

# WORKING TOWARD DEMOCRACY: BREAKTHROUGH IN SOUTH AFRICA

In December 1993, members of South Africa's racially segregated parliament approved a new constitution that ended more than three centuries of white rule. Under this constitution, South Africa will hold the first election in which the black majority of the population will be able to vote.

The new constitution is partly due to the efforts of President F.W. de Klerk and African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela, who shared the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize. It is also partly because of the efforts of the Commonwealth, which opposed South Africa's apartheid system for decades. This system not only denied political rights to South Africa's blacks, it controlled where they could live and work, and created huge gaps between rich (mostly whites) and poor (mostly blacks).

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 1961, Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker attacked apartheid. Following that incident, South Africa withdrew

from the Commonwealth.

Even after South Africa was no longer a member, Commonwealth countries continued to speak out against apartheid. On principle, they could not be silent about South Africa's racist policies. Countries that are close to South Africa, such as Zambia and Zimbabwe, were particularly active.



This was not an easy issue. Members could not always agree on what would work best or how far to go. Britain opposed eco-

nomie sanctions, arguing that sanctions would make South Africa's leaders even more stubborn and less willing to consider reforms. Canada was in favour of sanctions.

The Commonwealth did impose sanctions, such as bans on new bank loans and investment in South Africa. Members refused to buy South African products. The Commonwealth always made it clear that sanctions were not intended to punish South Africa, but to persuade its leaders of the need for change. Meanwhile, Commonwealth representatives tried to find ways to support the negotiation process among South African political groups.

Since 1990, apartheid has been slowly dismantled. Mr. Mandela was freed from prison. The government lifted bans on political parties and restrictions on the media, and other apartheid regulations were withdrawn.

As the South African government moved toward change,