to membership of the Commonwealth had not been flagged as an early priority of the new ANC government and yet it was among the first of its foreign policy decisions. Why was this so? Was this gratitude for the Commonwealth's support for the struggle, or a whiff of sentiment and nostalgia at the breaking of a new dawn? Or did the new government, and its president in particular, see practical benefits to be had, and

⁸⁴¹ Andrew Reynolds, "The Results," in Reynolds, *Election '94: South Africa*, 185.

⁸⁴² Welsh and Spence, *Ending Apartheid*, 138.

⁸⁴³ Anyaoku, "The Commonwealth, Mandela and the Death of Apartheid," 641.

⁸⁴⁴ Johnson, "How Free? How Fair?" *Launching Democracy*, 323.

⁸⁴⁵ Minty, "South Africa and the Commonwealth," 59.

diplomatic influence to be gained, by re-joining the association? In examining these issues, the chapter concludes by touching on the Commonwealth's programmes of assistance, particularly in support of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which continued after 1994.

2. Overcoming a divided Commonwealth

The release of Mandela on 11 February 1990 had been followed, twelve days later, by the announcement that the UK was unilaterally lifting a number of voluntary sanctions – the ban on new investment and the ban on the promotion of tourism to South Africa. Despite disquiet in Europe and consternation in the Commonwealth, Thatcher declared: “As you know, two of our voluntary sanctions have been lifted this morning after we had our consultations with Europe. We differ slightly on sanctions but not in the way in which we praise President de Klerk for his bold initiatives and what he has already done.”⁸⁴⁶

Mandela was incensed by Thatcher's actions. In the febrile and uncertain period prior to negotiations, the ANC and the UDF were aghast at any suggestion of rewarding de Klerk at this stage or altering the pressures on the government to come to the negotiating table. Two months later, making his first visit to London since 1962, Mandela declined an invitation to meet the British Prime Minister. Instead he told a rapturous rock concert at Wembley Stadium: “Do not listen to anyone who say that you must give up the struggle against apartheid.”⁸⁴⁷ When the Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers met in Abuja, in May 1990, his anger had not abated. “We would like to point out that we are, to put it mildly, amazed at the behaviour of certain countries”, he told the meeting, “there are no grounds whatsoever for lifting sanctions against the racist regime of South Africa or ending its diplomatic and cultural isolation.”⁸⁴⁸

However, Anyaoku appreciated that if the Commonwealth was to find a new international role in hastening apartheid's end, it could not cling to its full sanctions

⁸⁴⁶ Transcript of a Joint Press Conference, Margaret Thatcher with Giulio Andreotti, 23 February 1990, London, Margaret Thatcher Foundation, COI document 108020.

⁸⁴⁷ Steven Prokesch, “Mandela Urges Support for Sanctions,” 17 April 1990, *New York Times*, accessed 3 July 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/17/world/mandela-urges-support-for-sanctions.html>.

⁸⁴⁸ Statement by Nelson Mandela, African National Congress, to CFMSA, May 1990, quoted in Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*, 470.

policy once the process of irreversible change had begun. To do so would make it much more difficult to present the Commonwealth to the South African Government as a credible and impartial interlocutor. Additionally, despite his initial rhetoric, Mandela recognised the importance of reaching out to the private sector and to the major corporations doing business in South Africa. As Anyaoku put it: "It would be in nobody's interests if a new nation was born on the back of a broken economy."⁸⁴⁹ Anyaoku's opportunity to soften the Commonwealth's policy on sanctions came with a further meeting of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers in February 1991. He proposed that the Commonwealth should adopt the 'programmed management' of sanctions. By this he meant that "sanctions on South Africa should not be lifted in a unilateral and uncontrolled way but that, equally, it would be foolish not to respond to positive change in a collective and measured manner."⁸⁵⁰ Despite Anyaoku's African credentials and his well-cultivated diplomatic links in the region, his initiative was resisted by the four African ministers on the CFMSA, particularly Nathan Shamuyarira, of Zimbabwe. It took the threat of a phone call to Thabo Mbeki before Shamuyarira would accept that Anyaoku's approach had ANC support.⁸⁵¹ It was a policy then adopted by Heads at the 1991 Harare summit. Any change to the application of sanctions was to be linked to 'real and practical steps' in the ending of apartheid. The UN arms embargo, underpinned by various Commonwealth measures, would remain in force until the establishment of a post-apartheid government. By contrast, people-to-people sanctions (such as visa restrictions, cultural and other boycotts and bans on travel and tourism) would be lifted immediately, in recognition of progress made so far. What was more nuanced was the lifting of financial and economic sanctions. Economic sanctions, including trade and investment measures, would be removed once transitional mechanisms had been agreed, allowing all the parties to participate fully in the negotiating process. But financial sanctions, described by Heads as "the most demonstrably effective of all sanctions" and including lending by the international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, should only be raised after agreement on a new constitution had been reached.⁸⁵² The UK dissented from this view and therefore did not agree with the timescale for the lifting of financial and

⁸⁴⁹ Anyaoku, "The Commonwealth, Mandela and the Death of Apartheid," 638.

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 639.

⁸⁵¹ Anyaoku, *The Inside Story of the Modern Commonwealth*, 105.

⁸⁵² Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.2), 90.

economic sanctions.”⁸⁵³ That apart, a common approach was concluded on the resumption of sporting links with South Africa and plans laid for the Commonwealth’s involvement in the reconstruction of a post-apartheid South Africa, particularly as regards human resource development.

In November 1990, Mrs Thatcher unexpectedly lost power, after a challenge from within her party, being replaced by her former Chancellor and Foreign Secretary, John Major. Major knew the Commonwealth well, partly from a youthful career assignment in Nigeria and partly from the innovative work he did with other Commonwealth finance ministers on debt relief.⁸⁵⁴ Major was also instinctively and publicly anti-racist, a belief that he had made evident in his pre-parliamentary days while on Lambeth Borough Council.⁸⁵⁵ In the run up to the 1989 Kuala Lumpur CHOGM, the then Foreign Secretary had declared: “Apartheid cannot survive and does not deserve to survive. It is something to oppose constantly and comprehensively”.⁸⁵⁶ This did not spare him the mauling he received in Kuala Lumpur, but it won him lasting friends.

There had also been a change in the Commonwealth Secretariat. After fifteen years as Commonwealth Secretary-General, Sonny Ramphal came to an end of his tenure and was followed by his former deputy, Emeka Anyaoku. The British joined in the acclaim and the honours heaped on Ramphal’s shoulders but there was no denying the debilitating effects upon the UK-Commonwealth relationship of a very protracted and public dispute with Mrs Thatcher over apartheid and South Africa. The divisions and suspicions between the UK and the rest of the Commonwealth even infected staff relations within the Secretariat, with the then most senior British national in the organisation suggesting that all his UK colleagues should caucus together to defend their perceived interests. Fortunately, other UK nationals robustly rejected the idea, but there were still fences to mend.⁸⁵⁷ Anyaoku was an anglophile who recognised the damage done to UK-Commonwealth relations over many years. Having served in the Commonwealth Secretariat almost from its inception, he had taken to heart the repeated accusations of hypocrisy and double standards thrown at the

⁸⁵³ Ibid., 90.

⁸⁵⁴ This led to the adoption by Commonwealth finance ministers of the Trinidad & Tobago terms, and this package of debt relief was subsequently welcome by the UN and endorsed by the World Bank.

⁸⁵⁵ John Major, *John Major: The Autobiography* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999), 46-47.

⁸⁵⁶ Major, *John Major: The Autobiography*, 123.

⁸⁵⁷ Stuart Mole, interviewed by Sue Onslow, *Commonwealth Oral History Project*, 1 February 2013, accessed 7 March 2019, <https://www.sas-space.sas.ac.uk/4910/10/stuart-mole-transcript%201.11>.

Commonwealth, particularly by the British media, during the bitter debates over apartheid. As Robin Renwick put it: “Many of those criticising the South African regime themselves were guilty of anti-democratic practices and the British public knew it”.⁸⁵⁸ That much Anyaoku conceded, agreeing that “the apologists of apartheid and white minority rule in Southern Africa, many of whom were critics of the Commonwealth, had a point.”⁸⁵⁹ This rather grudging acceptance belied Anyoaku’s recognition that the Commonwealth was living with an ‘internal contradiction’ that “while it had members who were either military regimes or one-party states, it still espoused democracy as one of its key tenets.”⁸⁶⁰ That contradiction had to be resolved. It was not just South Africa that was changing – the Commonwealth itself had to change and become a more credible interlocutor for democracy and human rights.

This process of transformation within the Commonwealth itself had begun at the 1989 Kuala Lumpur Heads of Government Meeting with the formation of a High-Level Group (HLAG) of Ten Heads of Government. Their task was to report on the role and priorities of the Commonwealth in the 1990s and beyond.⁸⁶¹ Senior officials duly prepared a draft declaration for the coming 1991 Harare CHOGM, at which HLAG was due to report. While the content of the draft was unexceptional, it was over lengthy and written in rather turgid prose.⁸⁶² A month before the Summit, John Major produced an entirely new draft, largely the work of his Cabinet Secretary, Robert Armstrong. Major told Anyaoku: “The forthcoming meeting is very important for the future of the Commonwealth, and presents us with a golden opportunity, not to be missed or fluffed, to renew the Commonwealth’s sense of purpose and direction, and to refocus its energies and activities.” A stronger declaration, he argued, would help “strengthen our commitment to the Commonwealth’s guiding principles and our determination to follow them up in what we do, as well as what we say.”⁸⁶³

⁸⁵⁸ Robin Renwick, *Unconventional Diplomacy in Southern Africa*, 111.

⁸⁵⁹ Anyaoku, *The Inside Story of the Modern Commonwealth*, 129.

⁸⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁸⁶¹ McIntyre, *A Guide to the Contemporary Commonwealth*, 87-90.

⁸⁶² HLAG Working Group of Senior Officials, “Draft Harare Commonwealth Declaration”, Kuala Lumpur, December 1990, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, Marlborough House SGAN/03/011.

⁸⁶³ Correspondence from John Major to Emeka Anyaoku 26 September 1991, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/03/011.

Anyaoku's officials warned him that, according to their soundings, the tabling of a British text "may not be warmly received."⁸⁶⁴ Some of the tensions apparent in the drafting process surfaced when the ten HLAG Heads of Government met in formal session, immediately prior to the summit. All were conscious that they were attempting a further codification of the Commonwealth's fundamental values, building on the 1971 Singapore Declaration adopted twenty years before. It was to be, in the words of Anyaoku, their 'mission statement' and "an important milestone in the evolution of the Commonwealth."⁸⁶⁵ The statement of core principles would be linked (as Major had urged) to targeted and practical programmes. At the Heads' meeting, Major also linked the adoption of the Declaration to the criteria for accepting future applicants into membership. Up to that point, aspiring members invariably had to demonstrate widespread national support for any application, usually through a parliamentary vote, but they were not required to commit to any foundational principles. That would change, and acceptance of the principles and values set out at Harare would become a key requirement which new members were expected to uphold. What was not made clear was what would happen to any new or existing member who clearly flouted those principles. This was a question addressed four years later, in dramatic circumstances, at the 1995 Auckland CHOGM in New Zealand.

It has been suggested that other Commonwealth leaders were distracted by summit discussions on South Africa and paid no attention to the British draft or its detail.⁸⁶⁶ The British version, so it is argued, was therefore adopted with only minor changes. Such a view is not borne out by the evidence. The British draft had in fact been circulated towards the end of September, nearly three weeks before the opening of the CHOGM. Redrafting by officials of the Harare Declaration took place at the CHOGM between 16 and 18 October and the text was finalised by Heads of Government at their Retreat at Elephant Hills on the morning of 19 October. It was released to the media at a press conference the following day.⁸⁶⁷

⁸⁶⁴ Brief for the Secretary-General's meeting with Prime Minister Mahathir, Kuala Lumpur, 8 October 1991, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/13/001.

⁸⁶⁵ Anyaoku, *The Inside Story of the Modern Commonwealth*, 130.

⁸⁶⁶ McIntyre, *A Guide to the Contemporary Commonwealth*, 89.

⁸⁶⁷ Confidential note to Heads of Delegation from Emeka Anyaoku, "Harare Commonwealth Declaration", 19 October, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/03/011.

While the British desire for a “shorter, sharper and more dramatic” text was accepted, there were nonetheless important differences which needed to be resolved in the negotiating process.⁸⁶⁸ A clear and persistent tension lay in attitudes to systems of democracy and whether it had primacy over development, or vice versa. Many developing nations disliked the suggestion in the British draft that the European ideal of democracy was pre-eminent: “It has been vividly demonstrated in Europe”, read the British draft: “that, no matter how long and hard the fight, democracy and justice are essential to economic progress and the well-being of peoples and will prevail.”⁸⁶⁹ This also implied, many felt, that the decolonising struggles for national self-determination and liberty had not in fact been about democracy and justice, nor about economic progress, a view that they would vigorously rebut. That reference was duly deleted and, on a proposal from Singapore, a more cautious reference to democracy “according to local circumstances” was inserted. Some feared that this could be the thin end of a very undemocratic wedge. Most, however, saw it as a necessary movement away from the “Westminster model” of democracy automatically bequeathed on independence. Other amendments were made which strengthened the Commonwealth’s commitment to poverty alleviation, debt relief and development, and removed any suggestion that democracy, human rights and the rule of law were the Commonwealth’s overriding priority. This was a tension which was to recur repeatedly in the years that followed.

Anyaoku considered that the adoption of the Harare Declaration “not only defined the priority areas where the activities, energies and resources of the organisation should be directed. it provided an updated definition of the core principles of the Commonwealth, first enunciated in the Singapore Declaration”.⁸⁷⁰ For his part, John Major records his presence at Harare as the ‘happiest’ of any summit or conference he attended as Prime Minister. Mandela’s release had encouraged the healing of wounds over South Africa and the Harare Declaration laid down the standards of good government expected of Commonwealth members. “It was an important step”, commented Major, “not least because it answered complaints that the Commonwealth

⁸⁶⁸ Correspondence from Major to Anyaoku, 26 September 1991, 1.

⁸⁶⁹ Submission by the British Government, “Draft Harare Commonwealth Declaration,” 18 September 1991, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/03/011, 2.

⁸⁷⁰ Anyaoku, *The Inside Story of the Modern Commonwealth*, 130.

harboured dictators”.⁸⁷¹ More than that, he told Huddleston, it “mapped out a positive role for the Commonwealth, particularly on good government and human rights.”⁸⁷² Both in Harare and subsequently, a number of Commonwealth countries which were previously one-party or military regimes moved to multi-party, democratic systems.⁸⁷³ This helped a coming together of the UK with its Commonwealth partners, especially on the question of apartheid.

3. South Africa and the ‘new’ Commonwealth as supporter and facilitator

Overriding all the leaders’ discussions on the dramatic developments underway in South Africa was a palpable desire to find a new and more positive way for the Commonwealth to assist the process of change. Waiting patiently in the wings of the Harare meeting was the symbol of that seismic change, Nelson Mandela. As Anyaoku recalled: “I had become convinced that there was a real chance for negotiations and that the Commonwealth was in a position to assist in that negotiation process.”⁸⁷⁴

But what could the Commonwealth expect to do? Its last attempt at mediation had been in 1986, with the mission of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group. As an attempt to kickstart meaningful negotiations on the ending of apartheid, that mission had ended in failure. But it had produced a ‘Possible Negotiating Concept’ which had set out the steps that both the government and the opposition forces needed to take in creating a climate conducive to negotiations. The core elements of the Concept had now been realised: the removal of the military from the townships and the restoration of political freedoms; the release of Mandela and other political prisoners; and the unbanning of the ANC, PAC and other opposition parties in conditions of normal political activity. These steps also went a considerable way to overcoming the five principal obstacles to negotiations identified by the United Nations.⁸⁷⁵ But the final remaining blockage in the path of negotiations, compromising the government’s efforts

⁸⁷¹ Major, *John Major: The Autobiography*, 517.

⁸⁷² Correspondence from John Major to Trevor Huddleston, 12 November 1991, AAM archives, Bodleian, MSS AAM 1300.

⁸⁷³ Srinivasan, “Principles and practice”, in *The Contemporary Commonwealth*, 70-71.

⁸⁷⁴ Anyaoku, *The Inside Story of the Modern Commonwealth*, 106.

⁸⁷⁵ UNGA Resolution, “Declaration on Apartheid and its Destructive Consequences in Southern Africa,” 14 December 1989, accessed 5 March 2019, <https://www.research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/44>.

not to deploy the military in the townships and not to declare localised 'unrest areas', was violence.

The issue of violence, and reassurances about how this might be contained in conditions of political freedom, had proved to be the stumbling block for the mission of the EPG. Now the reality of violence and disorder was upon South Africa, and it was not clear how the Commonwealth could help. It was unlikely to have a mediatory role. True, its links with the ANC and with Mandela were as strong as they had ever been. At the same time, Buthelezi had felt increasingly side-lined by the Commonwealth, even while some in the West had championed his importance over that of the ANC. Despite Buthelezi's best efforts, he had not been invited to the Harare CHOGM alongside Mandela and this perceived slight had rankled. Similarly, the EPG's relationship with the government, built up in the course of the mission, had dissolved in acrimony. The SADF's attack on three neighbouring Commonwealth countries, in May 1986, had demolished the Commonwealth's openness to negotiation; and the organisation's subsequent crusade for the imposition of worldwide sanctions on South Africa had scarcely endeared it to the apartheid state as a potential interlocutor. What could it hope to offer?

Nonetheless, the soundings that Anyaoku had taken before the Commonwealth summit encouraged him to broach the idea of "a Special Mission to South Africa to explore with the principal parties concerned ways in which the Commonwealth could assist (and) render every practicable assistance for the reinvigoration of the faltering process of political dialogue including, in particular, the convening of the proposed Constitutional Conference."⁸⁷⁶ At their Elephant Hills' Retreat, Heads agreed that, despite the adoption of the National Peace Accord a month earlier, the escalating violence in South Africa was now so serious that it threatened the whole process of change. Choosing their words carefully, their communique read: "While the terms of a constitutional settlement were for the people of South Africa themselves to determine, Heads of Government believed that the Commonwealth must remain ready to assist the negotiating process in ways that would be helpful to the parties concerned. They therefore decided to request the Secretary-General to visit South Africa at the earliest

⁸⁷⁶ Confidential memorandum and draft terms of reference by Emeka Anyaoku, "Special Commonwealth Mission to South Africa," 16 October 1991, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/025.

opportunity in order to explore with the principal parties concerned ways in which the Commonwealth could assist in lending momentum to the negotiating process.”⁸⁷⁷

Even while Anyaoku assembled his mission, he knew that he would have difficulty overcoming the suspicions and reservations of the South African government. On 18 October, during the Harare meeting, Anyaoku had had a conversation with South Africa’s Trade Representative in Zimbabwe, N.M. Nel. Later that day, Nel passed a confidential response from the South African government to Anyaoku’s proposal. It began: “The Commonwealth can do incalculable harm if it sees itself as a pressure group charged with the task of extracting concessions from the government and generally engaged in prescribing solutions to problems which are the sole concern of South Africans.”

On a rather more positive note, it continued: “If, on the other hand the Commonwealth wants to be informed of the situation in South Africa and confines itself to promoting peaceful dialogue and, moreover, it can be seen to be unbiased in this respect, a visit by the Secretary-General could serve a useful purpose.” In reiterating its determination to get the multi-party conference off the ground, the government note concluded: “Against this background the Secretary-General is welcome to visit South Africa and to consult with the Government and representatives of political parties and other leaders.”⁸⁷⁸

While this was a green light of sorts, President de Klerk soon made his views known about any mediating or facilitating role by the Commonwealth or other international organisation in the negotiating process. “I am dead against international involvement in the internal affairs of South Africa,”⁸⁷⁹ he declared, though he did go on to accept that the international community had a legitimate interest in developments in South Africa. “We welcome fact-finding missions but international monitoring of the negotiating process (or the security forces) in the sense of internationalising an all-

⁸⁷⁷ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.2), 89

⁸⁷⁸ Correspondence from N.M. Nel to Emeka Anyaoku, 18 October 1991, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/025.

⁸⁷⁹ Interview transcript, F.W.de Klerk in conversation with CSM South Africa, 28 October 1991, Commonwealth Secretariat archives SGAN/09/025.

party congress – or a multi-party conference - I (am) against that, South Africans must find the solutions amongst themselves.”⁸⁸⁰

This scepticism was underlined by confidential and anonymous advice to Anyaoku from South Africa (possibly from the British Ambassador, Sir Anthony Reeve): “There is still strong resistance in Pretoria to any direct form of intervention in the transition”. But the note continues: “Having said that, there is clearly a far greater openness to international organisations in general and a willingness ... to normalise relations with such bodies as the Commonwealth...”. The writer adds: “Pretoria’s perception of the Commonwealth is that it has a long way to go on its own democracy/human rights programme before it would have either the credibility or skill to become involved in the intricacies of the South African situation. But it regards the Secretary-General as a person of considerable influence in relation to the ANC and therefore someone who should be cultivated. This is over and above Pretoria’s need to normalise relations with the Commonwealth.” The writer therefore saw “a window of opportunity for the future”.⁸⁸¹

Anyaoku was well aware that he would need all his persuasive powers to overcome the South African Government’s hostility. But, apart from establishing sufficient mutual trust for a good working relationship, what could the Commonwealth hope to offer? Some in the Secretariat thought Anyaoku might offer himself as a neutral convenor of the proposed All-Party Congress or could establish a high-level facilitative group to monitor the processes of constitutional and electoral development. Expert advice could be offered in these areas and there could be a focus on post-apartheid reconstruction.⁸⁸² By the time of Anyaoku’s departure for South Africa, accompanied by a small team, there was continuing debate about the specifics of any Commonwealth assistance. But it was agreed that the basis of any Commonwealth involvement should be the twin objectives of (a) encouraging the parties to the negotiating table, and (b) helping to end the violence.⁸⁸³ As Anyaoku put it: “There is

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁸¹ Memorandum (unidentified author), “Notes on Possibilities for International Role in the Transition to Democratic Government in South Africa,” Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/025.

⁸⁸² Memorandum from Max Gaylard to Emeka Anyaoku, “Secretary-General’s Mission to South Africa,”

29 October 1991, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/025.

⁸⁸³ Political Brief, “Secretary-General’s Mission to South Africa”, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/033.

a growing concern that recent developments, including continuing violence despite the Peace Accord, could undermine the negotiating process.” He emphasised that the constitutional future of South Africa “is for South Africans to determine, but I have been given the task of exploring with the parties concerned ways in which the Commonwealth could be supportive of the process.”⁸⁸⁴

Anyaoku and his team flew into South Africa in the early morning of Wednesday 30 October, for a visit that was to last nine days. His first meeting was with Pik Botha, the Foreign Minister, and, five years before, a closet supporter of the Commonwealth’s EPG mission. Much had happened since and he was not disposed to treat the Commonwealth mission with any favour. The next meeting, with de Klerk, was no less awkward. The Commonwealth had been consistently hostile to South Africa, remarked the State President. How could it now be its friend? The Commonwealth’s hostility had been to apartheid, responded Anyaoku, not to his government which had now declared that apartheid would be dismantled. As such, their objectives were the same and the Commonwealth’s ability to bridge difference might be useful to South Africa’s many communities. At the conclusion of the meeting, a mollified de Klerk led Anyaoku to a joint press conference in the Union buildings. “We focussed on the positive role that the Commonwealth could play in South Africa”, declared de Klerk. Both agreed that the Commonwealth role must not affect the sovereignty of South Africa or interfere with its internal affairs.⁸⁸⁵

Apart from further meetings with the government, including with Dr Gerrit Viljoen, the Minister for Constitutional Development, Anyaoku rekindled his relationship with a spectrum of political leaders. This included Oliver and Adelaide Tambo, Nelson Mandela, Cyril Ramaphosa, Thabo Mbeki, Allan Boesak and Jacob Zuma of the ANC; Dikgang Moseneke, and colleagues from the PAC; Andries Treurnicht, the Conservative Party leader; and Zak de Beer and others from the Democratic Party. But a particular task involved mending fences with Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi and the IFP. This necessitated a special visit to the KwaZulu capital of Ulundi. There, in the KwaZulu parliament chamber, Buthelezi and the IFP Central Committee greeted

⁸⁸⁴ Commonwealth News Release (91/39), “Commonwealth Secretary-General in Special Mission to South Africa,” 29 October 1991, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/025.

⁸⁸⁵ R. Dunn, “De Klerk in talks over violence”, 1 November 1991, *Daily Telegraph*, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/025.

Anyaoku and his delegation with a lengthy, pre-printed speech of welcome, much of it complaining of past disagreements or perceived slights. Buthelezi's conclusion was that perhaps Anyaoku's trip would lead to an appreciation of the complexity of the situation and that there was a need "for some months of ongoing dialogue between the Commonwealth and the South African political parties before any kind of finality is reached about what the Commonwealth should do during the next two crucial years."⁸⁸⁶

That was advice Anyaoku was unlikely to heed but he took the opportunity to sketch out some of the ideas for Commonwealth involvement that he was later to put to de Klerk in his final meeting with the State President. Anyaoku was also able to build his personal relationship with Buthelezi, something that would be invaluable in the coming years. Apart from the political parties, Anyaoku met business, church and trade union leaders, as well as prominent academics and journalists. Generally, the various parties rejected the idea of any Commonwealth mediatory role, although the PAC argued that the international community should provide a neutral venue outside South Africa for the All-Party negotiations and a convenor (or convenors) of suitable standing for the talks.⁸⁸⁷ But there was a feeling that the Commonwealth might help facilitate the negotiations and provide help and expertise.

This generally positive response led Anyaoku to put two specific proposals to de Klerk. First, that a team of five or six distinguished Commonwealth citizens observe the inaugural proceedings of the All-Party talks as official guests of the conference. This, Anyaoku considered, "could be particularly helpful as an indication of international support for the process and in promoting mutual trust between the various parties".⁸⁸⁸ The second proposal was for Anyaoku himself to be available to observe appropriate stages of the negotiations accompanied by a team of advisers from various disciplines whose expertise might be helpful to the process. Responding, de Klerk made clear that both proposals were matters for the All-Party conference to decide, though he made clear that he himself was 'not negative'. A definitive answer would be given following further consultation. In a joint statement issued to the media after the

⁸⁸⁶ Memorandum by Chief Buthelezi presented to Chief Emeka Anyaoku, 3 November 1991, Ulundi, KwaZulu-Natal, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/025, 8.

⁸⁸⁷ Correspondence from Emeka Anyaoku to Lynden Pindling, Prime Minister of The Bahamas, 8 November 1991, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/025, 2.

⁸⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

meeting, de Klerk and Anyaoku described their discussions as “constructive and fruitful”.⁸⁸⁹

These were modest beginnings, perhaps, but it led Anyaoku to report to Commonwealth leaders that the visit “has created a climate in which new opportunities for Commonwealth help to the people of South Africa may well be possible.”⁸⁹⁰ Michael Manley, the Jamaican Prime Minister, responded: “Let me ... congratulate you on the progress made during those discussions and the confidence you have established with all the parties for a constructive Commonwealth role.”⁸⁹¹ The Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir, was rather more downbeat, commenting that he had “no problem in endorsing the two proposals which you have put forward”.⁸⁹² Nevertheless, the Commonwealth’s new strategic direction, in aiding the process of transition, was now in progress.

Anyaoku and his team had scarcely arrived back in London when formal confirmation arrived for the start of all-party talks. These were to open, as the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), on 20 December 1991 in the World Trade Centre, north Johannesburg. Without question, the issue of international observers at CODESA’s opening plenaries was a minor one alongside the central issue of South Africa’s transition to democracy, the constitutional principles upon which this would be based, and the degree to which the negotiations would be inclusive of all the parties. But it was symbolic of the world interest in South Africa’s hazardous path out of apartheid, a cause with the United Nations and other international organisations (including the Commonwealth) had long held dear. In his opening statement, Mandela spoke of the country’s “yearning for democracy and peace”, adding: “CODESA represents the historical opportunity to translate that yearning into reality”.⁸⁹³ But he also included a welcome to “the guests from the United Nations organisation; the organisation of African unity; the Commonwealth; the European Economic Community, and the non-aligned movement”, adding “we trust that they will avail to

⁸⁸⁹ Joint Media Statement, FW de Klerk and Emeka Anyaoku, 7 November 1991, Union Buildings, Pretoria. Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/025.

⁸⁹⁰ Correspondence from Anyaoku to Pindling, 4.

⁸⁹¹ Correspondence from Michael Manley to Emeka Anyaoku, 19 November 1991, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/025.

⁸⁹² Correspondence from Mohamad Mahathir to Emeka Anyaoku, 23 November 1991, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/025.

⁸⁹³ Opening Statement by Nelson Mandela, First Plenary, CODESA 1, 20 December 1991, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, I-40/3-1.

the process now unfolding their wisdom, insights and experience gained in many similar initiatives across the world.”⁸⁹⁴

Anyaoku’s proposal for an international observer presence at CODESA would of course never have been accepted had it been confined to Commonwealth representation. It therefore had the effect of drawing in other international organisations, principally the U.N., and making it more likely that there might be internal acceptance of some kind of international role in the transition process in the future. Indeed, one of CODESA’s working groups was given the task of exploring the future contribution that the international community might make to transition. Close engagement with CODESA, and the numerous bilateral meetings that took place with various participants in its wings, would have deepened appreciation of many of the tensions and issues evident. Despite a veneer of warm bipartisanship, de Klerk and Mandela clashed; and the IFP (at that moment within the negotiating process) complained of collusion between the government and the ANC and doubted whether the talks could prove to be effective or genuinely inclusive. Others already outside the negotiations, from the Conservative Party to the PAC and AZAPO, made similar complaints.



Fig. 15 -Welcome to CODESA, 1992. Commonwealth Secretariat.

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid.

The Commonwealth group of observers saw CODESA 1 as “a milestone in South Africa’s political evolution”.⁸⁹⁵ However, they added that “violence continues to be an intractable problem, fuelling suspicion and mistrust”⁸⁹⁶ A joint statement by all the international observers declared: “Our presence at Codesa is a testimony of the profound commitment by the international community to encourage the emergence of a democratic, non-racial South Africa..”⁸⁹⁷ Most of those at the initial talks signed a Declaration of Intent, committing all parties to a united, democratic, non-racial, and non-sexist state. Five Working Groups were established and began their work, and administrative support for the process was put in place. There was considerable optimism that the next CODESA plenary, in May 1992, would see significant negotiating progress.

4. Combatting violence

The Commonwealth can legitimately claim responsibility for proposing the presence of international observers at the opening of multi-party negotiations (CODESA 1) in 1991. However, that presence was largely symbolic, suggesting only an active interest in, and support for, the internal process of negotiation by the international community. Anyaoku’s later proposal, that international observers could play a sustained role in combatting the upsurge in violence threatening negotiations, was viewed with greater scepticism. Anyaoku had mooted the idea, including with Mandela, during his attendance at the second negotiating plenary, CODESA II, which opened in May 1992.⁸⁹⁸ However, he was not the first to do so. In March of that year a delegation of church leaders, headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, put to de Klerk the notion of “an international monitoring mechanism” to address the violence. This proposal drew

⁸⁹⁵ The Commonwealth’s Distinguished Observers were Revd. Canaan Banana (former President of Zimbabwe); Rt. Hon. Sir Geoffrey Howe (former Deputy Prime Minister, UK); Shri Dinesh Singh (Former Minister of External Affairs, India); Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie (former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia); Hon, Mr Justice Telford Georges (Trinidad & Tobago, former Chief Justice of The Bahamas); and Rt.Hon. Sir Ninian Stephen (Former Governor-General of Australia).

⁸⁹⁶ Report of the Commonwealth Group of Observers, *The Commonwealth at CODESA*, 20-21 December 1991, (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1992), Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/009, 9.

⁸⁹⁷ Joint Statement by International Observers to the First Meeting of CODESA, Johannesburg, 20-21 December 1991, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/009 (CODESA1).

⁸⁹⁸ Record of a meeting between the Secretary-General and Nelson Mandela, 14 May 1992, Johannesburg, personal papers.

a sharp response from de Klerk who condemned it as “a gross infringement of South African sovereignty and a grave challenge to the legitimacy of his government.”⁸⁹⁹



Fig.16 ANC march against violence in Natal, Johannesburg, July 1990.Commonwealth Secretariat.

The massacre at Boipatong, following the collapse of CODESA II, changed the climate overnight. However, the accusation of state complicity in the violence, through a ‘third force’, led the Goldstone Commission to set up an independent inquiry, headed by the UK criminologist, Dr Peter Waddington. The Waddington Report later declared that the inquiry had: “uncovered no information that suggests any complicity on the part of the SAP (South African Police) in the attack”, adding that: “omissions arose, not from deliberation, but incompetence.”⁹⁰⁰

Anyaoku renewed his efforts, making contact with Mandela and de Klerk, as well as with Major and some of his ministers. His proposal document declared: “Violence in South Africa now threatens not only the current process of negotiations but the very

⁸⁹⁹ Douglas Anglin, “International Monitoring of the Transition to Democracy in South Africa, 1992-1994,” *African Affairs* 94:377 (1995): 521-2.

⁹⁰⁰ The Waddington Report, “Report of the inquiry into the police response to, and investigation of, events in Boipatong on 17 June 1992,” 20 July 1992, O’Malley archives, accessed 12 October 2018, <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/>.

prospect of a successful transition to the new South Africa.”⁹⁰¹ Even so, his initial overtures were rebuffed: “the ANC displayed a marked reluctance to involve the Commonwealth”, Anyaoku recorded.⁹⁰² Cyril Ramaphosa told Anyaoku that the ANC executive had decided to take the matter to the OAU. Anyaoku ruefully reflected: “I had to go along”, though he considered the likelihood of anything coming out of the OAU “quite unlikely.”⁹⁰³ Nevertheless, Anyaoku used the OAU summit to pursue the idea with Mandela, whose position began to soften. Likewise, de Klerk’s initial hostility began to abate once Anyaoku convinced him that the international observers: “would not interfere in the running of South Africa.”⁹⁰⁴ Later, de Klerk was to praise Anyaoku for “a very constructive role for which I have the greatest appreciation.”⁹⁰⁵

While Anyaoku was slowly making headway with a range of South African leaders, including Chief Buthelezi of the IFP, Clarence Mkwetu of the PAC and Constand Viljoen of the far-right Afrikaner Volksfront as well as the ANC and NP, it became clear that the UN Secretary-General, Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, also had considerable reservations. However, he assured Anyaoku that, providing the Commonwealth could secure South African agreement, the UN would be prepared to support such an initiative.⁹⁰⁶ By this time, following a meeting of the UN Security Council, Boutros-Ghali had been authorised to appoint a Special Representative, Cyrus Vance, whom Anyaoku also met. With the prospects of the ANC’s rolling mass action planned for 3 August descending into ‘uncontrollable violence’, the UN itself decided to despatch a 10-person observer team to cover the event.⁹⁰⁷ The Commonwealth was also invited to send a team but was not able to respond in the time available. Nevertheless, this initiative sealed the acceptability of international observers to monitor the violence.⁹⁰⁸ It also cleared the way for the adoption, on 17 August 1992, of UN Security Council resolution 772. This provided the mandate for reach of the four international observer

⁹⁰¹ Aide-Memoire from Emeka Anyaoku to various interlocutors, “Proposed Commonwealth Group to Assist in Arresting Violence in South Africa,” 3 July, Johannesburg, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/054,1.

⁹⁰² Anyaoku, *The Inside Story of the Modern Commonwealth*, 116.

⁹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁹⁰⁵ Emmanuel Nwagboiwe and Chike Amaikwu (eds.), *Footprints of an Iconic Diplomat*, (Abuja: Leverage Multi Global Concept Ltd, 2013), 93.

⁹⁰⁶ Anyaoku, *The Inside Story*, 120.

⁹⁰⁷ Anglin, “International Monitoring of the Transition,” 523.

⁹⁰⁸ Brief for COMSA Observers, “Commonwealth Observer Mission to South Africa, October – December 1992,” Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/054, 21.

missions. Their role was to “assist the people of South Africa to end violence” and they were to deploy their teams “in co-ordination with the United Nations and the structures set up under the National Peace Accord.”⁹⁰⁹

Spurred on by the Bisho massacre in September, where 29 died and over two hundred were injured on the Ciskei border, the various observer missions began to travel to South Africa. A thirteen-strong advance group from the United Nations arrived in Johannesburg in September to establish UNOMSA (the UN Observer Mission to South Africa). The first phase of the Commonwealth’s involvement began a month later with the deployment of the eighteen members of COMSA (the Commonwealth Observer Mission to South Africa). At the end of the month the fifteen European observers making up ECOMSA arrived and, in November, they were joined by four observers from the Organisation of Africa Unity. At the same time, UNOMSA attained its full complement of 50 observers.⁹¹⁰

All observer teams shared a common broad mandate, namely, to address the violence and to do so in partnership with the UN and within the structures of the National Peace Accord. Specific areas of concern were: “hostels, dangerous weapons, the role of the security forces and other armed formations, the investigation and prosecution of criminal conduct, mass demonstrations and the conduct of political parties.”⁹¹¹ This helped shape the composition of some of the teams. As far as COMSA was concerned, the mission was headed by Justice Austin Amissah, the former Attorney-General and Justice of Appeal of Ghana. The observers were selected with considerable thought from a variety of relevant fields, including in policing, criminology and law enforcement, law and the judiciary and politics and community relations.⁹¹² This helped determine where, within its broad mandate, COMSA was to develop its efforts. In later phases, electoral experts would be included in the mission as the elections approached

⁹⁰⁹ UNSC/RES/772 (1992).

⁹¹⁰ Report by Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali to the UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the question of South Africa,” 22 December 1992, UN document S/25004, 281292, 11.

⁹¹¹ UNSC 772.

⁹¹² Commonwealth Secretariat, Report of the Commonwealth Observer Mission to South Africa (Phase 1: October 1992-January 1993), *Violence in South Africa* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1993), 2-3.

The UN Secretary-General reported that the various international observers were coordinating their efforts and had “established close working relationships at the field and headquarters levels.”⁹¹³ Given the number of observers with a police background in both the UNOMSA and COMSA missions, a joint task force was set up to examine and monitor different aspects of the South African Police (SAP). At the same time, there were differences between the various international groupings, not only in reporting and methodology but in what the individual teams perceived as the scope of their authority, their programmes and the priorities they should adopt, and how and to where they should deploy.

The challenge that an upsurge in “extreme and brutal violent conflict” posed, not only to negotiations but to the prospect of peaceful and inclusive elections, was formidable⁹¹⁴ It is estimated that between 1990 and 1994 some 16,000 people died in violence in South Africa, in particular in KwaZulu Natal and in the townships of the East Rand.⁹¹⁵ “The violence”, say Taylor and Shaw, “claimed far more lives than did the fight against apartheid itself.” It was not only deaths. In reporting a 40% surge in violence in South Africa in 1992, compared with the previous year, the Human Rights Commission pointed out that politically motivated violence had also left around 6,000 injured (many maimed or scarred for life) and “tens of thousands displaced and homeless”.⁹¹⁶ All told, South Africa’s prevailing homicide rate made it “one of the most violent countries in the world.”⁹¹⁷ Furthermore, the nature of the violence was far more complex than the ‘black on black’ characterisation often portrayed in the media. Far from offering explanation, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVr) felt that such terms “disguise causation by reinforcing the camouflage of racial stereotypes.”⁹¹⁸ CSVr expressed concern not only about the big upswing in the levels of violence but “a qualitative shift in the forms and brutality of the conflict.”⁹¹⁹ COMSA was of the view that the causes of violence in South Africa were “complex and multifaceted” and needed to be viewed in a historical context “including the legacy of

⁹¹³ Boutros-Ghali, Report to the UN Security Council, 12.

⁹¹⁴ Simpson, *Political Violence: 1990*, 1.

⁹¹⁵ Rupert Taylor and Mark Shaw, “The dying days of apartheid”, in *South Africa in Transition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998) ed. David Howarth and Aletta Norval, 1998), 13.

⁹¹⁶ Quoted in Commonwealth Secretariat, *Violence in South Africa*, 12.

⁹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹¹⁸ Graeme Simpson, Steve Mokwena and Lauren Segal, “Political Violence: 1990,” in University of Natal. Centre for Socio-Legal Studies, *South African Human Rights and Labour Law Yearbook* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1990), 4.

⁹¹⁹ Simpson, *Political Violence: 1990*, 1.

the apartheid system.”⁹²⁰ The CSVR saw a ‘culture of violence’ acquiring “a pervasive social acceptability as a legitimate means of attaining change”. But the CSVR also emphasises that 1990 saw “a dramatic increase in violence against women, children and the elderly (as well as violent crime more generally).”⁹²¹ It has been estimated that as many as 300,000 women in South Africa were being raped each year and in 1990 the rape of young girls increased by 23%, compared with the previous year.⁹²² Child and domestic abuse also increased, as did family murders, and there was a marked upswing of violence by white homeowners against their black domestic workers. It was often difficult to disentangle political violence from general criminality. This is borne out by a special study of violence in Crossroads, in the Western Cape, undertaken by the Human Rights Commission (HRC) during 1993. While some of those involved held political office locally, the origins of the violence seem to have been the disputed development of a parcel of land, as well as ongoing ‘taxi wars.’ The HRC concluded that different community factions were “equally responsible” for the violence.⁹²³

Kynoch’s study of political violence in the townships of Katkehong and Thokoza presents a complex picture of the transition generating “an unprecedented level of communal conflict” where the ANC and IFP “armed and assisted local militias, and fighters aligned with both sides committed atrocities, often against non-combatants.”⁹²⁴ He sees “political violence as the primary enabling agent for the transition-era violence”, with nationalist histories and the dominant account of transition violence providing “sanitised versions of the past.”⁹²⁵ Guelke agrees that “violence was a function of political competition.”⁹²⁶ But he goes further in challenging the dominant narratives of the period by arguing that “violence played a part in the strategy of the very parties that negotiated a constitutional settlement”, though he concedes that the NP and the ANC also disagreed fundamentally on the nature of

⁹²⁰ Commonwealth Secretariat, *Violence in South Africa*, 13.

⁹²¹ Simpson, *Political Violence: 1990*, 2.

⁹²² *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁹²³ Human Rights Commission, “Special Focus: Violence in Crossroads,” UCT archives, BC 668, P4.10.

⁹²⁴ Kynoch, *Township Violence*, 197.

⁹²⁵ Gary Kynoch, “Reassessing transition violence: voices from South Africa’s township wars, 1990-4,” *African Affairs* 112:447 (2013): 303.

⁹²⁶ Guelke, *South Africa in Transition*, 47.

political violence.⁹²⁷ Spence dismisses ethnicity as the key characteristic of violence on the reef between township 'comrades' and hostel dwellers. He points out that "in Soweto, 40% of the permanent inhabitants are Zulu", adding to evidence that "the more settled a community, the less violence there is between members of different ethnic groups."⁹²⁸ Conversely, ethnicity becomes more of an issue among the most marginalised, such as between squatters and hostel-dwellers. Like Kane-Berman, Spence accepts the significance of socio-economic factors in violence, in addition to political motivations.

What therefore could a relatively small number of around 100 international observers hope to achieve in the face of such a challenging issue and across such a large and diverse country, with its population of around 30 million? Boutros-Ghali was in little doubt of their value, telling the Security Council that "the presence of the observers is viewed as having a salutary effect on the situation." He added that, despite the continuing violence, "there is wide agreement that without the deployment of international observers in the country the level of violence would be higher."⁹²⁹ This was echoed by COMSA which pointed to a nine-month low in politically related deaths in November 1994, attributed by the HRC in part to the presence of international observers.⁹³⁰

However, Abdul Minty was more critical. Drawing upon a fact-finding visit to South Africa in November 1992, he felt that the monitors had made "a rather limited contribution."⁹³¹ Leaving aside the obvious retort that international observer activity had scarcely begun by that time, it is instructive to itemise the detailed elements of Minty's critique against the more up-beat assessment of Boutros-Ghali. First, Minty acknowledged that the main value of observers "has been in being present at major rallies, meetings, demonstrations and marches." He added: "they have also made some impact in resolving local disputes on the spot and acting as a deterrent in preventing violent actions." However, Minty accuses the monitors of being "helpless when it comes to taking any preventative action; and they obviously cannot anticipate

⁹²⁷ Adrian Guelke, "Interpretations of Political Violence during transition", *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies* 27:2 (2000): 250.

⁹²⁸ Spence, *Change in South Africa*, 13.

⁹²⁹ Boutros-Ghali, Report to the UN Security Council, 7.

⁹³⁰ Commonwealth Secretariat, *Violence in South Africa*, 15.

⁹³¹ Minty, "South Africa: From Apartheid to Democracy," 80-81.

the various attacks on the trains and in African townships.” He adds: “In any case, they are usually remote from the areas of violence.”⁹³²

As regards the accusation of ‘remoteness’, there were differences between the various international observer groups. UNOMSA, with the largest number of observers, felt it important to have a national presence across South Africa. Its 50 observers were therefore deployed to all eleven provinces, although the deployment was “weighted towards the Witwatersrand/Vaal and Natal/KwaZulu regions, where 70% of the political violence occurs.”⁹³³ COMSA, with its smaller numbers, decided that it should be based exclusively in “the two regions of South Africa worst affected by violence: the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal (PWV) area and Natal”, as well as more distant flashpoints.⁹³⁴ On the other hand, while ECOMSA placed approximately half its fifteen observers in Johannesburg/PWV, where it also had its headquarters, the rest were quartered in Durban, Cape Town and East London. There was strong pressure in the European mission for rotation of personnel, so that observers stationed in PWV could spend time in a less stressful environment.⁹³⁵ ECOMSA reported that their work had become more dangerous because there was an increasing tendency: “for us to be used as marshals, Peace Structure Observers and police officers.” Nevertheless, ECOMSA was in no doubt that “the physical presence of Observers at rallies, marches and other tense public gathering has had a positive, calming effect on all participants.”⁹³⁶

While Minty is therefore correct in saying that some international observers were remote from the violence ‘hotspots’, this was certainly not the case in general, or at all in respect of COMSA. Minty himself appears to concede that the random and apparently motiveless acts of terror on commuter trains could not be anticipated. Nevertheless, COMSA designated train violence as a particular area of inquiry, given that its primary impact was in the PWV area where there were 269 trains attacks, 259 deaths and 469 injuries in the first ten months of 1992 alone.⁹³⁷ Having international observers ride a few trains would have been futile and might have provided false

⁹³² Ibid., 80.

⁹³³ Boutros-Ghali, Report to UNSC, 11.

⁹³⁴ Commonwealth Secretariat, *Violence in South Africa*, 3.

⁹³⁵ European Community Observer Mission in South Africa, Confidential Report for the period October 1992-April 1993, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/ A18.2, 43.

⁹³⁶ Ibid., 40.

⁹³⁷ Commonwealth Secretariat, *Violence in South Africa*, 16-17.

reassurance. Instead, COMSA engaged with the South African Rail Commuter Corporation, the SAP, the Goldstone Commission and others to pursue solutions capable of providing a lasting response, such as recruiting a 4,000-strong train guard unit to provide security on trains, introducing video surveillance systems, and enhancing security at station access points.

In other respects, however, the various international missions did attempt to anticipate potential violence by mobilising all their collective forces to be present at major flashpoints. One such event was on Sharpeville Day, on the 21 March 1993, in the large township area covering Vosloorus, Katlehong and Thokoza. Both the ANC and the IFP had announced that they would be holding election rallies simultaneously, at venues less than four kilometres apart.⁹³⁸ The IFP rally, addressed by Chief Buthelezi, had drawn extensively from hostels across the Reef. IFP supporters left the rally armed and buoyed up, some intent on marauding through neighbouring AMC areas. This tense stand-off was eventually defused with the assistance of IFP and ANC marshals, peace monitors and international observers.⁹³⁹

On a smaller scale, international observer groups were frequently contacted by Local Dispute Resolution Committees, peace monitors or community groups warning of possible trouble and seeking their help. Anglin comments: “on critical occasions like the Chris Hani and Oliver Tambo funerals, their role was decisive”. Moreover, “parties and communities continued to request observer ‘protection’”, even if, over time, “individuals determined on violence were not deterred.”⁹⁴⁰ Minty had from the outset acknowledged that international observers had sometimes had a positive impact in resolving local disputes. In the case of COMSA, this deserves a fuller analysis, given the Commonwealth’s claim to have a comparative advantage in the field of conflict-resolution and mediation. In any event, although the value of mediation was recognised by other observer missions, there was some doubt whether this was an appropriate area of activity. ECOMSA reported that while its observers had often acted as facilitators and mediators and had made proposals for conflict resolution, there was “some doubt in the minds of some ECOMSA team members whether these actions do

⁹³⁸ ECOMSA, Confidential Report, Appendix K.

⁹³⁹ Personal observation by the author, temporarily assigned to COMSA over that period.

⁹⁴⁰ Anglin, “International Monitoring of the Transition”, 535.

not in fact exceed their mandatory duties.”⁹⁴¹ In seeking clarification from the European presidency and individual governments, ECOMSA observed: “it is important to note that the Commonwealth Observer Mission do not accept the UN guidelines but operate under a wider interpretation of the mandate.”⁹⁴²

COMSA saw working with, and seeking to improve, the peace structures established under the National Peace Accord as being a key element of its mandate. The National Peace Accord (NPA), adopted by the political parties on 14 September 1991, recognised the untold misery, hardship and disruption caused by political violence and declared that it “now jeopardises the very process of peaceful political transformation and threatens to leave a legacy of insurmountable division and deep bitterness in our country.”⁹⁴³ Under the leadership of John Hall, the National Peace Committee worked hard to hold the various political parties to the undertakings given under the NPA. In that respect, COMSA was supportive of attempts to broker a peace summit between Mandela and Buthelezi.⁹⁴⁴ This was also an area where the Commonwealth Secretary-General sought to use his good offices. However, securing peace and an end to political violence was at least as much a local and regional issue as it was a national one. The COMSA team deployed to Natal found that only six of the 26 Local Dispute Resolution Committees (LDRCs) envisaged for the province had been established, and only two of these were functioning. They reported the widespread perception that Natal was sliding towards ‘all-out civil war’.⁹⁴⁵

The COMSA observers identified a major impediment to establishing local peace structures. While the KwaZulu ‘homeland’ government and the IFP leadership had signed the Peace Accord, the local *amakhosi* (chiefs) had not been included and were suspicious of actions and structures which might be seen as undermining their authority. COMSA therefore worked with the *amakhosi* to achieve reconciliation, peace and reconstruction, particularly by establishing LDRCs. Their focus, in Natal, was on two areas. The first was Umbumbulu, on the upper south coast. This rural district, with a population of around 400,000, had the reputation of being the area worst affected by violence in the whole of South Africa. Shortly after COMSA’s arrival, it was

⁹⁴¹ ECOMSA, Confidential Report, 2.

⁹⁴² Ibid., 2.

⁹⁴³ National Peace Committee, *National Peace Accord* (Johannesburg: minit print arcadia, 1991), 3.

⁹⁴⁴ Commonwealth Secretariat, *Violence in South Africa*, 25.

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid., 26.

declared an Unrest Area. After significant negotiations, involving the political parties, the *amakhosi*, business, the churches and regional bodies, the launch of a LDRC for Umbumbulu was achieved in December 1992, with agreement on the return of refugees displaced from their homes. This was hailed by the 'New Nation' newspaper as "an unsurpassed feat in the strife-torn Natal Upper South Coast."⁹⁴⁶ 'City Press' asked: "Was a magic wand waved over this area, healing the wounds of the past?" The answer, the newspaper suggested, was more prosaic: "independent peace facilitators from the Commonwealth Observer Group were instrumental in kickstarting the whole process."⁹⁴⁷

The Ensimbini Valley in the Port Shepstone area, on Natal's lower south coast, provided the other major focus for COMSA's activities. Despite the presence of a LDRC in Port Shepstone, the Emsimbini valley was a battleground between traditional forces, supporting IFP, in conflict with ANC-supporting youth. Local media dubbed the area "a wasteland".⁹⁴⁸ Following protracted negotiations, peace agreements were concluded in the KwaNdwalane and KwaMavindla localities, and sealed by a series of peace rallies, involving the former protagonists. At the largest of these, 6,000 people in Murchison were addressed by regional leaders of both the ANC and the IFP, urging peace. Reconciliation and Development Committees were established, and a substantial number of refugees were thereafter able to return to the valley. The 'South Coast Herald' described it as "a major breakthrough", with a dramatic fall in the death rate reported.⁹⁴⁹ A major figure in COMSA's mediation operations was Dr Moses Anafu, a Ghanaian and a senior political adviser in the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Despite the early success of conflict resolution in KwaZulu-Natal and its positive impact nationally on ANC-IFP relations, the continuation of the Commonwealth mission in Durban was cast into doubt by a potential restructuring of COMSA in its third phase, beginning in June 1993. In this new phase, there were rumours that the Durban team would be withdrawn, with an increasing emphasis on election preparations rather than conflict resolution. This prompted a flurry of letters of protest. On 28 April 1993, Mark Butler, a Human Rights Monitor with the Pietermaritzburg

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid., 27.

⁹⁴⁷ Fred Khumalo, "Refugees are returning home," *City Press*, 13 December 1992.

⁹⁴⁸ Commonwealth Secretariat, *Violence in South Africa*, 27.

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid., 28-29.

Agency for Christian Social Awareness, wrote to Anyaoku expressing his extreme concern “in the light of the unique and crucial role played by your Mission in the process of building peace in Natal.” He continued: “People in Natal do not trust easily, and your mission has been able to build trust in areas where we never thought it possible.”⁹⁵⁰ The Head of COMSA, the Australian criminologist Professor Duncan Chappell, privately told Commonwealth Secretariat staff that “members of the mission are very unhappy about this and feel it is particularly unfortunate that the Natal office is closing in this way; they feel they have done good work there.” He added that the changes being proposed “would not build on the progress the mission has made in the first two phases”: it would be “starting again from cold.”⁹⁵¹ Two days later the Secretary-General had a letter from Rev. Beyers Naude, the noted anti-apartheid campaigner (and chair of the Ecumenical Monitoring Programme in South Africa), asking for official clarification “as a matter of greatest urgency, especially in the light of the significant contribution that the Commonwealth Observer Group in Natal is making towards the cause of peace.”⁹⁵²

While Anyaoku’s office reassured those lobbying the Secretary-General that there were no plans to terminate the mission, in reality COMSA was facing a funding crisis. As earlier as December 1992, Anyaoku had privately admitted that “regrettably, I do not see how we can find the necessary financial resources for sustaining COMSA beyond 16 January 1993.”⁹⁵³ Only by raiding other budgets while preparing a fresh appeal to governments, could the mission continue its operations into the early part of the year.⁹⁵⁴ However, by the time of Anyaoku’s visit to South Africa at the end of May 1993, the Secretary-General was able to make it clear that COMSA’s role in KwaZulu-Natal would continue as the broader Commonwealth mission moved into its third phase.

⁹⁵⁰ Correspondence from Mark Butler to Emeka Anyaoku, 28 April 1993, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/22.

⁹⁵¹ Notes from a telephone conversation between Duncan Chappell and Commonwealth Secretariat staff, 1 May 1993, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN 09/22.

⁹⁵² Correspondence from Beyers Naude to Emeka Anyaoku, 3 May 1993, Commonwealth Secretariat archives SGAN/09/22.

⁹⁵³ Annotation by Emeka Anyaoku to Anthony Siaguru on correspondence from Barry Munson, Toti Crisis and Upliftment Centre, Amanzimtoti, 5 December 1992, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/002.

⁹⁵⁴ Memorandum, “COMSA Budget Estimates for period 15 January – 15 April 1993,” from Max Gaylard to Emeka Anyaoku, 15 January 1993, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/22.

The political context, however, had changed dramatically in April 1993 with the brutal assassination of Chris Hani, the SACP leader and rising ANC star. The perpetrators - the Conservative Party politician, Clive Derby-Lewis, and his accomplice Janusz Walus - had intended "to ignite racial fury and wreck the reconciliation process".⁹⁵⁵ Derby-Lewis later told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: "Hani had to be the target .. we were fighting against communism, and communism is the vehicle of the Antichrist."⁹⁵⁶ However, in a pivotal moment and in the face of erupting violence, Mandela broadcast to the nation. "This is a watershed moment for us all", declared the ANC leader, "our decisions and our actions will determine whether we use our pain, our grief and our outrage to move forward to what is the only lasting solution for our country – an elected government of the people, by the people and for the people."⁹⁵⁷ Despite the political hazards in taking such a stance, Mandela's decisive appeal had the desired effect. It was, Dubow considered, "an act of consummate statesmanship."⁹⁵⁸ Multiparty negotiations resumed, on a much more inclusive basis than previously and, on 1 June, the date of South Africa's first non-racial elections was quickly agreed.

It would be a mistake to regard COMSA as solely focussed on the practicalities of mitigating the violence. The team had also been chosen to contain a blend of high-quality skills and experience, particularly in policing, security and the law. An important component of the mission's work was to review the administration of justice, particularly the correctional system. At a press conference in December 1992 COMSA's Chairman, Justice Amissah, presented a report which was critical of South Africa's courts, its prisons and the police. "Until the confidence of the people is secured, the police contribution to the control of violence will be flawed", remarked Amissah.⁹⁵⁹ The Department of Justice immediately issued a lengthy rebuttal, branding it "a generalised, ill-informed and superficial evaluation" which would create incorrect perceptions.⁹⁶⁰ But, in an editorial under the heading "Upholding the Law",

⁹⁵⁵ Obituary, "Clive Derby-Lewis", 5 November 2016, *The Times*, 82.

⁹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁹⁵⁷ Broadcast by Nelson Mandela, 13 April 1993, accessed 18 November 2019, https://www.News24.com/NelsonMandela/speeches/FULL_TEXT_On_Chris_Hani_20110124.

⁹⁵⁸ Saul Dubow, *Apartheid 1948-1994*, 271.

⁹⁵⁹ Transcript of a press conference given by COMSA, 17 December 1992, Johannesburg, held in archives of the Department for International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), freedom of information request.

⁹⁶⁰ Statement by Department of Justice (P.A. Du Rand, Chief Liaison Officer), 22 December 1992, in response to COMSA statement, DIRCO archives, FOI request.

The Star said these criticisms were to be expected but “there is much truth in what the Commonwealth Observer Mission to South Africa had to say.”⁹⁶¹ There were other occasions when COMSA publicly clashed with the government in recommending changes, though the mission was careful to remain impartial between the various parties. If Minty’s accusation about the international observers, that: “They do not appear to make any independent assessment of the general situation”, had been plausible initially, it certainly carried no weight thereafter.⁹⁶² Even among these controversies, Foreign Minister Pik Botha was fulsome in his praise of the Commonwealth team, thanking Anyaoku for the quality of the observers and saying that any initial misgivings by the government had been “completely eliminated.”⁹⁶³

The Commonwealth had a less happy experience in its attempts to help train the embryonic National Peacekeeping Force (NPKF). The idea of the force was to overcome criticisms of the SADF and SAP that they were not properly impartial and did not enjoy the confidence of the communities to which they were deployed. Instead, a unified force would be built, drawing equally from all the armed formations in the country, including the homelands and the police. This would be used to provide security up to and during South Africa’s first democratic elections in April 1994. Anglin has described the establishment of the NPKF as: “an imaginative and constructive, but ultimately disastrous, initiative.” Although the TEC approved the plan in August 1993, with the enthusiastic backing of the ANC, it was not until November that COMSA was informally approached about Commonwealth assistance. In January, COMSA reported to London that “those involved in setting up the force have now come to the international community at the eleventh hour with a desperate request for assistance.”⁹⁶⁴ Of the four missions, only the Commonwealth was prepared to help, though the Australian Ambassador warned that the South Africans had left the matter too late and “now wanted the international community to pull the chestnuts out of the fire.”⁹⁶⁵ The Joint Executive Secretaries of the TEC, Mac Maharaj and Fanie van der Merwe, wrote to Anyaoku on 19 January 1994 formally requesting assistance. They

⁹⁶¹ Editorial, “Upholding the law,” *The Star*, 23 December 1992, DIRCO archives, FOI request.

⁹⁶² Minty, “South Africa: From Apartheid to Democracy,” 81.

⁹⁶³ Record of a telephone conversation between Emeka Anyaoku and Pik Botha, 24 November 1992, Johannesburg, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/002.

⁹⁶⁴ Memorandum by COMSA (Colleen Lowe-Morna) to Commonwealth Secretariat, “Commonwealth assistance to the transition,” 6 January 1994, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/046, 1.

⁹⁶⁵ Memorandum by COMSA (C. Lowe-Morna) to Commonwealth Secretariat, “Update on assistance to the NPKF,” 11 January 1994, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/046, 2.

declared that they saw “a crucial role for the international community in monitoring and evaluating the performance of the NPKF once the training is complete.” They asked that the Secretary-General consult with member governments with a view to “mobilising their bilateral contributions under a Commonwealth umbrella.”⁹⁶⁶ Despite the TEC’s recognition that this was “very short notice”, Anyaoku responded that he was confident, in the light of his consultations, that “Commonwealth governments will be in a position to provide the assistance requested.”⁹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the timing was impossibly short. Five days after the TEC’s request for assistance, the first NPKF recruits began to arrive for training. It was nine days before the opening of the election campaign and three months before polling day. Anglin commented that all four international observer missions had been sounded out “but only the Commonwealth was in a position to respond quickly and effectively and was willing to do so considering the obvious high risks of failure.”⁹⁶⁸

On 10 February, the Commonwealth announced that a Commonwealth Peacekeeping Assistance Group (CPAG) had been assembled to help in the training of the NPKF.⁹⁶⁹ Headed by Colonel Cottam of the British Army and A.K. Gupta of the Indian Police Service, CPAG was to be a combined group of eighteen army officers and eight police officers from seven Commonwealth countries, funded at an estimated cost “in excess of £250,000.”⁹⁷⁰ Given the time constraints, Anglin considers that assembling such a high-powered team was “a remarkable achievement.”⁹⁷¹ However, CPAG joined an initiative already facing mounting problems. With a second batch of recruits arriving on 19 February, making 3,800 in all, it was clear that no more could be trained by the time of the election and that the goal of a force of 10,000 by then was unachievable. The bulk of recruits came from MK (Umkhonto We Sizwe), the SADF and the Transkei Defence Force but these were raw recruits rather than the elite personnel anticipated, and there was minimal screening to assess their suitability. Conditions at the De Brug

⁹⁶⁶ Correspondence from the Joint Executive Secretaries, TEC to Emeka Anyaoku, 19 January 1994, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/46, 1.

⁹⁶⁷ Correspondence from Emeka Anyaoku to the Joint Executive Secretaries, TEC, 26 January 1994, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/046, 1.

⁹⁶⁸ Anglin, “The Life and Death of South Africa’s National Peacekeeping Force,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 33:1 (1995): 33.

⁹⁶⁹ Press Release, “Commonwealth announces support to NPKF”, 10 February 1994, Johannesburg, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/046.

⁹⁷⁰ Memorandum from John Syson to Anthony Siaguru, “CPAG- Requirement for Commonwealth Secretariat Funding,” 9 March 1994, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/046.

⁹⁷¹ Anglin, “The Life and Death of the NPKF,” 33.

camp outside Bloemfontein (shared by the CPAG team) were spartan, with inadequate facilities, accommodation in tents and limited food. Teething problems were reported, including strikes, insubordination, mutiny and desertion and several lurid instances of violence and racism between various factions.⁹⁷² Apart from basic soldiering skills, CPAG sought to provide training in peacekeeping techniques, especially in an electoral context. This included stressing the importance of community support and public confidence and strict adherence to a Code of Conduct and rules of engagement. At the end of the training period, the evaluation by the multinational team was that the bulk of the Force was “undertrained and not ready for deployment in war-like situations’.⁹⁷³ Added to poor command and control issues, the commanding officer appointed, Brigadier Gabriel Ramushwana, was an open supporter of the ANC (and an election candidate for the party). As the military leader in Venda, his democratic credentials were dubious and his integrity questionable. Nevertheless, the TEC’s Sub-Council on Defence pressed ahead with deployment. CPAG, and others, reacted with horror to the first proposal, that the NPKF be sent into KwaZulu-Natal. The IFP had boycotted the TEC and therefore supplied no formations for the NPKF. Given its leadership and provenance, the Force would have been viewed as an invading army in Natal and CPAG argued strongly against the deployment. The Sub-Council’s decision to deploy the NPKF to the townships of the East Rand instead, also opposed by CPAG, was deeply problematic, given the history of bloody conflict there between ANC Self-Defence Units (SDUs), IFP hostel-dwelling militants and, from time to time, other armed groups supporting AZAPO and the PAC.

After a hesitant start and without support from the SADF, the NPKF quickly disintegrated in the face of political resistance and an upsurge in violence. Col. Cottam reported that the first three days: “did not go too badly”, as the NPKF patrolled Thokosa, Katlehong and Vosloorus townships.⁹⁷⁴ However, by the fourth day gun battles had broken out between hostel dwellers and local SDUs, in which the Force was involved. Kynoch contends that the NPKF was widely perceived as an ‘ANC army’ and that its soldiers co-operated with ANC SDUs in their assault on the Mshayazafe

⁹⁷² Gary Kynoch, *Township Violence and the End of Apartheid: War on the Reef* (Woodbridge U.K. & Rochester, NY: James Currey/Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2018), 115.

⁹⁷³ Chris Louw, “Experts warned that NPKF wasn’t ready,” 22 April, *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/046.

⁹⁷⁴ Colonel Cottam, CPAG, Report to Russell Marshal, COMSA, April 1994, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/046.

Hostel on 18-19 April. "The NPKF, although operational for a very short time and only deployed in a limited area, clearly backed the ANC."⁹⁷⁵ The NPKF requested help from the SADF and the Force was withdrawn, confined to barracks until after the elections. Col. Cottam remarked: "The NPKD deployment has not been successful because it lacked the necessary support."⁹⁷⁶ Anglin contends that: "The real blunder was the decision to deploy the NPKF on the East Rand."⁹⁷⁷ The TEC wished to persist with the Force and requested that CPAG remain for a further phase of training. Col. Cottam demurred, remarking: "It would be a pity for CPAG to outstay its welcome."⁹⁷⁸ Instead, a CPAG withdrawal, he suggested: "can be achieved gradually and with dignity." Some have sought to defend the NPKF, arguing: "Where the soldiers were properly supported, they served well ... and laid the groundwork for a promising future for South African peacekeeping."⁹⁷⁹ A more obvious consequence was a new public confidence in the SADF and the SAP, whose support for the 1994 electoral process, in terms of security and logistical support, was widely praised. Seegers rates their performance over the period of polling as "exemplary."⁹⁸⁰ As a result, Anglin sees the ANC, as "compelled to undergo a rapid and radical change in their historically-conditioned distrust of the security forces."⁹⁸¹

5. The Freedom elections

This was far from the end of political violence, though the setting of an election date changed its character. In May 1993, COMSA had noted "a marked decrease in violence in the PWV area" prior to Hani's death, though the mission was unclear at that point as to whether levels of violence would continue to fall or would escalate. But COMSA felt that there was a new and strong consensus among political leaders that "negotiations should not be held hostage to violence."⁹⁸²

⁹⁷⁵ Kynoch, *Township Violence and the End of Apartheid*, 117.

⁹⁷⁶ Cottam, Report to COMSA, 4.

⁹⁷⁷ Anglin, "The Life and Death of the NPKF," 52.

⁹⁷⁸ Cottam, Report to COMSA, 4.

⁹⁷⁹ David Ridley-Harris, "South African Peacekeeping, 1994-2012," *Military History Journal*, 16: 1 (2013).

⁹⁸⁰ Annette Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa*, (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1996), 283.

⁹⁸¹ Anglin, "The Life and Death of the NPKF," 50.

⁹⁸² COMSA Press Release, "COMSA urges political tolerance," May 1993, Johannesburg, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN 09/16.

In a dramatic illustration of this imperative, the Multi-Party Negotiating Forum (the successor to CODESA II) was temporarily halted by a physical assault on the venue of the talks, the World Trade Centre in Kempton Park. On 25 June, around 3,000 supporters of Eugene Terre' Blanche's Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) and of the Afrikaner Volksfront (AVF) used an armoured vehicle to smash their way into the Centre and temporarily halt the talks. The SAP were ineffectual in containing the assault and there was considerable damage during the occupation but no fatalities or serious injuries. However, it was a reminder of the potency of the "white right" to disrupt the transitional process and threaten free and fair elections. By November, the MPNF had ratified the interim Constitution, a temporary Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) had been established and a Transitional Executive Council (TEC) was formed to provide a neutral administration for overseeing the period up to the elections. For some, this marked the culmination of a decisive ascendancy by the ANC over the NP, established in the aftermath of Hani's death.

These developments in turn had a considerable impact on the four international observer missions. While mitigating violence and monitoring the negotiations had been their initial focus, it had always been privately accepted that this would be superseded by "the ultimate purpose of promoting conditions conducive to free and fair elections."⁹⁸³ In any case, COMSA had recognised from the outset that violence was rooted in the apartheid system. While the mission had no illusions that violence would cease with the election of a non-racial, democratic government, they nonetheless believed that a government which enjoyed the support of a majority of the population "is in a far better position to address the issue of violence than one which does not."⁹⁸⁴ However, it was by no means certain that South Africa would wish an international observer presence at the elections. After all, de Klerk had railed against foreign interference early in his tenure and had initially dismissed the idea of an international observer presence to address the violence. The ANC and others had also been sceptical, as indeed had the UN. Opinion only began to turn after the Boipatong massacre.

⁹⁸³ Anglin, "International Monitoring of the Transition," 526.

⁹⁸⁴ Commonwealth Secretariat, *Violence in South Africa*, 5.

The presence of the international missions in South Africa after September 1992 certainly served to allay many fears. That said, COMSA in particular was publicly critical of aspects of government policy and this was not universally welcomed. De Klerk in particular was conscious of the international community's previous hostility to his party and government and reminded Anyaoku that "It was necessary for them to maintain a more impartial stance in relation to all the political forces in South Africa."⁹⁸⁵ Nevertheless, he expressed "appreciation for the cooperative and helpful approach of the international community" for the work it was doing.⁹⁸⁶ A year later, he gave a guarded welcome to the UN to send international observers for the elections but "to observe not to monitor."⁹⁸⁷ Many internationally considered this a distinction without a difference and used the two words interchangeably.⁹⁸⁸ Nevertheless, both the NP and the ANC made a functional distinction between the two and this was reflected in the IEC Act. International Election Observers (IEOs) were therefore told that they "must not perform tasks which, under the relevant laws, are to be performed by voting officials of the IEC, such as monitors, etc."⁹⁸⁹ The precise functions of IEC monitors were set out in the relevant legislation.⁹⁹⁰ In practice, in the sometimes chaotic circumstances of the 1994 elections, this line between observers and monitors was also one which in practice was often blurred.

⁹⁸⁵ Record of a Meeting between Emeka Anyaoku and FW de Klerk, 13 November 1992 (Note taken by M.J. Gaylard, 24 November 1992), personal papers, 1.

⁹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁸⁷ Anglin, "International Monitoring of the Transition," 526.

⁹⁸⁸ M. Abutudu, "Monitoring and Observation of elections in Africa", accessed 23 September 2019, <https://www. www.elections.org.za>content>work>.

⁹⁸⁹ IEC, "Manual for International Observers: April 1994," 7 April 1994, Johannesburg, 38.

⁹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.



Fig.17. Nelson Mandela and Chief Anyaoku at Marlborough House, 1993. Commonwealth Secretariat.

The Commonwealth summit in October 1993, the Limassol CHOGM, took a number of important steps. First, leaders recognised that, with the setting of an election date and the formation of the TEC, the process of change in South Africa was now irreversible. Apart from the arms embargo, they therefore lifted all other sanctions. Second, they noted that COMSA “had made an important and widely acknowledged contribution towards helping stem the violence, reconcile communities, return refugees and initiate socio-economic reconstruction” and they decided that COMSA should remain until the elections.⁹⁹¹ Its remit was to be widened to include preparatory electoral assistance.⁹⁹² Third, in view of the profound challenges still facing South Africa, they were of the view that “a sizeable international observer presence would be indispensable if confidence in the process were to be assured.”⁹⁹³ Fourth, apart from channelling technical assistance to a number of transitional agencies, the Heads

⁹⁹¹ Commonwealth Secretariat, *Final Communique, Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 1993*, 25 October 1993, Limassol, accessed 6 March 2020, <https://www.thecommonwealth.org/history-of-the-commonwealth/commonwealth-heads-government-meeting-limassol-cyprus-21-25-october-1993>, 10.

⁹⁹² Emeka Anyaoku, “Meeting the Challenges of Change,” *Biennial Report of the Commonwealth Secretary-General 1993* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1993), 6.

⁹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

declared that "they looked forward to welcoming a non-racial and democratic South Africa back into the Commonwealth at the earliest opportunity", should the new government so decide.⁹⁹⁴

Anyaoku later reported to leaders that "at the time of the April 1994 elections, 119 experts from 19 Commonwealth countries were providing technical support, including 50 electoral experts seconded to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and 33 military and police officers drawn from eight member countries, involved in helping train the National Peace-Keeping Force. The culmination was the largest ever Commonwealth Election Observer Group, led by Rt Hon Michael Manley of Jamaica."⁹⁹⁵ While the Commonwealth Observer Group to South Africa (COGSA) was the second-largest international observer group (IGO), numbering around 118 all told, with an impressive line-up of skills and experience within the group, it was dwarfed by UNOMSA. No less than sixty-seven Americans alone were part of UNOMSA, out of a total of 1,800 observers from 100 participating states. At the same time, the civil rights campaigner Jesse Jackson led an official US observer team, supported by a \$35 million US government grant.⁹⁹⁶ The other intergovernmental organisations already working in South Africa, the OAU and the European Union, provided similar sized observation teams.⁹⁹⁷ In addition to IGOs and overseas national delegations, international observers also came from the NGO sector. The largest of these was EMPISA, which was based in South Africa from 1992 to 1994 and recruited 443 participants to the programme during the period. Additionally, there were numerous local observers, many from South Africa's 54,000 NGOs. A National Electoral Observer Network (NEON) was formed immediately prior to the elections. It was expected to deploy around 30,000 domestic observers and 2,000 international observers from 67 foreign NGOs.⁹⁹⁸ The official IEC monitors completed the picture.

⁹⁹⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁹⁹⁵ Emeka Anyaoku, "Development and Good Governance: Local Action, Global Reach," *Biennial Report of the Commonwealth Secretary-General 1995* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1995), 5.

⁹⁹⁶ Andrew Reynolds (Ed.), *Election '94 South Africa: The campaigns, results and future prospects* (London, James Currey, 1994), 153.

⁹⁹⁷ The European Union had come into being on 1 November 1993, under the Maastricht Treaty. Its mission at the elections was the European Union Election Unit in South Africa (EUNELSA).

⁹⁹⁸ Commonwealth Secretariat, *Brief for Observers: Commonwealth Observer Group to the National and Provincial Elections in South Africa, 26-29 April 1994*, 7 April 1994 (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1994), 7.

Timothy Sisk has written that: “The end of apartheid unfolded perfectly scripted for a conflict-weary world”.⁹⁹⁹ It may not have seemed like that at the time but, one by one, the impossibilities standing in the way of a fair poll were steadily, almost miraculously, overcome. Despite a series of bombings at the start of the campaign, which in total claimed 21 lives and injured at least 173, the threat of right-wing violence disrupting the campaign receded.¹⁰⁰⁰ The bravado of Terre’Blanche and the AWB had dissolved in the blood and dust of Bophuthatswana, and General Constand Viljoen had defused a serious paramilitary threat from his supporters by deciding to participate in the elections, heading the Freedom Front. The other principal source of violence, centred in KwaZulu-Natal (as it had now become), came from Chief Buthelezi’s initial boycott of the elections, given his strong opposition to a unitary state. At the last moment, following a flurry of discussions and concessions, Buthelezi decided to register the IFP for the elections. The violence in KwaZulu-Natal fell away substantially and Justice Kriegler later stated that not a single death could be attributed to election violence during the period of voting.¹⁰⁰¹

However, despite an improving political climate, the remaining logistical challenges were immense. Adding the IFP name and emblem to millions of already printed and secure ballot papers (by means of a special sticker) was one issue. The absence of voter rolls was another. Eligibility to vote had to be proved by means of a suitable identity document which millions did not have, relying instead on the IEC issuing temporary voting cards. 3.5 million of these were given out, nearly half in the four days of polling.¹⁰⁰² If this expedient invited fraud and under-age voting, the procedures instituted for polling generally were highly complex. This included scanning the hands of would-be voters in case there was any sign of previously administered invisible ink; applying new ink to the finger to avoid double voting; and issuing each voter with two large scrolls of paper – one ballot covering the 19 parties standing nationally, and the second for the 26 parties standing in the nine provincial elections.¹⁰⁰³ For an electorate used to such complexities and polling staff experienced in such matters, the challenge

⁹⁹⁹ Timothy Sisk, “A US Perspective of South Africa’s 1994 Election”, in Reynolds, *Election ’94 South Africa*, 144

¹⁰⁰⁰ Commonwealth Observer Group, *The End of Apartheid: The Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group to the South African elections, 26-29 April 1994* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1994), 44.

¹⁰⁰¹ Commonwealth Observer Group, *The End of Apartheid*, 48.

¹⁰⁰² Welsh and Spence, *Ending Apartheid*, 137.

¹⁰⁰³ IEC, “Manual for International Observers,” Appendix 2, 1-11.

might have been manageable. But most of the electorate of 22.5 million had never cast a vote in their lives; polling stations had never before been sited across large parts of the South Africa land mass; and many of the 30,000 extra polling staff had had the barest of training.

In the event, in the words of Anyaoku, these major obstacles “melted away”, because they were met with “patience, good humour and flexibility.”¹⁰⁰⁴ The queues of voters stretched, people waited, and polling was extended by a day and a half, to make up for stations that failed to open and for ballots and election material that did not arrive. It was not, therefore, that everything suddenly fell into place: it did not. “There were irregularities and cheating” but for many, including most Africans “the election was a joyful catharsis and a symbolic affirmation of their newfound rights as citizens.”¹⁰⁰⁵ Nearly all wished the end, a peaceful deliverance from apartheid, and most were prepared to accept the practical and political compromises needed to achieve that goal. “We promised an adequate and respectable election”, pronounced IEC Chair, Judge Kriegler, “not a 12-cylinder supercharged election.”¹⁰⁰⁶ Despite the deficiencies, it was, said Kriegler, “substantially free and fair.”¹⁰⁰⁷ This was echoed by de Klerk: “If we cannot have a 100 per cent perfect election, we must go for a 95 per cent perfect election.”¹⁰⁰⁸ If in some cases electoral numbers did not tally, it was not, in Gould’s words, “a fast food operation.”¹⁰⁰⁹

As expected, the ANC emerged triumphant, winning 7 of 9 provinces and 62% of the vote nationally, with 252 seats. It fell short of the two-thirds majority needed to amend the interim constitution unilaterally, but such a course would have been unthinkable in any event. The National Party, with 20% of the vote, won 82 seats in the National Assembly and took control of the provincial government in the Western Cape. The IFP, which polled poorly outside its base, secured 10.5% of the national vote, and 43 seats. More importantly, the IFP were declared the winners in KwaZulu-Natal and qualified for a presence in the Government of National Unity. Nelson Mandela became South Africa’s first black President, with De Klerk and Thabo Mbeki as deputies and

¹⁰⁰⁴ Anyaoku, “The Commonwealth, Mandela and the death of apartheid,” 641.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Welsh and Spence, *Ending Apartheid*, 138.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Reynolds, *Election '94 South Africa*, 179.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Interview with Justice Kriegler, 5 May 2014, *SABC Digital News*, accessed 3 February 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZR_jIOG.yg.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Reynolds, *Election '94 South Africa*, 179.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Johnson, “How Free? How Fair”, *Launching Democracy*, 323.

with Buthelezi holding the influential Home Affairs portfolio. In the eyes of some this may have been: “a loveless marriage of convenience” but all recognised that it was a democratic imperative.¹⁰¹⁰ The Freedom Front (FF), Democratic Party (DP) and the PAC polled poorly but managed to secure a foothold in the National Assembly. The principle of inclusivity, which had been so important to containing the violence and delivering the election, was therefore preserved. In that respect, the positive and decisive role of the police and the SADF proved vital, not only in the security field but in logistical support for the electoral process.¹⁰¹¹

Perhaps the most questionable element of what was in part a negotiated outcome were the results in KwaZulu-Natal. Reynolds suggest that the province had: “the worst election irregularities and possibly the best case for the invalidation of an election.”¹⁰¹² A Commonwealth Observer in KwaZulu-Natal , reflecting on his experiences, commented: “I would say the vast bulk of the incidents we encountered were generated by Inkatha and their supporters and which is why we who were there were frustrated by the 'handover' of the province to that party.”¹⁰¹³ Nevertheless, given that there were significant irregularities across the country (including a possible 1 million illegal votes), to have invalidated the process only in Natal would have been difficult to justify and the political ramifications would have been huge. On 6 May, immediately following the announcement of the results of the elections by Judge Kriegler, coupled with his stated conviction that polling was substantially free and fair, the four intergovernmental observer groups issued a joint statement. This began by saluting the fact that South Africans had turned out in enormous numbers to participate freely in the elections. Nonetheless, the missions pointed to “serious inadequacies in the control and accounting of sensitive electoral material”, “irregularities” at the counting stage and “evidence of malfeasance.” In that last respect, they urged that all formal complaints should be properly investigated by the IEC and the SAP and criminal investigations pursued. However, while taking into account these issues, they declared that the missions “share the collective view that the outcome of the elections reflects the will of the people of South Africa.”¹⁰¹⁴ The Commonwealth’s own report on the

¹⁰¹⁰ Briefing, 20 May 1994, *Africa Confidential* 35 (10), 2.

¹⁰¹¹ Briefing, 6 May 1994, *Africa Confidential*, 35 (9), 1.

¹⁰¹² Reynolds, *Election '94 South Africa*, 210.

¹⁰¹³ Email exchanges between Chris Bowman and the author, November 2019.

¹⁰¹⁴ Press Release, “Final Statement by the International Observer Missions on the South African elections,” 6 May 1994, UNOMSA/PR/55, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/019.

elections makes clear that it was not for the mission to apply the 'free and fair' test; only that the elections were "a free expression of will" and whether the results reflected "the wishes of the people".¹⁰¹⁵ COGSA's cautious conclusion was that the elections were "a credible democratic process which was substantially fair."¹⁰¹⁶ In the Commonwealth's case, certainly, Welsh's accusations against 'sanctimonious foreign observers' cannot be justified. COGSA did not pronounce the elections 'free and fair'. It did not ignore the abuses and malpractices it found but reported these fully and urged that they be properly investigated by due process. It made recommendations to the IEC for future elections to correct shortcomings, but it did not exceed its mandate by seeking to directly interfere with the electoral process. That said, the international observers, the IEC and the political parties all recognised a greater truth. As "The Star" put it: "The big picture is majestic", whatever the multiple faults and failings. It continued: "Democracy, simply, was the winner. Its triumph was bigger than parties or policies or personalities."¹⁰¹⁷

6. South Africa and Commonwealth membership

The circumstances of South Africa's departure from the Commonwealth in 1961 were in part accidental. Were the vagaries of chance a similar factor in South Africa's return to membership in 1994? South Africa's exit thirty-three years before had been seen by many South Africans as a necessary stage in its post-colonial development. As the years passed and South Africa became enclosed in the cocoon of a pariah state, many of the old loyalties of English whites to a British Crown and an old Commonwealth also fell away. If the driver for a return to the Commonwealth was therefore largely from the ANC and the liberation forces, the evidence for this is not widely recognised. A return to Commonwealth membership had not been obviously flagged as an early priority of the new ANC-led government and yet it was among the first of its foreign policy decisions, taking effect on 1 June 1994, less than a month after the formation of the government of national unity.

Geyser has argued that the background reasons for this decision were two-fold: the disintegration of apartheid, and the end of the Cold War. He commented: "It is a reality

¹⁰¹⁵ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The End of Apartheid*, 4.

¹⁰¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁰¹⁷ Editorial, "The power of process," 29 April 1994, *The Star*.

that Africa can no longer use the iniquities of apartheid to shelter it from exposure to its own inadequacies; and communism's collapse has bared the continent to a new economic realism."¹⁰¹⁸ Geyser pointed to Namibia's accession to the Commonwealth on independence in 1990 as a case in point, though the country was never a British colony. Writing in 1994, he suggested that Mozambique, Angola and Cameroon were among those other African countries who had put out soundings about possible membership.¹⁰¹⁹

South Africa's return to the Commonwealth as a post-apartheid state was not a new topic. Ramphal has recalled raising the matter with Oliver Tambo not long before his death, and Tambo's insistence that "black South Africa never left the Commonwealth."¹⁰²⁰ It was also a thought never far from Anyaoku's mind, though he chose not to respond when in May 1993 the South African Ambassador raised the issue with him. Kent Durr, who had previously been an NP Minister and headed South Africa's sanctions-busting operations, told Anyaoku that the challenge "was for South Africa to continue to evolve to the point where it could confidently expect to be welcomed back into Commonwealth circles."¹⁰²¹ While Anyaoku may have been reticent at that point, prior to agreement on the election date, the formation of the TEC and the final lifting of Commonwealth sanctions, Durr was later to become a significant advocate for the issue in South Africa. In September 1993, he sent a paper to all South Africa's political leadership about South Africa and the Commonwealth. In it, he argued that reversing the effects of South Africa's long isolation would be a key priority so that the nation could be reintegrated into the international community and the global economy. Involvement in international organisations, including the Commonwealth, would assist in that task. The Commonwealth was "transcontinental, multiracial and multicultural."¹⁰²² He also saw it was becoming "a vehicle for serious dialogue on democracy and development".¹⁰²³

¹⁰¹⁸ Ockert Geyser, "South Africa re-joins the Commonwealth," *The Round Table* 83:331 (1994): 324.

¹⁰¹⁹ Mozambique and Cameroon both became Commonwealth members in 1995 and Rwanda joined in 2009.

¹⁰²⁰ Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life*, 461.

¹⁰²¹ Record of discussion between Kent Durr and Emeka Anyaoku, Tuesday 18 May 1993, Marlborough House, London, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, 40/3-1, 4.

¹⁰²² Kent Durr, "South Africa and the Commonwealth – My point of view," A paper for South African leaders, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/03/016, 4.

¹⁰²³ *Ibid.*, 8.

At the Cyprus CHOGM, in October 1993, South Africa's transition to democratic elections looked fragile, with the far right and Buthelezi's IFP refusing to join the negotiating process or the 1994 elections. At one point, Anyaoku secretly toyed with the idea of inviting Chief Buthelezi to the summit "solely to provide Commonwealth leaders collectively an opportunity to put pressure in him to be constructive and helpful", but found the ANC reluctant.¹⁰²⁴ Preparations were made for assisting the elections and for Commonwealth support for post-apartheid reconstruction and development. However, South Africa's return to membership was also on the minds of leaders. John Major, of the UK, was among a number expressing the hope that South Africa would re-join. Major said he was sure that his colleagues would offer "the warmest of welcomes to a South African Head of Government at its next meeting, thereby bringing to an end a very long and very unhappy chapter in the Commonwealth's history."¹⁰²⁵ Even Queen Elizabeth, the Head of the Commonwealth, intervened in the debate by privately telling leaders that the possibility of South Africa re-joining the Commonwealth "gives cause for hope and pleasure."¹⁰²⁶

The Commonwealth's formal offer came in the summit communiqué. Almost at the end of a long statement on different aspects of South Africa's transition, it declared: "While it was for the new, democratically elected government in South Africa to decide on whether it should seek to return to the Commonwealth, Heads of Government looked forward to welcoming a non-racial and democratic South Africa back into the Commonwealth at the earliest possible opportunity."¹⁰²⁷ In the fraught and frantic months leading to the 1994 elections, it would be fanciful to suggest that the issue was high on anyone's agenda. Nevertheless, exchanges and public statements continued. On 19 January 1994, in an address to the South Africa Club in London, Anyaoku considered the whole question of South Africa's future relationship with the Commonwealth, repeating the invitation from Commonwealth leaders for the new non-racial government to rejoin the association. The following day Pik Botha confirmed that

¹⁰²⁴ Aide Memoire, prepared by the Political Affairs Division, 6 September 1993, Commonwealth Secretariat archives SGAN/03/016, 1.

¹⁰²⁵ Record of the Second Session, HGM (93), 21 October 1993, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/03/016, 5-6.

¹⁰²⁶ Queen Elizabeth II, Private speech to Commonwealth Leaders, 21 October 1993, H.M.Y Britannia, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/03/016, 4.

¹⁰²⁷ Commonwealth Secretariat, *Communiqué, Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting*, Limassol, Cyprus 1993, accessed 28 September 2018, <https://www.thecommonwealth.org/history-of-the-commonwealth/commonwealth-heads-government-meeting-limassol-cyprus-21-25-October-1993>, 7.

procedural steps were underway to facilitate South Africa's return to membership of the Commonwealth and other 'reputable' international organisations "at the earliest moment after the elections."¹⁰²⁸ Botha added that this approach had the full support of the ANC, though he reiterated that the final decision would be for the new government.

Mandela was inaugurated as South Africa's first black President on 10 May and South Africa's return to the Commonwealth was announced shortly thereafter. Anyaoku records that it was one of the first decisions of Mandela's Cabinet.¹⁰²⁹ What were the reasons behind this decision and why did the Government of National Unity embark on this policy so swiftly in its new life? Hyam and Henshaw comment that "pariah states have to find a point of re-entry into the international community."¹⁰³⁰ Undoubtedly, after decades of isolation over most facets of public and professional life, connecting with the Commonwealth network offered a rapid means of re-integrating with the world. Clearly, this included re-building relations with the UK, with its long-standing ties with South Africa and its still considerable number of UK passport holders among its citizens, as well as with other western nations. But it was also about healing old enmities and building links where they might not have existed. For example, India had cut all ties with South Africa prior to 1948 and the formal inauguration of the apartheid policy. Other South-East Asian states, such as Malaysia, had come to independence at the time of South Africa's growing ostracism and had therefore looked elsewhere for its friendships and trade. Even in Africa, with 25% of Commonwealth members, use of the organisation had immediate advantages. Geysler quotes Anyaoku to demonstrate the mutual benefits which South African membership of a largely Commonwealth SADC would bring, making it "the engine of development there."¹⁰³¹

Quite apart from the economic benefits, Hyam and Henshaw point to the diplomatic and political advantages of the Commonwealth as a North-South forum, with its biennial summits of leaders from a highly diverse spectrum of countries. But they also reveal the hazards of analysing the Commonwealth through a bilateral UK-South Africa lens. They incorrectly ascribe to the British Government the hosting of the 1994 ceremony of welcome to the new South Africa in Westminster Abbey, rather than to

¹⁰²⁸ Kent Durr, Speech: "South Africa's future relationship with the Commonwealth – a South African view," 7 March 1994, Commonwealth Trust, London, personal papers, 3.

¹⁰²⁹ Anyaoku, *The Inside Story*, 125.

¹⁰³⁰ Hyam and Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok*, 349.

¹⁰³¹ Geysler, "South Africa re-joins the Commonwealth," 324.

the Commonwealth.¹⁰³² They then ask why the ANC should have taken up the renewed hand of friendship after a “formidable legacy of mistrust.”¹⁰³³ But that mistrust between the UK and the ANC, which accentuated markedly in the Thatcher years, was absent from the ANC-Commonwealth relationship. Abdul Minty, on behalf of the AAM, was a discreet attendee at every Commonwealth summit, except two, between 1960 and 1994.¹⁰³⁴ Other ANC figures were regularly in the wings of CHOGM, especially as the Commonwealth’s anti-apartheid programmes developed. In 1993, Thabo Mbeki quietly lobbied the Commonwealth Secretariat to include a reference in the summit’s communiqué to respecting the “human rights and fundamental freedoms of all its people” within a new democratic South Africa. This was designed to assist the ANC in its delicate negotiations with General Viljoen, the CP and advocates of the *Volkstaat*.¹⁰³⁵ The ANC, among others, had also been closely involved in Commonwealth initiatives, such as the 1986 EPG mission and negotiations, the sanctions campaign and the 1992-4 deployment of Commonwealth observers. None of that could have happened without their tacit consent. Other practical assistance was also offered and taken up, including fellowships, education and training. Denis Goldberg, one of the Rivonia trialists and imprisoned with Mandela, was in 1991 nominated by the ANC to take part in an advanced administrative training course in India and Malaysia, organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat, something he later described as “a wonderful experience.”¹⁰³⁶

In any case, Anyaoku had close links with South Africa’s black leadership. As Mbeki put it: “We trusted him and considered him our representative in the Commonwealth, not just for South Africa as a country but for the reconstruction of Africa.”¹⁰³⁷ They also knew that the process of change would not end with the 1994 elections. The Commonwealth had an important role in support of South Africa’s Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), not so much in drawing upon its own modest financial resources but in leveraging funds from significant donors and assisting the

¹⁰³² Service Booklet, Westminster Abbey: “Service to Welcome South Africa back into the Commonwealth,” 20 July 1994, personal papers.

¹⁰³³ Hyam and Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok*, 347.

¹⁰³⁴ Minty, “South Africa and the Commonwealth,” in *The Commonwealth in the 21st Century*, 57.

¹⁰³⁵ Aide Memoire, Moses Anafu to Emeka Anyaoku, 4 November 1993, “South Africa at the Cyprus CHOGM”, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/019.

¹⁰³⁶ Denis Goldberg, *The Mission: a life for freedom in South Africa* (Johannesburg: STE Publishers, 2010), 323.

¹⁰³⁷ Thabo Mbeki quoted in *Footprints of an Iconic Diplomat*, 92.

coordination and absorption of assistance. Nor was Commonwealth membership solely intergovernmental: South Africa's thriving civil society and professional organisations would find ready counterparts in all corners of the Commonwealth.

Finally, Hyam and Henshaw rightly identify the value of Commonwealth sporting links, both for South Africa externally and, internally, as a source of cohesion and shared ethos. South Africa's return to international cricket took place in 1991, even while Mandela separately argued for the maintenance of international non-sporting sanctions. Similar steps followed in rugby and, in 1992, South Africa participated in the Olympic and Paralympic games in Barcelona. South Africa's speedy resumption of Commonwealth membership in June 1994 was just in time for the rainbow nation's participation in the XVth Commonwealth Games, held in Victoria, Canada, in August.¹⁰³⁸ South Africa came twelfth in the medal table. In all this, the ANC saw the power of sport as a way of mobilising the new nation around its rainbow identity and forging a shared purpose as it returned to competitive international sport.

Re-joining the Commonwealth may have seemed a reassuring step back into the past for many of South Africa's whites. In truth, however, it was the ANC which drove the process, and which was most hard-headed about the modern nature of the Commonwealth and the practical benefits it could offer. As the ANC's Foreign Policy document had put it: "The ANC therefore believes that South Africa's return to the Commonwealth will represent the symbolic ending of the country's isolation" and that it would be "central to the spirit of the new foreign policy."¹⁰³⁹ The Commonwealth, of course, was only one of the 16 multilateral organisations South Africa joined, or gained re-admission to, by the end of 1994.¹⁰⁴⁰ Pretoria's policy was therefore one of 'universality', explained by Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad as: "being very nice to the rich and powerful, nice to the potentially rich and powerful, and kind to old friends who are neither."¹⁰⁴¹ The Commonwealth offered a route to countries in all three categories.

¹⁰³⁸ Durr, "South Africa's future relationship with the Commonwealth," 10.

¹⁰³⁹ Peter Vale and David Black, "The prodigal returns: The Commonwealth and South Africa. Past and Future," Centre for Southern African Studies, University of Western Cape, unpublished article, personal papers, 13.

¹⁰⁴⁰ John Siko, *Inside South Africa's Foreign Policy: Diplomacy in Africa from Smuts to Mbeki* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 32.

¹⁰⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

Nonetheless, South Africa's return to the Commonwealth in 1994 was to give Mandela a new role as a Commonwealth statesman. He was pivotal in the new internal mechanisms and rules adopted by the association in 1995 to implement the Harare Declaration in practical terms as an international human rights regime.¹⁰⁴² In this respect, the Commonwealth proved to be an innovator in fresh approaches to upholding and enforcing international norms.

7. Conclusion

The chapter began with the extraordinary events that took place in South Africa during February 1990. The far-reaching reforms unveiled by President de Klerk to the white parliament were surpassed only by the release of Mandela, so long the icon of South Africa's long struggle against apartheid. Internationally, the end of the cold war may not have been a decisive factor in the demise of apartheid, but it did have a powerful contributory effect to peace in the Southern Africa region. Both the US and former Soviet Union moved from supporting proxy wars and arming conflict into facilitating the resolution of long-running disputes. The Communist bogey may not have been finally laid to rest, but it ceased to have the resonance it once did in the politics of the region and, internally, in South Africa itself.

The Commonwealth, too, was experiencing change. In November 1990, Thatcher was toppled and John Major emerged as her successor. Earlier in the year, Anyaoku succeeded Sonny Ramphal as Commonwealth Secretary-General. Facing a radically different environment in South Africa, both men played a crucial role in ending the 'binary Commonwealth' and finding common purpose at the 1991 Harare CHOGM. In that respect, the adoption of the Harare Declaration was of profound importance. In Stultz's terms, the agreement may have been a declaratory act in placing a new emphasis for the association on the post-cold war themes of human rights and democracy. However, it also strengthened and elaborated the Commonwealth's human rights regime in ways which were to have far-reaching consequences internally, for both aspiring and existing member countries.¹⁰⁴³ Externally, its public adoption may have eased the passage of Anyaoku's mission to South Africa after the

¹⁰⁴² Don McKinnon, "Mandela and the Commonwealth: Identifying and Upholding Common Values," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 106:6 (2017): 650-1.

¹⁰⁴³ Srinivasan, "Principles and practice: Human Rights, the Harare Declaration and the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group," 69-76.

Harare summit. This was to open a new chapter in the story of the Commonwealth's role in the ending of apartheid. But, in its metamorphosis from implacable opponent of Pretoria to friend and facilitator, how significant was the Commonwealth's contribution to international assistance for the transition process?

The greatest contribution the Commonwealth was able to make to South Africa's transition was in promoting initiatives which were then 'internationalised', particularly in combatting violence and promoting peaceful negotiations. This was the case in terms of Anyaoku's offer of Commonwealth observers at CODESA, and in early 1992 his advocacy of international observers to address the growing violence, which eventuated in UNSC resolution 772 (92). The four international missions which as a result were deployed to South Africa focussed on the immediate challenge of violence. However, they also paved the way for a substantial international observer presence at the 1994 elections, which up until the last moment were also threatened by violence. Coupled with Anyaoku's continuing good offices contacts with the principal parties, this helped give the international dimension of South Africa's transition form and substance. Landsberg adds: "While there was almost unanimity amongst South African political parties that they did not want formal mediation by external parties, there was also tacit agreement that they wanted the foreign community to play a supportive role such as putting pressure on opponents to end violence."¹⁰⁴⁴ That tacit agreement had not been evident at the outset and the Commonwealth can claim credit in helping it materialise.

It is also the case that, given the calibre of the Commonwealth observers and the less restrictive operational constraints on their actions, COMSA and COGSA were able to be more proactive and interventionist than their counterparts in the UN, OAU and European Community missions. Generally, the actions of COMSA (and later, COGSA) drew praise, and its conflict resolution work in Natal was widely commended. Even so, given the scale of the problems faced, the limited numbers deployed and the relatively short-term nature of their deployment, their impact in any given area must have been limited. That said, whatever the threat of violence, it was very largely confined to highly localised areas of the East Rand and Natal, affecting no more than 10% of South Africa's population. The reach of the international observers prior to the elections was

¹⁰⁴⁴ Landsberg, *Quiet Diplomacy*, 224.

therefore greater than it might have appeared. However, in the circumstances of 'all-out' elections, held across the country, achieving meaningful impact everywhere was much more problematic. Of course, given that the electoral work of the four intergovernmental observer groups was co-ordinated by the UN to provide an integrated operation on the ground, all assistance no doubt proved valuable in coping with South Africa's considerable geography. There were many civil society and local observers, and official monitors, who helped improve scrutiny. It was also the case that (as in any election) the most pressing issues were in the areas of extreme party competition rather than in most districts where one or other party was dominant. Indisputably, the 1994 elections were beset by shortcomings and irregularities. For that reason, GOGSA avoided the trap of the 'free and fair' test, reported abuses and malpractice and urged that they be properly addressed. But, along with many others, it recognised the elections as the authentic final stage of South Africa's liberation. In the words of Waldmeir, "it was the perfect end to the negotiated revolution – a negotiated election."¹⁰⁴⁵

Guelke argues persuasively that the international community had considerable influence over the final stages of negotiations and transition. This involved promoting accepted definitions of political violence and the respective legitimacy of the various parties, as well as pressing for majoritarian principles in the constitutional dispensation.¹⁰⁴⁶ While it can be argued that the political parties were to some degree themselves the drivers of political violence, the presence of international observers, with leaders able to interact at the highest level with key South African figures, was a powerful restraint on any such actions. In the case of the Commonwealth, Anyaoku was regularly in contact with political leaders and, in turn, was sometimes asked to act as an intermediary. Similar capabilities were evident among COMSA, headed by Justice Amissah and Duncan Chappell, and with COGSA's chair and deputy-chair, Jamaica's Michael Manley and New Zealand's Archbishop Sir Paul Reeves, who had similar levels of skill, experience and status which allowed their voices to be heard. International support and acceptability, during the crucial period of transition, mattered to South Africa, to its leading parties and, perhaps not least, to its joint Nobel Peace Prize Winners, Mandela and de Klerk. Spence refers to the willingness of Mandela

¹⁰⁴⁵ Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle*, 262.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Guelke, *South Africa in Transition*, 151-153.

and de Klerk “to use the resources of private, informal diplomacy”, alongside “astute crisis management”, regardless of what may have been their public antagonism.¹⁰⁴⁷ External pressure, from governments and international organisations such as the Commonwealth, helped maintain the momentum of the negotiations, in the face of a deteriorating South African economy and rising popular expectations.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Spence, *Change in South Africa*, 8.

CONCLUSION

“How, of our divided peoples, can a great, healthy, harmonious
and desirable nation be formed?”¹⁰⁴⁸

Olive Schreiner, South Africa, 1923.

In 2002 the South African government instituted a national honour, *The Order of the Companions of O.R. Tambo*, to pay tribute to foreigners who had rendered exceptional service “to the efforts of the people of South Africa to define themselves as human beings”, in the example set by Oliver Tambo.¹⁰⁴⁹ Of its 110 current members, some 44 are Commonwealth citizens, many of them leading figures in the anti-apartheid struggle. In view of their ‘outstanding contribution to the ending of apartheid’, both Ramphal and Anyaoku have been inducted into the highest level of the Order, normally reserved for Heads of State.¹⁰⁵⁰ Manley, Mulroney, Fraser, Rajiv Gandhi and Kaunda are among those also honoured. No other international organisation is recognised to the same degree.

No full account has yet been written of the Commonwealth’s role in the ending of apartheid, but it is one which features strongly in the Commonwealth’s own mythology. Although an official history is missing, with nothing more definitive added to the Commonwealth Secretariat’s slim 1989 volume, there are numerous Commonwealth references confirming the campaign’s totemic quality.¹⁰⁵¹ There are also the biographies of some of those most closely involved and summary accounts, as well as oral histories. Reference has already been made to South Africa’s own initiative in documenting and assessing its recent past. Its account describes the Commonwealth’s role as ‘substantial’ but overlooks key elements of that history and does not attempt any overall assessment of the Commonwealth’s role.¹⁰⁵²

More commonly, aspects of the Commonwealth’s involvement are ignored, misrepresented or understated. On occasions, especially from a UK perspective, there

¹⁰⁴⁸ Olive Schreiner, *Thoughts on South Africa* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd, 1923), 63.

¹⁰⁴⁹ The Presidency, Republic of South Africa, *National Orders Booklet 2008*, accessed 3 March 2020, <http://www.the.presidency.gov.za/content/national-orders-booklet-2007>, 8.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Anyaoku, “The Commonwealth, Mandela and the Death of Apartheid,” 644.

¹⁰⁵¹ Emeka Anyaoku, “Development and Good Governance: Local Action, Global Reach,” *Secretary-General’s Biennial Report, 1995* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1995), 2.

¹⁰⁵² Houston, “Introduction,” *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, 1-40.

is a tendency to enlist Commonwealth actions as a subordinate narrative of British policy and practice. Where a Commonwealth contribution is acknowledged, it can sometimes lead to an overall assessment that is dismissed as ‘uneven’ or ‘insubstantial’ although often without proper explanation.¹⁰⁵³ In any case, analysing what part the Commonwealth played in the international campaign against apartheid raises a pre-existing question about the impact of external forces in helping bring about apartheid’s demise. Set alongside the resistance of South Africans themselves, with numerous stories of forbearance, courage and self-sacrifice, forgiveness and redemption, it may appear a small thing indeed. Within South Africa itself, there has been a growth in recent years in ‘struggle’ literature, which shines a light on hitherto neglected aspects of mass resistance to apartheid and counteracts the tendency of some to ascribe decisive change solely to the actions of two men, Mandela and de Klerk.¹⁰⁵⁴ This emphasis on the internal struggle chimes with a Marxist analysis of the failings of the post-apartheid state amid highly racialised economic and social inequalities.¹⁰⁵⁵

At the same time, there is a large body of historical writing, inside and outside South Africa, which acknowledges the international dimension in the anti-apartheid cause. It was an aspect of the struggle which was widely recognised at the time, has been honoured subsequently, and is now part of South Africa’s public history. Guelke is among those who believes that the significance of international pressure and norms has been underplayed.¹⁰⁵⁶ He considers that the influence of the international community was evident in “a myriad of different ways”. Crucially, he sees the international commitment to democratic majoritarianism having a decisive impact on the transition process.¹⁰⁵⁷

This thesis does not attempt to untangle the multiplicity of forces which contributed to apartheid’s ending, whether internal or external. Ultimately, it was the part that the people of South Africa, of all races, played in reaching a negotiated settlement that proved crucial. At the same time, this thesis is underpinned by the conclusion that the

¹⁰⁵³ Deryck Schreuder, “The Commonwealth and Peacemaking in South Africa,” in *Peace, Politics and Violence in the New South Africa*, ed. Norman Hetherington (London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1992), 75.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Simon Jenkins, Talk to a meeting of *The Round Table*, 17 January 2020, London, author’s notes.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Kirk Helliker and Peter Vale, “Radical Thinking in South Africa’s Age of Retreat,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 47:4 (2012): 338-9.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Guelke, *South Africa in Transition*, 135.

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

international campaign against apartheid, whether of governments, international organisations or the global anti-apartheid movement, made an important contribution to its ending. It brought pressure to bear on the regime, it succoured and sustained the forces of opposition and in various ways it supported and helped determine the course of the final settlement.

Within that paradigm lies the central research question of this thesis. What was the significance of the Commonwealth's contribution to that international campaign? Was it minimal, for all or any of apartheid's ascendancy? Was it sustained and persistent, or sporadic and uneven, as some have suggested? What forms did it take and how can the Commonwealth's actions be measured to assess their impact, and therefore their significance? In what ways did the Commonwealth's prolonged engagement with apartheid lead to changes within the association itself?

In seeking to answer these questions, I have provided an original analysis of the Commonwealth and apartheid which, while it could never be wholly comprehensive within a doctoral thesis, provides a framework and measures of impact for comparing and assessing the Commonwealth's role across the four decades or so of apartheid's existence. No detailed assessment of this kind has yet been undertaken and none, insofar as I am aware, has been able to access the Commonwealth's archives after 1990 for what was a crucial period of engagement in the transition from apartheid. The result is a study which challenges several myths. The first of these is that the Commonwealth, in its modern guise, was an implacable opponent of apartheid from 1949 until that system's demise in 1994. The second myth was that the Commonwealth's overall opposition to apartheid throughout the period was insubstantial and variable, being "at best very marginal".¹⁰⁵⁸

In the first case study, the thesis addresses the pressure which, in 1960-1961, eventually led to South Africa's exit from the Commonwealth. At this point, the Commonwealth was largely post-imperial in its leadership, structures and purposes. While individual member countries made clear their opposition to apartheid elsewhere, the association collectively remained mute. By 1960, there were two developments

¹⁰⁵⁸ Chris Saunders, "Britain, the Commonwealth, and the Question of the Release of Nelson Mandela in the 1980s," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 106: 6 (2017): 659.

which were transformative. First, changes to the membership of both international organisations brought about what Donnelly describes as “a change in the structure of international power.”¹⁰⁵⁹ In the case of the UN, there was a significant increase in African membership, which altered the dynamics in the General Assembly. In the Commonwealth, an influx of new members resulted in what has been characterised by Ali Mazrui as “the Afro-Asian takeover” of the organisation, with the ‘new’, developing Commonwealth membership in the ascendancy. The second of Donnelly’s variables was an “international moral shock” profoundly affecting the prevailing international political culture.¹⁰⁶⁰ Sharpeville, Stultz argues, was just such a shock. At the UN, Sharpeville hardened opinion against South Africa, shifted the UK and France away from their steady support for Pretoria, and undermined the argument that Article 2(7) of the Charter prevented the UN from acting on apartheid. A new arena of debate therefore opened with the involvement of the UN Security Council. Even so, the UN remained in ‘declaratory mode’, “the most elementary and weakest of international regime types.”¹⁰⁶¹

By 1961, steps were taken which led to South Africa’s departure from the Commonwealth.¹⁰⁶² South Africa’s non-white, extra-parliamentary opposition had joined forces with some Commonwealth governments and with the emerging anti-apartheid movement to campaign for the apartheid regime’s exclusion from the association. While the uncertain signals from Commonwealth governments eventually resolved into a clear view of South Africa’s exit, it was far from being an expulsion, as it is sometimes characterised. Nevertheless, the significance of the decision should not be underestimated, regardless of the hesitancy about its execution or the potentially grave consequences for the Commonwealth had it not so acted. In 1970, South Africa was expelled from the Olympic movement, having been barred from the Games since 1964. In 1974, it was prevented from participating in the UN General Assembly. Even though in the short-term South Africa’s exit from the Commonwealth was received as a triumph for Afrikanerdom and arguably strengthened apartheid’s dominance and its allegiance among white South Africans, it nonetheless represented the regime’s first step into isolation and pariah status. It altered the terms of

¹⁰⁵⁹ Donnelly, “International Human Rights: A Regime Analysis,” 614.

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 636.

¹⁰⁶¹ Stultz, “Evolution of the United Nations Anti-Apartheid Regime,” 2.

¹⁰⁶² Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 67.

international debate and increased acceptance of the emerging global norm of racial equality. It saw the beginnings of a world-wide campaign against apartheid and, in the Commonwealth itself, hastened far-reaching changes to its governance and leadership.

The second case study argues that the Commonwealth's preoccupation with the white settler regime in Rhodesia, after UDI in 1965, should be seen as an intrinsic part of the Commonwealth's wider campaign against apartheid. 1965 also saw the birth of the Commonwealth Secretariat (and Foundation) and the appointment of the first Commonwealth Secretary-General, Arnold Smith. Despite profound differences with the British government on Rhodesia, the Commonwealth's newly established decision-making bodies were able to develop a distinctive approach to the crisis, including in monitoring international sanctions, while accepting the UK's ultimate responsibility for the colony. As Smith put it: "It was crucially important to prevent a sell-out and to hold the line in Rhodesia until the necessary international and domestic pressures could be developed to bring about majority rule."¹⁰⁶³ Later, the Commonwealth had an important role in the ending of white rule, a constitutional settlement and the birth of Zimbabwe.

This was also true of the question of arm sales to the Republic. In 1971, the Commonwealth was plunged into crisis by the new UK government's announcement that it intended to resume arm sales to South Africa. While the Commonwealth could resort only to declaratory actions, its Singapore Declaration on Racial Prejudice nonetheless established an important set of principles which provided the normative framework for the Commonwealth's actions over apartheid for the next twenty years.¹⁰⁶⁴ In practice, the UK's resumption of arm supplies was very limited and within a few years a change of government had seen supply finally halted and the Simonstown agreement terminated. At the UN, the 1963 voluntary ban on arms sales was criticised as being "in practical fact non-existent."¹⁰⁶⁵ It became mandatory in

¹⁰⁶³ Smith, *Stitches in Time*, 75.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 156.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Sean Gervasi, "The breakdown of the arms embargo against South Africa," Testimony before Sub-Committee on Africa, US House of Representatives, 14 July 1977, *A Journal of Opinion* 7: 4 (1977): 27.

1977.¹⁰⁶⁶ While this enforcement action was the last of the sanctions against South Africa to be lifted, its effects were mixed.¹⁰⁶⁷

The Soweto students' revolt of 1976, with its graphic image of a dying 13-year old Oscar Pietersen murdered by the South African Police, provided the world with another international moral shock. After what some have described as the golden age of apartheid, a new resistance was taking root in South Africa's townships. It came at a time when white colonial rule on apartheid's frontiers – in Mozambique, Angola and Rhodesia – was collapsing and ceding power to African nationalism. Under Secretary-General Ramphal the Commonwealth now assumed new agency in driving forward the sporting boycott. Ramphal had a reputation in the Non-Aligned Movement as a rising star of the Third World. As he explained, "I came to the job as Foreign Minister of a country that was leading its region in support of these liberation movements."¹⁰⁶⁸

Faced with the threat of boycott of the 1978 Commonwealth Games, Ramphal knew that the Commonwealth would need to act at the 1977 London CHOGM. At the Gleneagles Retreat, Ramphal first developed a multilateral diplomatic method which was to bring a reluctant Muldoon on board and secure the unanimous adoption of the 1977 Gleneagles Agreement on Apartheid in Sport. In Donnelly's terms, the Agreement was declaratory, promotional and involved enforcement action, at least within the permissive remit of Commonwealth governance. It was an elaboration of the norm of racial equality set out in the Singapore Declaration. It was also a promotional accord, insofar as it "welcomed the efforts of the UN to reach universally accepted approaches to the question of sporting contacts" and set out its own commitments, by each country individually, to the undertakings in the Agreement.¹⁰⁶⁹

Gleneagles undoubtedly made a significant contribution to internationalising measures against apartheid in sport. It gave fresh stimulus to the rise in popular anti-apartheid activism in the period and closed down another aspect of South Africa's relations with the wider world. The sporting boycott proved to be particularly keenly felt by South

¹⁰⁶⁶ UNSC Resolution 418, November 1977, accessed 6 January 2020, [http://www.undocs.org/S/RES/418\(1977\)](http://www.undocs.org/S/RES/418(1977)).

¹⁰⁶⁷ UNSC Resolution 919, May 1994, accessed 6 January 2020, [http://www.undocs.org/S/RES/919\(1994\)](http://www.undocs.org/S/RES/919(1994)).

¹⁰⁶⁸ Shridath Ramphal, interviewed by Sue Onslow, 23 November 2013, *Commonwealth Oral History Project*, London, accessed 20 October 2017, <http://www.sas-space.sas.ac.uk/5900/1/Shridath%20Ramphal%20Transcript%201>.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit* (Vol.1), 199.

African whites, as South Africa retreated into near total isolation. At the same time, critics attacked Gleneagles for lacking teeth. As a result, there would be recurring issues of implementation (and interpretation) and bitter battles, with New Zealand in particular. In the process, Ramphal stretched to the limit the influence available to him in pressing for compliance and for the extra powers needed to enforce Gleneagles. In this he was largely successful. But, as the Commonwealth clashed with Thatcher over sanctions as well as sport, Ramphal could not prevent a disastrous boycott of the 1986 Commonwealth Games by most of its new Commonwealth members.

Two years after the adoption of the Gleneagles Agreement, Ramphal was to be deeply involved in the settlement reached at the 1979 Lusaka CHOGM on Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, the Lancaster House talks which followed, and Zimbabwe's transition to independence in 1980. As with the development of the Commonwealth's diplomatic methods over sport, new diplomatic mechanisms and techniques were honed as part of a distinctive Commonwealth contribution to Zimbabwe's birth.

The third case study explores the fresh energy given to the Commonwealth's campaign against apartheid following peace in Zimbabwe. The Commonwealth Accord on Southern Africa set out a two-pronged strategy for the Commonwealth.¹⁰⁷⁰ On the one hand, it resolved to further pressurise and isolate the South African government by the adoption of economic sanctions. On the other, the association delayed further sanctions while it explored the path of mediation. This opened the way for the 1986 Commonwealth EPG Mission to South Africa, with its ambitious remit to negotiate the end of apartheid. After extensive consultations, including with an imprisoned Mandela, the Commonwealth's 'possible negotiating concept' came close to acceptance. Ultimately, the regime effectively aborted the mission with the SADF's surprise attack on three Commonwealth neighbours in May 1986.

The ostensible failure of the EPG's mission resulted in a critical report which became a Penguin bestseller and provided impetus to the widening campaign for economic sanctions.¹⁰⁷¹ The influence of the report was not only exhortatory: a Commonwealth demarche to key capitals led to the EPG's co-chairs being on hand to give specific advice to Congressional leaders in the USA, as they introduced anti-apartheid

¹⁰⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 267-9.

¹⁰⁷¹ Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons, *Mission to South Africa*, 140-141.

legislation. As well as the Commonwealth, the European Union, the USA and Japan were among those adopting further sanctions. While the 1986 Special Commonwealth Summit in London marked a widening rift with Thatcher and the UK government over sanctions (marking the 'binary' Commonwealth), Commonwealth leaders placed increasing emphasis on financial pressures and divestment. In late 1989, FW de Klerk replaced the ailing PW Botha and the seeds of irreversible change began to germinate.

How significant were the Commonwealth's actions in both respects? It is undeniable that the EPG was granted unprecedented and unfettered access to all shades of South African political opinion, including to Mandela. No other international organisation had achieved anything of that kind before. It also managed to establish a basis of negotiation which won the support of the ANC, as well as Mandela, and came close to being accepted by the government. For the next four years, the leadership of white South Africa, in covert dialogue with a still-imprisoned Mandela, and other informal negotiating groups, wrestled with the unresolved issue exposed by the EPG. If free dialogue could be established between the principal parties based on the suspension of violence, how could either side be prevented at a later stage from abandoning peaceful negotiations and pushing South Africa into uncontrolled violence? This was a fundamental question which hung over South Africa's transition from 1991 until it was finally answered in March 1994 with the 'freedom' elections which marked apartheid's end.

The literature generally has tended to minimise and view in isolation the Commonwealth's EPG initiative. This thesis contends that the mission's engagement was prolonged, substantial and politically significant and should be seen as part of a pattern of pre-negotiations, in particular with Mandela, now evident in the period from 1986-1989. The failure of the EPG negotiations inevitably led to renewed pressure for enhanced sanctions. Clearly, the absence of the UK from further Commonwealth sanctions severely diminished their impact. However, the Commonwealth made a strong contribution to the international sanctions campaign. Its own sanctions were not insignificant; it helped to 'internationalise' sanctions, particularly in the USA; and it was a powerful advocate of financial sanctions, which proved highly effective. Taken together, the Commonwealth's twin-track approach, of sanctions and negotiations came at an important moment.

The fourth and final case study explores the Commonwealth's new strategic path following the release of Nelson Mandela and the beginnings of fundamental change within South Africa. After the turbulence of the Thatcher years, the 1991 Harare summit marked a rapprochement which sought a new unity between the UK and other Commonwealth countries, based on the values adopted in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration. Anyaoku's mission to South Africa, in November 1991, began to give substance to the notion of renewed engagement. There were few in South Africa, apart from the PAC, who wanted the international community to have any role in the internal negotiating process itself.¹⁰⁷² However, it was inescapable that the principal parties to South Africa's negotiations would look to the international community from time to time. A case in point was the question of lifting sanctions. The ANC and others were strongly opposed to the early raising of sanctions because they saw their continued application as constituting an important pressure on the regime during negotiations. This was despite the 'pro-business' approach of Mandela since his release and the ANC's desire not to inherit a broken-backed economy. At the same time, caution over lifting sanctions was not apparent when it came to normalising sporting links and South Africa's participation in major sporting events.¹⁰⁷³ This suited both the ANC and the NP, with the end of the sporting boycott featuring prominently in the whites-only referendum, of March 1992, approving de Klerk's negotiation strategy.¹⁰⁷⁴

Anyaoku's early attempts to develop a role for the Commonwealth and other international organisations resulted in the presence of international observers at CODESA. But, in the face of alarming degrees of internal violence, and the negative impact this had on the faltering negotiation process, an acceptance of a wider international role began to emerge. If Anyaoku was not the only advocate of the deployment of international observers to address the violence, he undoubtedly played an important role in encouraging the UN to act, through the adoption of UNSC resolution 772/92.

What thereafter was the impact of the Commonwealth on the ground in South Africa during the transition period? This involved the three phases of COMSA's deployment

¹⁰⁷² Correspondence from Emeka Anyaoku to Lynden Pindling, Prime Minister of the Bahamas, 8 November 1991, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/025, 2.

¹⁰⁷³ In 1992, South Africa participated in the Cricket World Cup in Melbourne, Australia (22 February-25 March) and the Summer Olympics in Barcelona, Spain (25 July-9 August).

¹⁰⁷⁴ Guelke, *South Africa in Transition*, 140-1.

between 1992-1994, including its role in mediation and dispute resolution in Kwa-Zulu/Natal under the provisions of the National Peace Accord. COMSA also investigated issues relating to violence and security, and the administration of justice. It ran schemes for the training of marshals and provided a substantial international military and police unit (CPAG) in the training of the ill-fated NPKP. As the elections approached, it provided electoral experts to assist the Electoral Commission. The organisation also deployed a Commonwealth Observer Mission to the elections (COGSA), the largest ever mounted by the Commonwealth, before or since.¹⁰⁷⁵ After the elections, support was given to the new government's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), and for many years there were continuing programmes for scholarships, fellowships and training for South African refugees. Notably, the Commonwealth's ability to rapidly mobilise quality technical assistance drew the approval of the UN.¹⁰⁷⁶

Purely quantitatively, in terms of expenditure and human resources, the United Nations' operations dwarfed those of the Commonwealth. But, compared to the modest size of the Secretariat's regular budget, expenditure on its anti-apartheid activities was considerable. COGSA, for example, had a core budget for the 1994 elections of £500,000 (at 1994 prices) though member governments provided in-kind support, in addition to special budgetary contributions. COMSA, across its three phases, had a much smaller core budget, with the burden of providing for the costs of the mission's individual observers spread across participating countries. The EPG initiative had a core budget of £1m which did not include much of the personnel costs or the very considerable expenditure by the Canadian Government in providing a Challenger aircraft, with a full crew, fuel and associated costs, for shuttle travel across the Southern Africa region, for weeks at a time. Together, this amounted to many millions of pounds. Even so, there was much more that could have been done, had

¹⁰⁷⁵ Letter from Anthony Goodenough, FCO, to Emeka Anyaoku, commenting on the 1994 elections and the "Commonwealth's special expertise and experience in election monitoring," 2 June 1994, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/019, 1.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Memorandum from John Syson to Emeka Anyaoku, "UNOMSA's Tribute to Commonwealth Technical Assistance Programme," 28 June 1994, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/019, 1.

the resources been available. As it was, COMSA's operations were threatened early in its life by a shortage of funds.¹⁰⁷⁷

In qualitative terms, the Commonwealth asserts that despite its smaller financial and human resources, it was able to 'punch above its weight'. There is supporting evidence for this, both in the qualifications, skills and standing of serving personnel and the preparedness of the Commonwealth to push its mandate to the limit.¹⁰⁷⁸ This was true of mediation and also in analysing shortcomings and promoting policy advice, sometimes to the public irritation of the regime. Crucially, field staff within South Africa were in close and regular contact with the Secretary-General and his office and would trigger interventions from Ramphal or Anyaoku where this could be useful or had been requested by one of the parties to negotiations. For example, COMSA's operations in KwaZulu-Natal highlighted the urgent need for a peace summit between Mandela and Buthelezi (with the aim of bringing the IFP into the political process) and Anyaoku's help was sought in this task.¹⁰⁷⁹

Across the four case studies explored, what conclusions can be reached about the central research question at the heart of this thesis? What overall assessment can be made of the distinctiveness and significance of the Commonwealth's collective contribution to the international campaign against apartheid? My response, first, is to draw upon Donnelly's categories of international action. These have merit in helping refine the areas of Commonwealth pressure and offering some measure of impact. The key Commonwealth interventions were concerned with, first, isolating apartheid (in withdrawing Commonwealth membership from South Africa, pressing for an effective arms embargo, leading the sporting boycott of apartheid, helping end the viability of Rhodesia as a white-settler state, and encouraging economic and financial sanctions). These were all types of *enforcement* action. Secondly, in the later stages of the relationship with South Africa, the Commonwealth approach was collaborative and *implementing* (in terms of the EPG initiative and negotiations, the mediatory role during the transition, as well as local examples of conflict-resolution). From 1960, the

¹⁰⁷⁷ Letter from Emeka Anyaoku to Paul Keating, Prime Minister of Australia, 10 December 1992, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/002, 2.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Confidential Report, "European Community Observer Mission in South Africa, October 1992 – April 1993," Commonwealth Secretariat archives, A18.2, 2.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Record of a telephone conversation between Emeka Anyaoku and Pik Botha, 24 November 1992, Commonwealth Secretariat archives, SGAN/09/002, 2.

Commonwealth also accompanied its actions by *declaratory* statements and declarations, as well as *promotional* activity, including its work with civil society and the global anti-apartheid movement. Although 'weaker' actions ostensibly, these last two steps helped develop and spread international norms that were particularly influential in South Africa's transition phase.

Of course, none of this is necessarily evidence that any of these actions on their own were effective in bringing about change but my contention is that, collectively, their impact proved decisive. There are contrasting views on the effectiveness of isolation and the various forms of international pressure, including economic and financial sanctions, which bore down on the regime. In many ways, South Africa was successful in dealing with punitive measures. It was able to circumvent the arms embargo and build its own arms industry. It countered the oil embargo by buying on the black market. But these countermeasures were achieved at a very considerable price, as van Vuuren has demonstrated.¹⁰⁸⁰ South Africa could afford to take such extraordinary steps when its economy was buoyant, with a current account surplus, substantial inward investment and ready access to international credit. When that was no longer the case, when 'forward defence' beyond South Africa's borders was failing, when containing township violence threatened internal stability and when 'reforming apartheid' had reached its limits, then white rule was no longer sustainable.¹⁰⁸¹ It was therefore the combination of circumstances, rather than any particular action in itself, which proved decisive.

A critical underlying theme was the issue of violence. From 1975, the Commonwealth (with the exception of Britain) made clear its support for the liberation forces, and therefore armed struggle, in Rhodesia and thereafter in South Africa itself. Some Commonwealth countries, particularly in the frontline states, provided those forces with bases and material support, often to the significant detriment of the host state concerned. The unresolved issue of violence in the end unravelled the promise of the EPG mission, and violence could so nearly have destroyed South Africa's transition process.¹⁰⁸² Ultimately, aware of the new realities of a post-cold war world, white South

33 van Vuuren, *Apartheid, Guns and Money*, 103.

¹⁰⁸¹ Hermann Giliomee, "Intra-Afrikaner conflicts in the transition from apartheid 1961-1991," in *Peace, Politics and Violence*, 190.

¹⁰⁸² Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 726.

Africans looked into the abyss of interracial conflict. Even if victory was possible (in the short-term at least), a negotiated transfer of power was now far more likely to preserve white wealth and privilege than a destructive internecine war.¹⁰⁸³

The Commonwealth was not therefore neutral on the question of violence or its root cause – apartheid. But it twice proved able, in 1985-1986 and 1991-1994, to use its by now developed status as an international organisation representing a broad range of countries to offer itself to South Africa as interlocutor and facilitator. This was not only because of the leadership qualities of its secretaries-general and the diplomatic method they used; it was also crucially dependent on the leadership evident in member countries across the Commonwealth, sometimes in Presidents and Prime Ministers but also among campaigners, politicians and writers. In the case of the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth remained caught in its symbiotic embrace: a country sometimes difficult to live with, and impossible to live without. At the same time, that close relationship brought influence on the former metropolitan power to a far greater extent than that of Francophone Africa on France.¹⁰⁸⁴ By working on the ambiguities of Britain's South Africa policies, the Commonwealth was on the frontier of the battle over apartheid. But, once those differences were past, the UK helped remake the Commonwealth as a rule- and values-based association with an adopted Charter, common institutions and established conventions.

After the 1994 elections the UN Security Council commended the 'vital role' played by the UN, the Commonwealth, the OAU and the EU in helping bring about a democratic, non-racial South Africa.¹⁰⁸⁵ Did South Africa also recognise as significant the Commonwealth contribution to the ending of apartheid? Many said so at the time, and South Africa's speedy resumption of Commonwealth membership is a testament to the organisation's global connections and its usefulness as an anti-apartheid ally. In May 2020 in South Africa's parliament, President Cyril Ramaphosa was urged by Vuyo Zungula, leader of the African Transformation Movement, to pull South Africa out of the Commonwealth because of its colonial origins. Ramaphosa replied that his government had no intention of pulling South Africa out of the Commonwealth and

¹⁰⁸³ Joan Wardrop, "The State, Politics and Violence 1989-91," in *Peace, Politics and Violence*, 68.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Anirudha Gupta, "Arms, African States and the Commonwealth," *Economic and Political Weekly* 6: 14 (1971): 749.

¹⁰⁸⁵ UNSC Resolution 930, 27 June 1994, accessed 3 March 2018, <http://www.undocs.org/S/RES/930> (1994).

emphasised that the country took its membership seriously. He then added: “When South Africa re-joined the Commonwealth in 1994, shortly after its first democratic elections, the South African Government recognised the Commonwealth’s contribution to the global campaign to end apartheid.”¹⁰⁸⁶ As one of those in the vanguard of the ANC at the point of liberation, Ramaphosa had special reason to recall his links with the Commonwealth and the value of the international campaign. However, I hope that this thesis will also go a considerable way in demonstrating that the Commonwealth’s contribution to ending apartheid was substantial, sustained and significant. That contribution was not defined in terms of volume of resources or scale of actions. Its substance and significance arose from the combination of institutional flexibility and creative multipolar leadership, working on the internal fault lines of conflicted interest. In 1986, on the issue of sanctions, the organisation could no longer sustain its unity and, for the period of the ‘binary Commonwealth’ broke free of its mutual interdependence. While this may have been necessary for both the UK and the majority of the Commonwealth at that time, neither benefitted in the longer term and the Commonwealth came together again in 1990. As a result, as it returned to grappling with contradiction, the Commonwealth was again able to be both pathfinder and interlocutor on the pathway to South Africa’s freedom.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Bongani Nkosi, “South Africa has No Intention of Pulling Out of the Commonwealth - Ramaphosa.” *The Star*, 20 May 2020. Accessed 4 August 2020, <https://www.iol.co.za/the-star/news/south-africa-has-no-intention-of-pulling-out-of-the-commonwealth-ramaphosa-48z13043>.

APPENDIX 1: COMMONWEALTH MEMBER COUNTRIES 1945-1995

**Countries in membership of the Commonwealth of Nations
during the research period.**

Country	Commonwealth Member	UN Member	Constitutional Status
United Kingdom	1931	1945	Monarchy/Realm ⁱ
Canada	1931	1945	Monarchy/Realm
Australia	1931	1945	Monarchy/Realm
Ireland	1931-1949 ⁱⁱ	1945	Monarchy/Rep.1949
Newfoundland	1931-1949 ⁱⁱⁱ	-	Monarchy/(Realm)
New Zealand	1931	1945	Monarchy/Realm ^{iv}
South Africa	1931-1961, 1994-	1945	Monarchy/Rep.1961
India	1947	1945 ^v	Monarchy/Rep.1950
Pakistan	1947-1972, 1989-	1947	Monarchy/Rep.1956
Ceylon /Sri Lanka	1948	1955	Monarchy/Rep.1972
Ghana	1957	1957	Monarchy/Rep.1960
Malaya /Malaysia	1957	1957	Malaysian Monarchy
Nigeria	1960	1960	Monarchy/Rep.1963
Cyprus	1961	1960	Republic
Sierra Leone	1961	1961	Monarchy/Rep.1971
Tanganyika /Tanzania 1964	1961	1961	Monarchy/Rep.1962
Jamaica	1962	1962	Monarchy/ Realm
Trinidad & Tobago	1962	1962	Monarchy/Rep.1976
Uganda	1962	1962	Monarchy/Rep.1963
Kenya	1963	1963	Monarchy/Rep.1964
Zanzibar /Tanzania	1963	1963	Sultanate/Rep.1964
Malawi	1964	1964	Monarchy/Rep.1966
Malta	1964	1964	Monarchy/Rep.1974
Zambia	1964	1964	Republic
The Gambia	1965-2013, 2018-	1965	Monarchy/Rep.1970
Singapore	1965	1965	Republic
Guyana	1966	1966	Monarchy/Rep.1970
Botswana	1966	1966	Republic
Lesotho	1966	1966	Lesotho monarchy
Barbados	1966	1966	Monarchy/Realm
Mauritius	1968	1968	Monarchy/Rep.1992
Swaziland /eSwatini	1968	1968	Swazi monarchy
Nauru	1968	1999	Republic
Tonga	1970	1999	Tonga monarchy
Western Samoa/Samoa	1970 (ind.1962)	1976	Samoa Head of State

Fiji	1970-1987, 1997-	1970	Monarchy/Rep.1987
Bangladesh	1972	1974	Republic
Bahamas	1973	1973	Monarchy/Realm
Grenada	1974	1974	Monarchy/Realm
Papua New Guinea	1975	1975	Monarchy/Realm
Seychelles	1976	1976	Republic
Solomon Islands	1978	1978	Monarchy/Realm
Tuvalu	1978	2000	Monarchy/Realm
Dominica	1978	1978	Republic
St Lucia	1979	1979	Monarchy/Realm
Kiribati	1979	1999	Republic
St Vincent and the Grenadines	1979	1980	Monarchy/Realm
Zimbabwe	1980-2003	1980	Republic
Vanuatu	1980	1981	Republic
Belize	1981	1981	Monarchy/Realm
Antigua and Barbuda	1981	1981	Monarchy/Realm
Maldives (ind.1965)	1982-2016, 2020-	1965	Republic
St Kitts and Nevis	1983	1983	Monarchy/Realm
Brunei Darussalam	1984	1984	Brunei Sultanate
Namibia	1990	1990	Republic
Cameroon (ind.1961)	1995	1960	Republic
Mozambique (ind.1975)	1995	1975	Republic

End Notes:

ⁱ There are currently sixteen Commonwealth realms (including the UK) with Queen Elizabeth II as their monarch and head of state.

ⁱⁱ Ireland ceased to be a Commonwealth dominion on 18 April 1949, with the coming into force of the Republic of Ireland Act 1948. However, the Irish Government effectively withdrew from participation in Commonwealth affairs with end of the Irish Free State in 1937.

ⁱⁱⁱ Newfoundland, an original Commonwealth dominion, voluntarily suspended self-government in 1934, accepting rule by a British-appointed Commission of Government until 1949, when it chose confederation with Canada. It was not independently represented at Commonwealth meetings between 1945 and 1949.

^v India joined the United Nations at its foundation in 1945, under the British Raj. Pakistan joined the UN in 1947, with the creation of an independent Pakistan.

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- **Shridath Ramphal (Guyana)**, former Commonwealth Secretary-General and Foreign Minister. First interview: 31 May 2011 (EPG); second: 12 June 2011, London.
- **Patsy Robertson (Jamaica)**, former Commonwealth and UN media specialist. Interview: 11 July 2019, London.
- **Mark Robinson (UK)**, former Minister, MP & diplomat. Interview: 31 January 2017, Bristol.
- **Clyde Sanger (Canada)**, journalist and author, former Commonwealth Secretariat media adviser. Online interview: 7 December 2012.

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- **David Steel (UK)**, peer, former MP/MSP and President AAM. Interview: 14 November 2017, London.

Group Interviews

- **Witness Seminar:** “Negotiating with Apartheid: The Mission of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group 1986.” 13 June 2011, University of London. Supported by the British Academy.

Archival Sources

- a) **Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives** 1956-1998 (Bodleian Library, Oxford)

B.1.1. Annual Reports and political reports, 1962-93.

I.2 CODESA and Negotiations, 1990-1994.

L. Commonwealth, 1960-1994: MSS AAM 1293-1305.

Main research focus on Commonwealth files concerning correspondence with Secretariat and member countries, reports and contact with Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa and Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings 1960-1993. Also: South Africa’s departure from the Commonwealth, 1960-1961; the Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons, 1985-1986; Evaluation and implementation of Commonwealth sanctions, 1988-1989; and South Africa’s return to the Commonwealth, 1994.

- b) **Commonwealth archives** (Commonwealth Secretariat, London)

1965-1973: Secretariat’s formation/Rhodesia/Arm Sales to South Africa.

IS1/99/2/67; 2001/39, 2001/110, 2002/36. 2005/019, 2012/073, 2008/110, 2008/111.

1975-1981: Sport and apartheid/Rhodesia to Zimbabwe.

2010/055, pt.1; 2011/118, pts 2-3; 2011/266, pts1-3; 2011/120; 2012/074, pt.2; 2012/234, 235; 2013/093, 094, 096,116, 153, 154; APP 85/53, 354; APP 86/038; APP 87/396; APP 88/461.

1983-1989: Commonwealth Accord/Mission of EPG/Sanctions.

COMGEP; COMGEP/40/01, 01/B05, 02/B, 03/B, 04A, 04C, 04D, 04E, 04F, 04/01A 04/01/A02, 04/01/B02, 04/01/B03, 04/01/B04, 04/01C, 04/01D, 04/01E, 04/01F 04/01G, 04/02, 04/02B, 04/02A05, 6, 06A, 06; APP86/037-040, 346-348.

1991-1994: Harare/SG's mission, negotiations/COMSA, violence/1994 elections.

SG/COM/HGM, SGAN/03/008, 010, 011, 012, 013, 014, 015, 016, 044, 046, 049. SGAN/08/001; SGAN/09/002, 003, 004, 005, 008, 009, 012, 016, 019, 021, 022, 025, 033, 037, 046, 075, 093. C.152/15/1, C.152/16/01, 02-3pts, 03-2pts, 14; C.152/40/01, 03, 07, 09. I40/3-1 (CODESA).

**c) Department for International Relations & Cooperation, Republic of South Africa
– Archives**

Commonwealth File no. 8/1/1

FOI requests resulting in assorted Commonwealth material relating to South Africa, particularly concerning transitional activity between 1990 and 1994.

d) Historical Papers, University of Witwatersrand (William Cullen Library, Wits University, Johannesburg)

AD 1502-B-Bb-Bb2-Bb2.50: The Republic and the Commonwealth.

AG 883-C-c9: Speakers Notes (1960-1981).

A 3217, AG 2543, AG 2510: Violence in South Africa.

AG 2466: Commonwealth and transition.

Historical archives provided five main areas of inquiry: (a) material on Republic referendum and South Africa's Commonwealth exit, including Alan Paton papers; (b) material on Rhodesian UDI and impact on South Africa; (c) Sporting boycott and its domestic impact; (d) EPG mission and sanctions issue, including Helen Suzman papers; and (e) material on violence and transition and the Commonwealth role.

e) National Archives of South Africa (Hamilton Street, Pretoria)

SAB*BTS*LEER*01: ref.1/20/95 (3,4,5,29); ref.1/20/9 (1,2,3,4).

Files principally concerned with South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth and the UK's future relationship with the Republic following withdrawal, including trade and imperial preferences.

Box A13: Vols.34, 35; A.14: 36, 37; A15: 39, 39 (1985-1988) – Nelson Mandela Prison Files (Correctional Services).

Application made and acceptance of request by archivist but no further response.

f) National Archives of the United Kingdom (Kew, London)

1945-1961: Post-War developments in Commonwealth/ SA's departure.

CAB/128/13/33; CAB/128/15/17; CAB 128/34/29; CAB 128/34/30; CAB/129/30/14; CAB/129/31/2, 13, 37; CAB/129/35/29; CAB/129/45/34; CAB/129/49/28; CAB/129/60/21; CAB/129/71/7; CAB/129/78/32. DO/35/10733. DO/161/102, 106, 118, 127. DO/180/4. DO/181/1. FCO/13/881. FCO/45/656, 958; FO/371/161898, 177101, 177179; COS (61) 160.

1965-1981: Development of Secretariat/Exit of SA/Rhodesia to Zimbabwe/ Arm sales to South Africa/sport and apartheid, Gleneagles Agreement.

CAB/128/66/12, 13, 19, 22; CAB/129/207/3; FCO/13/881; FCO/45/2138, 2139, 2140. DO/105/290; PREM/19/0376, PREM/19/3568.

1983-1989: Sanctions debate/Mission of EPG/Commonwealth summits.

FCO/105/2034,2035,2036, 2422/2, 3572, 3575; DCO 105/3575

g) Nelson Mandela Foundation Archive (Houghton, Johannesburg)

Box 4. File 2 - Notes and Notebooks: Commonwealth, International.

Material retrieved by Foundation archivist relating to Mandela's meeting with the EPG in 1986 and his subsequent involvement, as President of South Africa, in various Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings from 1995-1999.

h) South African History Archive (Constitution Hill, Johannesburg)

AL3050 – The Joseph Hanlon Collection

12 boxes, including correspondence, speeches, press releases, reports, newspaper cuttings and research data relating to Hanlon's work with the Commonwealth, 1980-1990, particularly regarding international and Commonwealth sanctions and their impact.

i) UCT Archives/Special Collections (Jagger Library, UCT, Cape Town)

BC345 - Margaret Ballinger Papers & BC347 WG Ballinger Papers

BC347 – Republic Referendum and the Commonwealth 1960

BC1329 - Colin Legum Papers

BC1103 - Colin Eglin Papers

Ballinger Papers and other boxes relating to 1960-1961 period in particular, including the 1960 referendum on the Republic; Legum Papers relating to Commonwealth meetings on Rhodesia and South Africa between 1964 and 1993; Colin Eglin Papers on Progressive Party

engagements with the Commonwealth including the EPG and on sanctions. Also material covering sport and apartheid in Western Province, and local community and women's activism, including ANC and Black Sash, in Crossroads and Cape Town.

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