CHAPTER 2

EXIT OF SOUTH AFRICA FROM THE COMMONWEALTH

In the 1950's, South Africa had an advantageous position in the Commonwealth. It was a founding member of the Commonwealth. The entry of the Republic of India into the Commonwealth in 1949 removed an obstacle that had been preventing South Africa from becoming a republic. Co-operation with Britain, based on the Commonwealth link, provided its main external military support. Britain was a major source of South African arms and military information and they exchanged defence training and exercise. It also entered into the Simónstown Agreement\(^1\) (1955) with Great Britain. Britain’s Commonwealth Foreign Relations Office helped South Africa get information about the member states.

Given the multi-racial nature of the Commonwealth and its professed belief in the equality of all races, the anomalous nature of South Africa’s presence in the association was obvious. But as traditionally the Commonwealth did not discuss the internal affairs of the member countries, it escaped criticism. Even the severest critics of its policies like India, who attacked it in the UN\(^2\), did not do so in the Commonwealth.

The rapid decolonisation and emergence of the African countries changed this situation. As Commonwealth was a multiracial organisation, South Africa’s policies were not compatible with its ideals and principles. The newly independent African countries began asserting and the western nations, who had been tactically supporting South Africa, realised that it was fast becoming an embarrassment for them. South Africa’s

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\(^1\) The agreement mainly dealt with the transfer of Simonstown naval base to South Africa by March 1957. They agreed to the joint defence of sea routes around South Africa and the use of the naval base by the Royal navy in both peace and war, even in a war in which South Africa was not involved. South Africa also undertook to purchase six anti-submarine frigates, ten coastal minesweepers and four seaward defense boats from Britain. James Barber, *South Africa’s Foreign Policy: 1945-1970* (London, 1973), pp. 85-86.

\(^2\) Although India had drawn international attention to South Africa’s domestic policies by highlighting South Africa’s treatment of its Indian population, the western nations in the UN refused to entertain it on the ground that the matter was under South Africa’s domestic jurisdiction, under Article 2(7) of the Charter.
policies only offended their sensitivities, not their interests. The western nations in the Commonwealth found themselves under growing strain of having to support South Africa for economic and strategic reasons, while they needed the support of the newly independent African countries, which were drastically influencing the international political balance. South Africa's ruthless application of racial policies only compounded their agony.

This chapter introduces and tries to account the reasons for, and the exit of, South Africa from the Commonwealth.

REASONS FOR THE EXIT OF SOUTH AFRICA

Many scholars pointed out the fact that the ideal of equal rights that the Commonwealth professes comes out battered when it has South Africa in the Commonwealth. But Britain and Australia continued to support South Africa. South Africa was against Great Britain granting independence to the African countries and it advised Britain against granting them independence hastily. It also began to lose enthusiasm for the Commonwealth as other African countries moved to independence and joined the Commonwealth. In 1951, Dr Malan, South African Prime Minister, accused Britain of killing the Commonwealth and "acting on her own accord and without consultation with or approval of the other group members... and she intends to continue the process

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3 As early as 1941, Sir Keith Hancock had warned that the ideal which the British Commonwealth profess. the ideal of 'equal rights for diverse communities', implies among other things resolute warfare against the substantial inequalities which separate one community from another. South African policy in the period under review has been dominated by a conception contrary to this: the Commonwealth theory comes rather battered out of the South African struggle. W. K. Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of Economic Policy 1918-1939* (London, 1941), pp. 320-21

4 In 1953 Ian Trethowan wrote, "Dr. Malan is the key to much that is said and done at Westminster about African affairs. He is also responsible as anyone else for the British tendency to adopt a pragmatic approach to African problems. If one eye has to be fixed on the problem itself and the other on Dr. Malan, wider considerations tend to get left out of the line of vision". J. D. B. Miller, *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of Expansion and Attrition 1953-1969* (London, 1974), p. 105.
without limitation." Malan threatened to withdraw from the Commonwealth on the issue of Ghana's membership into the Commonwealth.

Britain and Australia supported South Africa in the UN on the ground that the matter was essentially within South Africa's jurisdiction under Article 2(7). The Communist Countries have always sided with the Afro-Asian countries on the issue of racial equality. In 1959, United States supported a UN resolution expressing concerns and regret in the race conflict in South Africa. Australia, Britain's lone supporter on the question of South Africa in the Commonwealth, also began to modify its official position. It held that though the racial policy of south Africa fell within the domestic jurisdiction of that country, it would not do for it to be unmindful of Article 55, or if its obligation under Article 56 of the Charter.

Great Britain found herself alone in an embarrassing situation of supporting racist South Africa when almost all countries distanced themselves from giving public support to South Africa. A situation arose where she had to choose between African Countries and racist South Africa. Moreover, Sharpeville massacre shook the conscience of the world. Apartheid had always been criticised but Sharpeville massacre hardened the International opinion against South Africa and apartheid. The opposition within Britain and the emergence of the African states as Independent countries settled the matter for Britain.

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7 The United Nation used Articles 39, 55 and 56 to take action against South Africa. Article 2(7) states the organisation is not to inference in matters essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state. Article 39. The Security Council to determine the existence of any threat to peace or act of aggression. *UN and Apartheid 1948-1994* (New York, 1994), p. 43.
8 Article 55(c) UN undertook to promote universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, or religion.
9 In the House of Commons in 1959 James Callaghan said: "It is not the discussion of this matter (of South Africa) which divides the Commonwealth; what divides the Commonwealth is the policy being pursued by one of its fellow members. We have only to look at the record of the voting on the most recent motion: Canada abstained. Australia did not vote and Malaya, Ghana, New Zealand, Pakistan, India and Ceylon voted for the motion. Britain voted against it. That is where the division of Commonwealth takes place." B. Vivekanandan, *The Shrinking Circle: The Commonwealth's Role in British Foreign Policy* (New Delhi, 1983), p. 166.
African Entry into the Commonwealth

For the leaders of the newly independent African states, vigorous diplomacy was a means for achievement of independence, as they saw independence to be the aspiration to the whole of Africa. Nkrumah stated at the United States Council of Foreign Relations in 1958, that there are three factors common to the emerging Africa, "The first is our desire to see Africa free and independent, the second is our determination to pursue foreign policies based upon non-alignment. The third is our urgent need for economic development". The very first meeting of the Pan-African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa (PAFMECA) at Mwanza, in Tanganyika, in 1958, exhorted the independent states to take positive action in the UN and in all its agencies, the Prime Ministers' Conference of the Commonwealth and in any other place on all matters affecting the freedom of the African people, and in this connection, to reject completely such matters as domestic affairs of colonial or metropolitan country.

The increasing number of African countries meant shift in the balance of power. It was true in the UN and other international organisations. With their entry, the African Countries affected the balance of power in the Commonwealth significantly. They radically changed the racial composition of the Commonwealth. The first and major impact of African membership was the shift in balance of racial composition and strengthening of the principle of multi-racialism in the organisation. Ali Mazrui argues that with the entry of Malaya there was a numerical parity between the whites and non-whites members but it was with the entry of Nigeria that a shift in favour of the non-whites came. Though in 1961 only two countries were in the

11 Miller, n. 4, p. 102.
12 The Commonwealth evolved through three stages. The first Commonwealth consisted exclusively of white countries-Britain, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. The second Commonwealth emerged with the accession to membership of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The third Commonwealth came with the independence of Nigeria in 1960. Ghana's membership in the Commonwealth as an independent member (1957), did not mark the end of the second Commonwealth, as its membership did not tilt the balance of racial composition in favour of the non-white members. The entry of Malaysia only gave the non-white members parity, not superiority. The second Commonwealth might therefore be defined as "that period when the Commonwealth was already multi-racial but with white governments still maintaining a majority or numerical parity with the rest of the Commonwealth." Mazrui, n. 6, p. 3.
Commonwealth Tanzania and Sierra Leone had their conditions of independence published, others were to follow. African opinion was becoming important.

Another important significance of the African membership was the importance given to racial equality. African membership contributed to changing the Commonwealth attitude to the matter. African group was the largest single bloc and they could exert influence partially through solidarity with Asian members on colonial issues and also exert pressure on Britain. With the emergence of the African countries, the Asian dimension also declined in the Commonwealth. This new development was clear to the British Prime Minister Mr. Macmillan which led to his “Winds of Change” speech.

Winds of Change

On December 1959, Macmillan, the British Prime Minister announced that a Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Meeting would take place in May 1960. On 20 January 1960, South African Prime Minister, Dr Verwoerd, said that there would be a referendum to decide if South Africa should be a republic or not. He also raised the matter of continuing membership in the Commonwealth. Verwoerd said that if the policies of other Commonwealth members meant quarrelling around one table, he might take the lead in no longer allowing South Africa to remain a republic. He was making it clear that South Africa’s future membership would depend on how the members treated South Africa. This was aimed at Macmillan who was to visit South Africa in February 1960. It was during his visit that Macmillan found out the full degree of obstinacy brought into the policy of apartheid.

Until 1959, Great Britain had voted in favour of South Africa in the UN. But, Macmillan with his “Wind of Change” Speech at Cape Town in February 1960 gave notice that South Africa could no longer depend on British support. Macmillan stressed on the

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14 Macmillan began to realise to the full extent the degree of obstinacy, amounting really to fanaticism, which Dr. Verwoerd brought to the consideration of his policies. Apartheid to him was more than a political philosophy, it was a religion, a religion based on the Old Testament rather than on the New.... Even in small matters he had pressed apartheid to the extreme Harold Macmillan, Pointing The Way: 1959-1961 (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 152.
strength of the emerging African consciousness and that Britain rejected the idea of any inherent superiority of one race over another. But the most important aspect of the speech was the castigation of South Africa’s racial policy and his disengagement of public support from Britain. He said:

It is the basic principle of our modern Commonwealth that we respect each other’s sovereignty in matters of internal policy. At the same time, we must recognise that the internal policies of one nation may have effects outside it. We may be sometimes tempted to say to each other, ‘mind your own business’. But, in these days, I would myself, expand the old saying so that it runs ‘mind your own business, but mind how it affects my business too’ ... As a fellow member of the Commonwealth we always try and, I think, we have succeeded in giving to South Africa our full support and encouragement, but I hope you won’t 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 own territories we are trying to give effect.15

The speech provoked deep resentment among leaders and supporters of the South African government and outright condemnation from pro-government newspapers in the country.16 African leaders like the Kenyan leader Tom Mboya welcomed the speech. In Accra, The Ghana Times congratulated Macmillan on telling the South African government without equivocation that the British reject any idea of an inherent superiority of one race over another.17

An importance of the speech was that it was made in the parliament of South Africa. Had it been outside South Africa, it could have been explained away as an attempt to get into the Black nations’ good books. It was the first overt condemnation of apartheid by Britain. His speech hinted at historical inevitability and suggested that the growth of African nationalism could not be stopped. With this speech, Great Britain disengaged itself from giving public support for South Africa.

15 Ibid., pp. 156-59.
16 The Die Burger warned that the British attitude shown in the speech is the general attitude of the Western World and said there is a state of emergency in South Africa’s relation with the West. The Cape Argus said that Britain takes the side of African nationalism and African self-government and where things clash with the interests of white population she takes the non-white side. West Africa (London), 13 February 1960, p. 169.
17 Ibid., pp. 169-70.
Until 1960, South Africa's racial policies had not been discussed in the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth belief was that the internal affairs of the members' countries were entirely their business and by tradition, they were never discussed in the Commonwealth. Another reason was the convention that the agenda required the agreement of all members. However, the Sharpeville incident changed the attitude of the member states. The hesitancy shown before in discussing South Africa was no longer there.

**Sharpeville Incident**

Of all the suppressions of demonstrations and boycotts that protested apartheid, it was the Sharpeville massacre (March 21, 1960) that got the most international attention and intensified opposition to South African policies. The African National Congress (ANC) decided to campaign, against government's plan to issue passes to Black Women, in April 1960. However, a splinter group of the ANC, the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) formed in 1959, pre-dated its campaign to March 21, 1960 in an effort to cash in on political advantage. It exhorted the black Africans to go to local police stations and give back their passes in a non-violent way. Although the PAC-organised protest campaign itself was not successful in terms of the popular response, it got international attention because of the violent suppression it met with. The worst oppression was at Sharpeville, near Vereening in the Transvaal on March 21. Police opened fire at the peaceful and non-violent demonstration, killing 69 Africans and injuring 180 (including 40 women and 8 children). More than 80 percent of them were shot in the back while fleeing. A similar incident occurred at Langa near Cape Town, with less causality. Prime Minister Verwoerd observed that the natives had received a lesson they would remember from childhood, namely that equality with European was not for them.

The killings provoked outrage, furious demonstrations and burning passes. ANC's call for 'one-day stay at home' in protest was successful. Black labour force in Cape Town went on strike for two weeks. On April 9, 1960, Verwoerd was shot in an assassination

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18 South Africa Year Book 1995 (Pretoria, 1995), p. 34.  
19 Miller, n. 4, p. 141.  
attempt and for a moment nationalist single mindedness faltered. However the situation worsened with the measures adopted by the South African government. It declared a state of emergency and passed Unlawful Organisations Act, banning ANC and PAC. More than 20,000 were arrested and 2,000 detained without trial. ANC and PAC went underground than comply with the ban. SACP banned earlier also announced it was working underground.

The Sharpeville massacre was seen as a direct result of the policies of the South African government. Its failure to express regrets made it plain that it accepted the responsibility for the killing and was exposed to a barrage of international condemnation. Press photographs of the massacre was flashed throughout the world and increased the outrage. In Europe, the basic sentiment was outraged humanitarianism. It raised the problems of colour, European conscience and the colonialism. For the Asian nations, Sharpeville was a confirmation of the wickedness of the colonial government and felt gratified as world was coming to their point of view. Murder in the name of colour shook the consciousness of the world and hardened international opinion against it.

**International Reaction**

All countries recognised Sharpeville to be a domestic matter but felt it could not be left without condemnation. Even then there was a hesitancy which is noticeable in the Nehru-sponsored resolution in the Indian Parliament, on March 28, 1960.

It is not the custom of this house normally to consider such matters which are supposed to be in the internal jurisdiction of another country, nor indeed would we like the other countries to consider matters in the internal jurisdiction of this country ----nevertheless, sometimes, things happen which are not normal at all--and then it becomes difficult or undesirable for some normal convention to come in the way of the expression of the feeling which is deep-seated and powerful.  

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21 P. O. Sauer who was Minister of Land and the acting Prime Minister said in a speech at Haniansdorp in the Cape on May 21 said: “The old book of South Africa history was closed a month ago and, for the immediate future. South Africa would reconsider in earnest and honest her whole approach to the Native question. Freda Troup. *South Africa: An Historical Introduction* (London, 1972), p. 348.


The resolution however went on to condemn the Sharpville and Langa incident.  

The Malay Parliament passed a resolution which expressed that even though it fully recognised the responsibility of the South African government for its own internal policies and administration but expressed abhorrence at the violence used in the pursuance of apartheid. Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malays’ Prime Minister, was to attend his first Commonwealth Conference in 1960. He made clear his intention to speak out in the next Commonwealth conference. He however made a distinction between the policy and the shooting, saying that apartheid was purely a domestic and internal affairs of South Africa and it was only because it was followed by this atrocities that we have taken a stand.  

While Australia and Canada felt that Sharpville was a domestic problem and should not be dealt with in the Commonwealth British House of Commons had another opinion.

In Canada, replying to the question of Lester Pearson the leader of opposition, whether Canada would take any action or pass a resolution to express its view on apartheid, Diefenbaker, the Prime Minister, replied, that his government’s attitude was one of “restrained responsibility”. He said the government’s view was that no beneficial purpose would be served by diplomatic protests or by more extreme measures. Moreover he feared that if Prime Minister’s Conference became the judge and jury of the conduct of member nations Commonwealth’s future is itself in

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24 That this House deplories and records its deep sorrow at the tragic incidents which occurred at Sharpville and in Langa township near Cape Town in South Africa on March 21, 1960, resulting in the death of a large number of Africans from police firing. It sends its deep sympathy to the Africans who have suffered from this firing, from the policy of racial discrimination and the suppression of the African people in their own homeland. Ibid.,

25 That this house, while fully recognising the responsibility of the South African government for its own internal policies and administration nevertheless consistent with the Federation Government’s attitude in respect of violations of fundamental principles of human rights as exemplified by its stand on Tibet. expresses abhorrence at the shooting of, and the violence used against, the Africans by the African police in pursuance of the apartheid policy, and fully supports whatever positive action the Government considers appropriate in the matter. Mohammud Muda, “Malaysia-South Africa Relations and the Commonwealth 1960-95”, The Round Table (London), no, 340, 1996. p. 426.

26 Are we going there just to talk platitudes with whose hands are stained with red blood of innocent human beings? ... I intend to speak out... Those who rule South Africa today... [D]o not conform to our Commonwealth ideas and ideals of human rights and justice, and I am beginning to think whether a country like South Africa has any right to be within this family of nations. Miller, n, 4, p. 144.
jeopardy. Lester Pearson in a foresight pointed out that a situation was developing, not in which South Africa might be driven out of the Commonwealth, but in which South Africa might drive herself out by forcing a choice between her policies and the view of other members.

In Australia, Robert Menzies had strong belief in the principle that one government does not interfere in the matters which are within the domestic jurisdiction of another. He also felt that Commonwealth should not deal with a country's domestic policy. On Sharpville he said, "His Government was following a policy of non-intervention in what it is, though tragic and terrible, a domestic problem for the union of South Africa."28

The most striking debate among the white Commonwealth countries occurred in England, where the House of Commons adopted a resolution deploring the racist policies that denied normal human and political rights to the non-Europeans. It urged "Her Majesty's Government to take the opportunity of the forthcoming Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference to bring home to the South Africa government the strong feelings of British people on this question."29

The South Africa economy also came under pressure. Since 1957 there had been a net outflow of capital. In the eighteen months to June 1961 a total of R 248 million left South Africa. The Gold and Foreign exchange reserves fell from R 315m in January 1960 to R 142m in June 1961.

Prior to the massacre not many outside South Africa had taken serious note of the country's intention to carry out a referendum on whether to become a republic or not,

He said the government's attitude was not whether any such protest would relieve Canadian feelings, but what practical effects such an action might have in South Africa itself. Further he added, I would also point out that if I were not sitting where I am, with the responsibilities that are mine, I would express myself somewhat differently from the way I am at the moment. But looking ahead to the Prime Ministers' Conference... I fear for the future of the Commonwealth if, while never failing to make clear the viewpoint of each of us, the Prime Ministers' Conference should become the judge and jury of the conduct of member nations. Peter Harnetty, "Canada, South Africa and the Commonwealth 1960-1961", Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies (Leicester), vol. 11, 1963, pp. 34-35


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30 Miller, n. 4, p. 146.
nor saw it as an opportunity to challenge its membership of the Commonwealth. The Sharpeville massacre changed all that. This was in this background that the May 1960 Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Meeting took place.

THE 1960 COMMONWEALTH CONFERENCE

Background

There was a general agreement among the Asian and African Countries for discussions on South Africa’s racial policy in the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Meeting. Canada supported the move as Diefenbaker felt that “an exchange of views rather than collective act of condemnation was needed.”30 Tunku Abdul Rahman had written to Macmillan on 25 March 1960, suggesting that Sharpeville incident should be taken up in the succeeding Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference. Nehru supported it, saying that one “cannot have this policy of racial discrimination and segregation. On 1 May 1960, he added in London, that as apart from the immorality of it apartheid constituted a danger to world peace, it couldn't be glossed over from the point of view of the Commonwealth.”31 Nkrumah was resolute that “If no one else raised the matter I might very well do so.”32 But Macmillan disagreed and said he did not intend to raise the question in May.33

The situation was more complex as South Africa planned to hold a referendum to decide if it should be republic or not. The rule of the Commonwealth was that if a member proposes to be a republic and wishes to continue in the Commonwealth, it must renew its application for membership. There is no continuance of membership as a republic, without formal acceptance of the changed status by the member states. This meant that permission was to be obtained from all other members for re-entry into the Commonwealth. Eric Louw, the South African Minister for External Affairs

30 Vivekanandan, n. 9; pp. 168-69.
32 Nkrumah, n. 10, p. 223.
33 West Africa, 23 April, 1960, p. 473.
represented South Africa because of the attempted assassination of the Prime
Minister.

Meeting

Tunku Abdul Rahman raised the question of South Africa. Macmillan gave Malaya, the
newest member of the Commonwealth the honour to reply first to his welcome address
at the opening of the meeting on May 3 1960. Tunku Abdul Rahman, in his reply argued
that South Africa should be kept in the agenda for discussion. He said it was unthinkable
for him to tell his people that he was persuaded not to bring the matter in the
Commonwealth.34

Macmillan and Menzies, having discussed this probability, had agreed that a debate on
in what might be called a full meeting of Prime Ministers' Conference could be
disastrous. Menzies pointed out that they had never discussed Kashmir. There existed a
reluctance to discuss what they perceived to be the internal affairs of the country. The
conference then agreed that the racial question in South Africa was essentially a matter
of internal policy, though it had, its reaction on the Commonwealth as a whole. They
unanimously agreed that it would accept the offer that Eric Louw, the South African
Minister for Internal Affairs, then made—to have a limited group of Prime Ministers
discuss the matter privately with him. On May 6, Nehru said in London that apartheid
and racial discrimination might well shake the very foundation of the Commonwealth.

The racial policy of South Africa was discussed with Louw and the Prime Ministers
alone on May 9, 1960. For the first time an informal discussion on apartheid was held,
though in private. In this meeting, the Prime Ministers' made it clear to Louw, that
apartheid, being incompatible with the Commonwealth principle of racial equality, was
causing a rift within the Commonwealth. Menzies was impressed by the moderate stand

34 Recently the trouble in South Africa has posed a very difficult question for my government. ... I have
come from Parliament almost directly, armed with a resolution, which compelled me to speak it out
here... For me it is quite definite that I cannot go back to my country—it is unthinkable—and tell my
people that I am persuaded not to bring this matter here ... If South Africa persists in her attitude of
white supremacy it will always be a cause of suspicion and distrust among us, and such an atmosphere
is not conducive to good relationship between members of the Commonwealth ... It is my view that
this subject should be on the agenda for discussion, either formally or informally—so that by the time
this conference comes to an end we will have some firm statement made which the world will
appreciate... Muda. n. 25. p. 426
taken by Nkrumah, Tunku and Ayub, the Pakistan Prime Minister. They, raised the question of parliamentary representation by the Cape coloureds, of Bantu franchise and the personnel discrimination they would suffer in South Africa. The question of Sharpeville was not raised. 35

Louw had taken the line that the talks were to enable him to provide information to others and said so at a press conference given by him. This angered Tunku who was of the opinion that the talks were designed to reach a firm understanding. Tunku issued a statement accusing Louw of forestalling the results of the talks. He demanded action against South Africa and hinted at an international boycott. He publicly announced that he had broken off further informal talks with Louw and said he was determined to pursue the issue to the end, even if necessary to a bitter conclusion. 36 Moreover Louw used his invitation to visit Ghana as a proof that apartheid did not cause international tension. Nkrumah withdrew his invitation to Louw to visit Ghana. 37 This press conference further infuriated the Prime Ministers. Though at the private discussions it was agreed that in spite of their feelings about racial discrimination South Africa was still welcome in the Commonwealth at the Conference Nehru and Nkrumah brought up the question of South-West Africa. 38

After the private discussion, in the conference Louw asked whether the continued membership of South Africa as a monarchy was unwelcome. The answer was no. But, to the question if they could remain in the Commonwealth after becoming a republic, there were reservations. South Africa’s continuation as the Commonwealth member after becoming a republic was seen as a hypothetical question. Macmillan suggested that to approve membership before the referendum would perhaps influence the South

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35 Menzies, n. 28, p. 199-201.
38 According to Menzies they had already agreed at the end of the apartheid discussions that in spite of their feeling about racial discriminations, South Africa was still welcome in the Commonwealth. To the noting of Nehru and Nkrumah, Menzies objected saying that it was a United Nations question. Menzies, n. 28, p. 196.
African votes and constitute a form of intervention in South African affairs. The Communique issued noted that if South Africa becomes a republic and if then South Africa wanted to remain a member of the Commonwealth South African government then should ask for the consent of the Prime Ministers. Louw signed the communiqué that also contained some vital last words:

The Ministers emphasised that the Commonwealth itself is a multi-racial association and expressed the need to ensure good relations between all member states and peoples of the Commonwealth. 39

Louw at first had objected to this statement and to have it in the communiqué. He was spoken to in ‘pretty stringent terms’ by Menzies after which he consented. 40 It was clear from this statement that South Africa could expect opposition when its application would come up for consideration.

In 1960, Ghana was the only African country in the Commonwealth. Nkrumah said “it is illogical and unreasonable to expect African states to be happy in joining and remaining in the Commonwealth if the Commonwealth tolerates governments that perpetuate policies of racialism and Apartheid”. 41 Ghana imposed a boycott on South African goods and Ghana’s sea and airport were closed to South African ships and aircraft. In July 1960, the government imposed a ban on the entry or transit through Ghanaian territory of all White South Africans except those who signed a declaration of their opposition to Apartheid. 42 However there was difference of opinion about South Africa’s continued membership even among the opponents of apartheid.

39 In the event of South Africa deciding to become a republic and if the desire was subsequently expressed to remain a member of the Commonwealth, the meeting suggested that the South Africa government should then ask for the consent of the other Commonwealth governments, either at a meeting for the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’, or, if this were not practicable, by correspondence.

40 While reaffirming the traditional practice that the Commonwealth conferences do not discuss the internal affairs of the member countries, ministers avail themselves of Louw’s presence in London to have informal discussions with him about the racial situation in South Africa. Mansergh, n. 13, pp. 347-51.

41 Menzies, n. 28, p. 196.

42 Nkrumah, n. 10, p. 226.

43 When this was called an unwarranted abuse of international travel regulations, the office of the Ghanaian President issued a statement which quoted the precedent of United States denial of visas to communists and said “Apartheid is a far greater danger to peace and security in Africa than communism can ever be.” T. B. Miller, The Commonwealth and The United Nations (Sydney, 1967), pp. 159-60.
Question of Continued Membership

There were two schools of thought. One was that, the only way to change South Africa’s policy was to isolate it; while the other argued, that expelling South Africa meant that it will drive the liberal whites out and will abandon the blacks. The Rt. Rev. Joost de Blank, Archbishop of Capetown and a campaigner against apartheid wanted South Africa to stay within the Commonwealth so that the non-whites might not feel deserted and helpless. Dr. Ambrose Reeves, Bishop of Johannesburg, deported from South Africa and Chief Lutuli wanted South Africa out of the Commonwealth. In the Commonwealth also this difference existed.

Realising the anger and the anti-apartheid feeling in the Commonwealth, Macmillan warned Verwoerd on July 13 1960, about the possibility of other Commonwealth countries opposing South Africa continued membership in the Commonwealth if her apartheid policy continued unchanged. Menzies also realised the danger but felt that Nkrmah was angrier by the failure of Pretoria to receive High Commission from Ghana. He was of the opinion that “a lot of heat” would be taken of from the crisis if South Africa would receive diplomatic missions from others.

In South Africa also doubts remained about its continued membership in the Commonwealth. To allay the fears of the English, who feared exclusion from the Commonwealth if South Africa became a republic, Verwoerd told a republican rally, on July 1960:

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33 Chief Lutuli welcomed all forms of boycott, even though it might hurt the people the boycotts were trying to help because “we will never gain our freedom without suffering”. Derek Ingram. The Commonwealth Challenge (London, 1962), p. 250

34 You will be forming your own assessment but my appreciation is that if and when such an application (for continued membership of the Commonwealth when the union becomes a republic) is made, and if at that time those aspects of South African policy which were criticised here in May (and I am not here concerned with the validity of those criticisms) remain unchanged, there would be more than one Commonwealth country which despite the practise adopted hitherto would, for reasons of policy, oppose the continued membership of South Africa... This would create a most critical situation, and I must say quite frankly that I myself do not find it easy to forecast what the outcome might be. Macmillan, n. 14, p. 286.

35 But I do want to tell you that my personal opinion is that if you found yourself able to invite these other Commonwealth Countries to establish diplomatic missions in South Africa and were able to assure them that they would be receive and treated in exactly the same way as the representatives of Great Britain or Australia, a lot of heat would be taken out of the present conflict. Menzies, n. 28, pp. 221-22.
I am convinced that if South Africa decided to become a republic within the Commonwealth and put that request to other members of the Commonwealth the influence of Britain, Australian and Canada would see to it that South Africa is retained within the Commonwealth.  

Diefenbaker, however, denied having said anything that would justify this. He replied "most unequivocally" that he said nothing that would indicate or justify this view. On August 2, following a message through the South African High Commissioner that Verwoerd intended to hold a referendum on the issue of a republic on 5 October 1960, Macmillan appealed to Verwoerd to "postpone it until times in Africa are calmer."  

South Africa did not heed this advice and the announcement was made to hold the referendum.

With this Macmillan started his own diplomacy with the intention of keeping South Africa in the Commonwealth. Macmillan wrote to all Commonwealth Prime Ministers, urging them to say as little as possible on the issue at that stage. He also wrote to the Australian Prime Minister asking for his help on "How could South Africa’s subsequent expulsion be prevented and could they persuade Afro-Asians that the expulsion of South Africa could bring no benefit to the non-white population of the union?" 

Macmillan’s diplomacy seemed to have worked with Nkrumah informing Macmillan on September 7, 1960 that he was impressed by the real threat to the future of the commonwealth which might result in a split over the issue of South Africa’s membership. Therefore despite the difficulties, he would have in explaining his attitude he felt that in all circumstances it would probably not be wise for him to object to South Africa’s application though he would have to reserve his right to raise the issue of
apartheid separately. While Tunku Rahman met Macmillan and agreed to South Africa remaining in the Commonwealth 49

Following the referendum, 50 Verwoerd wrote to Macmillan on October 24 1960, asking for an early decision on its membership and asking the method through which it should be done. According to Verwoerd there were three methods for this.

1. To inform each of Prime Ministers separately and directly of the governments intention and desire in order to ascertain their views.
2. Macmillan to do so at the request of the union government.
3. A Prime Ministers’ Conference to be called to deal with the matter.

Verwoerd considered the best method to be the one by way of correspondence. He considered the call to amend racial policies as attempts to interfere in South Africa’s domestic affairs. Macmillan however felt that the matter should be dealt in the Prime Ministers’ Conference.

Canada’s Prime Minister, Diefenbaker, who till then had followed the line that Commonwealth should not judge South Africa’s domestic policies, changed track. On November 16, 1960 he wrote to Macmillan,

In my view ... of developments since May which give no indication of any change of attack by the government of South Africa, I feel obliged to let you know that unless significant changes occur in the union government’s policies, Canada cannot be counted on to support South Africa’s re-admission to the Commonwealth. 51

On the contrary, Britain and Australia were against expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth. Britain’s Prime Minister, Macmillan, wanted South Africa remain a member and “was determined to make every effort to keep South Africa in the Commonwealth”. 52 He wanted to persuade the Commonwealth members as a whole to accept the view that more influence could be brought on the union in the long run if South Africa remained a member.

49 Ibid., p. 288.
50 On October 5, 1960 the referendum was held, 90.73% of the electorate voted—8. 50, 458 (52.05%) voted in favour of republic and 7. 75, 878 (47.49%) against. Vandenbosch, n. 5, p. 182.
51 Macmillan, n. 14, p. 293.
52 Ibid.
Macmillan felt that the domestic policies of South Africa, however objectionable, would not be changed. But, he maintained that it was improper for countries that had taken advantage of the right to become republicans to use this technicality as a lever for the expulsion of a member of such long standing. To him it seemed unfair use of a purely procedural point to refuse to a republican what we continued to accept under a monarchical system. Macmillan argued that it will be better to keep South Africa inside the Commonwealth as the pressure of public opinion and the necessities of living alongside their African neighbours would lead to an actual change.

Moreover Macmillan felt that Diefenbaker was taking a 'holier than thou' attitude and wondered "if the 'whites' take an anti-South African line, how can we expect the Browns and the Blacks to be more tolerant". Macmillan asked Diefenbaker to "be careful not to take a decision which would bind you to come down against South Africa in any circumstances." He also wrote to Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, on the same line.53 The Labour Party in the opposition however declared that South Africa should be allowed to remain in the Commonwealth only if it abandoned the policy of racial segregation and urged the Prime Ministers to reject its application for continued membership unless that condition was fulfilled.

In Australia Prime Minister Menzies was also against discussing South Africa in the Commonwealth. He had more private reasons.54 South Africa made it clear that they will not change their policy of apartheid to remain in the Commonwealth. It was made clear that they would not compromise on 'principles' nor be subjected to any form of humiliating treatment.55

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53 According to Macmillan, "Since I knew how much weight India carried both from its size and importance and the outstanding character of its leader", he wrote the letter to Nehru. Ibid., pp. 293-95.
54 He feared that "If the domestic jurisdiction principles abandoned in the heat of the moment, so to speak, we may live to see the day when other nations, whether in the UN or otherwise will seek to discuss our aboriginal policies and claim as a precedent whatever action occurs in relation to South Africa." Menzies, n. 28, p. 192.
55 In November 1960, Verwoerd asserted, "South Africa will not permit herself to be subjected to any form of humiliating treatment. It must also be clearly understood that South Africa's claim to continued membership will be based on the existence of positive common interests, without the existence of any right or design to interfere in the domestic affairs of member states—even though other members may hold differing views." In London, the its High Commissioner, Dr AJR van Rhijn said, "When the Prime Minister asks for permission for the Union to stay in the Commonwealth, he will most certainly not crawl, beg or compromise the self respect of the South African nation. And above all he is most certainly not going to compromise on principles. He will in no circumstances be prepared to endanger the continued existence of a white South African nation." Ingram, n. 43, p. 253.
The African countries in the Commonwealth were under great pressure to act strongly in
the next meeting.\textsuperscript{56} Julius Nyerere, then Chief Minister of Tanganyika, believed that
South Africa should not be allowed to remain in the Commonwealth and he sent letters
to all the Prime Ministers expressing his view in the view of strengthening the
opposition. He found that there was an unwillingness to take the lead in any movement
for expulsion.

While in the 1960 meeting Ghana was the only African country, by 1961, it was not so.
Nigeria was independent; conditions for Sierra Leone independence were published; and
in Tanganyika, talks were at the final stage. It was becoming clear that countries that
supported South Africa would face stiff hostility from the growing number of
independent African countries. This rapid change meant that African countries and their
opinions were to become significant in world affairs. A feeling emerged that the
Commonwealth's position in the world was threatened by the continued membership of
South Africa and this was reflected in the 1961 Conference.

**THE EXIT OF SOUTH AFRICA**

At the end of 1960, the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference was announced to
be held on March 8-17, 1961. The conference had before it an application for the
continued membership of South Africa. Verwoerd was to attend this with the intention
of keeping South Africa within the Commonwealth. When he arrived in London,
Verwoerd said that South Africa was not prepared to change its policy and would not
allow the Commonwealth to interfere in its internal policies.

Macmillan and Menzies were in favour of retaining South Africa in the Commonwealth.
Before the conference, no government categorically demanded South Africa's expulsion.
What most of them resented was that an unqualified consent to its application would
amount to condone its racial policies. There was a growing antagonism of public opinion
in many Commonwealth countries towards South African policy. In Britain, *The Times*

\textsuperscript{56} The independent African states in a conference at Addis Ababa in June 1960 had passed a resolution,
which invited the 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
in its editorial ‘The One Apart’, considered that to keep the Verwoerd government as a partner with other governments would be to register a “gross anomaly”. The Economist talked of the implacable contradiction between the Commonwealth doctrine of racial equality and the Verwoerd doctrine.

On March 4, 1961, Nehru said in the Lok Sabha that India would not compromise with racialism. On reaching England, Tunku Abdul Rahman reiterated his strong feelings against racialism but said he would employ tactics different from those of last time Mrs. Bandranaike of Sri Lanka and Ayub Khan of Pakistan also felt strongly against South Africa. Canada’s Diefenbaker had also made known his displeasure. Nkrumah on his arrival said “I shall look around the table and see the general reception and reaction... Personally I wish for no showdown on South Africa”.

Nigeria was attending its first conference under Sir Abubakar Tafewa Balewa. He was sure he could not go back to his people without anything to show for his visit. On the eve of his departure to London for the conference, The Daily Times, the leading newspaper in the country carried a front-page open letter editorial entitled ‘No Readmission’ for South Africa. In a statement, the Prime Minister said that he was aware of the public opinion in the country and the views of the black man everywhere in the continent and he would respect these at the conference.

1961 Conference

The Conference began on March 8, 1961. Foreign policy and disarmament was taken up first. On 11 and 12 March, busy diplomatic activities took place, prior to March 13, the date for the discussion of South Africa issue. Eleven Prime Ministers were present on the debate. Nehru, who sent his representatives to others explaining his analysis of the problem and to urge a firm decision one way, or another, Diefenbaker, Nkrumah and

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57 The Economist
58 The Economist
59 Ingram, n. 43, p. 251-52.
61 Ibid.
Nyerere played important roles in the exit of South Africa. The first warning to the consequence of allowing South Africa to remain in the Commonwealth came from Nyerere.

**Nyerere’s Masterstroke**

On 12 March, Julius Nyerere wrote an article in *The Observer* titled ‘Commonwealth Choice: South Africa or us’. He wrote:

> We cannot join any ‘association of friends’ which includes a state deliberately and ruthlessly pursuing a racialist policy. To do so would be to confuse the minds of our own people and to jeopardise our purposes. ... We believe that the principles of the Commonwealth would be betrayed by an affirmative answer to South Africa’s application for re-admission as a republic. Inevitably, therefore, we are forced to say that to vote South Africa in is to vote us out.  

This was a masterstroke in diplomacy and it had tremendous impact. He also had the support and pressure from Chief Lutuli of South Africa to act decisively. Nyerere said, “Tanganyika needs the Commonwealth more than the Commonwealth needs us. For us to remain outside would be an unhappy thing for this country. But it is a sacrifice we must be prepared to make in our fight to preserve the dignity of man in Africa and to wipe out racialism.”

It was a timely warning for the Prime Ministers to ponder over the consequences of allowing South Africa to continue in the Commonwealth without changing her racial policy. The choice before them was limited—either to allow South Africa to continue in the Commonwealth and allow itself to disintegrate or drop South Africa if she refuses to change her apartheid policy and help the organisation to grow with new members. A decision by Tanganyika to keep out would have also kept Kenya, Uganda and other African countries out of the Commonwealth. Moreover, it would have put pressure on Nigeria and Ghana to withdraw.

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63 Chief Lutuli had written to Nyerere “Africans in South Africa are prepared to face whatever may result to their detriment if South Africa is expelled from the Commonwealth, in the hopes of attaining a greater thing—the breaking of apartheid”. Inram, n. 43, p. 255.

Nyerere also wrote that there were many people who disliked South Africa’s policies but felt that discussing apartheid was irrelevant in a conference discussing South Africa’s membership. This was Macmillan’s plan that was supplemented by Menzies. Macmillan’s compromise plan was to handle South African question in two parts: first, there was to be a constitutional discussion to establish the convention that a change to republican status should be regarded as domestic affairs needing only to be notified to other members. This meant that South Africa would automatically continue its membership as a Republic. After that there was to be a debate on Apartheid in full conference, on South African affairs, with South Africa as a participant and not a petitioner. However, it did not work out in this way.

When the question of South Africa’s membership was taken up on March 13, some Prime Ministers indicated that as Verwoerd had indicated his willingness to engage in a full discussion of South Africa’s racial policy, they wanted the two to be combined. The members believed that the question of membership could not be separated from the international implication of South Africa’s racial policy. All agreed that South Africa’s Constitutional change was not in itself an obstacle to continuing membership, but the strong view was that the question of membership could not be divorced from the international implications of its racial policies.

When the discussion began, Verwoerd explained his government’s Apartheid policy. After referring to the race discrimination in India and Canada, he put forward the request for continued membership. The decisive answer came from Diefenbaker who said that there could not be any “automaticity” about the permission to remain in the Commonwealth. He also made it clear that he would not approve any a formula or solution that did not maintain beyond any doubt that non-discrimination concerning race

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66 Extract from a speech by the Canadian Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. JG Diefenbaker in the House of Commons. 17 March 1961, in Mansergh, n. 13, p. 367.
67 “I pleaded that we should accept in principle therefore that everybody was in favour of ultimate free coexistence and that everyone of us was striving towards this end in our own way, and that that should not be used as an argument to push us out of the Commonwealth. ... I wish to inform the meeting that the Union of South Africa will shortly become a republic, and request the meeting to accept the wish of the Union of South Africa to continue to be a member of the Commonwealth.” Harcourt, n. 27, p. 39.
and colour is an essential principle of the Commonwealth association. He said, "South Africa’s racial policies have such a far-reaching effect that the impact was international." Tunku Abdul Rahman said that the Commonwealth must be based on common ideas, principles and objectives, which should include respect for human rights and of complete absence of racial discrimination.

The Nehru Plan

At the discussion, Nehru’s argument centred around three points: First, the Commonwealth could not be considered an association of free peoples as long as a country practising apartheid was its a member; second, the concept of the Commonwealth as a multi-racial society based on racial equality would be meaningless so long as this anomalous situation lasted; and third, the continued practice of apartheid not only threatened to dismember the Commonwealth, but also hindered the growth of the organisation as it is bound to prevent others from joining it. He categorically asserted that the apartheid policy of South Africa was incompatible with the Commonwealth membership.

He presented his “Nehru Plan” that called upon the Prime Ministers to sign a statement reading “we accept the principle that apartheid is inconsistent with the membership of the Commonwealth of Nations”. In the debate, Prime Ministers waited for some willingness from Verwoerd to meet their objections. The most suitable compromise was the publication of two statements, one from the Prime Ministers declaring their abhorrence of South Africa’s racial policy and the other from Verwoerd putting his case. Verwoerd did not like this as he felt that it would make South Africa an inferior member.

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69 Mansergh, n. 13, p. 367.
70 Asian Recorder (New Delhi), 26 June-1 July 1961, p. 4026.
71 The Hindu (Madras), 14 March 1961.
72 Vivekanandan, n. 9, p. 174.
The Debacle

On the morning of March 15, Verwoerd and Macmillan met for an hour and Verwoerd asked for time to reconsider his position. The Prime Ministers agreed to discuss Congo situation, instead of resuming their discussion of South Africa. During this time, it is likely that Verwoerd made telephone calls to Cape Town. When the discussions resumed, it was clear that Verwoerd would yield nothing. He would not even agree to non-white members having diplomatic missions in South Africa. His fanatical belief that he alone was right would not permit him to yield. This angered the Prime Ministers and Duncan Sandy later revealed that this was the last straw.

All but the Prime Minister of South Africa were in agreement that no expression of consent to South Africa’s continuing membership was possible without an expression of strongest views on their part on apartheid.

On March 15, a document, divided into three parts was drafted. The introduction explained that South Africa’s constitutional change was no bar to her remaining a member. The second part dealt with the racial question. The statement explained that in the course of a full discussion all the Prime Ministers other than South Africa’s deplored the policy of apartheid, which appeared to them to involve a substantial measure of racial discrimination. They stressed the anxiety it was giving rise in the minds of millions of people throughout the world, and expressed deep concern about its impact on the relations between the member countries of the Commonwealth and the cohesion of the Commonwealth itself as a multi-racial association.

They expressed strongly the view that this policy was inconsistent with the basic ideals on which the unity and the influence of the Commonwealth rest (and with the Charter of the United Nations). They affirmed their belief that all societies to be offered equality of

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Ingram, n. 43, p. 256.

The Commonwealth is essentially an association of nations of different races and colours who have established a close and special relationship with one another. That close and special relationship can be maintained in one way only, and that is by continuous and intimate consultation between their governments. Yet, while applying for continued for membership, the South Africa Government—and this is something which bit very deep into all other members—still firmly refuses to receive diplomatic representatives from any non-European members from the Commonwealth. J. D. B. Miller, “South Africa’s Departure”, Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, vol. 1, no. 1, November 1961, p. 64.
opportunity to all irrespective of race colour, or creed. The third part set out the minority view of Verwoerd. In this he deplored the accusations of racial discrimination levelled against South Africa by member countries which he alleged were themselves guilty of this practice. He insisted on non-interference in domestic affairs was not prepared to accept that the Charter of United Nations should be involved when dealing with Commonwealth affairs.75.

The ‘Withdrawal’

However, the question was whether it was compatible with the spirit of the Commonwealth that South Africa should remain its member. When Verwoerd agreed to the document, most of the Prime Ministers made it clear that they did not want South Africa in the Commonwealth.76 Impossible conditions were attached for continuing the membership, which would lead Verwoerd to denounce apartheid itself.

The Nigerian Prime Minister raised the fresh round of objection. Abubakar insisted that it must be made clear that it was incompatible for a country to remain a member of the Commonwealth without it being stated that every member country should build a structure which would create a society in which equal opportunities would be given to everyone irrespective of race, colour, or creed. Abubakar objected to the proposal that Verwoerd should be allowed to express his views in the communique since, in his opinion, this would imply that the other Prime Ministers acquiesced in the continuation of South Africa’s racial policy. According to Verwoerd, the Prime Minister of Nigeria stated that if the propositions were accepted, he would, in the circumstances have to consider whether Nigeria should remain a member of Commonwealth if South Africa nevertheless remained a member.77

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76 According to Menzies “But when Macmillan announced that Dr. Verwoerd was agreeable, ... He was promptly told by several of the Prime Ministers that it was not good enough. One or two of them indicated quite plainly that they did not accept his continued membership, and that if it became necessary to move the expulsion of South Africa they would do so. In other words, at least half the Prime Ministers indicated that they did not want South Africa in the Commonwealth.” Menzies, n. 28.
Nkrumah reserved the right at any time to move for expulsion of South Africa, failing which, he threatened, to withdraw from the Commonwealth. Nehru promised that he would attack South Africa’s policies at every opportunity. Malaya indicated that they did not accept South Africa’s continued membership. Diefenbaker objected to the excessive emphasis given to the South African Prime Ministers’ view in the draft communiqué. At this point, Verwoerd withdrew to reconsider his position.

The rift between South Africa and other members of the Commonwealth over apartheid became so wide that the smooth functioning of the Commonwealth itself was placed in jeopardy. Macmillan realised that the Union’s apartheid policy was even threatening to damage the concept of Commonwealth itself as a multiracial association. In those circumstances it was impossible to overlook the racial issue. In fact… it became the dominant issue, and the purely constitutional point was overshadowed.

There was a near unanimous feeling among the Asian and African Countries that South Africa should not be allowed to stay on in the Commonwealth. It was clear that if there was a vote on the question of South Africa’s continued membership only Australia, Britain and New Zealand would side with South Africa, Canada would have voted against it. Macmillan realised this and feared that if Verwoerd pressed for a vote on the issue it would put Britain in a spot. It was clear that South Africa’s application would be voted out in the event of being pressed. Realising this, Macmillan advised Verwoerd to withdraw his application for continued membership in the Commonwealth rather than face an eventual expulsion. However Verwoerd seemed to have got an assurance from Macmillan about continued trade relations.

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78 According to Macmillan, “Even President Ayub Khan usually so moderate was deeply offended by some of Dr Verwoerd’s remarks… Nehru and Mrs Bandemaike would equally have forced the issue. What then I had to do was to avoid a vote (which I suppose Dr Verwoerd might have asked for). This would have put United Kingdom government into great difficulty. We should have only got Australia and New Zealand, Canada would have been against.” Macmillan, n. 14, p. 299

79 ibid.

80 Even as the Prime Ministers’ Conference was on, South Africa’s Finance Minister was confidently announcing in the Parliament that “if South Africa ceased to be a member of the Commonwealth, it would have no effect on trade relations with other members.” Akinrinade, n. 60, p. 96.
Verwoerd understood that if he pressed for the continuation of the Commonwealth membership without changing his policies, South Africa could be expelled. On his return, Verwoerd announced that he felt no option but to withdraw his application. Even though technically South Africa withdrew, the reality was that it would have been expelled otherwise. Menzeis said, "Technically South Africa withdrew. But in substance he had to withdraw unless he was prepared to depart from his policies." The withdrawal was a case of resignation in anticipation of expulsion.

South Africa chose to withdraw before being expelled from the pressures of Asian and African members and Canada. Had Canada not sided with the non-white countries, the Commonwealth could have been divided on the basis of colour, with white countries supporting South Africa and non-whites opposing. Canada's joining the non-white countries prevented this.

Reactions to the Exit of South Africa

The Communique released at the end of the meeting said that in light of the view expressed by others South Africa decided to withdraw. Verwoerd On his reasons for withdrawal said:

We were faced with three facts, in the first place, the members concerned wanted to reserve the right to themselves to regard South Africa's colour policy not as a domestic affair only, but as one which they could raise and discuss at any time. Secondly, they predicted and threatened that they would come forward with a motion asking for South Africa’s expulsion, whether at a subsequent meeting or earlier, or even now. Thirdly, they reserved the right that in these circumstances, if South Africa remained a member to withdraw from the Commonwealth themselves.

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81 Menzies, n. 28,
82 The meeting also discussed with the consent of the Prime Minister of South Africa the racial policy followed by the union government. The Prime Minister of South Africa informed the other Prime Ministers that in the light of the views expressed on behalf of other member government and the indication of their future intentions regarding the racial policies of the union government he had decided to withdraw his application for South Africa's continued membership of the Commonwealth as a Republic. "Communiqué On South Africa", Meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers, 1961. The Commonwealth At The Summit: Communiqués of Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings 1944-1986 (London, 1987), p. 67.
83 Mansergh, n. 13, p. 385.
Verwoerd further added that he had chosen to withdraw not on behalf of South Africa, but also in the interest of "our friends in the Commonwealth, particularly the United Kingdom. I could not place them in the invidious position of having to choose between South Africa and a group of Afro-Asian States".  

Verwoerd claimed that it was the beginning of disintegration of the Commonwealth. He explained that he allowed the discussion of the racial policies as he felt that otherwise it would spoil the atmosphere to the extent that the prospect of success would disappear. Also that if any Prime Minister had doubts or objections to South Africa's continued membership due to her colour policy and wish to have these doubts removed, it was both reasonable and desirable that they should be allowed to discuss the issue. According to him what the Asians and Africans wanted was domination by superior numbers in the form of equality and ultimately the thin end of the wedge.  

Menzies was the only Prime Minister in the 1961 Commonwealth meeting to feel that with the withdrawal of South Africa, Commonwealth had been injured and not strengthened. He believed that South Africa should not be excluded for her domestic policies. Menzies supported South Africa membership throughout so much so that Verwoerd said of Australia, "you are seen by all shades of opinion perhaps the best friend South Africa has, and the feeling of comradeship with Australia has never been

84 Ibid.

85 According to Verwoerd what the non-whites wanted was "not equality through co-existence and non-subordination in countries like South Africa, but the domination of superior numbers in the name of full equality and therefore, eventual victory over the whites by forcing out or swallowing up the whites. It was there that we had to draw the line. They said that all we had to do was to make small concessions and then we could find a bridge... It was perfectly clear to me, however, that those small concessions were to be made not only to overcome the immediate problem, namely to keep us within the Commonwealth, but also with an ultimate object. It was to be the beginning of undermining our policy and therefore, the thin end of the wedge to create the prospect of full equality." Ibid., p. 378.

86 After South Africa's withdrawal, in a press conference on 19 March 1961 Menzies said, "Even though there has been a great deal of international agitation, this (apartheid) is still a matter of domestic policy in South Africa which South Africa does not seek to apply to any other country. It is as much a matter of domestic policy to South Africa as Australia's migration policy is a matter for us. To have a member of the Commonwealth virtually excluded from the Commonwealth on a matter of domestic policy presents, in my opinion, a rather disagreeable vista of possibilities for the future." Alan Watt, *The Evolution of Australian Foreign Policy: 1938-65* (London, 1967) p. 282.
better". 87 However the opposition party in Australia explicitly attacked Menzies. 88 All the others thought that the Commonwealth would strengthen with the exit of South Africa. New Zealand though was not for South Africa’s expulsion felt that by its determination to stand for the principle of racial equality the Commonwealth far from beginning to disintegrate, has demonstrated its strength and its capacity to serve great and worthwhile ideas.

It was the support of Canada for the Asians and Africans, which resulted in the withdrawal of South Africa. So much so that later Louw, the South African Minister for External Affairs, claimed that Diefenbaker alliance with the Afro-Asian members was motivated by political expediency. Diefenbaker, on the significance of the exit of South Africa said, “We have declared that non-discrimination on the basis of colour and race is the foundation stone of multiracial association composed of the representatives from all parts of the world.... We accepted the basic principle and established it as a Commonwealth custom for the future.” 89

Macmillan was unhappy about the withdrawal 90 but like Menzies he didn’t think it would weaken the Commonwealth. 91 Macmillan believed that had Verwoerd shown the smallest move towards an understanding of the views of the members, or made any concession, the situation would have been different. Diefenbaker corroborates the fact


88 In the Australian House of Representatives the leader of opposition Mr. Calwell accused Menzies of poisoning the atmosphere in Asia against Australia. He said Menzies had attempted to equate South Africa’s policy of apartheid with Australia’s immigration law, in doing so he had done a great disservice to Australia. He continued that it was understandable that the South African Prime Minister should attack Afro-Asian countries but it was not understandable that the Australian Prime Minister should join the attack. Asian Recorder (New Delhi), 1961, p. 4030.


90 Macmillan wrote to British High Commissioner Sir John Maud on 21 March, “It is sad that we have not achieved our immediate purpose—to keep South Africa in the Commonwealth in order to help the ideas in which we believe.” Macmillan, n. 14, p. 302.

91 Macmillan in his speech in the House of Commons said, All kinds of discrimination - not only racial, but political, religious and cultural—in one form or another have been and are still practised, often as a survival of long tradition. But the fundamental difference between ours and the South African philosophy is that we are trying to escape from these inherited practice. ... It is not, therefore, because all of us are without sin that we felt so strongly. It was because this apartheid theory transposes what we regard as a wrong into a right. Macmillan, n. 14, pp. 303-04
that Verwoerd was not ready to yield. 92 Britain would have been happy to let the situation continue as it is. But the pressure from Commonwealth forced Britain to advice South Africa to withdraw. 93 After the exit Britain admitted that apartheid had ceased to be a matter of purely domestic concern. 94 This signalled a major departure from the traditional British argument that apartheid was purely a matter of domestic concern, under article 2(7) of the UN Charter.

Nehru said that the withdrawal was very significant step, which had strengthened the association. South Africa was now completely isolated from world opinion and it was good development from every point of view. Ayub Khan felt that the Commonwealth would be stronger organisation as the result of the withdrawal. 95 Tunku Abdul Rahman was happy that he “can go back to face my people with a clear conscience”. Mrs Bandaranaike said the withdrawal was a “dramatic vindication of the equality of human dignity for which the Commonwealth stands.” 96

Abubakar said “so long as one member openly advocated racial discrimination, it was impossible to accept that the Commonwealth was indeed an association of free and equal nations. In my considered opinion it will greatly strengthen the Commonwealth. 97 Moreover he felt that it has literally purged the Commonwealth and believed that Commonwealth can now wield tremendously powerful influence for good in world politics. Nkrumah said that had South Africa shown even the slightest sign of modifying apartheid he would have gone along with it. It now became the duty of all nations to

92 He said, “The countries which feel discrimination most strongly and which were the most outspoken critics showed a desire and readiness at all times to come to an agreement without sacrifice if principle and I say in no bitter sense that there was no corresponding readiness on the part of Prime Minister Verwoerd.” Mansergh, n. 13, p. 368.

93 According to Kenneth Younger, “If there have been no pressure from the Commonwealth, Britain would not have acted at all. Britain would not have I think, positively expelled South Africa, had it not been for the feeling that she had to choose between the solidarity with the rest of Africa or the solidarity with the Union of South Africa. And it was very specific for the Union of South Africa, but for economic reasons we might have just let it around. And I think the Commonwealth pressure was probably the decisive one.” Vivekanandan, n. 9. p. 176.

94 Duncan Sandy declared, “It must, however, be recognised that apartheid has aroused deep emotion throughout the world and has ceased to be a matter of purely domestic concern”. Ibid., p. 175.

95 Asian Recorder, 1961, p. 4028-4030
97 Mansergh, n. 13, p. 365.
bring pressure on South Africa with the imposition of political and economic sanctions. \(^9\)

Julius Neyrere, who had played an important role said, “It was the happiest day of my life... you see... that man Verwoerd could not modify his position. It was a question of changing a man’s whole religion.” \(^9\) The exit in other words meant that the Commonwealth must be an ideological as well as an historical community. \(^10\) Canadian Commentator John Holmes put it as adherence to the more recent principle of racial equality took precedence over the preservation of the family. \(^10\)

**Evaluation**

As long as the Commonwealth consisted of white dominions, there was no criticism against South Africa. Even after the arrival of Asian countries, moves against South Africa took place in the UN. Moreover, no Prime Ministers’ conference was held between 1957 and 1960, a period when Malaya joined and there were rapid developments towards African independence. African countries brought a new dimension of morality to the Commonwealth. They regarded racial equality as a prerequisite for the Commonwealth membership.

Attitudes in White nations also changed and South Africa soon turned to be an embarrassment for them. Great Britain, in particular, found herself in a tight situation of having to choose between showing solidarity with African countries or with South Africa. However, increasing importance of African presence in the world politics and her policy of “Paramountcy of natives” made Britain choose the African side. Sharpville incident added further pressure. The pressure on South Africa that each time her policy would be questioned and that a motion for expulsion can be passed anytime forced her to withdraw from the Commonwealth.

The inclination to evict South Africa seemed an attempt to say that having been a subject of the British Crown was not enough qualification for membership. In addition, each

\(^9\) n. 95, p. 4029.

\(^9\) Ingram, n. 43, p. 238.


member should behave in a certain way. In other words, the Commonwealth must be an ideological as well as an historical community.

Britain decided in favour of withdrawal of South Africa due to the fear that if South Africa continued to be a member the African countries will refuse to join the Commonwealth resulting in the disintegration of the Commonwealth. Further the existing members may themselves withdraw. Macmillan or the British government did not feel that apartheid was right. In their opinion it was not right to use the issue of South Africa's decision to be a republic to expel South Africa from the Commonwealth. Macmillan felt that if such a course was thought necessary, it should not be associated with the changing of South Africa into a Republic but a separate proposition should be put forward at a special meeting. It should also be kept in mind that it was his duty as the chairperson to come up with compromises. However Britain admitted that apartheid was no longer just a domestic concern. This signalled a major departure from the traditional British argument that apartheid was purely a matter of domestic concern, under article 2(7) of the UN Charter.

The severing of the Commonwealth link by far the longest standing of South Africa's formal external contacts was an indication of its increasing isolation. When the break was made, the flow of information, which Great Britain provided, stopped. There was no way to replace the informal contacts with a group of this range and diversity that the Commonwealth provided. However, South Africa's withdrawal did not affect her relationship with Britain and economic relations continued. Verwoerd seemed to have received assurance of continued co-operation from Britain before he announced the intention to withdraw from the Commonwealth. None of the Commonwealth rules were broken as South Africa's permission was taken to discuss her racial policy.

The question of course could be raised that continuing the membership might have been better as it would be easier to exert pressure on South Africa as expulsion would only harden the determination to pursue the apartheid policy. But it should be realised that the exit was an important development in the growth of the Commonwealth. With the exit of South Africa, the principle of racial equality as the basis for Commonwealth membership received the recognition of the Prime Ministers. It strengthened the
Commonwealth for it demonstrated the association’s determination to reject the policies based upon the ideas of racial superiority. The Commonwealth expulsion had an important impact. The example of expulsion was to be imitated by other international organisations. The departure of South Africa from the Commonwealth did not end the problem. It was the beginning of a long struggle against apartheid for the Commonwealth. But did the African countries continue their support to anti-apartheid struggles with the same vigour or were their own problems forcing them to make compromises on the issue? This is the focus of the next chapter.