

Traditional Ties Remain

As I said a moment ago, South Africa remains a member of the Commonwealth until May 31. Dr. Verwoerd made it clear that traditional ties with the Commonwealth countries will continue. It is difficult to convey the picture of only a matter of 12 or 15 hours ago, when we were together as guests of the Queen and when such a change came about with so little apparent ill feeling.

Was the result unavoidable? I think it was. Over the years I have contended that in a multiracial association it had to become clear beyond doubt that, if the Commonwealth is to be a force for good, as it should be, there must be a measure of general agreement that discrimination in respect of race and colour shall not take place. I do not think we can compromise that principle if we believe that the Commonwealth has a mission for all mankind. It would lose its power to meet challenges and opportunities in the future. I am more convinced than ever as to the power of this institution touching every part of the world.

I am not going to deal today with the conclusions of disarmament, but I think the discussions on that subject brought about a new relationship among the members of the Commonwealth; but not an institutionalization, or anything that would interfere with the sovereignty of any of us. The influence of India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Ghana, Nigeria and Malaya joined with the other members of the Commonwealth on a subject that has divided the United Nations and on which there has not been that progress that the Secretary of State for External Affairs would have hoped for, represents a major step, as indicated in the appendix on disarmament, toward a realization that only through action now can we save mankind from ultimate self-destruction.

Effect on Commonwealth

The question naturally arises, has the Commonwealth been weakened? Dr. Verwoerd says it is the beginning of disintegration. There are some who view with apprehension the shifting composition of the association. It is a strange thing, but out goes Verwoerd and in comes Archbishop Makarios to represent Cyprus. Sierra Leone was accepted, and other countries will be making application to join within the next year or so. The close intimacy of the days when the present Leader of the Opposition was Secretary of State for External Affairs, with a few members gathered about, is ended.

There are those who see South Africa's decision as the forerunner of further withdrawals as a result of campaigns of criticism related to national policy. In that connection I should point out this. All of us agreed that no national policy of any country should be examined or considered without the consent of that country. Dr. Verwoerd himself undertook the explanation of the policies of his country.