

Commonwealth governments, either at a meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers or, if this were not practicable, by correspondence."

Not Automatic

On October 5, 1960, South Africa's choice was made by a referendum which resulted in a majority favouring the adoption of a republic. Subsequently, the Government of that country announced that a republican constitution would be proclaimed on May 31. I felt and still feel that we had made it clear last May that there was no automaticity about the application of a country which was a member of the Commonwealth and which changed its form of government to that of a republic; and that until the legislative processes had been completed the decision had not finally been made.

That view did not command general support. I should point out here that the first reading of the bill to set up a republic was given in the South African House of Representatives on January 23, that second reading was given on February 9 and that then the bill was referred to a select joint committee of both Houses, the committee to report to Parliament on March 24. Hence the matter is still before the Parliament of South Africa.

What in effect was being asked was advance approval prior to the final legislative decision being made; something that was denied last May. The wording of the communiqué in May 1960 reflected the general view of the Prime Ministers that a positive act of concurrence was required on the part of each of the other member governments if South Africa's request for consent to remain a member of the Commonwealth was to be granted. It was agreed by the Foreign Minister of South Africa that all governments would have to consent; at least that was the statement he made in May last. It was argued that, even in the face of the wording of the communiqué last May, it was still a virtual formality for countries applying for continuance of membership to remain as members. I think it was the consensus of a majority if not all of the Prime Ministers that more than a formality was involved.

South African Case

Dr. Verwoerd, the Prime Minister, relied throughout on the argument that the constitutional issue should be dealt with separately, and that on the basis of the precedents there should be no question of South Africa's right to continuing membership. The discussion took a long time. All agreed that South Africa's constitutional change was not in itself an obstacle to continuing membership, but the view was strongly held that the question of membership could not be divorced from the international implications of the Union Government's racial policies. Apartheid has become the world's symbol of discrimination; and in the eyes of the Prime Ministers present, other than Dr. Verwoerd, to give unqualified consent to South Africa's application would be to condone the policies of apartheid.