

The tenth conference of Commonwealth Prime Ministers since World War II did not live up to expectations as far as South Africa was concerned. The discussions concerning South Africa's request for continued membership after becoming a republic could not make any headway. The eleven member states – Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Ghana, Malaya and Nigeria, together with the Prime Minister of the Federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland who had been invited to attend – were of such a divergent character that attacks on South Africa's racial policy could have been expected.

When some member states threatened to make progressively unreasonable demands on South Africa, Dr. Verwoerd brought about a dramatic trend in the discussions by withdrawing his request for continued membership on Wednesday night, the 15th March, 1961 in the congregation hall of historic Lancaster House.

Before the conference commenced, it had been arranged that the 17th March. After the dramatic turn of events, Dr. Verwoerd was obliged to change the theme of his speech, to which so much importance was attached that the B.B.C. made special arrangements to keep open one of its networks to broadcast it, something which had never been done before.

South Africa was not the first independent member to resign from the Commonwealth. The Republic of Ireland withdrew from the Commonwealth in 1949.

On former similar occasions the problem of black-white relations in South Africa has been accorded particular attention. This time the wonderful potentialities and variety of South Africa could justifiably have been placed in the foreground – this diamond with many facets. I would dearly have loved to have reminded you of the beauty of the South African scenery – its mountains, its blue sky, its white beaches and the surrounding sea, the open veld, the dry and healthy Karoo, the luxurious Low veld, the vineyards and orchards of the south and the north, its green maize lands, the great cultivated areas of yellow sunflower, the waving gold of the wheat lands, the tobacco plantations, the irrigation settlements – green borders stretching from horizon to horizon beside miles of slowly flowing river, green even in the driest winter.

I would wish to guide you to the wild flowers of the Namaqualand, the protea and the silver tree

of the Cape and visit with you old homesteads, great national parks filled with wild animals from the smallest antelope to the lion, the rhinoceros, the giraffe and the elephant.

And all this beauty and variety is only one single facet which today largely escapes the attention.

One would wish to talk of South Africa's prosperity – this land of opportunity; of the economic development of the last 50 years, and of the last ten; of the old mines and the new; of the older industries and the younger, for greater development and the preparation for much more to come, expansion planned systematically, even for ten years ahead.

One would wish to praise farseeing investors from within and without the country who can see through the mists, imagined or otherwise, and seek to participate timeously in the prosperity which lies ahead in this always most stable part of Africa – this Europe of Africa, similar to the small strip of the Euro-Asian continent called Europe, which differs wholly from the continent and thereby led the world to all that it is today.

I would wish to talk about the new nation which we are building – our scientific endeavour, the growth of our educational institutions, and our welfare work, all in the interests of all sections of the community.

## Dr HF Verwoerd's address to the South African Club in London, March 17, 1961

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Unfortunately, present occurrences would make such a painting of the full and true South African scene seem unrealistic, because owing to the conference which has just ended, everybody's attention has once again been focussed solely on the one facet of white-black relations and our policy for solving the political problem involved. Even though you would, like myself, prefer to turn this diamond to the sunshine to let its brilliance scintillate and delight, I am compelled, once again, to hold this one, familiar facet before you.

This is particularly necessary because of what occurred during the last few days.

I came to London with the conviction that the Commonwealth would remain based on the same lines as heretofore, i.e. a body of nations wholly independent, in no wise subordinate one to the other, and who therefore do not interfere in each other's domestic affairs, even under the subterfuge that they affect international relations. The Commonwealth has always been founded on seeking points of agreement, and co-operating on them while forgetting (within that combination) all differences, however strongly they might have to be stated and fought elsewhere. South Africa persisted in this mature attitude throughout this meeting, as before, when she supported the membership of India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Malaya, Ghana and Nigeria, without hesitation, in spite of boycotts and sustained attacks at the UN and elsewhere by them.

At this conference it was their duty to the ideal of Commonwealth association to do likewise. Unfortunately some of them failed, in their immaturity. The great vision was beyond them. A witch hunt was more to their liking. The change from monarchy to republic was of no importance in this except as an opportunity to raise a matter which would otherwise have been raised by a special motion either now or soon.

South Africa was prepared to attempt to have the air cleared by consenting to a full discussion

of her policies. She was prepared to discuss and to agree to one formula after the other, in which in various ways both sides could sum up their case in the public communiqué. This would have enabled the opponents of South Africa's policy, which they had attacked very volubly in advance in public to prove to their countries that they had persisted in these attacks, and that the fact that South Africa remained in the Commonwealth in no way meant that they thereby condoned, or accepted co-responsibility for her policies.

Retainment of membership would have been solely due to the purely constitutional position. We were prepared in the interest of the Commonwealth to accept any such proposition, however unpleasant, and to our minds wrong, such statements on a member's policy would be, and even though this might prove harmful to South Africa.

The conciliatory attitude of South Africa must have been a disappointment to our attackers who then in a much more hostile manner than before began to make further demands. They now wanted the communiqué to contain, over and above the expression of their opinions, the addition at the end of what would be a joint condemnatory resolution, as well as the formulation (as a principle of the Commonwealth) that its multi-racial character should not only be respected in the relationships between nations, as is done by all of us, South Africa included, but that this must apply to the internal policies of constituent members as well.

It would have to apply in such a way that full integration could be the only form which would do justice to such a principle. This would not only constitute interference in domestic affairs but would also mean the disappearance of the rights of the white man and of the minority coloured groups in South Africa.

I could not accept this for South Africa. South Africa could not remain a member under such a

formula without being under continual fire of remaining under false pretences.

But this was not all. It was made clear to us that, should we remain, we would be under the threat of a proposal for expulsion, whether sooner or later, even within days. And still not satisfied with this, several Afro-Asian nations gave notice that if South Africa nevertheless retained membership, they would have to consider whether they could remain members.

Under such circumstances it must be clear to everybody that it was not a matter of not being accommodating, but that on two scores I was driven to the decision I took. Both the honour of South Africa and the practical considerations involved for South Africa made the decision to withdraw the indication of our desire to retain membership inevitable.

Besides, I had to take into consideration the invidious position in which our friends, and particularly the United Kingdom, would be placed if I forced them to decide the issue and perhaps to choose between members! The only honourable and friendly method of solving the problem was to take the decision I did, however hard and sad. In the circumstances it is most unfair to blame my stand on foolish and unnecessary obstinacy.

And now, what lies ahead?

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For the United Kingdom, the opportunity to hold together in her own way, if she can, the new and changing Commonwealth of increasingly non-White nations. She can attempt to do so without the embarrassment of South Africa with her policy of creating full but separate opportunities for White and Black. Indeed, particular emphasis should in future be laid, as we do, on the fact that the White people of Africa, being in the minority, from now onwards have the greater need for care and justice.

For South Africa and the United Kingdom and the other old friends this decision means new opportunity. They must seek to develop in other ways, untrammelled by the former problems, great bonds of friendship and co-operation to their mutual advantage. We are already working on these lines. Perhaps it is better this way, since sources of possible clash in most difficult situations fall away. Our trade and bilateral agreements, including the maintenance of the preferential trading arrangements. South Africa's membership of the sterling area, and the value of our gold production, defence agreements with regard to a common enemy, etc., need undergo no change. They can be re-endorsed in what our experts find to be the correct manner.

This is a comforting assurance. We need each other. With friendship unimpaired and so many interests so intertwined to our mutual benefit, this is wise policy, and will, I trust, and have reasons to believe, become wise practice. We will leave London satisfied that what happened had to be, and that our countries and their leaders remain better and more understanding friends than ever before.

For the purpose of what I have to say on race relations I shall presume a fairly extensive knowledge of the details of the Government policy of separate development. Today it seems more imperative to deal with the wider background of this policy, its morality and purpose. My reason for this approach is that it seems to me that the world at large and your own public have accepted, even if reluctantly, that South Africa has done and is doing more for the welfare of its non-white people than any other state in Africa.

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In fact, it seems as if it is already being realized that the Asiatic nations and even others in Europe or South America fall behind, sometimes far behind, the achievements of South Africa in this respect with regard to her Bantu. South Africa has progressed very far indeed in the education and training for professions and trades of all its peoples, in health services for all, in housing, in income per capita, in health services for all, in housing, in income per capita, in the scope of the services each group provides for its own people, including the provision of tradesmen, administrators and professional men of all kinds.

Other countries would justifiably claim and receive great credit for creating such material benefits and great opportunity for the general advancement of their masses. It is only in the case of South Africa that all this is swept aside with the bland statement that all this is worth nothing as long as one looks upon the recipients as inferior beings to whom participation in the government is denied.

It is of no avail to emphasize that the Government's policy is not based on people being inferior but being different, or to point out that a member of an African State can scarcely be accounted fortunate if he is in rags, with little to eat, with low wages, little continuous employment and a shack to live in, if the only compensation for all that he lacks and suffers is that he has the vote!

Does the vote satisfy and aid the people if the masses have to exercise this vote without much personal discretion because they know nothing of politics, or because a black near-dictator or a politically minded half-educated clique demands blind allegiance to keep them in power?

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It is this distortion of values in the eyes of the prejudiced or blind critics from afar, judging according to their own privileged experience and advanced state, which makes for the unjust and unfavourable condemnation of South Africa. Lack of perspective leads to nonsensical statements like the following which I collected from your newspapers: "South Africa discriminates unfairly and hates its coloured people! Government policy tramples on the rights of the black people whom they regard as inferiors!

"South Africa's assurances as to its aims and intentions for the development of its non-White people are dishonest! South Africa wishes to retain white supremacy throughout black and white areas and is not prepared to grant the non-Whites any political rights anywhere whatsoever! South Africa wants to keep the non-Whites in the position of second class citizens who will never participate in any form of government!

"South Africa must provide a blueprint for the future and this should contain no other ultimate object than domination by the black man which the white man must concede if he wishes to be allowed to live there in peace even though he then loses the vote or its value!"

A reply can be given to each of these, and many other, outrageous accusations and unjust criticisms which in addition do not take account of one great fundamental fact, namely that the white man of South Africa has as much or perhaps more right to justice and fair treatment and self-government, in his areas. To judge the morality of a policy it must be remembered that in all ethics a balance must be struck between different values, different rights. Absolute right for the one may mean tremendous injustice to the other.

I wish to deal with these contentions, either directly or by implication and commence by stating the dilemma of South Africa. Its problem is unique. Nowhere in the world and never in history has a situation developed which is quite similar. The solution must therefore also be unique. And yet everybody, everywhere, whether knowledgeable or quite uninformed, would like to impose theoretical ideas and principles or solutions found to be, or thought to be, useful elsewhere, on this different situation. Allow me to put to you the factors involved in very broad outlines.

More than 300 years ago two population groups, equally foreign to South Africa, converged in rather small numbers on what was practically empty country. Neither colonized another man's country or robbed him by invasion and oppression. Each settled and gradually extended his settlements, and in the main each sought a different part to become his own. There were clashes and frontier wars, and border areas were conquered, but since then the white man has added, and is adding, more land to the Bantu areas from what he himself settled and intended to be his own.

The first point is therefore, that there was no colonialism, only separate settlement by each, nearly simultaneously, and each had the chance to develop his country to serve his growing population for more than 300 years. The white man did this but not the black man and the white man did not use his power to overrun and acquire black man's country. In fact, only in South Africa, the white man deliberately reserved it for him and endeavoured (mostly in vain) to train him to make the best use of it, as he did with his own, and to such good purpose that the black man came to him for employment, food and the good things of life, and not for political conquests.

The white man therefore has not only an undoubted stake in, and right to, the land which he developed into a modern industrial state from denuded veld and empty valleys and isolated mountains, but according to all principles of morality it was his, is his and must remain his.

It is true that, in the course of time, he received within his country growing numbers of black people. Some fled to him for protection, driven out of their own country by internecine strife and the heavy hands of tyrants. Many came to him seeking relief from hunger or attracted by the bright lights of cities or by the desire for money or the good things of life.

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It is also true that elsewhere immigrants from one country to another could become fully-fledged citizens with political rights under certain conditions. It must, however, not be forgotten that for that very reason such countries could, and do, ration and restrict entrance to numbers which would not change the character of the nation or the control of its country, its culture and ideals or its very existence.

South Africa did not need to exercise this control and could be very liberal in giving entry, providing aid and a better life to all who entered, even illegally, because such consequences did not come into the picture on the South African scene.

The non-whites who entered the white man's country or the urban areas, came solely to seek employment, safety, health, education, all of which was provided freely by the white man, and knowing of and not expecting and not even thinking of political rights.

There was thus no question of robbing the white man of his country by any political result of this entry in huge numbers, or by the natural increase of his population under the white man's protection and care. This was world-wide usage. Particularly as the result of their stage of civilization, it was never contemplated that their presence would one day cause pressure upon the children of the white pioneer settlers of empty land to hand over without protest or resistance their whole heritage to such newcomers and protégés.

In fact, it seemed then that for all time the Whites would as guardians even have to rule the

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black man's country as part of their own in his interest because he could not be developed to do this properly for himself. This white man therefore allowed the influx to continue until he was outnumbered four to one, and even now, against his will, streams of illegal black immigrants flow across his borders from many parts of Africa, because of the better wages and way of life they find in this land of so-called oppression.

What is the solution to this dilemma, which history and the unexpected awakening of the black man has handed us? Theorists and others who far away can remain unaffected themselves, but philosophize gladly on the handing over of what is the possession of others, expect the white South African to give away gradually (and knowing that after the first step the pace will become uncontrollable) his country and his possessions and indeed ultimately his whole nationhood and existence.

Where does morality come in if this is demanded? If there must be justice for the black man, there must be justice for the white man and the Coloured too, who will both be affected and suppressed.

The British fought to the death for their very existence. Cannot you understand us doing so too? And yet we do not only seek and fight for a solution which will mean our survival, but seek one which will grant survival and full development, politically and economically to each of the other racial groups as well, and we are even prepared to pay a high price out of our earnings for their future.

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The moral problem just like the political problem, is to find a way out of this extremely difficult and complicated situation, caused by the fact that no longer as in the past is the black man incapable or undesirous of participation in the control of his political destinies. Nor is there any longer anyone prepared to oppress him by refusing the fulfilment of such ambitions in a form fair to all. Again I ask: What is the solution?

In certain parts of Africa where the white man also ruled alone before, a solution is relatively easy. Those who find it easy there and do not realize the great difference between the two situations, are unfortunately tempted to wish to transplant that solution to South Africa. I refer to the countries of Africa which undoubtedly belong to the black man by settlement and inheritance, although they were taken over, administered and developed by different white nations. It is right that their land should now politically become their own.

Then there are in Africa other states where the political solution is not so straight-forward or simple in spite of the fact that those territories were black-settled and at least theoretically not open space when whites originally moved in. The Whites are also far in the minority in these areas and this seems to support the demand for making black states out of these areas as well.

On the other hand the main body of these white people were genuine settlers, many for generations, and the fact cannot be denied that the development and prosperity of these areas today are wholly the result of their initiative investment, hard work and administrative capacity. In that sense it is their country too, or at least parts are, and they or their kin in the mother country have ruled alone until now. Have justice and the demands of morality nothing to say about the primary rights of these white people?

In the first planning it was accepted that their rights should be fully protected and the idea of partnership was born. This partnership was, for a long time to come, actually intended to be junior partnership for the Blacks and the continued control as senior partner by the Whites. Warnings made no impression on the rulers overseas that this theory would not work out that way, with the inevitable result that the black majorities soon demanded, and are quickly receiving, the right to what amounts to full control with the white man pushed out of politics to all intents and purposes.

He must furthermore expect to lose his possessions and see his hard-won farms, well-developed areas and businesses fall to pieces when he must go, as he realizes is inevitable. It is in such areas that the white settlers feel that they have been left in the lurch by parent countries.

Neither of these solutions would therefore suit the already described quite different South African situation. Not only are the Whites less outnumbered than anywhere else, and not only do they claim the empty country settled by their forefathers as really theirs, but they know that if they gave way to some preliminary form of partnership it would become the end of white civilization in South Africa too - and white civilization in the world would lose its only anchor in Africa. The lessons of the developments set out before are clear.

Forget the word "apartheid". Forget any term by which to describe a policy, and just ask yourselves what you would do under such circumstances.

There are three possibilities. One is that the white people of South Africa should sacrifice themselves, their possessions and the generations to come. They can do this by surrendering to black rule, even if it became a dictatorship, and evacuate the country of their forebears, or by

remaining and becoming an indistinguishable part of a black nation. Would you really choose that if it were England of which we are speaking?

Another way is to bluff yourself by making apparently smaller concessions, hoping to stave off the evil day, so that your children or grandchildren may suffer, but not you. This could be done by accepting some black people in Parliament and in every phase of life in the community, in the hope that their selfish satisfaction of life in the community, in the hope that their selfish satisfaction of own ambition will prevent them from developing and leading the ambitions of their masses.

And if this does not happen, what then? If junior partnership would quickly – very, very quickly – also lead in South Africa to the demand for black rule alone, must the white man fight or submit? And at what stage should he admit that his subtle attempt to retain power has failed?

In fact, this second method of solving the problem, solves nothing at all. It only means that the struggle for power goes on and on, while the white ruler of today lets things develop until he gives in as before, or finds himself at last fighting in the last, or nearly last, ditch for self-preservation.

There is another method, however, and that is to take your example from the nations: live and let live – apart. Would anybody in the United Kingdom accept as his ideal for the Commonwealth that it should become one state with one central government, controlled solely by numbers and not by the merit of your country as leader state, smaller in numbers but great in experience and knowledge?

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That one multi-racial state, including the province which Great Britain would then be, would of necessity be governed from India under the majority control of those hundreds and hundreds of millions of non-Europeans concentrated there, bolstered by others scattered over the earth.

Of course you thrust this aside as nonsense, but why must South Africa accept just that for herself in a smaller way? We prefer each of our population groups to be controlled and governed by themselves, as nations are. Then they can co-operate as in a Commonwealth or in an economic association of nations where necessary.

Where is the evil in this? Or in the fact that in the transition stage the guardian must needs keep the ward in hand and teach him and guide him and check him where necessary? This is separate development.

South Africa will proceed in all honesty and fairness to seek – albeit by necessity through a process of gradualness – peace, prosperity and justice for all by following the model of the nations which in this modern world means political independence coupled with economic interdependence.