

# *Behind The Headlines*

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**Seizing the Future:  
Post-Apartheid  
South Africa and  
the 'Post-Modern'  
Commonwealth**

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# Behind The *Headlines*

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# Seizing the Future: Post- Apartheid South Africa and the 'Post-Modern' Commonwealth'

PETER VALE and DAVID  
BLACK

'Is the Commonwealth a wasting asset?' In the first forty-five years of its 'modern' history, the usual answer to this perennial question was probably no. The end of the Cold War has overturned stock answers, however, and the Commonwealth – like virtually all international organizations – is now engaged in a search for relevance.

The familiar listing of global developments – the trend towards economic and political regionalization, the renewed preoccupation with and demands upon the United Nations system, and the near-universal fiscal crisis with its resultant parochialism – endanger public and official interest in the Commonwealth. Furthermore, these threats are augmented by one which is as old and as idiosyncratic as the organization itself: the ongoing decline in the social and cultural glue amongst the peoples of the former British empire.

It is our proposition that notwithstanding these challenges, the Commonwealth has the potential to achieve a new relevance in the final decade of the century. Whether it fulfils that potential will depend on its ability to bridge the uncertain international interregnum of the early and mid-1990s and to demonstrate its capacity for relevance. Towards this end, we argue that the Commonwealth is ideally positioned to assist in one of the most salient transitions of our times – South Africa's.

The argument has a closer concern, however: a lack of effective engagement with South Africa might speed the Commonwealth's demise. For the obverse of its nascent new relevance is to be found in the telltale signs of a slow but determined drift towards obsolescence and neglect.

## At the Crossroads

South Africa's road towards its goal of a non-racial non-sexist democracy has been difficult. An average of 4,000 South Africans, most of them Black, have perished annually in the violence which has racked the country. And the endemic instability which has marked the past four years promises to continue through the five years of the Government of National Unity which will follow the democratic elections of April 1<sub>994</sub>. As serious, instability will spew across South Africa's borders and touch the political stability of its neighbours, all of whom, with the qualified exceptions of Angola and Mozambique, are Commonwealth members. These issues will sharply focus the Commonwealth's political will and test – in profound ways – its capacity to rise to the challenges of the 1990s.

It is a truism to say that the Commonwealth thrives on transformation. Its very formation was from the remnants of the British empire, and, through three decades of momentous international change, it has evolved into a broadly representative agglomeration. Its fifty member states span the major regional, economic, and social divisions of the globe but retain, for the most part, the habit of relatively easy, open, and informal communications. This is the result of the Commonwealth's pragmatic approach to its mission. At a time when the old divide between high and low politics seems increasingly inverted, it is important to note that, for the Commonwealth, functional and trans-societal co-operation has always enjoyed great priority. Consider, for example, the relatively small scale but innovative Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation and agencies like the Commonwealth of Learning which promotes co-operation in distance education.

Institutionally, moreover, the Commonwealth has displayed an uncanny capacity for adaptation, while, of necessity, avoiding the organizational traps of administrative and budgetary bigness. This adaptability has been reconfirmed in the recent institutional reforms initiated by the current secretary-general, Chief Emeka Anyaoku.<sup>3</sup> With these strengths it is not surprising that the organization has won the admiration and support of such diverse political leaders as Pierre Trudeau, Malcolm Fraser, Julius Nyerere, Michael Manley, and Lee Kwan Yew.

Yet despite its accomplishments, its many admirers, and its potential to command international attention and moral authority, its capacity for effective political action on major world issues has always been sharply limited: 'every part of its membership ... is committed to its own regional organisation ... or to particular power relationships which may militate against Commonwealth cooperation ... The Commonwealth internationally organises its membership only when other more major factors permit it to.' In consequence, the Commonwealth and its supporters have some-

times appeared to read moral virtue into its practical incapacity to exercise meaningful power in world affairs.

### *Leaving the Commonwealth*

At about noon on Monday, 30 March 1961, the pupils of the Messina Hoerskool stood near a white beacon on the hillock, Shingelele, to the south of this town on the northern Transvaal border.

They had gathered in the bright sunshine to welcome home Dr Hendrik Verwoerd who, five days earlier, had taken South Africa out of the Commonwealth. Afrikaners were gripped by patriotic fervour: their promised republic could defy world opinion and prosper now that South Africa was free of outside meddling. Verwoerd had done them proud; Messina would signal its gratitude.

That is how Dr Ferdinand Vermooten, the school's principal, saw it. He and history teacher Sarel Lee thought their school was uniquely placed to acclaim their champion the moment he crossed into South African airspace.

A pile of car tyres had been carried to the top of Shingelele. At a strategic moment these were set alight; the timing was perfect. As a Boeing 707 approached from the north-east bearing Verwoerd and his party, a billow of black smoke rose into the blue northern Transvaal sky. The silver jet responded by dipping its wings in salute.

Who could have recognized the awful events unwittingly foreshadowed by Messina's joyous republicans? Burning tyres have evoked more than their fair share of horror in South Africa's subsequent story.

As South Africa's international fate was being sealed in London, Verwoerd was cavalier. An aide recalls that he doggedly refused to court the British press. After much cajoling, he sat down for a press conference and uttered these words: 'To those who want South Africa out, they have won their wish but lost their cause.' With that, he left the room.

Retired in Pretoria, Vermooten continued to admire Verwoerd in 1991 when I spoke to him by telephone. Why? 'We revered him for what he achieved. And we despised that Diefenbaker.'

Excerpted from Peter Vale *South Africa* New World (1991).

As Bosnia so graphically illustrates, however, issues of morality are manifestly superimposed on questions of power in the post-Cold War world. How the Commonwealth rises to this central challenge of the 1990s will have a decisive impact on its future, and South Africa, which has long engaged the energies of the Commonwealth, may well provide it with a niche from which to meet this challenge.

Ever since the de facto expulsion of the Union of South Africa from the Commonwealth in 1961 (see box), the organization has been enmeshed in the complex debates and strategies surrounding international efforts to end apartheid. Simultaneously, and inevitably, it was engaged in the closely related issues of Rhodesia's UDI (Unilateral Declaration of Independence) and South Africa's occupation of Namibia. Paradoxically, then, the modern Commonwealth has been shaped as much by its most celebrated outsider as by any country within its fold.

Concern with apartheid rested on the diverse racial and cultural underpinnings of the Commonwealth of the early 1960s. It is symbolic of the organization's determination to pursue a non-racial agenda that a leader of an 'old' Commonwealth country, Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, was instrumental in calling the organization to its challenge, arguing that membership must be tied to the acceptance of certain core principles – above all non-discrimination on the basis of colour.

Despite some contradictions in Diefenbaker's role and motives, his stand at the London meeting has become a defining moment in the lore of Canadian foreign policy. What was more important for the Commonwealth, however, was the fact that behind Diefenbaker's stand and the subsequent South African decision to withdraw lay the firm resolve of the leaders of emergent African countries against apartheid. Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, who was to mature into a Commonwealth statesman of great stature, urged that a vote for South Africa 'could logically be interpreted as a vote against the future membership of countries such as Tanganyika.' By choosing against apartheid, the Commonwealth ensured its continued growth and evolution towards a diverse, multiracial body. It also ensured that the Commonwealth would become enmeshed in problems with the same racial configuration on South Africa's periphery

Take Zimbabwe, for example. From the 1966 Lagos meeting onwards, the Rhodesian issue engendered persistent, occasionally life-threatening, debates with the Commonwealth. Ultimately, however, it was the focus of what many Commonwealth watchers regard as the organization's 'finest hour,' commencing with its role at the 1979 Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) in Lusaka in facilitating the agreement to convene the constitutional conference at Lancaster House which was ultimately to lead to Zimbabwean independence in 1980. In particular, the extraordinary efforts of the secretary-general, Shridath (Sonny) Ramphal, during and after the Lusaka meeting have been regarded by many as vital in the process of securing a successful outcome. This was a moment of maturity for the Commonwealth Secretariat and demonstrated its potential to play a sophisticated and independent diplomatic role.

Less prominent were attempts to bring direct pressure to bear on South Africa. Still, controversies concerning South Africa were central to Com-

monwealth development. In the early 1970s, Britain's prime minister, Edward Heath, decided to resume arms sales to South Africa, citing a purported Soviet naval build-up in the Indian Ocean as justification. This decision gravely threatened the 1971 Singapore CHOGM - and indeed, the organization itself. The face-saving compromise which ensued included as its most important consequence a Commonwealth Declaration of Principles focussing on 'the need to remove racial prejudice and ... the wide disparities of wealth that existed both within and outside the association.'" This meeting has been described as a crucial step in the development of the Commonwealth. Although vague, the Singapore Declaration became a cornerstone around which subsequent Commonwealth documents were constructed, forming the basis for an emergent 'constitutional personality.'

The 1977 Gleneagles Agreement on Apartheid in Sport built on this foundation and struck a deep emotional chord in a country as dedicated to sport as South Africa. The roots of Gleneagles demonstrate again the Commonwealth's ability to manage compromise. When Robert Muldoon's New Zealand government refused to interfere with the Springbok (South Africa) -All Black (New Zealand) rugby links, a boycott of the 1978 Edmonton Commonwealth Games was threatened. Through the Agreement, Canada, in conjunction with the Commonwealth, sought and obtained a mechanism to avoid such an outcome.' Like other Commonwealth agreements on South Africa, however, Gleneagles enjoyed a life outside Commonwealth circles; it became a landmark in the successful and influential campaign to isolate South Africa from most international sporting contacts.

### *The Climactic 1980s: Confronting the Apartheid State*

The Commonwealth's true test on the apartheid issue came in the 1980s –a response to a sustained popular insurrection in South Africa and to the `apartheid state's' ongoing destabilization of its neighbours. As six frontline states – Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland – were Commonwealth members, the organization could hardly avoid grappling with the mounting regional crisis.

In keeping with the programme of the broadly-based international anti-apartheid movement, most Commonwealth countries were vigorous advocates of sanctions. The difficulty was that, Britain, the one member which could most influence South Africa through sanctions, was led not only by a resolutely anti-sanctions government but by a prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, who 'carried little of the old Tory sense of empire and nothing of the Fabian belief in the Commonwealth.'"

The Secretariat sought, therefore, to manoeuvre Britain into accepting a

limited but escalating sanctions package. To succeed the strategy needed to work in close co-operation with prominent member-states, including Australia and Canada. The aim was to set, and draw upon, precedents from and for sanctions packages imposed by the European Community, the United States, and individual Nordic countries. Each effort was to build on what had gone before, creating a 'wave' phenomenon."

The Commonwealth swell began at the 1985 Nassau CHOGM where Thatcher reluctantly agreed to a mild package of economic 'measures' against South Africa. At the same meeting, an Eminent Persons Group (EPG) of seven was established to facilitate 'a process of dialogue' to replace apartheid with a popular government. Underpinning this strategy was the certain knowledge that if this diplomatic approach should fail the case for additional punitive sanctions would be strongly reinforced. When the EPG did eventually fail, its report incorporated an understated but compelling case for sanctions."

In the aftermath of the EPG mission, seven Commonwealth heads of government (from Australia, the Bahamas, Canada, India, Zimbabwe, and Zambia, as well as Britain) met at an extraordinary 'mini-summit' in London in August 1986 in which the Secretariat moved to associate Britain with a more substantial package of partial sanctions, including financial ones. Ripples of this wave were later felt in the United States when Congress passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, and anti-apartheid sanctions were taken up by states, cities, and institutions in that country; and in Europe, when the European Community adopted a watered-down sanctions package. In London, however, Thatcher would have none of it and refused to accept the sanctions agreed to by the other participants. The divide in the Commonwealth was set. Despite the formidable leadership of Ramphal, the Secretariat had failed to mobilize the organization behind a single policy.

With Thatcher determined both to minimize the role of sanctions on South Africa and to work in tandem with her allies in Europe and Washington rather than the Commonwealth, the options had narrowed. Some states, notably India, had a long-standing comprehensive sanctions policy; others, notably Australia and Canada, were committed to partial sanctions but were hesitant to go further and risk hurting their economic interests while further diverging from their Western allies; still others, on the front-line, could not follow through on the limited Commonwealth package without severe damage to their own economies and peoples.

The 1987 CHOGM in Vancouver was climactic: South Africa, torn by internal strife, dominated the agenda. Thatcher continued to resist pressure to impose sanctions. According to Dennis Austin, 'Morality was weighed against interests, and Britain was found wanting.'<sup>13</sup> The ensuing public furore was amongst the most contradictory and difficult the

Commonwealth had ever faced, with open – even 'electric' " - disagreements between Thatcher and other leading Commonwealth figures at the daily press conferences and in the plenary sessions. Paradoxically, this uncharacteristically open acrimony within the 'family' garnered more political and media attention for the organization than did its many quieter accomplishments.

In true Commonwealth tradition, however, an outcome was to follow: the Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa (CFMSA) was established, ostensibly to seek ways of 'keeping the pressure on Pretoria' It was composed of Australia, Canada, Guyana, India, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Following the Vancouver CHOGM, the organization's activities took on a less dramatic and expansive cast and attracted considerably less media attention. Nevertheless, with the foreign ministers meeting faithfully every six months, the activities of the CFMSA demanded a substantial commitment of political and bureaucratic resources for the countries involved, as well as for the Commonwealth Secretariat. Given the raw emotion attached to the apartheid issue, not to mention its longevity, it is not surprising that the work of the CFMSA (and particularly of its chair, the Canadian foreign minister, Joe Clark) was marked by criticism over its lack of progress in adopting major new sanctions initiatives.' The essential dilemma, however, was an old and thorny one – without British participation, additional sanctions would have little real impact. And the CFMSA, to its credit, continued to assert that sanctions 'remained the most effective peaceful path to the ending of apartheid,' while exploring specific steps to increase the effectiveness of existing sanctions and to counter South African propaganda and censorship.

Eventually the CFMSA'S central strategic focus became an effort to strengthen international financial sanctions. While politically astute, it had limited practical consequence within the Commonwealth setting. The Commonwealth nevertheless carved out a position of intellectual leadership on this and related issues, commissioning a series of expert studies on financial sanctions, trade sanctions generally, the security needs of the frontline states, and South African destabilization of its neighbours.<sup>16</sup>

Of longer-term significance – certainly from the perspective of this paper – were CFMSA consultations with a range of South African opposition groups, both internal and external, from the African National Congress (ANC) to the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) to the trade unions and churches and the United Democratic Front (UDF). These exchanges had a significant impact on the understanding of the South African situation within the Commonwealth. Traditionally such understanding was limited, coming through the prism of sanctions and domestic lobbies which were not always attuned to the pace and substance of events on the ground. A distinctive – and generally favourable – Commonwealth iden-

tity was also created among a limited but influential cross-section of South African leaders. (Indeed, it was at one such meeting that Oliver Tambo, then the president of the ANC, pointed out that South Africa's government, not the country's people, had left the Commonwealth in 1961.)

What role then did the Commonwealth play in hastening the end of apartheid? Its own hyperbolic claims – for example that it played 'a catalytic role in shaping world opinion in respect of the unfolding events in South Africa' – should be appropriately discounted. In reality, the Commonwealth was a relatively minor player in the unfolding sequence of events, and, as noted, much of its strategic efforts failed to achieve specific objectives.

Nevertheless, in both symbolic and normative terms, the Commonwealth campaign was arguably of some real significance in influencing international developments, even when its immediate goals were not realized. In diplomacy, failure can have important and sometimes positive repercussions. The EPG setback and the subsequent Commonwealth sanctions package, though materially marginal, had some influence on the more substantial sanctions package subsequently adopted in the United States. And the CFMSA, although achieving relatively little of immediate consequence, reinforced the mounting international pressure on the South African regime and the prospect of unremitting sanctions pressure until a process of negotiated change was irreversible.

Because of the Commonwealth's broadly representative character and the political synergy which resulted on the South African issue, collective Commonwealth activities carried more moral and symbolic weight than they materially warranted in traditional 'realist' terms. This was reflected in the *Economist's* report on the 1989 Kuala Lumpur CHOGM: 'South Africans still care about what the Commonwealth says, if only because the sanctions it agrees to tend to become the bench-mark for action against South Africa by Europe and the United States...' 18

### The *Interregnum*

Two years later – after Prime Minister E.W. de Klerk's watershed speech announcing his intent to dismantle apartheid and after Nelson Mandela, the long-imprisoned leader of ANC, had been released – South Africa responded. On 15 March 1991, thirty years to the day after the country left the Commonwealth, two South African newspapers – the *Cape Times* and the *Natal Witness* - carried op-ed pieces calling for a return to the organization.

The Commonwealth's search for a role in South Africa's transition was constrained, however, by the confusion and in-fighting which marked this process and by the obvious absence of constitutional positioning. Unlike

the Zimbabwean transition, which was much less internationalized and in which a Commonwealth Observer Group occupied 'a strategic place between the British governorship and world opinion, <sup>19</sup> the Commonwealth is just one of many international actors seeking a small niche in the transition from apartheid. Furthermore, the success of this process depends much more heavily on groups within South Africa than on any external actor. Nonetheless, within these parameters, the Commonwealth has taken several small-scale but useful initiatives to assist with both the immediate and the long-term challenges of the transition. The direction and the low-key nature of these suggest that the Commonwealth could stake out a place for itself in South Africa's search for stability and democracy.

Take, for example, the creation in May 1990 of the Expert Group on Human Resource Development for a Post-Apartheid South Africa – a panel which for the first time in twenty-nine years included two South African 'experts.' The aim of the initiative was to define and plan for longer-term requirements, meshing neatly with the Commonwealth's traditional emphasis on technical co-operation. The Expert Group also initiated plans for a post-apartheid donors' conference on human resources development, to be jointly sponsored by the Commonwealth and the United Nations.

At the level of 'high politics,' Nelson Mandela was granted observer status at the 1991 Harare CHOGM and pledged to return South Africa to the Commonwealth. Diplomats from South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs were poised to attend the summit but the Mugabe government balked at issuing visas. Shortly after the meeting, however, the first official links took place between the Commonwealth Secretariat at Marlborough House and the South African embassy in London. This enabled the Commonwealth to become directly involved in the transition itself.

The Harare summit also gave the secretary-general a mandate to visit South Africa and 'explore with the principal parties ... ways in which the Commonwealth could assist in lending momentum to the negotiating process' He made three trips to the country and in July 1992 proposed to South Africa's government and other political players that a multidisciplinary team of Commonwealth experts 'provide practical assistance to arrest the ongoing violence, which had emerged as the key impediment to negotiations.' This effort has focussed on the immediate tasks of confidence building and the creation of the climate of trust necessary for a successful electoral and constitutional process. The Commonwealth Observer Mission, composed of an international group of police, justice, and public service professionals, has been in South Africa since early 1992. Its three reports suggest that it has had some success in promoting local political dialogue, engaging in reform-oriented discussions with local law enforcement personnel, and investigating the criminal justice system, among other activities.'

At the 1993 Cyprus CHOGM, the Commonwealth decided to send a 55-member delegation led by former Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley and composed of political leaders and electoral experts from 25 countries to monitor the elections. Through this initiative, the thirty-year circle of conflict between the Commonwealth and South Africa is set to close.

In many ways, the Commonwealth and apartheid were programmed for conflict from the 1,961 London CHOGM. In an era in which issues of race have been so prominent and emotionally charged, it is hardly surprising that apartheid generated heated emotion even within the confines of the Commonwealth 'family' Furthermore, as we have recorded here, the South African issue periodically threatened the organization's very survival. In confronting and overcoming these controversies, the constitutional and institutional shape of the Commonwealth was enlarged and its mission was strengthened. The Commonwealth in turn helped to shape the outcome of events in South Africa – thereby demonstrating its capacity, albeit intermittently, for genuine political relevance.

Evidence of its relevance to the country's recent past can be found in contemporary South Africa's response to the Commonwealth. The question of where the country will seek its international destiny has been under active discussion, and a number of embryonic projects – conferences, commissions, articles, and the like – have been undertaken. While each has a different interpretation of where South Africa will find its international niche, one issue on which all these projects agree is that South Africa will rejoin the Commonwealth. The ANC's foreign policy document emphatically declares, under a category of 'special memberships' that 'The ANC ... believes that South Africa's return to the Commonwealth will represent the symbolic ending of the country's isolation. We believe further that South Africa's membership of the Commonwealth will be central to the spirit of the new foreign policy. We recognize that the Commonwealth is a complex web of links. We consequently welcome the country's association with the ministerial meetings and the various consultative bodies.' The serious challenge today lies in understanding, and seizing, the Commonwealth's new role in South and southern Africa.

### *Seizing the Future*

Can the Commonwealth survive the ending of apartheid? This question, a favourite with South African examiners, captures both the uncertainty which surrounds the Commonwealth's future and the pre-occupation which the organization has brought – some would say to excess – to the South African issue. The obvious answer lies in a single word: engagement. And the engagement which the Commonwealth has shown through

its various transitional initiatives is a promising start. But the fundamental challenges of South Africa's transition will linger far beyond the successful conclusion of its first elections.

Every single facet of South African society will require healing from the ravages of forty years of apartheid. It is a truism that in 'no place on earth (with the possible exception of the former Soviet Union) is the transition to a post-Cold War regime likely to be more complex than in the Republic of South Africa.'<sup>22</sup> There is, however, more at stake for the Commonwealth than the reconstruction of South Africa after apartheid. Several of its own member states – South Africa's immediate neighbours – will also need to be assisted from the abyss to which apartheid has brought them. And then, for the Commonwealth itself, there is the need to ensure that a non-racial southern Africa can both work and prosper if the ideals which underpinned Diefenbaker's challenge in London in 1961 are to have any resonance in the coming decade.

During South Africa's thirty-two year absence from the organization, the memories of the Commonwealth family have faded. Few South Africans below the age of 50 can recall the attractions of membership. In the intervening years, moreover, the state and its school system demonized most international organizations, including the firmly anti-apartheid Commonwealth.

But sentiment alone will not determine relations between South Africa and the Commonwealth. South African foreign policy will draw a clear distinction between emotional and hard-nosed practical reasons for membership. It will be important, too, that the South African public understands – and draws – this distinction; not only in the case of the Commonwealth but with other international organizations. Namibia has shown that the Commonwealth can provide essential development aid and, just as important, expertise to a country which is to all intents and purposes starting again.

South Africa's reintegration into the international community is a helpful place to start. At a time of cascading international changes, the new South Africa, a country with a limited foreign policy experience, will be expected not only to deal with these changes but to respond to a host of new demands and responsibilities, especially from its neighbours and other states in Africa. For instance, South African diplomacy has had limited exposure to the proliferation of multilateralism since its estrangement from the international community. An immediate priority for the Commonwealth could therefore be to co-ordinate a programme on multilateral issues for South African diplomats and civil servants. More generally, the opportunity for South African officials to gain exposure to multilateral issues and practices in the relatively low-key atmosphere of Commonwealth ministerial and heads of government meetings should provide valuable experience and contacts.

In addition, the Commonwealth's unique understanding, through direct engagement, of southern African issues can bolster South Africa's capacity to grapple with its increased regional responsibilities. This potential was demonstrated during the attempted coup in Lesotho in January 1994, when the Commonwealth secretary-general helped to defuse the situation to the advantage of the entire region.

The primary challenges in southern Africa lie, however, in the realm of low politics.' As the Commonwealth has shown through its Special Fund for Mozambique (now being replaced by a new Capacity Building Fund), multilateral assistance to a non-member state can work. South Africa's new government will be well positioned to augment this initiative and lend close managerial support. By working with and through the Commonwealth, however, it may be able to provide assistance without arousing the same fears and suspicions which a unilateral initiative would generate.

As the countries of the region draw closer together under the Southern African Development Community (SADC) umbrella, furthermore, a host of new security and economic problems are emerging. Drawing on its long international experience with technical assistance and 'capacity building,' notably through the Fund for Technical Co-operation, the Commonwealth is well positioned to offer advice on regional development structures and projects.

Parallel to technical advice is the important challenge which faces the Commonwealth Higher Education Support Scheme – part of a wide-ranging commitment to education. Southern Africa's universities face demanding transitional problems. In the countries around South Africa, the universities share with most other parts of the Commonwealth acute problems of declining resources, increased student numbers, and the need to produce graduates capable of global competition. At best, the region's universities are struggling to keep pace with these demands; at worst, they have simply failed and are backsliding.

Within South Africa a complex university culture – itself a product of the country's unhappy past – is wrestling with the same problems in the context of the transformation of the society. Two further challenges immensely complicate the picture: as the region's universities retreat, South African universities will be expected to take up the slack; and they will increasingly become a locus of social protest and struggle.

Without a serious and sustained long-term strategy to rehabilitate the universities and to manage them through the transition, prized national assets will be frittered away in the coming decade. Without the potency and professionalism of the country's higher education system, the prospects for development and democracy in the entire region will be dimmed. A number of donor countries – the Norwegians, for instance – have recognized this. But there is a fit between South Africa's universities and those in the Commonwealth which suggests that it could make a

particularly important contribution in this area.

Elsewhere in civil society, the networking intrinsic to the Commonwealth family will play an important role in supporting South Africa's search for democracy. The Commonwealth Lawyers' Association and its associated network of legal groups should help to strengthen their South African counterparts and, in particular, help the South African Bar Association to become more representative of the demographics of the county.

The energetic work already undertaken in South Africa by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association needs to be augmented. In May of this year, South Africa's new legislature will assemble: it will be an historic occasion. But it will also test the institutional memory of a body which, until now, has governed South Africa's peoples by will of the minority. Changing this will not be easy since the constraints of the transitional agreements favour, in many ways, the past in order to secure the future peace. But South Africa's parliament will have to change if it is to be truly representative. Given its shared Westminster roots, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has an important role to play in this area.

The work of these Commonwealth organizations is vital to the capacity of South African society to take its place in the wider world of international relationships. Contributing substantially to this process was the recent announcement that South Africa's application to participate in the 1994 Commonwealth Games in Victoria, British Columbia, had been accepted. This announcement was greeted with great enthusiasm in a South Africa which is as passionate about sport as it ever was.

Also within the fold of the Commonwealth, long-term issues of perception and misperception can be resolved. It is interesting to speculate whether – apartheid notwithstanding – southern Africa would have been so viciously destabilized in the 1980s if South Africa had remained in the Commonwealth with its neighbours. This is not mere idle speculation; in the aftermath of the Cold War, South Africa's military planners are recasting their threat perception. Preliminary impressions suggest that India looms large in their thinking. It is therefore crucial that strong bilateral ties develop between Delhi and Pretoria. In addition, however, and of almost equal weight, there is a need to monitor and, if necessary, manage latent areas of conflict within the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth venue and atmosphere, in other words, provides a potentially valuable means of fostering communications and mutual trust in a dangerously unstable world.

In sum, Commonwealth membership will provide a range of important benefits to a new South African regime. It will help to facilitate its re-entry into world affairs; assist in garnering and channelling its resources to meet its regional obligations; help it develop into a credible democracy; and facilitate a range of important bilateral ties.

Furthermore, while it would be a mistake to exaggerate the Common-

wealth's potential to transcend its relatively marginal place in world politics, the re-incorporation of South Africa offers opportunities for mutual benefit: the organization and South Africa should both emerge stronger. And a renewed Commonwealth association, bolstered both symbolically and practically by South Africa's hobbled but formidable strengths, could be well-suited to promote innovation and provide leadership in several key areas within the wider field of world affairs. In South Africa itself, closing the gap between anticipation and delivery, between fear and expectation, between assurance and doubt will not be easy. Yet a good deal could hang on the Commonwealth, if the foregoing analysis is correct.

There remains, however, the paradox of unfamiliarity. Like many other international organizations, the Commonwealth has a poor image in much of South African society. Moreover, it has many enemies, especially in right-wing circles where memories stretch back to the Diefenbaker intervention. Notwithstanding their age, recent events have shown what damage these groups can do to South Africa's hopes for the future. Therefore, the Luddites who oppose Commonwealth membership and democratic transition are important. If South Africa is to enjoy a peaceful future, they will have to be brought into the wider process of change. They will also have to be assured that their own interests will be acknowledged and respected by the international community. Here, too, the Commonwealth has a vital role to play. To do this, it will have to reach into its own institutional memory and draw into its South African operation those within the old – particularly the white – Commonwealth who are willing to lend some constitutional support to South Africa's minority. However uncomfortable it is for the Commonwealth and for South Africa's new government, a serious effort has to be made to allay the fears of those who can destroy the promise of a new South Africa.

### ***From International Rotary Club to International Organization***

The Commonwealth has many personalities: international organization, global network, diplomatic club, amongst others. Underpinning these, however, is an intricate and complex set of linkages, from the Commonwealth University Association to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. These professional organizations are, in many ways, the glue which holds the Commonwealth together.

Scepticism about the Commonwealth is commonplace. In a world of deepening economic blocs, it is small wonder that an organization which appears to 'hang together because its members have little in common' is sometimes viewed as trivial and anachronistic. And yet, the fundamental challenges of our times lie beyond the necessity for economic benignity;

they lie, as we see in the Balkans and in South Africa, in the democratic rights and obligations of distinctive groups of people to live in harmony with each other. The central challenge of our times is to make the world safe for diversity.

Perhaps more than any other two entities, South Africa and the Commonwealth reflect the challenge of this new world. Their past history mirrors the struggle of the human spirit to overcome the fears attached to a world of racial divides in which prejudice has played such a destructive role. As with South Africa's people, the ending of apartheid has opened new doors for the Commonwealth – Canada conspicuously included. Will both rise to the challenge of the new millennium?

#### Notes

- This phrase is borrowed from Margaret Doxey, 'Meeting new challenges: Commonwealth roles and structures in the 1990s,' *The Round Table*, 328 (1993), 439.
- 2 John Cunningham, 'Is the Commonwealth a wasting asset?' *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 27 July 1991.
- 3 See Doxey, 'Meeting new challenges.'
- 4 Stephen Chan, *The Commonwealth in World Politics – a Study of International Action 1965-85* (London: Lester Crook 1988), 67. See also Margaret Doxey, 'Evolution and adaptation in the modern Commonwealth,' *International Journal* 45:4 (autumn 1990).
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- 17 CFMSA, Special Session, London, 16 February 1991, Concluding Statement, item 8.
- 18 'Mrs T. against the team,' *Economist*, 28 October 1989, 51.
- 19 See Chan, 'The Commonwealth as an international organization,' 403.
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