CHAPTER V

CANADA, SOUTH AFRICA AND THE COMMONWEALTH
PRIME MINISTERS' CONFERENCE, 1961

The 1961 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference marked an important turning point in the evolution of the Commonwealth. "What to do about South Africa produced as much searching of mind, perhaps even more of heart, as any problem of Commonwealth in Canada's history." 1 The Observer (London) wrote: "Mr. Diefenbaker's role [in the 1961 conference] was of decisive importance. Not only did he provide a bridge between the old white dominions and the new non-white members; he also demonstrated the importance of somebody giving a lead."

The South African Government conducted on 5 October 1960 a referendum in South Africa to decide whether it should become a Republic or not; the majority of the Whites-only electorate favoured a Republic for South Africa. Nearly three-fifths of the adult population of South Africa were excluded from participation in the referendum, just because they were not Whites.


Soon after this referendum, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan had informal meetings with the representatives of the Commonwealth Governments to find out whether it was possible to arrive at a consensus regarding the question of South Africa's continued membership in the Commonwealth after it became a Republic. Jawaharlal Nehru and Robert Menzies also entered into correspondence with the Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth; but it was found that no agreement could be possible. Therefore, as per the communiqué of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference of 1960, the issue had to be settled by a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference. So, it was decided to convene such a conference in 1961 mainly to take a decision on this question.

More than any other issue, the question of South Africa's continued membership in the Commonwealth brought forth wide disagreements among the Commonwealth members. The opinion in South Africa itself was divided. Even the religious leaders had differences of opinion on this issue.

3 India, Lok Sabha, Parliamentary Debates, 25 August 1960, col. 4839.
4 For a detailed account of Menzies efforts, see R.C. Menzies, Afternoon Light; Some Memories of Men and Events (London, 1967), pp. 198-210.
5 Diefenbaker revealed in the Canadian House of Commons on 27 February 1961 that it had been found that it would be better to discuss the issue at a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference. Canada, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 3, 1960-61, p. 2452.
The Anglican Archbishop of Capetown pleaded for South Africa's retention in the Commonwealth because the non-Whites had no say in the referendum; while the Bishop of Johannesburg felt that South Africa should not be allowed to continue in the Commonwealth because of her racial policy. The official opposition party, the United Party of South Africa, wanted South Africa's continuance in the Commonwealth; but the President of the banned African National Congress felt that the Union Government should be dismissed from the Commonwealth to show international disapproval of the "apartheid" mania.6

Public opinion in Britain was deeply stirred and divided on this issue. The letters to the editors appearing on this question many days before the commencement of the conference indicated that some felt that there might not be any alternative left except to exclude South Africa from the Commonwealth, while the others wanted South Africa to be in the Commonwealth as they were concerned about the English-speaking people in South Africa, with whom they would like to maintain as much contact as possible through

6. The Times (London), 9 March 1961. South Africa's Press was solidly behind Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd's mission to keep the nation in the Commonwealth. The most typical was that of Rand Daily Mail which said: "Every consideration of practical advantage and good sense now demand that South Africa should remain in the Commonwealth." Reproduced in the Globe and Mail, 6 March 1961.
the common membership of their country in the Commonwealth.

Public Opinion in Canada

In Canada, the National Liberal Party Rally held in January 1961 passed a resolution to the effect that "apartheid" was incompatible with the nature of the Commonwealth as a multi-racial association. The Canadian Commonwealth

7 The major newspapers in Britain also expressed divergent views. The pro-labour Reynolds News and the Independent Observer felt that South Africa should not be permitted to continue in the Commonwealth. The Conservative Sunday Dispatch and the Conservative Daily Telegraph were for the keeping of South Africa, though they denounced its racial policy. Quoted by Toronto Globe and Mail, 6 May 1960. The London Times though was not categorical in its views, made it clear that the Verwoerd Government could be accepted only on sufferance. Editorial, The Times (London), 4 May 1960. Most of the Australian newspapers agreed that the question of South Africa's racial policies would be the hottest issue at the conference. Newspapers in Ghana and Nigeria felt that their country should think whether to continue in the Commonwealth with the African haters. Quoted by Globe and Mail, 6 May 1960. Many of the Indian newspapers strongly criticized South Africa's racial policy.

Federation Party (CCFP) felt that it should be made clear to South Africa that her policies should be changed before sympathetic consideration could be given to its continued membership in the Commonwealth.  

One of the leading dailies of Canada, The Toronto Globe and Mail, took the view that South Africa should be put out of the Commonwealth until she had a complete change of heart, and Canada should be the first country to propose such a step in the 1961 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference.  

The Free Press indicated that if South Africa applied for Commonwealth membership, Canada should vote against her, since to admit her would be to condone the South African Government's neo-Nazi mentality and jeopardize the West's position and interests throughout the Afro-Asian Community.  

The Montreal Daily Star opined that if continued membership of the association rests on a community of interests and ideals of equality under God, and if South African Prime Minister Verwoerd shut the door even on the ideal, no members of the Commonwealth would wish to continue in the association with South Africa.

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9 Canada, n. 5, p. 2621.
12 Montreal Daily Star, 22 November 1960. In February 1961 T.H. Robert of Montreal, the President of the Consolidated Paper Company, while on a visit to South
Government's Attitude Before the Conference

Between 1960 and 1961 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' conferences, Diefenbaker was critical of South Africa's racial policies. He gave an interview to the Natal Daily News of Durban. In the interview he said that there was a contrast between the impression he had gained from the Canadian Press and what he had found in South Africa itself. He charged that the Press had given a wrong impression of South African life and "greatly magnified" the colour problem. Isolated incidents of violence he contended were played up "to the extent that people got the impression that this sort of thing was common all over the country." This interview is reprinted in the Globe and Mail, 6 March 1961. This accusation of the Canadian Press was quite unfounded. The Canadian newspapers had certainly not played up isolated and unimportant incidents to make conditions in South Africa look bad. They had simply published the important news reports from that country, when and as they came, like the Sharpeville massacre; the arrest and internment by the Nationalist Government of more than 10,000 of its critics and opponents; the attempted assassination of Prime Minister Verwoerd; the controversy over South Africa's status in the Commonwealth; the threat of eventual civil war voiced in January 1961 by exiled African leaders in London. These incidents had certainly given to the Canadian public an impression that South Africa was a country of tension and strife. The allegation of Diefenbaker that Canadian newspapers had magnified South Africa's colour problem, was not correct because the colour problem had come to dominate every phase of South African life: government policy, political parties, industrial activity, education, and even religion. How can any honest reporting ignore this explosive issue? See Globe and Mail, 6 March 1961.
policy, but did not give in public any clear indication as to whether or not he favoured South Africa's continued membership in the Commonwealth. On 16 May 1960, he affirmed the traditional view of the association that the Commonwealth as such should not take up consideration of the internal policy of other members, because if that was done, it would lead to a wrong precedent. If a majority of Commonwealth governments allied themselves in the condemnation of one or more of their members, he added, it would amount to constituting themselves as a court of judgement, and if that happened, then it would lead to the end of the association. 13 But this did not mean that in the early months of 1961 he eagerly supported South Africa's continued membership in the Commonwealth. He particularly made it clear that it was not correct to imagine that if South Africa decided to become a Republic, the influence of Canada would necessarily be used to retain South Africa in the Commonwealth. 14

In a speech on the eve of the conference, Prime Minister Diefenbaker, for the first time, related the two issues of South Africa's racial policy and that of its membership in the Commonwealth, and wondered:

14 Ibid., vol. 7, p. 7536.
Are we now at a stage that membership in a multi-racial Commonwealth carries with it obligations on members to promote certain commonly accepted standards in relationships between peoples of varying racial origins and colour within the boundaries of a member state...? 15

But, at the same time, while addressing the Canada Club in London, Diefenbaker indirectly rebuked those who were impatiently demanding the expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth. He said that the essence of the Commonwealth was tolerance and added: "We have to have that infinite compassion that spirit that brings us together." 16 However, he revealed that he would prefer the Commonwealth to pass a Bill of Rights. 17


16 Ibid. From this speech of Diefenbaker the Globe and Mail came to the conclusion that "Mr. Diefenbaker's heart is really bleeding for Prime Minister Hendric Verwoerd and his associates in their self-imposed troubles....Our Prime Minister in fact now seems firmly aligned with the group at the conference which is opposing any move to exclude South Africa from the Commonwealth". Editorial in Globe and Mail, 9 March 1961.

Malyea's Tunku Abdul Rahman, who upset South Africa rather badly in the 1960 conference, made it known that he had had discussions with Diefenbaker in Canada on this question and that there was some understanding between Diefenbaker and himself, and that both of them felt very strongly about racial discrimination. The Tunku's "private belief is that Mr. Diefenbaker will open the attack." About a fortnight before the commencement of the conference, the Times indicated that "if one of the original Commonwealth members votes against South Africa's membership in the Commonwealth the African and Asian members can hardly do otherwise," and called Diefenbaker, "the man to watch." The London Observer's Commonwealth correspondent, Collin Legum, opined that "most of the Afro-Asian members are looking to Canada for a lead. They would prefer it to come from one of the White Dominions. Prime Minister John Diefenbaker is known to have strong views on the South African question.... There is some evidence to support the view that Canada might turn out to be South Africa's foremost opponent." Diefenbaker's non-committal statement in advance about South Africa's continued membership in the association put

18 Ibid., 6 March 1961.
19 The Times (London), 1 March 1961.
him in a unique position among the Prime Ministers of Australia, New Zealand and Britain, who were already committed to South Africa's continued membership in the Commonwealth, despite its racial policies. Also Diefenbaker's reputation as a man who throughout his life championed the rights of all the Canadians, irrespective of the countries from which they had immigrated to Canada, put him in a different light, compared to any of the White Dominion Prime Ministers. On the eve of the conference, it was very difficult to predict what attitude Canada would adopt in the conference because Diefenbaker kept his cards very close to himself.

Discussion in the Conference

Since the contribution made by Diefenbaker to the 1961 conference cannot be studied in isolation of that of the role played by the other Prime Ministers and the events necessitate further comments, it is necessary to review the proceedings of the meeting.

The meetings of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers were held in private, but what was discussed in these meetings regarding the question of South Africa's membership in the Commonwealth was given out later in great detail, especially by Prime Ministers Verwoerd, Menzies, Diefenbaker and Macmillan to their respective Parliaments. The experienced reporters of the reputed newspapers of the Commonwealth countries also gave lengthy reports of what
transpired inside the hall through their own reliable sources.
except for minor shifts in emphasis, on the whole, these
reports are not very different from that of the Prime
Ministers.

The conference discussed the question of South
Africa's membership in the Commonwealth for three days,
Monday through Wednesday.

On Monday, after the introductory remarks by
Macmillan, Verwoerd formally applied for South Africa's
continued membership in the Commonwealth after it became a
Republic. He agreed to the discussion of South Africa's
racial policy in the conference, hoping that it would
brighten the chances of South Africa retaining its mem-
bership in the Commonwealth. 21 After that, every other Prime
Minister stated his views. The atmosphere in the conference
was very calm; nobody spoke excitingly; Verwoerd had no
grievance against the climate of discussion. 22 But this
climate of great courtesy, dignity and calm made the under-
lying tension all the more real. 23

Diefenbaker in his speech indicated that the
approval of South Africa's application for continued

21 Nicholas Mansergh, ed., Documents and Speeches on
375.
22 Ibid., p. 381.
membership in the Commonwealth was not simply a formal step, because procedural and substantive qualifications were to be taken into consideration. Therefore, he felt that the Commonwealth could draw up a Bill of Rights for which it stood. He reminded his colleagues that the UN Charter accepted the principle that there should be no discrimination on grounds of race, colour, creed, language, religion etc; the Commonwealth could stand for no less. As far as Canada was concerned, it abhorred the principles and practices of "apartheid".

Jawaharlal Nehru of India opined that the fellowship of men should be the basis of the Commonwealth. Ayub Khan of Pakistan and Sarwan of Ghana hinted that if South Africa was not at all prepared to modify her policy, it might have to leave the association. Prime Minister Verwoerd wondered why when other countries after becoming Republics could remain in the Commonwealth, South Africa should be singled out? There was much that could be criticized in the policy of the other countries too, he added. Macmillan and Menzies opined that for a country to become a Republic was as much no cause for its exclusion from the

According to Verwoerd, on the first day itself some of the Prime Ministers made it clear that there would be no effective co-operation with countries which did not accept a multi-racial community with equal rights and that there would be international repercussions if the Commonwealth allowed South Africa to remain a member, without any qualifications as to what the Commonwealth's racial policy ought to be.

On Monday, it appears that two sets of views were expressed, apart from that of Canada's; one group took the lawyer's position that South Africa was changing her status from a Monarchy to a Republic and for this it could not rightfully be excluded from the Commonwealth and that a member's domestic policy should not be a criterion to determine whether it should continue in the Commonwealth.

25 The Times (London), 14 March 1961. Julius Nyerere, the then Chief Minister of Tanganyika (as it was) whose country would soon to become a full member of the Commonwealth wrote in an article to the London Observer: "We believe that the principles of the Commonwealth would be betrayed by an affirmative answer to South Africa's application for readmission as a republic. Inevitably, therefore, we are forced to say that to vote South Africa in is to vote us out." The Observer, 12 March 1961.

26 Verwoerd, see Nicholas Mansergh, ed., n. 21, pp. 331–2.
or not. The other group felt that the racial policy of South Africa was much more than purely the domestic affair of South Africa and "apartheid" could not be ignored when they were to decide on South Africa's continued membership in the Commonwealth.

On Tuesday, the Prime Ministers discussed a few draft texts of the final communiqué. One such draft in its first part, according to Verwoerd, stated that "there was nothing to prohibit South Africa technically from remaining a member; and the second part stated that ... one could not really divorce the decision as to South Africa's membership from the condemnation of its policy." Verwoerd disagreed with the draft, not only because it did not clarify whether South Africa could be a member or not, but also it was couched in terms which, in his own words, "acquired the character of laying down the rules and principles of the Commonwealth .... It would mean that South Africa would have to change its policy, and that we would not be prepared to do so." Macmillan, supported by Menzies (Australia) and Holycroft (New Zealand), desired the communiqué to state that South Africa could continue in

27 Ibid., p. 383.
28 Ibid.
the Commonwealth, but at the same time making it clear that it did not constitute the approval of "apartheid" policy. 29

Amin Abdur Rahman wanted "a clear expression of Commonwealth opposition to racism". 30 Agreeing with him, Ayub Khan wished that in the communiqué a clear assertion of opposition to "apartheid" should be made. Nehru himself proposed a draft saying "we, the Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth, recognize that the principle of racial discrimination is incompatible with the membership of the Commonwealth". 31 Menzies made it clear that South Africa should not be virtually forced out of the Commonwealth. 32 Diefenbaker indicated that if the Commonwealth made a declaration of the principle of racial equality, there would be no problem of whether or not South Africa should be

29 Robert Duff, Globe and Mail, 15 March 1961. According to the Times (London) the British draft statement, in effect, explained that South Africa's application for continuing its membership was accepted but it would mean that the other members in no way approved its racial policy. The Times (London), 15 March 1961.


31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.
allowed to continue in the Commonwealth, but it was up to South Africa to subscribe to the principle. After some more discussions, an agreed draft appears to have emerged. In the words of Henzies:

The broad nature of the draft was that we first set out that we saw no technical constitutional ground for refusing the application, but that we had debated, with Dr. Verwoerd's consent on this occasion, the matter of racial policy. We then went on to summarize the criticism that had been made, and the nature of the replies made by Dr. Verwoerd. We then concluded that, not withstanding those replies, we adhered to our criticisms.

Verwoerd wanted the first part of this draft to be changed and enquired whether the necessary amendments could be made to make it clear that the first part of it dealing with policy only represented the viewpoints of the other Prime Ministers but did not lay down new principles for the Commonwealth....? According to Verwoerd, he virtually got an affirmative answer from members, but to what extent this is true is difficult to say. However, that at one stage agreement was almost reached, was

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33 Ibid.
34 Nichols, Senorgh, ed., n. 21, p. 352.
35 Verwoerd, ibid., p. 334.
36 Ibid.
confirmed by Diefenbaker and Menzies. 37

so on Tuesday, it appears that Macmillan and Menzies supported by Holyoake was able to convince, at least temporarily, the Afro-Asian members that it would be a dangerous precedent to make other members' agreement to a member's internal policy as a pre-condition for its continued membership in the Commonwealth. If this draft communique was agreeable to all, it would mean that the Commonwealth accepted "apartheid" as essentially a domestic affair of South Africa, and the Commonwealth as such should not interfere in this issue. This agreed formula in effect had also rejected the idea of laying down racial equality as a basic principle of the Commonwealth, because the views of the other Prime Ministers on racialism had become mere opinions. Menzies and Macmillan had succeeded on Tuesday in making the Prime Ministers agree to a large extent with the view that laying down qualifications for membership in the Commonwealth was also basically contrary to the character and spirit of the association.

37 Diefenbaker told the Canadian House of Commons later: "There was a time when discussions seemed to give promise of a mutually acceptable solution. Dr. Verwoerd seemed ready then to accept in a formula which would have been coupled with a declaration of principle by the cumulative conscience of the other prime ministers." Canada, n. s., 5, p. 3032. Menzies, see Nicholas Mansergh, ed., n. s., 21, p. 383.
According to Verwoerd, the next day, after making a few amendments to the draft which was more or less agreed upon the previous day, he showed it to the Chairman of the conference (Macmillan) in advance. The latter recommended certain minor changes, which Verwoerd accepted. When Macmillan submitted it to the conference, he stated that he believed that a solution had now been reached, because, Verwoerd had agreed to work on a basis which had evidently been acceptable to the other members in the previous afternoon, but in regard to which they had agreed that certain amendments should be made. The amended draft did not satisfy many of the Afro-Asian members. Their argument centered round the theme that to allow South Africa to continue her membership in the Commonwealth side-tracked the essence of the problem that now South Africa should subscribe to the principle of racial equality. They did not want South Africa to change at one stroke her "apartheid" policy; but indicated that moves should be made towards a multi-racial society and for that purpose they demanded minor concessions from the South African Government. Siebenbeker told the author later in Ottawa: "There was

38 Verwoerd, see Nicholas Henshergh, ed., n. 21, p. 394.

a suggestion that like earlier days the blacks -- I do not
know what they are called, may be non-whites -- be given
representation in the South African Parliament. Verwoerd
refused, I was disappointed. 41

It also became clear to the other members of the
Commonwealth that South Africa's attitude towards racial
matters had become incompatible with the effective operation
of Commonwealth relationship as the Commonwealth is essen-
tially an association of nations of different races and
colours who have established a close relationship with one
another. That close and special relationship can only be
maintained by continuous and intimate consultation between
their governments. The South African Government in the 1961
conference also indicated that it would not receive diplo-
matic representatives from the non-white countries of the
Commonwealth. This, according to the then British Secretary
of State for Commonwealth Affairs, Duncan Sandys, "makes a
mockery of consultation; and, in any case, we cannot accept
that because of the colour of their skin certain members of

40 The 1959 Act led to the removal of the former (white)
Native representatives from the South African
Parliament.

41 Interview with the author in July 1968.
the Commonwealth are to be treated as lepers." As the debate went on, according to Diefenbaker, the true depth of the gulf between Verwoerd and the other members of the Commonwealth was revealed, stretching to the breaking-point the will to bridge it. Verwoerd indicated later that Jawaharlal Nehru expressed the view that at the first opportunity, he would raise the question as to whether South Africa could be in the Commonwealth while its racial policy continued unabated. The other Afro-Asian members opined that it was incompatible for a country to continue its membership in the Commonwealth without it being stated that every member should build a structure which would create a society in which equal opportunity would be provided to all, irrespective of race. According to Menzies, two members wanted the communique to conclude with a declaration


43 Canada, n. 5, p. 3082.

44 Verwoerd, See Nicholas Mansergh, ed., n. 21, p. 335.

that South Africa's policies were incompatible with the membership of the Commonwealth. Another agreed and added that he reserved the right to move for the expulsion of South Africa or to withdraw his country from the Commonwealth. 46 But Verwoerd gave no sign whatever that the policy of "apartheid" would be modified by even a scintilla. 47 At this stage, Diefenbaker took a hard line against South Africa, as it was revealed by the then South African Minister for External Affairs Eric Louw who accompanied

46 Robert Menzies, n. 21, p. 393.

47 The Times (London), 16 March 1961. Diefenbaker also told the Canadian House of Commons later, "Well, 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 agreement without sacrifice of principle, and I say in no bitter sense that there was no corresponding readiness on the part of Prime Minister Verwoerd." Canada, n. 5, 1961, p. 3081. Macmillan expressed his conviction later in the British House of Commons, that had Verwoerd shown the smallest move towards any understanding of the views of his Commonwealth colleagues, or made any concession, had he given us anything to hold on to or any grounds for hope, the conference would have looked beyond the immediate difficulties to the possibilities of the future. Harold Macmillan, n. 21, p. 374.
Verwoerd to the conference: "It was after Ghana and Nigeria had indicated that they might move for the expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth that Mr. Diefenbaker forced the issue by proposing that the communique should contain a paragraph condemning South African policies." As the debate went on, it became more and more clear to Verwoerd that attacks upon "apartheid" within the Commonwealth would increase in future. Verwoerd evidently came gradually to the view that the basic differences over racial policy would in practice continue to create severe strains for South Africa in the Commonwealth. At this point, after a brief adjournment, he rose to tell the other Prime Ministers that he felt that South Africa was not welcome as a member and was in fact an embarrassment. After a short adjournment, he announced that he thought it better to withdraw its application for continued membership in the Commonwealth after it became a Republic.

Conclusion

Before the commencement of the conference, Diefenbaker had been scrupulously avoiding to reveal exactly what attitude he would be taking in the conference.

regarding South Africa's continued membership in the association, but as we have seen earlier, he affirmed the Commonwealth convention that internal policies of members should not be discussed in the Commonwealth Conference. If this was done, he made it plain that the end of the association was near. In this connexion, he also observed that one should have tolerance towards the other members. These statements of Diefenbaker put him more on the side of those who were prepared to keep South Africa, within the Commonwealth, not withstanding its racial policy. John Dugdale, a British Member of Parliament, who had a lengthy conversation with Diefenbaker in Ottawa three weeks before the beginning of the conference, indicated: "... I came to the conclusion that he [Diefenbaker] was going to recommend that South Africa should remain in the Commonwealth and that he would do all that he could to press for that." 50

From the information Robert Menzies got from Diefenbaker it is clear that the latter wanted to keep South Africa in the Commonwealth. 51 But Diefenbaker also made observations which indirectly hinted that probably now the Commonwealth had reached a stage when membership of the association carried with it the obligation that at

50 UK, n. 42, col. 468.
51 Menzies, n. 21.
least in racial matters there should be some commonly accepted standards. Harold Macmillan also got this impression from his correspondence with Diefenbaker. As we have seen earlier, Tunji Abdul Rahman from his talks with Diefenbaker got the impression that the latter would initiate the attack on South Africa in the conference.

Thus at the most, an observer got a conflicting picture of Diefenbaker regarding what he would do in the conference. This was because he was very much eager to avoid being identified neither with the group which desired to allow South Africa in the association without laying down any conditions regarding its racial policy, nor the other group that was against any such move. Surely, he should have known from the correspondence that was going on among the Commonwealth Capitals a few months before the beginning of the 1961 Conference regarding South Africa's membership in the Commonwealth that the Afro-Asian members were determined to take a strong line on this question, whereas the others were not. To side with any of these groups, Diefenbaker would have thought, could prevent him from playing the role of an intermediary between the two groups in the conference, if that need arose.

On the first day, when the question of South Africa's membership came up for consideration, Diefenbaker

suggested that the Commonwealth should have a comprehensive Bill of Rights for itself. When Diefenbaker found that this idea of a Commonwealth Bill of Rights did not find favour with the majority of the members, the next day he narrowed down the scope of the Bill only to include specifically the principle of racial equality. This, of course, does not mean that Diefenbaker decided to present an ultimatum to South Africa, as he did not make it specific whether the principle of racial equality was a binding principle of the Commonwealth or only an ideal to be achieved. He would have realized from the discussions on the first two days that the Afro-Asian members would not agree to a completely non-binding principles on this issue. Therefore, it appears that he had left it to the conference to decide to what extent it should be obligatory and what small steps South Africa should take, at least to begin with, to show beyond doubt that it was moving in the direction of bringing in racial equality in the South African society. It seems that Diefenbaker thought that South Africa and the Afro-Asian members might approach the question in a spirit of give and take. Thus, on the first two days of discussions on South Africa, he hoped that, surely, a compromise could be achieved.

On the first two days, Diefenbaker lived up to the Canadian Commonwealth traditions of playing the role of a
mediator and conciliator in finding a formula which would have maintained a principle without dividing the various members of the Commonwealth, but the debates that took place on the third day on this question made it clear to Diefenbaker that Verwoerd was not prepared for any change in the direction in which the Afro-Asians were insistently asking for in South Africa's racial policy. When Verwoerd was quite intransigent, Diefenbaker probably felt that no useful purpose would be served by trying for a compromise. It dawned on Diefenbaker at this stage that he was wrong in taking into his calculations that South Africa, after all, might show a little concession. At this juncture, he decided to throw his weight on the side of the Afro-Asian members. In his own words: "At the end of the discussions in the conference, even if there was a vote taken, I would have voted along with the Asian and African members; I knew that the others i.e., the senior members of the Commonwealth would not have done like that." 53

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53 Interview with the author. According to the then South African External Affairs Minister, "Mr. Diefenbaker's alliance with Afro-Asian Commonwealth group was motivated by consideration of political expediency. He has been losing ground in Canada and is pandering to the anti-South African campaign carried on in the Canadian Press as well as in clerical and ultra-liberalistic circles." Globe and Mail, 20 March 1961. It is true that Diefenbaker's action in 1961 conference was popular in Canada and, in 1960 and in the months preceding the 1961 Commonwealth meeting, he was criticized by some of
But after the exist of South Africa from the Commonwealth, Canada was not prepared to adopt the same strategy as that of the Afro-Asian members who felt that South Africa should be made to change its policy through moral and material ostracism. Of course, Diefenbaker was quite categorical in his denunciation of "apartheid" policy after South Africa's exit. In this connexion, it should be noted that by forcing South Africa to leave the Commonwealth when South Africa refused to change its racial policy even slightly, the member nations of the Commonwealth indicated at least their moral disapproval of South Africa's policies. Of course, South Africa leaving the Commonwealth would not automatically result in South Africa losing the trade benefits it enjoyed with other Commonwealth countries. But if Commonwealth trade preferences were to be maintained and normal relations of every sort was to be continued between the Commonwealth countries and South Africa, after it ceased to be a member of the organisation, then its withdrawal from the Commonwealth was not going to make in substance any difference to South Africa. After all, the

the organs of the Canadian Public opinion, especially the newspapers, religious organisations and the Commonwealth Co-operative Federation, a Canadian leftist party, for his soft policy towards South Africa, but surely, in Canada, among the public at large, Diefenbaker was not significantly losing his popularity just because of his stand on South Africa before the conference of 1961.
overall objective of any action should be to make the South African Government to abandon its racial policy. Before leaving London, President Nkrumah commenting on South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth said:

I am not happy in a way. Even if they had shown the slightest sign of modifying their apartheid system, we would have gone along with them [i.e., South Africa's desire to remain in the Commonwealth]. Now that South Africa had decided to continue her apartheid system it is incumbent on all members of the Commonwealth to bring pressure to bear on South Africa to abandon the system, by imposing total economic and political sanctions on her. 54

But so far as the Afro-Asian members were concerned, the question of imposing these sanctions did not arise, as they neither traded with South Africa, nor did they maintain diplomatic relations with her. Therefore, it was up to the senior members of the Commonwealth to impose these sanctions. Of course, Britain, Australia and New Zealand were not prepared to do any such thing. This was expected, considering the role played by Macmillan, Menzies and Holyoake in the conference. Since Canada took a different line in the conference from these founder-members of the Commonwealth and at the end sided fully with the Afro-Asian members, one is eager to know whether in practice Canada would be in

54 The Times (London), 23 March 1961.
this respect different from Britain, Australia and New Zealand. As the *Montreal Daily Star* put it:

> Let us in Canada not wallow in self-righteousness. We have done the right thing in exceedingly difficult circumstances and may take credit for it, but let us not descend to the level of thinking that the principle of racial equality is implemented by the mere fact of putting our signature to it.

From the information furnished by the then Canadian Minister for Trade and Commerce, George Beec, to the Canadian House of Commons shortly after South Africa decided to withdraw its membership, it is evident that Canada would not only have its full trade and other normal relations with South Africa, but also continue the preferential trade arrangements with South Africa made when it was in the Commonwealth, even after it ceased to be a member of the

55 *Montreal Daily Star*, 16 March 1961. *The Vancouver Province* also indicated that Eric Nicol, a reporter of the *Vancouver Province*, made the point that the courage of our convictions in this issue can be measured only by what it costs us in trade with South Africa, that we have been 'chewing the cud of comfortable self-interest long enough'. The fact, suggests Eric, that enlightened self-interest is still at work here and that, on the largest possible scale, we are still chewing that 'comfortable cud' all the while properly supporting a position of the highest realism and moral integrity. Let's just make sure that we don't swoon over the latter and forget the former.
association. Thus, the Conservative Government of Canada was not prepared to go to the extent the Afro-Asian Commonwealth members would have liked it to go in its relations with South Africa after the 1961 conference. Canada in fact reverted virtually to its earlier bilateral relations with South Africa, once the crisis in the Commonwealth was over, despite the fact that Diefenbaker was known to be the champion of human rights in Canada. It is possible that Diefenbaker sided with the Afro-Asians in the Commonwealth Conference of 1961 only because of his desire to prevent the Commonwealth dividing itself on racial lines and thus preserve the Commonwealth, and not because the Diefenbaker's Government was convinced that the time had come to make the South African Government to change its racial policy by supporting such strong moves as the removal of South Africa from the Commonwealth of Nations.

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56 "Hon. L. M. Pearson (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the Minister for Trade and Commerce whether he would care to comment on reports that he has given an assurance to the South African trade mission now [25 April 1961] in Canada that there will be no alteration in the existing preferential trade arrangements with that country once it leaves the commonwealth.

Hon. George H. Reece (Minister of Trade and Commerce): That is correct."

Canada, n. s., vol. 4, p. 3966.