

Between the Old and the New Commonwealth:

Canada and the Rhodesia Crisis, 1963-1966

by

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A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

August 2003

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Abstract

This is a study of the Canadian Government's response to and policy towards Rhodesia, 1963-1966, as it moved from a British colony to a Unilateral Declaration of Independence and the status of international outlaw. Canada balanced its position between the Old and New Commonwealth, keeping the British informed of African opinion and helping the Africans to get their viewpoint across to the British. The primary aim of this study is to provide a first full account of official thinking and decision making with reference to Rhodesia, and to do so by extensively reviewing governmental files both in Canada and Britain.

Acknowledgements

This thesis began with a question, “How was Canada involved in the Rhodesian crisis?” The answer that I found would still be lost if not for the help of some, and the support of many.

The empirical evidence contained in this thesis was largely the product of two very kind and helpful professionals. Maureen Hoogenraud at the National Archives of Canada assembled an interim box full of essential documents pulled from many different volumes. Callista Kelly at Carleton’s Interlibrary Loans kindly took my requests and worked a miracle or two ensuring they were fulfilled.

The faculty of Carleton University deserves recognition as their concern for students is real and apparent. The friendly atmosphere in the history department made my education that much more enjoyable. Professor Duncan McDowell of Carleton University offered a critique of an earlier piece on the historiography, prodding me to delve deeper into the subject and into my craft. Professor Muise’s door was always open, and his advice always appreciated. Professor Susan Whitney has been encouraging and given me many helpful tips, I thank her for her patience with my impositions. My fellow students in the department put up with this “great man” history for two years in seminars and around the office, I thank them for their influences.

My friends and family have shown unrelenting support for my endeavours as a professional student. Michel Laplante is surely an expert on Rhodesia, listening intently as I worked through many ideas with him. His support for the project was there from the beginning as was Tiffany Harris’, thank you both. Bill Smith understood the demands graduate work places on an employee. Darren and Becky provided me with a home away from home, as did Howard and Dominique. Kim Giroux has given up much lately as the push to finish consumed so much time.

To my parents: thank you for having the faith in me, for taking the time with me, and for sacrificing so much for me. My father was the root of this history. His heritage as a Rhodesian was the basis of my interest in the subject. My mother’s love and support was unrelenting as always, and much needed during the down times.

To Norman Hillmer I owe a special debt of gratitude. Working conscientiously for the past three years he has gone beyond the role of supervisor in every capacity. My training as a historian, and so much more, is a product of his dedication.

ryan.

For Mary-Jane,
To you, the future, I give you the past.

Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	11
The Crisis to Come, 1963-1964.	
Chapter 2	35
“The Problem of Rhodesia Exploded,” 1964 – 1964.	
Chapter 3	55
UDI, 1965.	
Chapter 4	74
Confronting the “Tragedy,” 1965-1966.	
Conclusion	93
Works Consulted	97

Introduction

This is a study of the Canadian Government's response to and policy towards Rhodesia, 1963-1966, as it moved from a British colony to a Unilateral Declaration of Independence and the status of international outlaw. Canada balanced its position between the Old and New Commonwealth, keeping the British informed of African opinion and helping the Africans to get their viewpoint across to the British.

Rhodesia, now known as Zimbabwe, was a landlocked country in Southern Africa which began its life as a British possession. In the early 1920s, the white population sought to rid itself of the British South Africa Company Charter, which provided basic law and order. After paying 2 million pounds sterling to the British Government for public works and land in 1923, Rhodesia (called Southern Rhodesia) bought the privilege of self-government, the only community in British imperial history to have done so. A Legislative Assembly was broadly responsible for laws and governance. The British left safeguards in place which aimed to protect Africans from discriminatory legislation, but Britain refrained from interfering in the country's internal affairs. Rhodesians made their laws, elected their officials, recruited their own civil servants, ran their armed forces and controlled their own foreign commerce. Rhodesia, indeed, was intent on pursuing more independence, but World War Two interfered and the idea of complete freedom from Whitehall would have to wait.

After the war, the idea of independence was put aside in favour of federation. In 1953, white-dominated Rhodesia joined with the much poorer, but resource rich, and predominately black Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. In 1958, Sir Edgar Whitehead

became Prime Minister of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and sought to remove the remaining powers Britain still held in the Federation. Negotiations began, leading to the 1961 Constitution, which provided for the advancement of Africans in the colony of Rhodesia. The Constitution was accepted by all of the political parties in the country, including the National Democratic Party led by African nationalist Joshua Nkomo. After the electorate had approved the Constitution, the British placed a new section in the document allowing the British to amend or revoke the Constitution; Nkomo also soon withdrew his acceptance of the Constitution. These incidents gave Southern Rhodesians a sense of mistrust and an intensified desire for independence.

Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Nyasaland (Malawi) were allowed by the British to secede from the Federation and seek independence, which was granted to Northern Rhodesia in 1962 and Nyasaland the following year. Watching Zambia and Malawi receive their independence only amplified Rhodesian demands for full nationhood. In 1963 Rhodesia formally began seeking independence. The white population of 250,000 was almost entirely comprised of British stock, and seeking rule over the 4 million blacks in the country. The election of the Rhodesian Front party in Rhodesia in 1963 ensured the Rhodesian government would seek independence on the basis of the 1961 constitution. Repeated negotiations between the British and Rhodesians over the next decade would fail because of the British reluctance to grant independence without some assurance of eventual black majority rule. The only other route to independence for Rhodesia was a Unilateral Declaration of Independence, (UDI), and that is the route which was taken in 1965. The Rhodesia of the 1960s was symbolic of the age's struggles, and increasingly white Rhodesians led by the obdurate Ian Smith, were found to be an

anachronism on the wrong side of history. They stood between the newly emergent black-ruled Africa, and the old white Africa; Rhodesia was on the frontline of post-war independent Africa and pre-war colonial Africa.

In 1963, Lester Pearson was elected Canadian Prime Minister, and he came, to say the least, with a foreign policy background. As a former Minister of External Affairs, Pearson subscribed to the foreign policy principles set out by Prime Minister Louis Saint Laurent in the 1947 Gray Lecture.¹ He believed in “participatory internationalism” as a primary objective of his national policy, the purpose of which was to maintain and strengthen world peace.² For Pearson, “everything that happens in the world affects us.”³ His adherence to the tenets of liberal ideology, particularly equality, freedom and tolerance, played a central role in the foreign policy of Canada in the 1960s. He could be expected to champion black Africa’s causes, but he sought out the middle way in negotiations, and was comfortable with his recurring role as mediator in international affairs. Pearson believed in quiet diplomacy as a means to avoid complicating matters with publicity.⁴ Pearson valued the Third World, and it him; indeed, “Pearson was seen internationally as one of the best friends the Third World had in the industrialized West.”⁵ But he was also Britain’s friend.

¹ See Lester B Pearson, *Mike The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson Vol. 2, 1948-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 26-27.

² Ibid. 32.

³ Ibid. 31.

⁴ For a detailed explanation of all these concepts and further readings see Erika Simpson, “The Principles of Liberal Internationalism according to Lester Pearson.” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, XXXIV no. 1 (Spring 1999), 64-77.

⁵ John English, *The Worldly Years: The Life of Lester Pearson, 1949-1972* (Toronto: A Knopf, 1992), 371.

The Commonwealth, “a basic consideration in the external policy”⁶ of Canada fit Pearson’s methodology, beliefs, and personality. He spoke to the Empire Club in 1958, commenting on its value: “It can act as a bridge between Asia and Africa and the West. The new Commonwealth ideal, moreover, is one of helpful and practical co-operation between nations of varied races and cultures, and in varying stages of economic and industrial development.” He went on, “Its continued success will be of the most far-reaching importance; not only to the Commonwealth but to the whole world...It should be a privilege for Canada to work for the maintenance and the strengthening of the British Commonwealth of Nations as a strong force for peace, security and progress in the world.”⁷ The Commonwealth was a company of equals, whose value rested in its multiracial composition. Pearson would later write of the Commonwealth, “It is, if I may use the word, a fellowship, the great value of which stems from the fact that it is an association of people of every race, freely joined together as equals in the hope that they have something to offer one another and can give the world an example of inter-racial as well as international friendship and co-operation.”⁸ In addition, Pearson recognized that membership served the Canadian national interest by providing a counterweight to the United States and complementing Canada’s work at the United Nations.⁹

The historiography relating to Canada’s involvement in the Rhodesian crisis is minute. The best and most relevant source is Frank Hayes’ article, “Canada, the Commonwealth, and the Rhodesia Issue,” which examined the approaches of the

⁶ Ibid. 26.

⁷ Lester Pearson, *Canada and the Commonwealth*, November 27, 1958. *The Empire Club of Canada Speeches 1958-1959*. (Toronto: The Empire Club Foundation, 1959), 117-127. Taken From <http://www.empireclubfoundation.com/details.asp?SpeechID=884&FT=yes>, July 31, 2003.

⁸ Pearson, *Mike*, 289.

⁹ K.A. MacKirdy, “The Commonwealth Idea,” *Behind the Headlines*, XXV (October 1965), 14-18.

Canadian government at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers Meetings between July 1964 and September 1966. Hayes concluded that Canada's primary concern was the maintenance of the Commonwealth, because it was a useful body for furtherance of Canadian interests.¹⁰ The striking characteristic of this piece, is the author's confession in the bibliography, "I was fortunate to hold interviews with sources who were privy to policy documents or who participated in the events under examination, but who have chosen to remain unidentified. In addition, I had access to classified files and private papers which cannot be cited." Publishing in 1982, Hayes thus did not have full access to records and could only vaguely cite what he had seen. The historian is left without a map to revisit the sources and complete the picture. As an example, Hayes quotes an African impression of Pearson as the 'Great Liberal'¹¹, but we are unsure who has described him in this way and without that, we are unsure of the significance of the comment. Hayes' article, furthermore, concentrates on the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meetings in 1964, 1965, and 1966. He has neglected to examine Canada's actions outside of and between the formal meetings. It is in these periods when we can clarify and contextualize Canadian policy.

Canada's involvement in the Rhodesian crisis receives only cursory attention in other published scholarly sources. Linda Freeman looks at Canada's role as an aspect of Canada's involvement in Southern Africa and, more specifically, as a factor in Canada's Zambian Policy.¹² Douglas Anglin's *Zambian Crisis Behaviour*¹³ concentrates on

¹⁰ Frank R. Hayes, "Canada, the Commonwealth and the Rhodesia Issue," in *An Acceptance of Paradox: Essays on Canadian Diplomacy in Honour of John W. Holmes*, Edited by Kim Richard Nossal (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1982), 142.

¹¹ Ibid. 146.

¹² Linda Freeman, "Canada and the Front-Line States" in *Canada, Scandinavia, and*

Zambia position in the crisis and does not focus on Canada's involvement in the Rhodesian crisis.

In their examination of Canadian policy towards the larger geographical region of Southern Africa, Robert Mathews and Cranford Pratt identified four factors determining the policies of the Canadian government towards Southern Africa in the 1960s. These factors, according to Mathews and Pratt, were: a well-established set of ideological perceptions through which the government and the Department of External Affairs viewed Canadian national interests with reference to Southern Africa, a self image of Canada as a middle power accepted by the Developing world as honest, sensitive and neutral; a responsiveness to the interest in Southern Africa of Canada's major allies, Britain and the US, and to what were loosely conceived as the interests of the "West"; and finally, a concern for Canadian economic interests. The first of these factors are certainly present in Canadian policy towards Rhodesia, and particularly relevant to an understanding of Canadian actions. But Canada's Rhodesia policy was primarily reactionary not premeditated or predetermined. It was driven by events in Africa, Britain and the Commonwealth.¹⁴

Unpublished works have dealt with Canada and the Rhodesia issue. Colleen Mayo-Pankhurst's M.A. thesis, "The Impact of Membership in the Commonwealth on Canadian Policy Towards Rhodesia, 1964-1966", is superior to Geoffrey Chada's M.A.

Southern Africa, Edited by Douglas Anglin, Timothy Shaw and Carl Widstrand (Uppsala, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1978), 69-84.

¹³ Douglas Anglin, *Zambian Crisis Behaviour: Confronting Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence, 1965-1966* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, 1994.)

¹⁴ Robert Mathews and Cranford Pratt, "Canadian Policy toward Southern Africa," in *Canada, Scandinavia, and Southern Africa*, Edited by Douglas Anglin, Timothy Shaw and Carl Widstrand (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1978) 164.

thesis "The Canadian Response to Rhodesian UDI" because of Mayo-Pankhurst's use of primary sources which were unavailable to Chada. Both rely heavily on Hayes' work.

Chada concludes that "the Canadian policy towards Rhodesia was influenced by Canada's membership in the Commonwealth, the UN Security Council, and its relations with African States north of the Zambezi." Furthermore, "The Rhodesian crisis involved principles of racial justice and equality and the principle of self determination which are the basis of the Commonwealth and the UN."¹⁵ One would not disagree with these comments, general as they are. However, Chada's thesis in practice pays only brief attention to the nature of the Commonwealth and Canada's relations with Commonwealth Africa during the crisis. The Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conferences do not bulk large, and the thesis concentrates more on British policies, noting when Canada adhered to the British position. Chada's footnotes frequently cite Harold Wilson's autobiography, *The Labour Government*. Like Hayes' article, Chada attributes numerous Commonwealth successes to Lester Pearson, but never provides the evidence to fit the case. For example, in a discussion of the Lagos Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting in January 1966, Chada states boldly that "Pearson played a significant and unique role to save the Commonwealth."¹⁶ Chada then contends that "Though Pearson did not force Wilson to follow a policy of intervention he persuaded the African leaders to give Mr. Wilson more time to prove the effectiveness of sanctions, and the African leaders gave in to Mr. Pearson's plan."¹⁷ There is no evidence given for this statement, and the reader is left wondering how exactly Pearson persuaded African leaders to adopt his position.

¹⁵ Geoffrey Chada, "The Canadian Response to Rhodesian UDI," History, Lakehead University, 17 April 1973. iii.

¹⁶ Ibid. 51.

¹⁷ Ibid. 53.

Mayo-Pankhurst's examines Canada's Rhodesian policy as a case study in liberal-internationalist theory. She concludes, "Membership in the Commonwealth was both a factor in determining that there would be a Canadian policy on the Rhodesia issue, as well as a strong force influencing the creation and shaping of the Canadian policy."¹⁸

Mayo-Pankhurst, writing in 1991, consulted the Lester B. Pearson and Arnold Cantwell Smith fonds at the National Archives, however the Department of External Affairs papers were still closed. Gaps exist in the story and, like Hayes' article, the principal focus is on the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meetings, with almost no attention paid to the story of how the key players arrived at their policies, or what were the motivations or implications of the policy. The thesis is highly theoretical, taking as its base David B. Dewitt and John Kirton's *Canada as a Principal Power*.

Canada's policy towards and response to the Rhodesian crisis, then, is still largely unknown. The primary aim of this study is to provide the first full account of official thinking and decision making with reference to Rhodesia, and to do so by extensively reviewing files both in Canada and Britain.

Documents obtained from the National Archives of Canada and the Public Record Office (PRO) in England provide the foundation for this analysis of Canadian policy. The Lester Pearson manuscript group revealed less than was hoped for, and while the Arnold Smith fonds were helpful for the later years of the crisis, they reveal little about Canada's crucial early perspective of the crisis. External Affairs papers at the National Archives were reviewed and released for this study, demonstrating the substance and texture of Canadian policy in the telegrams and memorandums of Canadian officials. The Public

¹⁸ Colleen Mayo-Pankhurst, "The Impact of Membership in the Commonwealth on Canadian Policy Towards Rhodesia, 1964-1966," Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, December 1991. iii.

Record Office in England also proved particularly helpful both in delineating Canadian responses but also in assessing British policies and Anglo-Canadian relationships. The British Prime Ministers Correspondence and Papers in particular gave insights into the difficulties facing Britain and its opinion of Canada's stance throughout the crisis.

Canadian letters to British officials and records of meetings were also discovered in these files. The Commonwealth Relations Office collection included copies of telegrams and correspondence between Commonwealth leaders.

The Department of External Affairs produced numerous accounts of Canada's role in the world, on a weekly, monthly and annual basis. These were indispensable for summaries of Canadian policy, and for contextualizing Rhodesia by making clear Canada's other concerns during the 1960s. In addition, these contemporary sources, close to the time of the crisis, were useful in gaining perspective, and giving a broad understanding of the public reaction to the Rhodesian Crisis. The memoirs of the major actors, Lester Pearson, Harold Wilson, Ian Smith, Arnold Smith, Paul Martin and Douglas Alex-Home, were at once indispensable and self-interested. Further contemporary evidence was gathered from *The Round Table*, *International Journal* and various newspaper articles.

The thesis has been divided into four chronological sections, corresponding to stages of Canada's involvement in the Rhodesia crisis. Chapter one will examine Canada's initial involvement with the Rhodesian problem, tracing the Rhodesian push for independence and illustrating Canada's hesitation to become involved. As the problem posed to the Commonwealth intensified, Canada assumed its traditional role of helpful-fixer. The chapter traces Canadian initiatives and actions at the 1964 Commonwealth

Prime Ministers' Meeting, where the problem of Rhodesia was creating a schism in the Commonwealth along lines of race. Chapter two shows how the Rhodesian problem escalated into crisis between Harold Wilson's election as British Prime Minister in 1964 and the 1965 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting (CPMM). The Canadian delegation's actions were crucial to maintaining Commonwealth solidarity during the 1965 CPMM. Chapter three traces the final steps taken by the Rhodesian government towards UDI and examines the Canadian government's response, first in an attempt to prevent UDI, and afterwards, in response to what was widely perceived as an international crime. Chapter four examines Canada's role in ensuring that a special meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting, to deal with the Rhodesia issue, would materialize. At that meeting in Lagos, Nigeria, Canada would once again play the role of mediator between the old and new Commonwealth members.

Chapter 1

The Crisis to Come, 1963-1964

Lester Pearson's first international act as head of government was to visit British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. Arriving in London on May 1, 1963¹⁹ Pearson found Macmillan intent on discussing international and cold war questions rather than those more specifically concerning United Kingdom-Canadian relations.²⁰ They talked about disarmament, the situation in Laos, the Kashmir dispute, Jordan, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. While Rhodesia was not included on Britain's formal list of discussions, Saville Garner, the permanent under-secretary in the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO), briefed Pearson on the problems that Rhodesia was presenting, and assured him that the Prime Minister would like to discuss the issue with him.²¹

Only days before Pearson assumed power External Affairs was preparing a memorandum outlining the Rhodesia problem. The Prime Minister reviewed the memorandum in preparation for his meeting with Macmillan.²² Southern Rhodesia's recent demand for complete independence²³ had burdened Britain with the task of finding a workable solution suitable to all the peoples of Rhodesia. Canada was concerned that

¹⁹ Public Record Office (PRO) Kew, England. Records of the Dominions Office and of the Commonwealth Relations and Foreign and Commonwealth Offices, (DO) 182/65. Itinerary of Lester Pearson visit to London, May 1-3, 1963.

²⁰ Lester B Pearson, *Mike The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson Vol. 2, 1948-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 284.

²¹ DO 182/65, Memorandum from Saville Garner, May 2, 1963.

²² Notes in the margins of the memorandum indicate Pearson reviewed the document on April 29, the day he left for England. National Archives of Canada (NAC), Records of the Department of External Affairs (DEA), Interim Box 37, 840/s276- 18 Conf., Memorandum for the Minister, April 22, 1963.

²³ A formal application for independence was submitted by the Southern Rhodesian government on March 29, 1963. DEA, Interim Box 37, 840/s276-18, Letter from British Foreign Secretary R. A. Butler to Rhodesian Prime Minister Winston Field, April 9, 1963.

“if a solution [was] not found within the near future the repercussions may do great damage to Britain’s prestige at the United Nations and to the structure of the Commonwealth.”²⁴

Demands for Rhodesian independence were commencing through diplomatic channels at this time. The Rhodesia situation had not reached a crisis yet, but the African Commonwealth members were expressing concern over Southern Rhodesia’s lack of progress towards majority rule. The Canadian government wanted to find a solution guaranteeing a place for the white settler population in the country’s future while also advancing the black African goal of independence under majority rule. The Rhodesian problem, as stated unambiguously in the External Affairs memorandum, was:

To work out a compromise which will give to the non – white population a firm promise of speedy improvement of their position, leading to majority control within a reasonable time limit and at the same time to guarantee to the white settler population sufficient economic and continuing political rights to induce them to remain in Southern Rhodesia and to work for its economic and social development.²⁵

The British needed to demonstrate exemplary negotiating skills and mix financial pressures and rewards if “bloodshed is to be avoided and progress made towards the African goal of independence under majority rule.”²⁶

The Canadian government was aware that “some new approach to a solution must be found. The White Southern Rhodesians are not prepared,” the reasoning of External Affairs continued, “to abandon the prosperous modern community which they have built themselves; they fear, with reason, that if they give up political control in Southern

²⁴ DEA, Interim Box 37, 840/s276-18, Memorandum for the Minister, April 22, 1963.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

Rhodesia they will sooner or later be forced to leave.”²⁷ It was generally recognized in Canada and Britain that the Africans in Rhodesia were not capable of governing such a complicated modern state without extensive training.²⁸ Pearson would attempt to persuade black Africans to accept a moderate solution by assuring them of Britain’s “sincerity and purpose in bringing about a just settlement in central Africa.”²⁹ Pearson’s government looked at the crisis through an international lens, preferring to concern itself with British prestige and Commonwealth solidarity, rather than with the domestic situation in Rhodesia at the root of the problem.

In late June, British representatives and the three leaders of the countries making up the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland met in Victoria Falls to discuss the future of the Federation. The Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister, Winston Field, had threatened to boycott the conference unless the British government “conceded beforehand Southern Rhodesia’s right to independence at the dissolution of the Federation.”³⁰ Although the British did not capitulate, Field did in fact attend the conference, where it was agreed that the Federation would be dissolved on December 31, 1963. Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia were to receive independence shortly thereafter; however, Southern Rhodesia was not guaranteed independence automatically. Southern Rhodesia would need to institute a parliament with one third African membership; to issue a guarantee

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ The structure of Rhodesian society ensured that Africans were in a subordinate role. While there were education programs for blacks, they were limited and far inferior to those of the whites. Consequently Canada, Britain and Australia all doubted that there were sufficient Africans with experience in governance to take over and rule Rhodesia. See NAC, DEA, Interim Box 144, vol. 3449, file 1-1964/1A, Papers prepared for Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference, June 29, 1964; DEA, Interim Box 37, 840/s726-18, Letter from Canada House to External Affairs in Ottawa, March 12, 1965; Interim Box 37, 840/s726-18, Message No 227. Letter from Pearson to British Prime Minister Harold Wilson, April 29, 1965.

²⁹ DEA, Interim Box 37 840/s276-18, Memorandum for the Minister, April 22, 1963.

³⁰ DEA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18, Message from Canada House to External Affairs in Ottawa, June 19, 1963.

that the strictures of the 1930 Land Apportionment Act would be gradually eliminated; and extend the 'B-roll' franchise; and remove racial discrimination.³¹

The first contact between Pearson and Field came in mid June 1963. The Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister extended an open invitation for Canada to send a Minister to Southern Rhodesia. The intent was to clear up what Field felt were views "based on inaccurate information about the conditions"³² in Rhodesia. Canada refused the offer, concluding that the Rhodesians "still appear to think that if members of the old Commonwealth understood their objectives, they would support them against African nationalist demands."³³ The "Southern Rhodesians would probably be more hurt if we sent a representative who came away still unconvinced that their demand for independence under their present constitution is entirely justified."³⁴ Canada wanted to appear neither sympathetic nor hostile to the situation. The government was intentionally distancing itself from involvement.

Canada's official denial of the request to send a representative was delivered on July 17, 1963. It explained that all the members of the Canadian government were too busy at that time;³⁵ however, the Canadian government was willing to accept a representation from a Minister of the Southern Rhodesian government. Such a visit would not cause an 'embarrassment' to the British government and would help to convey

³¹ While publicly the Government of Great Britain placed conditions on independence, Winston Field and Ian Smith swear that they were assured that Southern Rhodesia would receive the same independence commensurate as that of the other two territories. Kenneth Young, *Rhodesia and Independence*, 2 ed. (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1969), 87-95.

³² DEA, Interim Box 37, 840s/276-18, Letter to Pearson from Winston Field, Salisbury, June 12 1963.

³³ DEA, Interim Box 37, 840/s276-18, Memorandum to the Acting Prime Minister Paul Martin from Lionel Chevrier, June 25, 1963.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ DEA, Interim Box 37, 840/s276-18, Memorandum for Pearson, July 17, 1963.

an impression of flexibility and moderation to the Rhodesians.³⁶ By extending an invitation to the Rhodesians, Pearson nullified the purpose of Field's invitation. Field had hoped to convince a Canadian representative of the progress being made between the races. He believed that a state sponsored tour of Potemkin Rhodesia would demonstrate to the Canadian visitors that progress was being made towards racial integration. Sending a Minister to Canada with information about the state of affairs in Rhodesia, however, would not make the same impression and consequently would not advance Field's hopes of obtaining support from the older Commonwealth members.

The president of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), Ndabaningi Sithole, wrote Pearson in early November 1963, during "an hour of great anxiety."³⁷ ZANU was the premier African Nationalist movement in Southern Rhodesia. Sithole wanted Pearson to use his "good influence" to bring about a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' emergency meeting which might find a solution to the Rhodesian problem. Three weeks later, O.W. Dier, an assistant to the Prime Minister, wrote to Sithole assuring him that the Canadian government was watching the situation closely and directed the ZANU president to a Canadian statement made the month before at the General Assembly of the United Nations.

As members of the Commonwealth we are concerned that the final solution should be in keeping with the principles of freedom and democracy on which the Commonwealth is based. We are confident that the influence of the United Kingdom will be directed to this end. At the same time there is a heavy responsibility, particularly on the government but also for the people of Southern Rhodesia, both white and black, to speed the process of peaceful transition to majority rule by facilitating agreement on the

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ NAC, EA, Interim Box 37, 840/s726-18, Letter from Ndabaningi Sithole to Pearson, November 5, 1963.

compromises which will certainly be necessary.³⁸

African Nationalists had hoped, Sithole urged, that Canada, “the oldest Commonwealth member whose leadership in the battle for human liberty and national self-determination is widely recognized and appreciated in Africa,” would come to the rescue by forcing the issue of a conference and helping to “avert the sure disaster” for which Rhodesia was heading.³⁹ Pearson was not interested in encouraging a Nationalist leader in Zimbabwe. Canada would be viewed as interfering in Rhodesia’s domestic policy and, more importantly, in a British colonial concern. It is worthwhile to note that the UN Statement sent to Sithole placed responsibility for finding a solution entirely with Britain, while the responsibility for peaceful transition lay with the Rhodesians, both black and white. Canada again assumed the role of interested spectator, not an actor in the drama.

By early 1964, talks between Macmillan and Field had produced the first stalemate of the crisis. Rhodesia was increasingly active in its pursuit of independence. On the other side, Britain was stalling, hoping time would weaken the Rhodesian resolve. The Commonwealth Relations Office telegraphed Ottawa seeking assistance. The CRO urged Canada to “exercise what influence you can upon Field; he greatly respects the views of the old Commonwealth and would give most serious consideration to any views you might express.”⁴⁰ The flattery was poured on at the telegram’s end: “Apart from any approach which you may feel able to make direct to Winston Field, we should greatly

³⁸ DEA, Interim Box 37, 840/s726-18, Letter from O.W. Dier to Ndbaningi Sithole, November 26, 1963.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ PRO, Records of the Prime Ministers Office, (Prem) 11/ 5023, Outward telegram from the Commonwealth Relations Office to Ottawa, February 7, 1964.

welcome any thoughts or advice you may have to give us on this important and delicate situation.”⁴¹

Pearson wrote Field in February of 1964, clearly stating the Canadian position on the Rhodesian crisis. “Our concern (in Canada) relates to our interest in maintaining the integrity of the Commonwealth, and to the even larger problem of the future relationship in world affairs generally between the non-white races in the West.”

During Pearson’s first year of office, then, Rhodesia was a faraway problem. Pearson’s participation had been unsuccessfully sought by Field, Sithole and the CRO. Pearson’s response in all three instances was to assert and reassert that Rhodesia was Britain’s problem and Britain’s province. While Pearson’s main concern was the maintenance of the Commonwealth, it was not necessarily for the benefits that came with Commonwealth membership. For Pearson, the Commonwealth represented a microcosm of the world; it was untainted by UN power struggles and relatively free of Cold War agendas. For Pearson, the Commonwealth was the only venue which was capable of finding a solution to the problem and, if the Commonwealth could not do it, there would be little chance that any other international forum could provide the auspices under which a peaceful resolution could be found.⁴²

On April 13 1964, when Ian Douglas Smith succeeded Winston Field as Southern Rhodesia’s Prime Minister, the dynamics of the situation abruptly changed. The first Rhodesian Prime Minister born in the country, Smith represented a growing resentment and fear in the settler population that they might lose their place in Africa. Independence was for them an imperative, and Smith would pursue it with all the diligence and

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² NAC, Arnold Cantwell Smith fonds, vol. 66, file 1, Southern Rhodesia, June 26, 1964.

obsession of Ahab chasing the great white whale. The next day, Secretary of State for External Affairs Paul Martin predicted in a speech that the “Commonwealth is about to enter a new and constructive period of great usefulness to the world community.”⁴³ It would first have to fight a crisis which would threaten its very *raison d’etre*.

Preparations for the 1964 Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Meeting (CPMM) were haunted by the Rhodesia problem, foreshadowing the crisis to come. Rhodesia had been attending the CPMM’s as early as 1944 in the capacity of observer. In 1951 a standing invitation to attend the conferences was extended to Southern Rhodesia, and Rhodesia attended every Commonwealth Prime Ministers meeting up until 1963. But things were changing. On January 1 1957, there had been no African member states in the Commonwealth, but by January 1964 there were nine independent African members. For the African bloc in the Commonwealth, the Rhodesian government was offensive because of its race policies; the governing Rhodesian Front party line sought to postpone majority rule by seeking independence but Rhodesia was then still part of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The other members of the Federation, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, had already granted majority rule to their citizens.

When Lester Pearson was questioned in the House of Commons about whether Rhodesia would be invited to the 1964 conference, Pearson replied that he thought it was inappropriate to discuss the matter since the British had not consulted the Canadian government about it. He did say, however, that “The Prime Ministers of independent Commonwealth governments, including Canada, would naturally expect to be consulted

⁴³ Canadian Institute of International Affairs, *Monthly Report*, April 1964. 45.

before invitations to attend a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting were issued to the representatives of countries which are not fully independent."⁴⁴

The 1964 CPMM was to be held at Marlborough House, in central London, from July 8-12. The Canadian delegation was by then well acquainted with the Rhodesian predicament. A memorandum compiled by the Department of External Affairs reminded the Canadian delegates that Ian Smith was firmly in charge of Southern Rhodesia's affairs, and, although the idea of a settlement was still a possibility, Rhodesia would resort to "other actions if all else fails."⁴⁵ The Canadian government believed Rhodesia, if denied independence, had one of two routes to follow: a unilateral declaration of independence, or the "Southern Rhodesian Government might attempt to join their country with the republic of South Africa."⁴⁶ Admittedly, this latter possibility was remote because South Africa would be unlikely to accept three million more blacks into its population.⁴⁷

The uneasy political situation in Rhodesia was crippling external investment flows to the country. Smith believed independence would correct the economic slowdown created by wary foreign investors. The Canadian government realised that the economic avenue might be crucial to finding a solution to the problem. There were two possibilities explored by Ottawa. First, if the Rhodesian government could be convinced that a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) would worsen the economic situation in the country, "they may swing rapidly towards seeking a political settlement

⁴⁴ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*. May 4, 1964. 2876.

⁴⁵ DEA, Interim Box 37, 840/s276-18, Memorandum for the Minister, April 22, 1963.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

with the British government on the latter's terms."⁴⁸ The second possibility Canada considered was an economic incentive to white ruled Rhodesia. Rather than punish Rhodesia in an attempt to force it to capitulate, it was suggested that aid might bring about a preferable solution. Thomas L. Carter, a Canadian foreign service officer stationed in Africa for most of the 1960's, made an official visit to the Rhodesian capital of Salisbury in March. He informed the Rhodesian government that the Canadian External Aid office had allocated \$125, 000 for Technical Assistance, which also included educational assistance.⁴⁹ Traditionally Canada had refrained from giving aid to countries that were not fully independent, but now it was being suggested that Canada could change this policy and offer Rhodesia an aid package similar in scale to the ones offered to independent African countries comparable to Rhodesia.⁵⁰

Canadian delegates to the 1964 CPMM were given a particular goal for which to strive. The Department of External Affairs memorandum delegates studied in preparation for the conference offered advice on one particular aim the conference might attempt to achieve:

The Conference might aim at producing a statement on Southern Rhodesia which would not give grounds to the present Southern Rhodesian Government to claim that the Commonwealth was attempting to interfere in Southern Rhodesia's internal affairs and which would at the same time gives hope to the Africans and Liberal White Southern Rhodesians that the Commonwealth as a whole would be willing to give material support to help African educational and economic advancement."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Arnold Cantwell Smith fonds, vol. 66, file 1, Southern Rhodesia, June 26 1964.

⁴⁹ Arnold Cantwell Smith fonds, vol. 66, file 1, Southern Rhodesia, June 26 1964.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Pearson was aware that a practical position for Canada to assume at the upcoming CPMM would be to endorse a collective statement. Such a statement would need to be ambiguous enough to be inoffensive to White Rhodesia; respectful of British authority in the situation; promise the Africans that change was coming.

After opening the 1964 Calgary Stampede on July 6, Pearson flew to the North-West Territories and boarded a Royal Canadian Air Force jet headed for London. Several Commonwealth Prime Ministers appeared on a British television debate that evening. Even though Canada was absent from the discussion, it managed to emerge from it well positioned to assume the role of bridge-builder at the CPMM. Prime Minister Eric Williams of Trinidad and Tobago took one of the extreme positions during the debate saying, “the Commonwealth has not meant much to Trinidad,” and added that Trinidad found it much easier to talk to Canada than to its former colonial master.⁵² Prime Minister Milton Obote of Uganda and Prime Minister Albert Margai of Sierra Leone assured viewers that the Rhodesia situation needed to be dealt with level heads, rather than rash action.⁵³ Levelheadedness was the Canadian *métier*.

The 1964 Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference was different from the first one Pearson had attended as Under Secretary of State fifteen years earlier. “This conference was different that any I had attended in London,” he remembered, “There was still a family atmosphere, but also a frankness of discussion which would certainly have led to a break-up at the United Nations in New York, and which, indeed, put quite a strain

⁵² “Five Commonwealth Chiefs Debate its Future on TV,” *Globe and Mail*, July 7, 1964.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

on the Commonwealth. The Canadian delegation actively tried to use its influence to prevent disintegration.”⁵⁴

The difference in discourse was not the only change Pearson must have noticed. A considerable expansion in membership, and a much broader range of political ideologies, could be discerned in the Commonwealth on the eve of the 1964 conference. Ghana, Kenya, Malawi (Nyasaland), Zambia (Northern Rhodesia), Sierra Leone, Tanganyika and Uganda were the seven African members; Jamaica and Trinidad represented the West Indies; the four Asian members were India, Pakistan, Ceylon, and Malaysia. Cyprus was also present. The old white empire, consisting of Britain, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand confronted a multiracial institution which had begun to be built with the admission of India and Pakistan to the Commonwealth in the late 1940's.

The London based *Sunday Telegraph* reported that some of the African nations had threatened to withdraw from the Commonwealth over the Rhodesian issue.⁵⁵ The most notable threat came from Ghana; it was the oldest African member of the Commonwealth and a leading proponent of pan-Africanism. The Department of External Affairs expected Kwame Nkrumah, the Prime Minister of Ghana, to lead the African attack, but it did not appear concerned about predictions of Commonwealth dissolution. Rather, it was expected that Ghana would attempt to pressure Britain to secure the release of all political prisoners in Rhodesia and convene a constitutional conference aimed on furthering the objective of ‘one-man, one-vote.’⁵⁶ Nkrumah had only just confirmed that he would attend the conference the weekend before. Simultaneously, he distributed a

⁵⁴ Pearson, *Mike*, 283.

⁵⁵ “Rhodesia Issue Looms Large in London Talks,” *Globe and Mail*, July 6, 1964.

⁵⁶ DEA, Interim Box 144, 3449, 1-1964/1A, Commonwealth Papers prepared for Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference, June 29, 1964.

pamphlet placing complete responsibility on the British to find a solution resulting in “one-man one-vote.”

The Commonwealth Prime Minister’s meetings were meant to be intimate gatherings where like-minded members could hash out their differences behind closed doors. The 1964 Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Meeting was preceded by secret meetings held in hotel rooms by African and Asian delegates and designed to discuss plans for action. It must be remembered that many of these nations did not have the funds needed to maintain communications with other members. The initial backroom meetings may have been the only opportunity that many African nations had to discuss their positions with one another.

British Prime Minister Sir Alec-Douglas Home opened the conference on July 8, 1964 at 11 am, offering his welcome to the members. He gave way to Lester Pearson who, as representative of the oldest Commonwealth member, offered a more detailed welcome to the delegates.⁵⁷ The agenda and timetable of the meeting were discussed that morning. Britain was aware of opposition to its Rhodesian policy coming from the newer Commonwealth members and anticipated harsh condemnation. United Kingdom officials believed that discussions on Rhodesia could be limited if the subject was hidden within the agenda. They decided to discuss Rhodesia under the broad heading: “Progress of Dependent Territories towards Independence.” But some of the Prime Ministers pushed at the outset of the meeting to have the item brought up sooner in the week, and Douglas-Home acquiesced in their request. His first order of business was a proposal to the newly independent Malawi to accept Commonwealth membership. Douglas Home then

⁵⁷ DEA, 3450, file 1-1964/3A, Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (64) 1st Meeting, July 8, 1964.

expressed his intention of doing the same for Northern Rhodesia once it had received full independence.⁵⁸

The first substantive meeting of the conference was held that afternoon, under the heading “world political situation.” Discussion centered on Cold War issues and Chinese communist influences in Malaysia, until Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta broke from that topic, saying “Kenya had an African viewpoint; they were committed to a policy of non-alignment and could not take sides in the differences between the two great power blocs of East and West.”⁵⁹ Kenyatta considered it a “moral duty to support others whose struggles for freedom were not over.”⁶⁰

The next day Ghana’s Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah informed the meeting, still under the rubric of the World Political Situation, that he regretted that so much time had been spent discussing the issue of communism on the previous day. He brought up the Rhodesian problem, and outlined his vision of the Commonwealth, “All members should reject colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism and racial discrimination. All should accept the preservation of world peace as the basis of their policy.”⁶¹ But an acceptance of differing ideologies was not enough; the Commonwealth administration needed an overhaul because, as Nkrumah pointed out, “It was no longer an association of like-minded countries deriving their institutions from Britain... The main bond uniting the Commonwealth now was respect for the independence of its various members and its strength in the future must rest on the agreement on certain tenets and the acceptance of

⁵⁸ DEA, 3450, file 1-1964/3A, Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (64) 2nd Meeting, July 8, 1964.

⁵⁹ DEA, 3450, file 1-1964/3A, Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (64) 3rd Meeting, July 8, 1964.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ DEA, 3450, file 1-1964/3A, Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (64) 4th Meeting, July 9, 1964.

new obligations...”⁶² Nkrumah proposed that the Commonwealth give serious thought to establishing a clearing house in London, a Commonwealth Secretariat, that would prepare plans for trade, aid and development and circulate information on these matters to all the members of the Commonwealth.⁶³

Arnold Smith, later elected the first Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, recounts in his memoirs his embarrassment at not recognizing the fundamental difference between the old and new members. The latter simply did not have the money to actively participate in the Commonwealth. Their resources prevented them from developing backgrounder reports and maintaining communications with other members. Smith’s Commonwealth Secretariat served the administrative needs of the newer members and demonstrated to them the benefits of Commonwealth membership.

The afternoon of July 9 was Pearson’s turn to speak. He said he “would touch on the problems of the world from a North American viewpoint – which was not necessarily the same as a United States viewpoint.”⁶⁴ Pearson acknowledged that the journey to freedom for both individuals and nations was still ongoing and the separation between wealth and poverty was often paralleled by the separation of race. All members of the Commonwealth, in Pearson’s eyes, had an obligation to “heal these divisions.”⁶⁵ He concluded that if the Commonwealth hoped to survive, it “must stand for the principle of full racial co-operation without discrimination and if they were to have any formal principles this must be one of them.”⁶⁶

⁶² DEA, 3450, file 1-1964/3A, Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (64) 4th Meeting, July 9, 1964.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ DEA, 3450, file 1-1964/3A, Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (64) 5th Meeting, July 9, 1964.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

The morning session of July 10 saw discussions hover around the race problem in Africa without actually spotlighting Rhodesia. Discussions on South Africa, barred from the Commonwealth three years earlier, demonstrated divisions in the Commonwealth along black and white lines. Sir Albert Margai of Sierra Leone criticized the older Commonwealth members for not supporting trade sanctions against South Africa. Pearson delivered a plea for racial equality and expressed concern that, if South Africa was expelled from the United Nations and left to wallow in its own isolation, there would not be a forum where countries could express their disapproval of apartheid to the South Africans directly.

That afternoon delegates began the discussion of "Progress of British Territories towards Independence." A fine line separated what was appropriate to discuss and what was not. Douglas-Home reminded the delegates that "colonial questions were a matter between Britain and the colonies concerned."⁶⁷ The Commonwealth and Colonies Secretary, Duncan Sandys, opened with a report on British Guiana. The British government was being criticized for its continued rule. Sandys expressed to the Prime Ministers British fears about the consequences of granting independence prematurely; "it would be irresponsible to make British Guiana independent in circumstances which would lead to immediate civil war between the two races."⁶⁸ The British probably wished to underline the general dilemmas of colonialism before moving to specific discussions on Southern Rhodesia.

When it came time to broach the subject of Rhodesia, Sandys explained Britain's relationship with Rhodesia. Britain had not legislated for Southern Rhodesia, except by

⁶⁷ DEA, vol. 3450, file 1-1964/3A, Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (64) 7th Meeting, July 10, 1964.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

request, since 1923. While there were those who felt that, despite the long interval Britain, could reassert the right to legislate for the country, “the fact remained that Britain had long ago ceased to have any physical control over Southern Rhodesia.”⁶⁹ The British did not have any officials or soldiers in Southern Rhodesia to whom they could give instructions. Even if the British Parliament were to pass laws taking over the responsibility of legislating for Rhodesia, there were no practical means of enforcing them “short of sending an army to invade the country, which there was no thought of doing.”⁷⁰

However, there was one power that still rested with Britain, the power to grant independence. Britain had informed the Rhodesians that they would receive independence under the same conditions that Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland had received it. Before Southern Rhodesia was awarded independence, there would have to be a “system of government reasonably representative of the population as a whole.”⁷¹ Next, Sandys directed the Prime Ministers’ attention to a statement made by Ian Smith that morning when he stated, “Independence is not a burning issue. We must pursue it by further negotiation.”⁷² Sandys proposed, in light of this, that they do nothing that might intensify the desire for independence in Southern Rhodesia.

The July 10 afternoon meeting was dominated by African delegates demanding decisive action and attacking British claims. Indeed, the Commonwealth’s newest member, Malawi, was quick to question the British claim that she had given her colonies

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

independence.⁷³ But first came some velvet. “Let’s be frank ... you British have not been as pig-headed as other imperialists. You have recognised in time what is inevitable, and accepted it gracefully.” Dr. Banda said. “That is your greatness, and we honor you for it, but it has not all been voluntary. There’s been a significant element of persuasion, and many of us here have been among the persuaders.”⁷⁴ Moving around the table, Banda listed the names of those leaders who had been imprisoned during the struggle for decolonisation. Pearson eased in to break the tension, turning Banda’s barb into a joke. He “liked being in ‘inner circles,’” Pearson said, “and there seemed to be one forming here, of prison graduates.”⁷⁵ Pearson had once been confined to barracks when he was a medical orderly during the First World War.

Banda gave way to another nationalist speaker, Kenyan Prime Minister Jomo Kenyatta. He offered the use of his country’s troops, saying, “I know Britain’s dilemma because faced with a settler rebellion they may not find it easy to act with troops if necessary, but to allow this to influence their decision would be to betray their moral duty...and the Commonwealth itself.”⁷⁶

When the conference resumed the next morning, Pearson was the first to speak. In his view, the Commonwealth had gone through three marked changes in its history: the granting of independence in 1867 to Canada; the acceptance of India, the first republican government, into the Commonwealth in 1949; and the Commonwealth stance against racial intolerance in 1961. Pearson stated that “they were at a similar moment today,” as

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Arnold Smith, *Stitches in Time* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1981), 2.

⁷⁵ Smith, *Stitches*, 2-3.

⁷⁶ “Kenyatta Offers Soldiers,” *Globe and Mail*, July 11, 1964.

the Commonwealth was about to undergo another major change⁷⁷ They had arrived at this moment, Pearson felt, because of the mutual fears between races, which was a root cause of trouble in the world. “The continuance of racial discrimination and the intensification in many areas of mutual fears between races are both the most disturbing features of the present world situation and a great cause of the difficulty with the regard to many remaining unresolved colonial problems.” He went on to suggest that “That problem exists in the Commonwealth; it exists outside of the Commonwealth.”⁷⁸ Pearson thus, and there can be no doubt it was strategy as well as diplomacy, acknowledged the events that were concerning the African delegations and provided them with some hope of rectification while avoiding the pointing of a smoking gun at Britain.

Specific manifestations of the mutual fear between the races could be found in Southern Rhodesia and British Guinea. It affected members’ belief in the Commonwealth as a viable institution. To solve this Pearson suggested - in a “masterpiece of diplomatic timing and presentation”⁷⁹ - a Commonwealth declaration of racial equality:

For all Commonwealth governments, it should be an object of policy to build in each country a structure of society which offers equal opportunity and non-discrimination for all its people, irrespective of race, colour or creed. The Commonwealth should be able to exercise constructive leadership in the application of democratic principles in a manner which will enable all people of the many racial and cultural groups in our various countries to exist and develop side by side as free and equal citizens.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ DEA, vol. 3450, file 1-1964/3A, Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (64) 9th Meeting, July 13, 1964.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 5604.

⁷⁹ Martin, *Public Life*, 413.

⁸⁰ DEA, vol. 3450, file 1-1964/3A, Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (64) 9th Meeting, July 13, 1964.

Pearson next addressed concerns about the skills Africans in Rhodesia would need to have in order to assume power in Rhodesia. This, in his view, was less of an argument for constitutional delay than it was for accelerating the training of Africans in preparation for majority rule.⁸¹ Pearson's Canada pledged to provide technical assistance for the training of Southern Rhodesians in Canada and to donate several million dollars for crash programs within Southern Rhodesia that would help prepare the Africans for majority rule.⁸²

Pearson then broke with tradition and began discussing how these racial principles might be applied to Southern Rhodesia. There was, he claimed, no insurmountable disagreement among members; rather, differences were arising because of timing and methodology. All members were seeking the independence of Rhodesia and its membership in the Commonwealth, as long as it put in place a non-discriminatory constitution providing for the just representation to all races. The continued imprisonment of African nationalists in Southern Rhodesia, such as Joshua Nkomo and Rev. Sithole along with their associates, was a problem, not only for Blacks in Southern Rhodesia, but for leaders in neighbouring nations. The continuation of their imprisonment in Southern Rhodesia, Pearson continued, would result in the weakening of control that neighbouring African leaders had over their populations, which would be disturbed by the inaction of their leaders. This, and calls by nationalists for the release of the prisoners, prompted Pearson to argue that the "meeting might therefore consider making a moderate appeal for the release of the African leaders, in preparation for the early conference on which

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² DEA, vol. 3450, file 1-1964/3A, Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (64) 9th Meeting, July 13, 1964.; Richard Ogden, "The Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference," *International Journal*, XIX no .4 (Autumn 1964), 546.

hopes for an agreed solution must rest.”⁸³ Pearson concurred with most of the other delegates that “an independence conference should be convened to seek agreement on the steps by which Southern Rhodesia might proceed to independence within the Commonwealth.”⁸⁴

Sir Robert Menzies, the Prime Minister of Australia, interrupted Pearson after he began discussing a possible Unilateral Declaration of Independence. A short debate ensued because discussion of the internal situation in Southern Rhodesia, Menzies insisted, was outside their mandate. “The meeting was not in position to judge: Southern Rhodesia had not been represented at the discussions, though they had asked to be heard.”⁸⁵ After a short exchange with Menzies, the representative of a country with a traditional relationship with Canada of brother and rival, Pearson resumed his speech. His purpose, he explained, had not been to condemn Rhodesia. Pearson made the case for complete British control over the issue: it was their problem under their authority. If the Commonwealth, however, were to issue a statement in the final communiqué expressing members’ reluctance to recognize the Rhodesian regime, it might help to strengthen Britain’s hand in negotiations.⁸⁶ Pearson concluded his thoughts on Southern Rhodesia by saying, “Southern Rhodesia had become a matter of importance far beyond its own boundaries; it had become a symbol and what was decided on it would be taken as a test of the seriousness of purpose behind any principles that might be adopted.”⁸⁷

Pearson added a few words on the situation in British Guinea, where British troops had been sent to bring a stop to the chaos and violence resulting from clashes

⁸³ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, July 17, 1964, 5605.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, July 17 1964, 5604.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

between Indians and Africans. Pearson wanted a statement included in the final communiqué that would help bring pressure to British Guinea to resolve their problems. The military situation in British Guinea created problems for the British Government because Africans felt that they were quick to send in British troops when neither antagonist was Caucasian. By broaching the subject of British Guinea, Pearson demonstrated to the Africans his sympathies with the Developing world.

Canada's alignment with the African and Asian nations was a continuation of the stand against racial discrimination made by John Diefenbaker at the 1961 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, and Pearson was made this known on his return to the House of Commons on 17 July 1964. Pearson stated "The Canadian delegation ... tried to make a contribution which would be objective and helpful in the evolution of our multi-racial community based on racial equality and non-discrimination." Pearson directly referred to the 1961 Conference and stated his policy's relationship to the stand taken there "I, in my way, tried to follow and reaffirm the position taken then in regard to racial equality." This was smart – and generous – politics.

Pearson and the Canadian delegation had been involved in a difficult balancing act in mediating between the old and new Commonwealth members. While he had reassured the African members of Britain's (and Canada's) sincerity, he had also protected the interests of the British. Richard Ogden argues that the agreed blueprint for action was "largely the work of the Canadian delegation." Pearson's racial equality statement, the call for the release of the imprisoned nationalists, the commitment to assist in the training of Africans for governing positions and the assurance that the Commonwealth would not recognize an independent regime without majority rule eased

that African position and assured them of the Commonwealth's sincerity in dealing with the situation, while the recognition of complete British authority over the situation allowed for the two blocs, old and new members, to find a compromise. Ogden suggests, "this formula left the British government with sufficient leeway for dealing with Southern Rhodesia while leaving the latter in no doubt about the views of the other governments. There was no question of denying London's primary responsibility for granting independence while at the same time realising the limitations on what it could do."⁸⁸

Pearson's racial equality statement would become a standard in Commonwealth affairs. It headed off the fragmentation, and perhaps even the ultimate destruction, of the Commonwealth. It also made clear to Britain and the world that the Rhodesian crisis was one with which the British must cope. The traditional policy of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meetings was not to interfere in other member nation's domestic issues, but Pearson moved just enough in that direction to let it be known that was the Commonwealth's business too. He carefully navigated between opposing positions resulting in a final communiqué that was signed by all members.

Although major steps were taken at the conference towards building a stronger and more unified Commonwealth, the Rhodesia problem would shortly bloom into a crisis. It was with this in mind that a special meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers was requested by several delegates. The meeting would be devoted to the Rhodesian crisis. Pearson stated in the House of Commons: "Most of us, including myself expressed the view that an independence conference should be convened... at the

⁸⁸ Richard Ogden, "The Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference," *International Journal*, XIX, no .4 (Autumn 1964), 546.

earliest practicable time, on the basis of majority rule.”⁸⁹ The special conference encountered delays, as there was no possibility of finding an adequate settlement between the Southern Rhodesian government and the British.

Canada’s initial involvement in the Rhodesia crisis, then, could be characterized as careful, but consistent with its helper-fixer reputation and self image. Canada felt that this was an internal matter for the British: the Canadian government wanted to appear neither sympathetic nor hostile. It would watch developments closely, resisting direct involvement. Canada’s interest in the situation intensified as the threat of a unilateral declaration became more possible. However, the real catalyst for Canada’s involvement came when the Rhodesian situation menaced the future of the Commonwealth. Pearson had a special affection for the Commonwealth, an understanding of its importance and sense that it was in a period of change.

⁸⁹ Hansard, *House of Commons Debates*, July 17 1964, 5605.

Chapter 2

“The Problem of Rhodesia Exploded,” 1964-1965

The October elections of 1964 in Great Britain saw Harold Wilson take power with a slight majority. Pearson's government was pleased with these developments because the Labour party's line on colonial issues, the United Nations and nuclear issues was attuned to that of the Canadian Liberal party.⁹⁰ But Prime Ministers Ian Smith and Harold Wilson were now responsible for the Rhodesia negotiations. The men distrusted each other and their mutual animosity introduced an atmosphere of conflict and enmity which permeated everything.

On October 19, Wilson recalled, four days after the British election, “the problem of Rhodesia exploded.”⁹¹ Smith had gathered a group of tribal chiefs and presented them with the option of working within the 1961 constitution, which provided for eventual majority rule. The ‘Indaba’ of chiefs agreed but few, besides Smith and his loyalists, believed that the ‘Indaba’ was representative of the African people in Rhodesia. Smith proceeded to schedule an independence referendum for November 5. Wilson pressed Smith for a categorical assurance that a ‘yes’ vote did not guarantee independence, but never received one. Minister of External Affairs Paul Martin stated in the House of Commons the Canadian view: the referendum would *not* be regarded as a mandate for independence.⁹²

⁹⁰ Richard Ogden, “The Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference,” *International Journal*, XIX, no. 4 (Autumn 1964), 546.

⁹¹ Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964-1970* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 21.

⁹² Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, October 30, 1964. 9599.

Reports trickled into British intelligence that Rhodesia was about to declare independence.⁹³ The reliability of this information is at best questionable. It would have been illogical for Smith to declare independence just a week before he expected to gain support from the electorate. Rather, it would seem that these anonymous ‘threats’ of independence provided the British with the impetus to issue a declaration of their own. The British put out a statement reminding Smith and his compatriots that the decision and authority to grant independence was in the British domain. A Rhodesian declaration would have no constitutional effect and would constitute “an open act of defiance and rebellion and it would be treasonable to take steps to give effect to it.”⁹⁴ The British declaration, however, made little impact on the Rhodesian electorate, except perhaps to stiffen its spine. There were 58, 176 votes in favour of independence, with only a tenth of that number opposing it.⁹⁵

Pearson traveled to London for a state funeral in late January 1965, after the “greatest heart in Britain had ceased to beat.”⁹⁶ Winston Churchill’s political career had begun during Queen Victoria’s reign; his vibrant life and recent decline closely paralleled that of the British Empire. While attending Sir Winston’s funeral, Pearson had the opportunity to discuss the Rhodesia issue with Harold Wilson, and also with Ian Smith, for the first time. Pearson would come away from London with a new sense and level of concern. Smith told Pearson during their London meeting that independence, even if obtained illegally, would restore economic stability to Rhodesia by ending the political uncertainty that was scaring off investors. Furthermore, he believed that the loss of

⁹³ Wilson, *The Labour Government*, 25.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Kenneth Young, *Rhodesia and Independence*, 2ed. (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1969), 175.

⁹⁶ Adam Skies and Iain Sproat, *The Wit of Sir Winston* (London: Sphere Books Ltd., 1970), ix.

Commonwealth status would not hurt Rhodesia, because the West along with Japan would still seek Rhodesian raw materials.⁹⁷

Zambia was another key player in the Rhodesian situation, as Smith ominously cautioned Pearson. "Rhodesia could destroy Zambia's economy very quickly."⁹⁸ The proximity of Zambia to Rhodesia made the country dependent on its neighbour for trade routes and energy supplied by generators located inside Rhodesia at the Kariba Dam. Zambia would soon begin searching for a backer for a new railroad that would by-pass Rhodesia. Both the US and China offered assistance, seeking to buy the newest Commonwealth member's allegiance.⁹⁹ As the Rhodesian crisis unfolded, Zambia was crucial. It would be the launching point for any invasion into Rhodesia. Pearson was concerned with the Zambian aspect of the crisis, and aided Zambian Prime Minister Kenneth Kaunda by providing airlifts and financial aid, trying to ensure that Kaunda maintain his moderate approach. Pearson understood the delicacy of the situation: two nations separated by the mighty Zambezi; on one side, the old colonial Africa, and on the other, the new Black Africa; if a race war was to start, it would start here.

After meeting with Smith, Pearson visited 10 Downing Street, telling Wilson about his encounter with Smith. The Canadian Prime Minister hoped to facilitate a meeting between Wilson and Smith, but was assured by Smith that such a meeting was politically impossible. When Wilson informed him that Smith had indeed visited him less than two hours ago, "Lester Pearson was astounded," Wilson recalled, "Not only, I think,

⁹⁷ National Archives of Canada (NAC), Records of the Department of External Affairs (DEA), Interim Box 37 840-s726-18, Message # 73, Telegram from Paul Martin to Canada House, February 17, 1965.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ See Anthony Lake, *"Tar Baby" Opinion: American policy toward Southern Rhodesia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.)

that Mr. Smith should have misled him, but also that the Rhodesian Premier should think that he could get away with it.”¹⁰⁰

Three days later, an article appeared in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* comparing Pearson and Smith. “If anyone wished to illustrate the two extremes of attitude within the British Commonwealth, they were to be found in two men who had a chat...Prime Minister Lester Pearson of Canada and Prime Minister Ian Smith of Rhodesia.”¹⁰¹ Journalist Scott Young’s “The peaceful Prime Minister” reported that discussions between Smith and Pearson had revealed a polarity in characters. Yet Smith wanted Canada’s help. Britain had proposed to send a parliamentary fact-finding group to Rhodesia a few weeks before, but Smith refused to receive it now. Smith approached Pearson with a proposal for a Canadian parliamentary fact-finding group.¹⁰² There is no evidence that this plan ever materialized. Canadian policy at this time was still within the tight boundaries of respect for British sovereignty in dealing with the crisis. Indeed, Canadian respect for British sovereignty was consistent. Paul Martin did not even raise the issue of a Parliamentary fact finding group in his February telegram to the Commonwealth Secretary.¹⁰³

The January meeting between Pearson and Smith increased Canada’s awareness of and concern over the situation. Pearson came away from the meeting with a dislike for Smith,¹⁰⁴ as well as “a very real impression that an illegal declaration of independence

¹⁰⁰ Wilson, *The Labour Government*, 74-75 and 116.

¹⁰¹ Scott Young, “The Peaceful Prime Minister,” *Globe and Mail*, February 1, 1965.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ NAC, EA, Interim Box 37, 840/s726-18, Memorandum from Paul Martin to Commonwealth Secretary Arthur Bottomley, September February 17, 1964.

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, *The Labour Government*, 116.

was a real possibility.”¹⁰⁵ The Department of External Affairs drew up contingency plans in the event of UDI. If that were to happen, the Canadian government would withdraw Commonwealth preferences, and then close the Canadian Trade Commissioner Office in Salisbury. The effect of such action by Canada would not cause any sort of hardship for Rhodesia, but would officially display Canada’s rejection of the new regime. Martin informed Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs Arthur Bottomley that Canada’s support for British sovereignty over the issue could only go so far. If a resolution concerning Rhodesia was brought to the United Nations Security Council and passed under Chapter VII – the section of the UN charter designed to deal with threats to international peace and security – Canada would be “ obliged to implement it.”¹⁰⁶

On April 23 1965, Wilson sent a letter to Pearson seeking advice and approval. Ian Smith had repeatedly turned down any suggestion of a conference on Rhodesia, such as had been suggested at the 1964 Commonwealth Prime Ministers conference. Rather he invited Wilson to set out the “terms of independence.” But Wilson worried that, once these terms were presented to Smith, he would say to Rhodesians that they had been presented with an offer on a take it or leave it basis. Smith would then gain even more public support in Rhodesia. Instead, Wilson contemplated setting out broad principles which would be the basis for any negotiated settlement for independence.¹⁰⁷ His letter to

¹⁰⁵ NAC, EA, Interim Box 37, 840/s726-18, Memorandum from Paul Martin to Commonwealth Secretary Arthur Bottomley, September February 17, 1964.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ The prerequisites for independence were as follows.

1. The British Government would need to be satisfied that independence on basis agreed was acceptable to people of Rhodesia as a whole.
2. Some immediate improvement in the B roll franchise for Africans would be necessary.
3. There should be some guarantee of unimpeded progress towards majority rule.
4. A guarantee would also be needed against any retrogressive amendments to the constitution.

Pearson discussed the timing of presenting these principles to Smith, who at the time was in the middle of an election campaign, and he finished the letter by asking Canadian Prime Minister “if you could let me have your views on these suggestions and particularly draft principles.”¹⁰⁸

Pearson agreed that the broad principles would be better than detailed terms, and that they should be presented to Smith after his election campaign. He did not believe, however, that the principles would receive support from all the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, and reminded Wilson of the Communiqué issued at the 1964 Prime Ministers conference, with its statement that referred to the necessity of convening a conference to deal with Rhodesian independence on the basis of majority rule. He told Wilson, “At the conference and in my statement to the Canadian House of Commons on July 17, I fully endorsed this view.”¹⁰⁹ Pearson believed that international meetings were international balm, and would help meet the specific Rhodesian threat and cool growing African tempers.

Pearson’s diplomatic capabilities and experience were clearly evident as he presented his perspective on the situation to Wilson. He felt that the African Prime Ministers would not accept the principles if they fell at all short of majority rule. He also supported the view that the African politicians in Rhodesia would not be able to run the complicated developed economy of Rhodesia. This, he stated, “is made stronger by the complete lack of political skill which the Rhodesian nationalist parties have exhibited in

5. Progress would have to be made towards ending of racial discrimination.

¹⁰⁸ DEA, Interim Box 37, 840/s726-18, Telegram from Wilson to Pearson, April 23, 1965.

¹⁰⁹ DEA, Interim Box 37, 840/s726-18, Letter from Pearson to Wilson, April 29, 1965.

the past two years, even allowing for the difficult conditions under which they have operated.”¹¹⁰

Wilson delivered a statement addressing the economic consequences that UDI would carry with it to the British House of Commons at the end of April; he hoped the statement would have the desired effect of “dampening Rhodesian enthusiasm for a UDI.”¹¹¹ In Wilson’s speech, he declared that a declaration of independence would in fact be an act of rebellion, which would consequently cut Rhodesia off from the rest of the world. This had been prompted by a White Paper put out that week by the Rhodesian Government which stated that the economic effects of UDI would not be as severe because there would be alternative markets for Rhodesian goods.

Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs Paul Martin had the opportunity in early May to discuss global concerns with a group of British Ministers. Rhodesia was on the list. Smith had undertaken to “continue relentlessly to pursue” independence “through negotiation.”¹¹² But in the event of UDI, the Canadian government wanted to participate in a reaction that was in concert with the other Commonwealth governments. Indeed, “a vigorous reaction by the old Commonwealth governments would be essential to fulfill warnings which have been given,” but it would serve a dual purpose of moderating Rhodesian resolve for independence while also discouraging “extreme reactions in African Commonwealth countries such as sudden withdrawals from the

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ DEA, vol. 3497, 19-1-BA-Brit-1965/1, Meeting between Minister for External Affairs Paul Martin and the Commonwealth Secretary – Talking Points, May 6, 1965.

¹¹² Ibid.

Commonwealth.”¹¹³ The threat to Commonwealth solidarity was replacing respect for British sovereignty as the Canadian government’s greatest concern.

Concerned about the upcoming Prime Minister’s conference, Wilson again wrote to Pearson in May 1965. Wilson expected an immediate demand to discuss Rhodesia by some of the African delegates at the outset of the Conference. Pearson suggested to Wilson that Canada wanted to limit the discussions on Rhodesia: “the effect of giving special prominence to the question of peace-keeping and disarmament might in the end be to limit the time for their discussion as a separate item close to the foot of the agenda.”¹¹⁴

British planning for the conference also aimed at deflecting attention from Rhodesia. In early June, Wilson explored within his cabinet the idea of establishing a “Consultative Committee of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Meeting on “South Africa generally.”¹¹⁵ Such a move would take “the pressure off Southern Rhodesia in the discussions and the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Meeting itself.”¹¹⁶ While the evidence thus suggests that both the British and Canadians aimed to limit the discussions, the strategies of the two countries were very different. Wilson wanted the issue deflected and Britain left unscathed; Pearson wanted to avoid the use of force and felt that a constitutional conference provided the most acceptable solution to this end.

The Fourteenth Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference opened June 17, 1965. During the meeting held on the opening day, Harold Wilson proposed a peace

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Public Record Office (PRO), Records created or inherited by the Dominions Office and of the Commonwealth Relations and Foreign and Commonwealth Offices (DO),183/762. Message from Pearson to Wilson, May 18, 1965.

¹¹⁵ DO 183/762, Whitehall 5422. London Cabinet Office. Letter From B. Vadoe to Martin Williams, June 9th, 1965

¹¹⁶ DO 183/762, Document addressed to the Prime Minister stamped by the Under Secretary of State, June 14, 1965.

initiative to Vietnam. Pearson had been informed earlier and fully endorsed the proposal which would see Wilson, Prime Minister Joseph Nyerere of Nigeria, President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and President Williams of Trinidad travel to Washington, Moscow, Peking, Hanoi and Saigon in an attempt towards the ending of hostilities.¹¹⁷ A closer examination into the Rhodesian policies of Nyerere, Nkrumah, and Williams indicates they were hardliners, intent on pressuring the British government to use force in Rhodesia. Wilson may well have selected these hard-liner states and introduced the Vietnam mission early in discussions to deflect African attention from Rhodesia. It was to no avail, however, as Wilson opened discussions on the world political situation, he invited President Kaunda to speak on Africa. Before Kaunda had a chance to start, Kwame Nkrumah interrupted to ask if Rhodesia could be discussed under the heading. Wilson refused and reminded the Ghanaian that it had been agreed that Rhodesia, by prior agreement, would not be discussed until after the weekend. But this did not prevent the majority of the morning speakers from making some reference to the urgent problem in Rhodesia.¹¹⁸

Meetings the next day saw the previous year's suggestion of a Commonwealth Secretariat arise and the Rhodesian crisis was in fact fundamental to the establishment of the Secretariat and the form it would assume. In September of 1964, a group of Canadian elder diplomats had gathered to discuss the functionality of a Commonwealth Secretariat. Canadian government had a long-standing fear of bureaucratic centralization in London, and so they had sabotaged proposals for a Secretariat in 1907, 1909, 1932, 1944 and 1956. But Commonwealth membership had increased threefold since most of these

¹¹⁷ Wilson, *The Labour Government*, 109.

¹¹⁸ DEA, vol. 3451, file 1-1965/3. Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (65) 5th meeting, July 18, 1965.

meetings had been held. Changes would have to be made to the structure of the institution to ensure its survival. Canada recognized this and, viewing the idea still “as an unwelcome development” recognized that “it had to avoid a negative posture.”¹¹⁹

Arnold Smith reports in his memoirs that it was the Rhodesia issue which bedevilled the 1964 Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Meeting and made him “realise some of the changes that were needed in Commonwealth relations between Britain and the other members.”¹²⁰ More specifically, he recognized the need for reports on political developments throughout the Commonwealth to “assist new members who lacked qualified diplomatic staff.”¹²¹ The problem of insufficient diplomatic resources was primarily a problem faced by African Commonwealth members. The proposed Secretariat would solve this problem by writing reports and disseminating information to all members on an equal basis. Britain, Australia and New Zealand all worried about this function in relation to information on colonies because they were the only members with colonies left. Wilson, Robert Menzies, and Keith Holyoake, Prime Minister of New Zealand, wanted any new Secretary-General to “consult the administering government before circulating papers on colonial territories.”¹²² This way the internal matters of those countries would not be publicized throughout the Commonwealth without their approval.¹²³ In the end, the Secretariat would circulate “balanced papers... on the understanding that the responsible member Governments would always be closely consulted in the preparation of the papers.”¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ David W. McIntyre, “Canada and the Creation of the Commonwealth Secretariat,” *International Journal*, LIII, no. 4 (Autumn 1998), 767.

¹²⁰ Smith, *Stitches*, 10.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 76.

¹²² *Ibid.* 79.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 14-15.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 15.

On June 23, Smith was appointed as the first Secretary General of the Commonwealth. Although the Canadians had not suggested the establishment of the Commonwealth Secretariat, they endorsed its creation to accommodate African interests. Historian David McIntyre argues that the Canadian government's role in the creation of the Commonwealth Secretariat was essential, and Lester Pearson recounts in his memoirs "We were instrumental in founding the Secretariat."¹²⁵ But it had been almost a year since the idea had been raised at the last Commonwealth meeting, and talks were dragging on the process for electing a Secretary General. But Canadian official Gordon Robertson ensured that the creation of the secretariat did not get stalled, telling arguing Commonwealth representatives that "they were wasting time... each official had instructions on which candidate his head of government wanted to support; write down that name on a slip of paper and let's have a ballot."¹²⁶ Canada, then, worked diligently towards the creation of the Secretariat and by doing so helped create part of the modern machinery of the Commonwealth. Canadian delegates were motivated by the opportunity to demonstrate to African nations a concern for their situation, and to prove that the Commonwealth could change and adapt to new situations,

Outside events would also help shape the form the conference was taking. On June 20, 1965, Algerian President Ahmed Ben Bella was overthrown by a *coup d'état* the day before discussions on Rhodesia were to be held in London. Ben Bella was to have been the host of the Non-Aligned Nations conference in Algiers, and was known to be a

¹²⁵ Lester B Pearson, *Mike The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson Vol. 2, 1948-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 283.

¹²⁶ Arnold, Smith, *Stitches*, 17.

strong proponent of the Bandoeng ideology.¹²⁷ His beliefs had earned him great respect from the likes of Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah. When Soviet tanks were shown on television rolling into the Algerian capital, Nkrumah and Nyerere thought a closer relationship with “Britain seem[ed] just a little more acceptable,”¹²⁸ than the possibility of a Soviet-sponsored *coup* in their own nations. The Algerian *coup* – close to home for Nkrumah – demonstrated the quickness with which unexpected change could come to Africa and the value of having strong friends in the old world.¹²⁹ Indeed, Harold Wilson admitted that the Algerian *coup* “went far to ease relations”¹³⁰ at the Commonwealth Conference.

For Britain, the first task in regards to Rhodesia at the Commonwealth Conference was to deal with the issue of a constitutional conference. The Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs, Arthur Bottomley, opened discussions on Rhodesia a half hour later than scheduled because of African requests that the meeting be delayed to take account of Algerian crisis.¹³¹ Bottomley tried to assure the members of British sincerity in dealing with Rhodesia by illustrating the severity of the situation and assuring them of aggressive British measures to find an amicable solution. Members also heard for the first time the five principles, which Pearson and Wilson had discussed two months

¹²⁷ The strategy of militant Afro-Asian states was to strengthen their independence from Western imperialism while keeping the Soviet bloc at a comfortable distance. This strategic bloc, which was supposed to be independent from the superpowers, was the beginning of what came to be known as the “non-aligned” movement. Mathew Quest, “The Lessons of the Bandung Conference: Reviewing Richard Wright’s The Color Curtain 40 Years Later.” Taken from: <http://www.spunk.org/library/pubs/lr/sp001716/bandung.html>. July 25, 2003.

¹²⁸ Wilson, *The Labour Government*, 109 – 114.

¹²⁹ There have been 79 successful *coups d’etat* in post colonial Africa. In contrast there have been 48 constitutional changes of government, most because of the death or retirement of the incumbent and only four have been because of electoral defeat. Ieuan L.I. Griffiths, *The Atlas of African Affairs*, 2 ed. (London: Routledge, 1995), 80.

¹³⁰ Wilson, *The Labour Government*, 113.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 114.

earlier, on which the British government hoped to base negotiations.¹³² Rather than waiting for another member of the Commonwealth to press Britain for a constitutional conference, Bottomley raised the issue and frankly stated: “this is not at present a constructive way of proceeding.”¹³³ Negotiations between Britain and Rhodesia were still open, but UDI was a serious threat. Bottomley continued, “To impose one man, one vote, immediately is not a tenable position. Insufficient Africans are ready to assume the responsibilities of office or of higher administration.”¹³⁴ The political situation in Rhodesia would make the proposed conference futile.¹³⁵ Bottomley informed the meeting that he had visited Rhodesia and had the opportunity to meet the representative of imprisoned nationalist leaders Joshua Nkomo and the Reverend Sithole. Their representative, Leopold Takawira, had asked for an immediate constitutional conference, and a proclamation, to be imposed by force if necessary, of the principle of one-man one-vote. Bottomley replied that a constitutional conference was easy to call, but without Ian Smith and the imprisoned African leaders in attendance, it would be a failure.

Upon entering office, Bottomley told the delegates, he had been confronted by two very real problems, Zambia and Rhodesia. It was his understanding that the Rhodesian government wanted the 1961 constitution as a basis for independence. For Bottomley the situation as it now stood “might perhaps have been better if his African friends” had agreed to work on the basis of that Constitution.”¹³⁶ He went on to tell

¹³² See page 5, footnote 15.

¹³³ DO 183/762, Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference Talking Points for the Commonwealth Secretary, June 21, 1965.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ DEA, vol. 3451, file 1-1965/3, Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (65) 7th Meeting, July 21, 1965.

¹³⁶ DEA, vol. 3451, file 1-1965/3, Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (65) 7th Meeting, July 21, 1965.

members that “at the time that it was drawn up, the Europeans in Southern Rhodesia were acting liberally, and if the Constitution had been accepted and worked with Rhodesia might have been on the verge of independence with majority rule.” Indeed, Bottomley blamed Black terrorists for strengthening the reactionary elements in Rhodesia.

The British Government for their part had tried to encourage Smith to start negotiations. They were willing to accept the principle of one-man one-vote as the basis of legitimate government in Rhodesia’s future, but had pointed out that it was impossible to use force to achieve that end. After 40 years of controlling their own affairs, the Rhodesia Government had the powerful loyalty of armed forces, the police force and the civil service. To use force would be a major British military undertaking, which might even lead to something approaching another Congo situation, a problem which had plagued the international community in the early 1960’s and was part of the context of Western understanding of the contemporary African continent. And even if force were successful, Bottomley did not know which of the conflicting African groups the British could or should deal with, chaos would have resulted. The ensuing disaster would have been on Bottomley’s conscience forever, and he believed that the Africans would have regretted for years that they had not stuck to peaceful means.¹³⁷

Bottomley’s speech did not placate the African members. Rather, it served as the mortar cementing the bricks of British policy. The British government had raised their

Bottomley was referring to the incident which Alec-Douglas Home called ‘the gravest blunder of all.’ African nationalist leader Joshua Nkomo had accepted the 1961 constitution in London but when he returned to Africa he went back on his word, refusing to work with that constitution. This allowed the Europeans to condemn the Africans as “neither responsible nor trustworthy.” Alec Douglas-Home, *The Way the Wind Blows* (New York: Quadrangle, 1976), 134.

¹³⁷ DEA, vol. 3451, file 1-1965/3, Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (65) 7th Meeting, July 21, 1965.

wall in the hope of providing some protection from the accusations and demands about to be hurled from around the room.

Nkrumah spoke next, outlining a six-point plan for British government action.¹³⁸

The Rhodesia talks for the rest of the day would centre on the idea of a constitutional conference rather than the proposed guidelines for independence that the British had set out. In essence, the majority of members wanted a constitutional conference to be arranged which *all* political leaders would be free to attend. If the Rhodesian government refused to work with the agreement resulting from such a conference, then an interim government would be appointed to repeal discriminatory laws. A general election would then be held on the basis of one-man one-vote to establish a government that would be entitled to independence.¹³⁹ Nkrumah also suggested that Commonwealth solidarity would be demonstrated through the issuing of a special communiqué expressing unanimous agreement that the 1961 constitution had failed to provide adequate

¹³⁸ President Nkrumah's six principles were as follows:

- i) The summoning of a constitutional conference of all political leaders; all political prisoners to be released in order to attend.
- ii) The constitutional conference to be announced at once and the Smith Government to be given a time limit within which to state their willingness to release the prisoners and detainees.
- iii) Unless Mr. Smith agreed within two weeks after the end of the present Prime Ministers' Meeting to release detainees, the British Government to introduce legislation to suspend the 1961 Constitution and appoint an interim government.
- iv) The interim Government to repeal repressive, oppressive and discriminating laws and prepare the way for free elections.
- v) After agreement at the constitutional conference on the form of the Constitution, a general election to be held in Rhodesia on the basis of one man one vote.
- vi) Southern Rhodesia to obtain independence as soon as possible after the election of a government based on free elections.

DEA, vol. 3451, file 1-1965/3, Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (65) 7th meeting, July 21, 1965.

¹³⁹ DO 183/762, no. 906, Outward Telegram from Mr. N. D. Watson at the Commonwealth Relations Office to Commonwealth Countries re: Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting, June 22, 1965.

safeguards against discrimination, or adequate representation of Africans in government.¹⁴⁰

In Nkrumah's view, delaying the issue would have drastic repercussions, "not only for blacks in Rhodesia but for the international community." The Ghanaian held that "If the present settler regime in Southern Rhodesia were to unite with South Africa and Portugal in a military alliance all the free countries of Africa would be threatened by it. The formations of such an alliance, and its direct or indirect support by NATO or any Western European Powers, would be a threat to world peace." He continued, "The stability of the independent states of Africa depended on a solution ... it was necessary to come to a clear decision about the future action and about what Commonwealth leaders would tell their peoples on their return from the Prime Ministers' Meeting."¹⁴¹

Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia followed suit. The problem not only existed for Britain and the Commonwealth, but was also posed a threat to world peace. "In a few years, Rhodesia would be a second South Africa. Nothing would then move the Portuguese from Mozambique and Angola, and the development of a bloc, consisting of Rhodesia, South Africa and the Portuguese territories would raise a threat to the peace of the whole world."¹⁴²

African delegates were upset at Britain's resolve not to use force. Kaunda pointed out that there had been British intervention in Cyprus, Kenya, British Guiana and Aden. Nkrumah had not suggested the use of force as a solution to the situation, although he did say that if the Rhodesia "problem were not solved for seven years Africa would by then

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ DEA, vol. 3451, file 1-1965/3. Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (65) 7th Meeting, July 21, 1965.

¹⁴² Ibid.

be in flames.”¹⁴³ Kaunda of Zambia concurred that a “peaceful solution must be achieved if possible.”¹⁴⁴

African nations made no direct call for armed intervention. British and Canadian minutes of the meeting only record Dr. Williams of Trinidad as pressing for the use of force. Rather, African delegates one after another asked the British government to convene a constitutional conference. Sir Albert Margai of Sierra Leone introduced to the discussion the idea of setting a date for a conference in the not distant future. The pressure was building against Britain. Australian Prime Minister Menzies weighed in on the British side, stressing his objection to discussing the issue without a Rhodesian representative at the conference. “How could majority rule be sensibly and effectively achieved overnight?” he went on. “Demands for majority rule were being made, “irrespective of the state of preparedness of the African majority to take over the party of government.”¹⁴⁵ New Zealand’s Holyoake expressed similar concerns, as well as saying Rhodesia was Britain’s business.¹⁴⁶

With Britain, Australia, and New Zealand resisting pressures from the rest of the Commonwealth to convene a conference and African delegates stressing the absolute necessity of convening such a conference, Lester Pearson began to speak. His first task was to lighten up the atmosphere in the tense room. After confessing that he had never been to Africa but desired very much to go, Pearson inquired whether Nkrumah would pay for his visit (as he had earlier offered to do for Prime Minister Menzies). Or better yet

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ NAC. DEA. MG 31 E47 vol. 66 File #2. Canadian Paper prepared for the CPMC 1965. Pp 79 (Major Document I don’t have the cover so I am unsure what it is called.)

¹⁴⁶ DO 183/762, no. 906, Outward Telegram from Mr. N. D. Watson at the Commonwealth Relations Office to Commonwealth Countries re: Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Meeting, June 22, 1965.

could the funds be taken out of Canadian aid grants made to Ghana?¹⁴⁷ Pearson underlined how important the question of Rhodesia was for Africa, for race relations within the Commonwealth and around the world.¹⁴⁸ Pearson first flattered the British by paying tribute to their attempts to resolve the crisis and appealed to the African delegates to have faith. He admonished delegates that, if anyone doubted British sincerity in resolving colonial issues, they need only look at a map of the world in 1940 to see how sincere Britain was about ending colonialism.¹⁴⁹ Pearson changed the tone to warm the ears of the African members. He warned that, “the first and worst danger was that, without hope, the African population might be driven to despair and to the acts which despair engenders.”¹⁵⁰ There was a stark contrast between Pearson’s speech and the others heard that day; his speech was marked by moderation. As Harold Wilson remembers in his memoirs, however, “Lester Pearson certainly did not go all the way with the Africans, particularly on military intervention, but he felt that we should be doing more.”¹⁵¹ Pearson would play the role of bridge-builder, but that did not mean the absence of strong views.

External Affairs reported Pearson as saying that “Everybody agreed on the principles that peace needed freedom, and that freedom implied self-government, which in turn implied majority rule as a basis of universal suffrage, and above all the absence of discrimination.” But a consensus needed to be built between members that would allow Britain to continue negotiations but also make the African nations realise that no change

¹⁴⁷ NAC, EA, MG 26 N3, vol. 268, 812.3 – 1965 Conf., Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference Canadian Delegation Press Briefing, Dorchester Hotel, June 21, 1965.

¹⁴⁸ DEA, vol. 3451, file 1-1965/3A, Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (65), 7th Meeting, July 21, 1965.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Wilson, *The Labour Government*, 116.

could come as a result of the use of force. Change “could not be delayed indefinitely but nothing but chaos could result from attempting to use force.”¹⁵² Pearson not only was referring to military force, but also political or economic pressure applied prematurely.¹⁵³

Pearson supported the idea of a conference and felt that the British government should make arrangements for one. He reminded the delegates of the previous year’s communiqué, which read, “an independence conference should be convened which the leaders of all parties in Rhodesia should be free to attend. The object would be to seek agreement on the steps by which Rhodesia might proceed to independence within the Commonwealth at the earliest practicable time on the basis of majority rule.”¹⁵⁴ At this point Wilson raised an objection. Wilson explained that, although the conference idea had been included in last years communiqué, it was not an agreed statement, and Britain in fact had reserved its position. While Pearson had not “wished to give the impression that the British government had agreed last year... it would be wise this year to include the quoted words in an agreed statement,”¹⁵⁵ and release the statement as soon as possible. Pearson thus pressured the British to sign on to a statement that would guarantee that there would be no independence without majority rule. Britain agreed. When the final communiqué was issued with those words, African nations could rest a little easier, knowing that Britain was bound to the cause of majority in rule in Rhodesia.

¹⁵² DO 183/762, no. 906, Outward Telegram from Mr. N. D. Watson at the Commonwealth Relations Office to Commonwealth Countries re: Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Meeting, June 22, 1965.

¹⁵³ DEA, vol. 3451, file 1-1965/3A, Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (65), 7th Meeting, July 21, 1965.

¹⁵⁴ 1964 Commonwealth Prime Ministers Meeting Final Communiqué, in House of Commons Debates, appendix to July 17, 1964.

¹⁵⁵ DEA, vol. 3451, file 1-1965/3A. Meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Minutes of Meetings and Memoranda, P.M.M. (65), 7th Meeting, July 21, 1965.

Upon returning to Canada, Pearson described the conference as “Intricate and very difficult,”¹⁵⁶ and stated that it had been the most difficult Prime Ministers’ Conference that he had ever attended.¹⁵⁷ The press reported that Pearson had come down heavily on the side of the Africans,¹⁵⁸ but Pearson tried in fact to bring the two opposing sides together at the conference. Britain originally did not even want to discuss the Rhodesia situation while the African bloc wanted more concrete action, including the possibility of using force. Pearson denounced the use of force, but appealed to Africans by insisting that a constitutional conference was the best way to proceed. He also tried to bind Britain to holding the conference and he insisted that there could be no independence before majority rule.

¹⁵⁶ Department of External Affairs, *Canadian Calendar* (1965), 243-244.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Chapter 3

UDI, 1965.

In October 1965, the world would witness the final movements towards a Rhodesian Unilateral Declaration of Independence. Internationally, diplomats and heads of governments negotiated and lobbied to prevent Rhodesian independence under Ian Smith. Canada sought to provide a moderating influence, but Pearson was bothered by the possibility of African nations taking ‘rash’ action. Harold Wilson later commented that the final steps towards UDI gave him the “sensation of being present at the fifth act of a Greek tragedy.”¹⁵⁹

Ian Smith traveled to London in October, for talks that he described as “final and conclusive.”¹⁶⁰ On the first day of negotiations, October 5, Canada made a statement at the United Nations General Assembly. Dr. Stanley Haidasz, the Canadian delegate, urged that statements and actions regarding the Rhodesian crisis “should be guided by the overriding need to provide a constructive influence at this critical time.”¹⁶¹

Pearson would attempt to provide the constructive influence in dealing with the situation. The British were pessimistic about the outcome of the meetings and said as much to Pearson in a telegram dated October 2. Wilson wanted Canada to pressure Smith by expressing directly to him Canada’s disapproval of UDI. Wilson hoped that Pearson’s influence, as well as the influence of the other older Commonwealth members, might be helpful in deterring UDI. The British Prime Minister felt Pearson’s message might prove

¹⁵⁹ Public Records Office (PRO), Kew, England, Records of the Prime Ministers Office, (Prem) 13/ 1127, Commonwealth Relations Office Telegram, no. 2846, November 1, 1965.

¹⁶⁰ National Archives of Canada (NAC), Records of the Department of External Affairs, (DEA), Interim Box 37 840/s726-18. Memorandum prepared by Marcel Cadieux for Prime Minister Pearson, October 3, 1965.

¹⁶¹ Department of External Affairs, *Canadian Weekly Bulletin*, Vol. 20, 40 (October 6, 1965), 1.

most effective if “it were made immediately and publicly after it became clear that the current negotiation has foundered.”¹⁶² Wilson made similar appeals to both New Zealand and Australia.¹⁶³

Pearson opted for a private message, which was to be delivered before the meetings began. Canadian officials believed that a private message might have a “helpful effect on Smith’s attitude in the negotiations.”¹⁶⁴ There were other motivating factors in the decision to disregard Wilson’s request and undertake private communications with government of Rhodesia. Pearson was concerned that a public message at this stage “might simply annoy Smith” and give him the impetus to declare independence.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, Pearson worried that a “public message concerted with Australia and New Zealand would give Smith the impression we were acting at British suggestion.”¹⁶⁶

More important for Canada’s Prime Minister was the effect that a concerted approach might have on the African Commonwealth members. Pearson was advised in an External Affairs memorandum that, “ concerted public messages... on eve of UDI would not help in consultation with the remainder of Commonwealth which will be most important immediately following UDI.”¹⁶⁷ Such a campaign, coming from Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, might give the impression to newer Commonwealth members that the old boy’s club was meeting, with no new voices or black faces allowed.

Lionel Chevrier, the Canadian High Commissioner in London, delivered Pearson’s letter to Smith in London on October 5. He recalls that Smith “took the letter,

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ NAC, DEA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18 conf., Memorandum prepared by Marcel Cadieux for Prime Minister Pearson, October 3, 1965.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ NAC, DEA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18 conf., Telegram no. ME-104, Telegram prepared by T. Carter, African and Middle East Division, from External Affairs, Ottawa to London. October 4, 1965.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

read it and put it in his pocket. He received me rather coolly, and did not encourage me to stay.”¹⁶⁸ While the suggestion to contact Smith came from Wilson, Pearson took the opportunity to apply his own brand of diplomacy. Corrections made to a draft copy of the document from Pearson to Smith indicate that Pearson wanted personally to ensure that the letter was friendly, sympathetic, and most importantly, non-threatening. The changes he made in the telegram altered and softened its tone. Pearson began by appealing to Smith’s sense of tradition, heritage, and reason:

I have no intention to express detailed views on the matters under discussion. However, in view of our common heritage, I am sure that you will understand the nature of my concern.

Many of our people, like yours, left Britain to seek greater opportunities overseas and in our past history as in yours now there have been serious differences of viewpoint with Whitehall. This did not prevent – with us, as with you – the development of the closest and friendliest relationship in peace and war.

In an inoffensive tone, Pearson expressed to Smith Canada’s views on the policies of the Rhodesian government. “Even though we may not share your views about appropriate conditions for Rhodesian Independence, we have tried to appreciate your problems and understand your approaches to them.” The letter then went on to advise Smith that, “you will give very careful thought to all the consequences before taking an irrevocable step which could separate you from Britain, from Canada and from other Commonwealth countries.”¹⁶⁹ It is important to note that the letter originally read, “which would separate...” but Pearson changed it to read, “which could separate.” Pearson was

¹⁶⁸ Lionel Chevrier, “The Practical Diplomacy of Lester Pearson,” *International Journal*, XXIX, no. 1 (Winter, 1973-4), 133.

¹⁶⁹ NAC, DEA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18 conf., Telegram no. ME –105, Telegram from Lester B. Pearson to Ian Smith, London, October 4, 1965.

worried about ostracizing the Rhodesian Prime Minister and preferred to use quiet language.

Smith replied to Pearson on October 8, saying “We believe that the condition which we have put forward, including independence... satisfy all the fundamental requirements not only the British government, but also of the older Commonwealth countries whose friendship and esteem we value so highly.” It was “we, the government of the country, who must be responsible for the final decision. It is we who will have to live with the consequences of our decision and therefore it is hard for us to appreciate why other Commonwealth governments do not appear to trust the bona fides and political wisdom of the Rhodesian Government in guiding the country along towards a solution which will provide equal opportunities based on merit.”¹⁷⁰ Smith attempted to persuade Pearson by suggesting that Canada should “Withhold its judgment on Rhodesia for a period to see how we discharge our responsibilities.”¹⁷¹ Lastly, while Smith was still concerned with fostering relationships with older white Commonwealth members, he was less enthusiastic about the concerns of the Afro-Asian Commonwealth members, “Frankly, we are not interested in what they say.”¹⁷²

The London negotiations between Smith and Wilson had all but failed by then, and while the delegates would meet again the next day, it was an exercise in futility. Wilson explained to Pearson that the negotiations had been unsuccessful because of the uncompromising attitude of Ian Smith.¹⁷³ Smith needed independence¹⁷⁴ and wanted it

¹⁷⁰ NAC, DEA, Interim Box 37 840 – s726-18 conf., Telegram no. 4069, Canadian Embassy in London to External Affairs Ottawa, Ian Smith to Lester Pearson, October 9, 1965.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Canadian Institute of International Affairs, *Monthly Report*, Vol. 4, no. 10 (October 1965), 106.

¹⁷³ NAC, DEA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18 conf., From External Affairs to London, Message from Pearson to Wilson, October 12, 1965.

based on the 1961 constitution. Smith complained that Rhodesia could no longer survive with Britain controlling its foreign policy, especially since the “winds of change”¹⁷⁵ had brought increased communist activity into Southern Africa. Smith felt that “reasonable African opinion” supported his Rhodesian Front Party, while dissident African opinion was supported by communist sources looking to gain a foothold in Africa.¹⁷⁶ Wilson held the Commonwealth line, willing only to grant independence based on majority rule, obtainable within the foreseeable future.

The Smith and Wilson delegations clashed, each unwavering on its position, resulting in the failure of negotiations, Rhodesia moved a step closer to independence. What did come out of the conference was a joint communiqué. “Despite intensive discussion,” it read starkly, “no means had been found of reconciling the opposing views. No further meeting has been arranged.”¹⁷⁷ The two sides seemed irreconcilable. Smith informed British writer Kenneth Young that getting Wilson to sign off on a document declaring the two sides had come to the point of irreconcilable differences was the next best thing to a negotiated independence. With this document Smith could turn to the world and say “look we can not negotiate;” and go on to separate from Britain.¹⁷⁸ Smith headed home, anxious to begin preparations for independence.

Canada continued planning for UDI by assembling a list of counter measures. It would not recognize UDI and the state created in consequence would be considered

¹⁷⁴ Smith was having a difficult time controlling his government at home. Without a settlement it was believed that the even more radical William Harper, Minister of Internal Affairs, would replace Smith. *Globe and Mail*, October 5, 1965.

¹⁷⁵ On February 3, 1960 British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan delivered a speech in the South African Parliament about the acceleration of Britain’s decolonisation process. In the speech Macmillan said “the winds of change are blowing across Africa.”

¹⁷⁶ “Rhodesia Deadlock Reported Absolute,” *Globe and Mail*, October 8, 1965.

¹⁷⁷ Kenneth Young, *Rhodesia and Independence*, 2ed. (London: J.M. Dent & sons ltd., 1969), 238.

¹⁷⁸ Young, *Rhodesia and Independence*, 239.

illegitimate. The acting trade commissioner in Salisbury would be removed and an arms embargo would take effect. Commonwealth preferences would be eliminated for Rhodesia, and no new aid or financing would be available to the rebel government.¹⁷⁹ Copies of Canada's proposed reaction were sent to the governments of African Commonwealth members in the hope that they might have a moderating effect on their reactions to UDI,¹⁸⁰ proving that a white country was on their side. Canada wanted to maintain good relations with the African members, who were speculating that Britain would betray them at the first opportunity and negotiate a settlement that would ensure white majority rule indefinitely. The African members found no ally in Australian Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies, who was pro-British and discontented by the growing African influence within the Commonwealth.¹⁸¹ Canada wanted to be Africa's friend as well as Britain's and use Ottawa's influence to pacify angry African voices.

Pearson wrote Wilson on October 12, confessing that "I would very much like to do anything I can to help."¹⁸² Pearson decided to contact Smith once again. This time the letter would be not as friendly, or as private. Smith still did not believe that older Commonwealth members would abandon Rhodesia, saying, "there was no reason to suppose Rhodesia would be isolated if it seized its independence."¹⁸³ Pearson this time forcefully expressed Canada's stance and tried one last time to covert Smith to Canada's way of thinking:

¹⁷⁹ NAC, DEA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18 conf., Messages to the Heads of Government of the African Members of the Commonwealth from the Commonwealth Relations Office, October 9, 1965.

¹⁸⁰ The letter was sent to: Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, and Malawi.

¹⁸¹ "Showdown nears in Crisis," *Globe and Mail*, October 16, 1965.

¹⁸² NAC, DEA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18 conf., From External Affairs to London, Message from Pearson to Wilson, October 12, 1965.

¹⁸³ "Rhodesia Deadlock Reported Absolute," *Globe and Mail*, October 8, 1965.

I am naturally very disturbed to learn of the breakdown in the discussions between you and the British Government, a result which is a matter rightly and inevitably of Commonwealth concern. I would again urge you and your colleagues to think most carefully about the very grave consequences involved in a unilateral declaration of independence.

Commonwealth heads of Government have twice declared that they were “irrevocably opposed to any unilateral declaration of independence” by the Rhodesian Government, an action which can only be considered by them as illegal. I share sincerely the views held by other Commonwealth leaders that independence for Rhodesia should only be recognized if based on the principle of majority rule. Any other course will inevitably have consequences which can only be very unhappy for your country. You should know that Canada would join the other members of the Commonwealth in refusing to recognize a unilateral declaration of independence and would also join in certain practical measures that would inevitably follow.

If no such unilateral declaration of independence is made Canada will, of course, continue to do what it can to help in the search for a satisfactory solution to the problems that face your country.¹⁸⁴

The tone of Pearson’s October 4 telegram had been affable, while the October 14 communication was cold, authoritative and ominous. Pearson received no reply from Smith.

A Canadian election Campaign was in midstream. George Hees, the former trade minister in John Diefenbaker’s cabinets and then the Conservative candidate in the riding of Northumberland, saw a silver lining in the dark cloud forming over Southern Africa. It was reported on October 13 that Canada was ready to join in a trade blockade and impose economic sanctions against an independent Rhodesia.¹⁸⁵ The same day, Hees suggested that a trade blockade on Rhodesia would provide an opportunity for Canada to replace the

¹⁸⁴ NAC, DEA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18, Press Release, October 14, 1965.

¹⁸⁵ “Canada ready to apply Sanctions,” *Ottawa Citizen*, October 13, 1965.

Rhodesian tobacco being shipped to the UK with Canadian tobacco. With Rhodesian overseas sales worth \$87 500 000 a year, tobacco was its greatest earner of foreign currency and the majority of sales went to Britain.¹⁸⁶ Pearson deplored Hees' statement as "short-sighted and irresponsible in a critical situation."¹⁸⁷

Wilson sought a Commonwealth mission to Rhodesia. In a television broadcast made October 12, Wilson outlined his new initiative. A mission of senior Commonwealth Prime Ministers, representative of all the prime ministers, presidents, and people of the Commonwealth, was to proceed to Rhodesia." Wilson concluded his address by warning Smith, "Prime Minister, think again."¹⁸⁸

The British tried to recruit Pearson to lead the mission. However, it was unthinkable for Pearson to consider journeying to Africa at the peak of a federal election. Instead, Britain chose Menzies to head the delegation. Pearson informed Wilson that he thought the mission "was a wise and imaginative proposal and we would give it our full support and complete approval. We will do anything we can to help in this matter." He added, "I hope that a mission of this kind, if it could be sent and received by the Rhodesian government, might through consultation postpone – if not prevent – a step which I think would be disastrous for Rhodesia."¹⁸⁹ On October 14, Smith proposed that Menzies become involved as a mediator without the participation of African leaders.¹⁹⁰ Menzies sympathised with Rhodesia in its concerns over increasing Communist influence in South Africa, and over the increasing influence of African and Asian nations in the

¹⁸⁶ "Don't take law on Own Hands, Rhodesia told," *Globe and Mail*, October 11, 1965.

¹⁸⁷ Canadian Institute of International Affairs, *Monthly Report*, 4, no. 10 (October 1965), 103.

¹⁸⁸ Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government, : A Personal Record, 1964-1970* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson and Michael Joseph, 1979), 150.

¹⁸⁹ "Wilson plan 'wise, imaginative' –Pearson," *Ottawa Citizen*, October 14, 1965.

¹⁹⁰ "Showdown nears in Crisis," *Globe and Mail*, October 16, 1965.

Commonwealth. Nevertheless, Smith rejected the mission on October 18,¹⁹¹ telling Wilson, "It is evident that you have already lobbied all other Commonwealth countries on the problem of our independence."¹⁹²

Wilson's anxieties were further complicated by the British Conservative party's sympathy for the settler population in Rhodesia. In addition to rank and file Tories, The *Toronto Star* reported, "many people in Britain... feel deeply attached to their white 'kith and kin' in Rhodesia and feel duty bound to support them."¹⁹³ Wilson was in a tough spot and looked to old Commonwealth members for support.

The Prime Minister of Britain called Pearson on the morning of the nineteenth to discuss Rhodesia. In a 15 minute telephone conversation, Pearson suggested that, in the event of a declaration of independence, "we in the Commonwealth would have to think very quickly whether we should meet immediately and try to anticipate what might happen and how to hold the Commonwealth together in the face of proposals and counter proposals which might put great pressure on the Commonwealth."¹⁹⁴ Pearson wanted a Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference which might lend support to moderate African Commonwealth members, who would be otherwise influenced at Organization of African Unity (OAU) summits and at the UN. The Nigerian Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, informed Pearson that his capital, Lagos, might provide the setting for such a gathering. Pearson worried that any conference held in Africa might leave African Heads of Government "open to very great pressure to take extreme

¹⁹¹ Wilson, *The Labour Government*, 151.

¹⁹² "Rhodesia Rejects PMs Team," *Globe and Mail*, October 19, 1965.

¹⁹³ *Toronto Daily Star*, October 15, 1965.

¹⁹⁴ NAC, EA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18 Secret, Memorandum for the Secretary of State for External Affairs Paul Martin from the Lester Pearson, Ottawa, October 19, 1965.

counter-actions.”¹⁹⁵ Pearson suggested that Ottawa might be a preferable location.

Wilson agreed with the Canadian proposal and concurred with Pearson that it should be held in the near future in order to “head off rash and extreme action at the United Nations.”¹⁹⁶

Pearson would again press Wilson for a Commonwealth conference the following day. Pearson telegraphed the British Prime Minister with more detailed opinions on the proposed meeting. Instead of holding discussions at the ministerial level, as Wilson had suggested, Pearson wanted it to be held at the highest official level. It was hoped that “such a meeting could hold the line as a first barrier against rash and unwise action and could try to concert constructive and collective Commonwealth reaction.”¹⁹⁷ Pearson reiterated his opposition to holding the conference in Africa, preferring to meet in either London or Ottawa: “Either city would I think, have advantages over an African site. Our main objective must of course be to hold the Commonwealth together by avoiding either rash action with its inevitable division or a failure to take effective action.”¹⁹⁸

Twice, in as many days, Pearson had explicitly stated to Prime Minister Wilson his concern about African extremist governments taking some form of “rash action” in the event of UDI. In the final weeks of October 1965, Canada’s preoccupation shifted from preventing Commonwealth disintegration to avoiding international conflict. Indeed, Pearson was to receive a letter on October 16 from President Nkrumah of Ghana suggesting that a Commonwealth meeting after UDI might see an immediate demand for

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ NAC, EA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18, no. m-167, Message from External Affairs Ottawa to London, October 20, 1965.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

collective Commonwealth military actions.¹⁹⁹ A major policy document produced by the Canadian government on October 21 warned of “a particularly violent reaction” from African extremists retaliating against a unilateral declaration of independence.²⁰⁰ And with the threat of a black-on-white war, Pearson was quick to suggest that a Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference might cool the heating global situation. The long time British official, Lord Garner, would later comment about the possible repercussions of a race war, “Who could tell were the blood bath would end? ... The first shot could have started a holocaust.”²⁰¹

While still contemplating Pearson’s suggestion for a Commonwealth meeting, Wilson felt justified in making a “final effort to see whether there is any possibility of breaking the deadlock and of averting the disaster that otherwise impends.”²⁰²

Wilson would go to Salisbury under the condition that he would be permitted to meet with whomever he chose. Wilson said, “I shall naturally expect to have an opportunity of meeting anyone whose views I feel to be relevant to a solution of the grave problem.” This included past Rhodesia Prime Ministers and African Nationalist Leaders Joshua Nkomo and Ndbangi Sithole. Wilson reassured Smith, however, that the central purpose was to find a way of “breaking the deadlock” and averting “the tragic consequences” which would ensue.²⁰³ Wilson aimed at achieving this goal by persuading Nkomo and

¹⁹⁹ NAC, EA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18, Memorandum for the Prime Minister, “Rhodesia – Current Situation and Action After a UDI,” October 21, 1965.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Garner, Lord. *Rhodesian settlement plan as an ‘essay in gradualism.’* International Perspectives (March 1972) 17.

²⁰² NAC, DEA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18 Secret, Message from the Rt. Hon. Harold Wilson, M.P. to the RT. Hon. Lester Pearson, M.P., October 20, 1965.

²⁰³ NAC, EA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18 Secret, Message from Harold Wilson to Ian Smith, October 21, 1965.

Sithole to work with the 1961 constitution as a first step towards majority rule.²⁰⁴ They outright refused, but the Canadian government felt that Wilson had different motivations for his trip. An External Affairs memorandum suggested that “Wilson probably feels that his visit to Rhodesia and the continuation of negotiations will at least slow down the momentum of the Rhodesia move towards a UDI.”²⁰⁵

Smith had warned Wilson that Rhodesia had made its “decision on what our next step should be.”²⁰⁶ Pearson was handed a classified report on October 21. It began, “A UDI by the Rhodesia Government still appears imminent but the Rhodesia Government and the British Government both appear to be hesitating on the brink.”²⁰⁷ Canadian policy makers suggested that this hesitation might be attributable to an OAU meeting being held in Accra, Ghana October 14-21. A Rhodesian declaration of independence during such a meeting might provoke “a particularly violent reaction” from some of the African extremists.²⁰⁸ The OAU’s final communiqué called on the United Nations to declare that UDI would constitute a threat to world peace. Furthermore, the OAU urged its own members to “take all possible steps, including force,” to prevent Rhodesian independence under minority rule.²⁰⁹

It does not seem, however, that Canadian policy makers were correct in their evaluation of the situation. Instead, the evidence suggests that, while no definite decision had been made whether to declare independence, Rhodesia was preparing for the

²⁰⁴ NAC, EA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18 Secret, Message from the Rt. Hon. Harold Wilson, M.P. to the RT. Hon. Lester Pearson, M.P., October, 20, 1965.

²⁰⁵ NAC, EA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18, Memorandum for the Prime Minister, “Rhodesia – Wilson’s Visit to Salisbury,” October 21, 1965.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ NAC, EA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18, Memorandum for the Prime Minister, “Rhodesia – Current Situation and Action After a UDI,” October 21, 1965.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ “Use Force in Rhodesia, Britain Told,” *Globe and Mail*, October 23, 1965.

repercussions of such an action, rather than hesitating on the brink. Harold Wilson reported finding a Rhodesia government sponsored gas ration coupon during his mission to Rhodesia in late October. This suggests that the Rhodesian government was using its time to hoard supplies in the event of sanctions, rather than concerning themselves with OAU threats.²¹⁰ Further hints that there was no hesitation are plentiful. The OAU, for example, was going through the same growing pains as the Commonwealth. The meeting in Accra was only the third OAU summit, and only half of the delegations attended the summit because of internal bickering.²¹¹ Furthermore, Rhodesia was prepared for a military invasion by neighbouring countries. The Rhodesian Air Force was modern, inherited from the British after the dissolution of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1963. Combined with an army touted as “one of the continents hardest hitting military units.”²¹² OAU member states did not provide a serious threat to Rhodesia.

Canada, however, was concerned. Canadian officials predicted that, immediately following UDI, Britain would call a UN Security Council meeting in an attempt to avoid any reference to Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, which could lead to mandatory sanction and UN military actions. Policy makers also advised Pearson to “expect extreme African reaction.”²¹³

Britain could control the outcome of events at the UN by using their veto power, while Canada looked to the Commonwealth as a forum where it could participate with some influence. Discussion of the time and location of the next conference, as well as the

²¹⁰ Wilson, *The Labour Government*, 153.

²¹¹ “Use Force in Rhodesia, Britain Told,” *Globe and Mail*, October 23, 1965.

²¹² “Rhodesia Runs the Risk of Terror,” *Globe and Mail*, October 14, 1965.

²¹³ NAC, EA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18, Memorandum for the Prime Minister, “Rhodesia – Current Situation and Action After a UDI,” October 21, 1965.

possible repercussions of such a meeting, was set out in a departmental memorandum that Pearson saw on October 21. Such a “conference after UDI would have some obvious advantages by providing an opportunity for moderate Africans (who might feel more free to speak out there than at the UN) to influence the African extremists, as they have attempted unsuccessfully to do at the OAU meeting in Accra.”²¹⁴ The advantages were offset by major disadvantages. Waiting until after UDI meant that African emotions would then be at fever pitch. The hard-line resolution passed by the OAU foreign ministers denounced Britain and called for military intervention. The OAU summit went as far as forecasting the recognition of an independent state in Rhodesia named Zimbabwe.

The Canadian government worried that a Commonwealth meeting held in such an atmosphere might “result in the radicals infecting the moderates rather than vice-versa.”

²¹⁵ If that were to happen, Canada along with the other western nations might be exposed to African anger, which would be intensified by a British veto at the UN. External Affairs advised the Prime Minister that the initial demand for military intervention might come at a post-UDI Commonwealth Prime Ministers Meeting. “If the Commonwealth meeting ended in failure, highlighting widely divergent views in the excited post-UDI atmosphere, the result could be particularly damaging to the Commonwealth.”²¹⁶

However, on balance, External Affairs concluded, “there would appear to be advantages in leaving final consideration of a Commonwealth meeting until after UDI. By the time a meeting were convened initial African anger at UDI and at Britain and the USA over possible blockade of UN military action might have simmered down a little....In general

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

a Commonwealth meeting at a later date might be helpful in picking up the pieces inevitably scattered immediately after a UDI and helping to combat extremist threats to break up the Commonwealth.”²¹⁷

There was, meanwhile, the Wilson visit to be considered. External Affairs hypothesised that such a move “could revive apprehensions on the part of some African leaders that he is prepared to reach an agreement which would involve giving in on some vital point to Mr. Smith.”²¹⁸ Wilson arrived in Rhodesia on the 25 of October. During his five days in Rhodesia, he was able to meet with African nationalists leaders, members of the Rhodesian Front party, and industrialists and consortiums of businessmen. In discussions with Smith and his cabinet, the British ministers proposed a Royal Commission. Already an independence constitution was being considered by both parties, and the constitution would need to receive approval from the commission. The commission was to be a three-member panel. Sir Hugh Beadle, Chief Justice of Rhodesia, was to be chairman, with Britain and Rhodesia each appointing one of the other members.

Wilson left Rhodesia with a small victory in his pocket. He had averted disaster, for now. “I tried every method to persuade the African Nationalists both to work together and to work within the existing constitution; but to no effect,” Wilson reported to Pearson upon his arrival home from Salisbury. “Moderate European opinion, represented by business and finance, is paralysed by a sense of helplessness before impending doom... Smith has quite a nice little police state in embryo there. The government have control of television and radio, although the press is still free. Most of Smith’s cabinet are

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ NAC, EA, Special Interim Box 37, 840/s726-18, Memorandum to the Prime Minister, “Rhodesia –Wilson’s Visit to Salisbury,” October 21, 1965.

impervious to argument and divided only on whether they should commit suicide now or later.”²¹⁹

Pearson replied almost a week after receiving Wilson’s letter. The election was fast approaching, and his brief and vague letter to Wilson – already out of date – reflected this. “It seems clear that your visit there had a useful effect. I hope that it will result in the establishment of the proposed Royal Commission, which would provide a valuable breathing space to allow time for Rhodesian leaders of all kinds to face reality.”²²⁰

On November 5, Pearson learned of the failure of the Royal Commission idea. “In view of the failure so far of the British and Rhodesian governments to agree on the terms of reference for the proposed Royal Commission” External Affairs reported, “there is a possibility that the Rhodesian government may declare a UDI in the next day or two.”²²¹ Negotiations were now dead.

On November 1, the Fourth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly heard a resolution that described the Rhodesian situation as “a threat to international peace and security” and called on Britain to use all necessary means, including military force.”²²² The vote passed 79 to 8, with 17 abstentions. Canada had decided to vote against the resolution after learning of the US intention to do the same.²²³

Canada played the part of patient observer during the final days leading to UDI. Pearson, along with the rest of political Canada, focused its energies on the election set to wind up on the eighth of November. Beginning in Winnipeg on Monday night, Pearson

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ NAC, EA, Special Interim Box 37, 840/s726-18, no. ME-617, Message from External Affairs, Ottawa to London, November 5, 1965.

²²¹ NAC, EA, Special Interim Box 37, 840/s726-18 Memorandum for the Prime Minister, November 5, 1965.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

would spend the rest of that week campaigning in Ontario.²²⁴ Pearson was returned to power, although without the majority promised to him by his political guru and finance minister Walter Gordon. Gordon would tender his resignation the following day. Events of this magnitude – a federal election and the resignation of Walter Gordon – would give pause to Pearson’s international commitments. Added to this were Pearson’s private feelings on the election. He recounts in his memoirs “ My own first reaction was to resign the leadership...but a few days of hard thinking... showed me that I could not leave.”²²⁵ Pearson had greater priorities than Rhodesia in these days.

Smith was attempting to get Wilson’s agreement that the two parties had found differences “irreconcilable.” Wilson waited until late November 10, delivering a last message to Smith, but with no mention of “irreconcilable differences.” Smith and the rest of the Rhodesia went to bed that evening, loyal British subjects for the last time. Smith would speak in the morning. Wilson phoned in the morning, but nothing was resolved. The Rhodesian cabinet had essentially decided the night before that November 11, Remembrance Day, would take on a new meaning for all Rhodesians.

Smith polled his cabinet on UDI. He recalls in his memoirs “ I said quietly, deliberately avoiding emotion, it seemed as if we were ready for a decision, in which case I believed each member should give me his individual answer. Do we declare our independence – “Yes” or “No”?”²²⁶ As he moved from one minister to the next, methodically moving his way around the table, yes echoed unanimously.

²²⁴ “They’re OFF on the Election Cross-Country,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 1, 1965.

²²⁵ Lester B Pearson, *Mike The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson Vol. 2, 1948-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 208.

²²⁶ Ian D. Smith, *The Great Betrayal* (London: Blake Publishing Ltd., 1997), 102.

Smith read out publicly, later that morning, the prepared declaration of independence. After reading the declaration, which was constructed using the American declaration of independence as a basis, Smith went on, “Now that the final stalemate in negotiations has become evident, the end of the road has been reached. It has become abundantly clear that it is the policy of the British government to play along with no real intention of arriving at a solution which we could possibly accept.”²²⁷ Later that day, the Rhodesian Government would put in place a new constitution; “It is hereby notified that we, the Government of Rhodesia, have adopted, enacted and given to Rhodesia this constitution.” The 1961 constitution had “no force or effect in Rhodesia.”²²⁸

The Canadian Prime Minister made the following statement after Rhodesia’s declaration of independence:

I have learned with deep disappointment and regret of the decision of the Government of Rhodesia to declare its independence. This action has been taken in the face of numerous warnings by the British, Canadian and other governments. Prime Minister Wilson has announced this is an unconstitutional act, amounting, in fact, to rebellion... we do not recognize the Government of Mr. Smith in Rhodesia, or the independent state of Rhodesia which he claims now exists, or the Smith Government itself in Rhodesia.²²⁹

Canada followed through on its contingency plans for Rhodesia, which Pearson shared with the nation in his statement. The Canadian Trade Commissioner in Salisbury was removed, as were Commonwealth preferences and most favoured nation status. Pearson also announced a complete arms embargo, which did not change anything

²²⁷ Ibid. 105.

²²⁸ Government of Rhodesia, *The Constitution of Rhodesia*, Government Printer, Salisbury, Rhodesia, 1965.

²²⁹ Department of External Affairs, *Canadian Weekly Bulletin*, November 17, 1965.

because Canada had ceased shipping military goods to Rhodesia the year before. Most damaging, perhaps, was the promise of “no new aid and financing agreements.”²³⁰

Pearson expressed Canada’s concerns about the crisis during his speech. Commenting on the situation and its seriousness, he said: “Rhodesia [is] particularly serious because of its potentially divisive effect on the Commonwealth and on race relations, which are so important to co-operation and development in Africa.”²³¹

Immediately following the breakdown of the London meetings in early October Pearson had made contact with African governments attempting to provide a moderating influence by impressing upon them the damage of precipitate action. In his telephone conversation with Wilson on October 18, Pearson lobbied for a Commonwealth meeting in the hopes that it might soothe angered African opinion, and he did so again the following day in a telegram to Wilson. And on October 21 he worried over “the danger of African action if no collective Commonwealth consideration is given.”²³² The need to counteract “rash” or “extreme” actions from African states was the primary factor in Canada’s Rhodesian policy during the final weeks prior to UDI. The need to counteract ‘rash’ or ‘extreme’ actions from African states was the primary motivating factor in Canada’s Rhodesian policy in the weeks leading up to UDI on November 11, 1965.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² NAC, EA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18, Memorandum for the Prime Minister, “Rhodesia – Current Situation and Action After a UDI,” October 21, 1965.

Chapter 4

Confronting the Tragedy, 1965-1966

The United Nations asked its members on November 20, 1965²³³ to do their utmost to break economic relations with Southern Rhodesia. Canada would announce its actions on the 26th, banning sugar and tobacco. Foreign Minister Paul Martin would reinforce Canada's disapproval of the regime in early December when he declared that the government would ban ferrochrome, chrome ores and concentrates of Rhodesian origin. This round of sanctions, combined with earlier restrictions placed on Rhodesian tobacco and sugar, constituted an embargo on ninety percent of Rhodesian imports to Canada.

African nations were not as reserved in their response to Ian Smith's declaration. African heads of government met for an Organization of African Unity (OAU) on December 3, in Addis Ababa, where it was agreed that December 15 would be the date by which Britain must "crush" the rebellion and restore "law and order" in Rhodesia in preparation for majority government.²³⁴ The OAU resolution in principle declared war on Rhodesia.²³⁵ Furthermore, during Wilson's speech to the United Nations General Assembly on December 16, African delegates walked out in protest. Rhodesia had created a schism in not only British – Rhodesian relations, but also in British – African relations, and, more generally, between white and black nations that poisoning the Commonwealth, the UN, and East-West relations.

²³³ Canadian Institute of International Affairs, *Monthly Report*. Vol. IV, no. 11, November 1965.

²³⁴ "African set deadline for U.K. to crush Smith," *Globe and Mail*, December 4, 1965.

²³⁵ Blacks threaten war if U.K. fails to crush Smith regime in 10 days," *Globe and Mail*, December 6, 1965.

Soon following the Rhodesian UDI – and the Canadian election campaign that returned Pearson to power – Canada’s prime minister took a vacation. He and his wife Maryon traveled to the Caribbean, where he visited the Commonwealth countries of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, the first Canadian Prime Minister to go to these places since they received independence in 1962. Pearson paid special attention to the Rhodesia issue during his discussions with Acting Jamaican Prime Minister Donald Sangster in late November.²³⁶ On December 14 he met with Dr. Eric Williams, the president of Trinidad and Tobago. The Department of External Affairs reported the men reviewed their country’s bilateral relations and development loan agreements and the Rhodesian issue.²³⁷ Both of these visits were timely because of the approaching OAU deadline for a British solution to the Rhodesia crisis. While neither Jamaica nor Trinidad were OAU members, they were both black nations closely associated with the Pan-Africanist movements of the era.

Pearson’s southern visit is revealing because of the impression that he received from the black leaders. Commenting later, Pearson confided in Harold Wilson “how greatly the attitude of non-white members of the Commonwealth to the Rhodesian issue was dominated by prejudice based on race and colour.”²³⁸ For Pearson, race was not a motivating factor. Pearson’s internationalist glasses were tinted with the extensive experience of a diplomat. International interests and the maintenance of peace framed his worldview.

²³⁶ Department of External Affairs, *External Affairs*, 1966. 52.

²³⁷ Department of External Affairs, *External Affairs*, 1966. 54.

²³⁸ Public Records Office (PRO), Kew, England, Records of the Prime Ministers Office, (Prem) 13/776, Meeting held at the Residence of the Canadian Prime Minister, December, 19 1965.

When the OAU deadline came, and then went, none of African states withdrew from the Commonwealth, although Tanzania and Ghana both broke relations off with Britain. Tanzania had previously contacted Canada and asked the Canadian government to represent their interests in London. Canada was one of the only countries with the resources, will, and reputation to do this. "In less than two decades, Canada has acquired an awareness of, and sensitivity towards, the problems of Commonwealth Africa. It enjoys a reputation as a friendly and responsive power in African eyes,"²³⁹ said one commentator. Pearson wrote Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere hoping to convince him to not sever relations with Britain. Pearson asked him to think again because such a move might impair any progress towards a solution to the problem.²⁴⁰ Once again Canada would act as the bridge between black and white, keeping the British informed of African opinion and helping the Africans to get their viewpoint across to the British.

Not all African delegates were on side with the OAU resolution. Moderate African leaders hoped that a Commonwealth break could be averted and, to ensure this, Nigerian Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafelwa proposed an emergency Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting to deal exclusively with the question of Rhodesia. Tafelwa expressed his disgust at the action of fellow African leaders, after the December 3 OAU resolution.²⁴¹ Tafelwa originally wanted to propose to Commonwealth Prime Ministers, other than the British prime minister, that they should meet in Lagos to try to work out some proposals designed to help the British Government. Without Britain at the

²³⁹ Lorne Kavic, "Canada and the Commonwealth: Sentiment, Symbolism and Self-Interest," *The Round Table*, no. 257 (January 1975), 47.

²⁴⁰ PRO, Prem 13/776, *Threatened Breach in Tanzania's Diplomatic Relations with Britain*. Contains the text of message 752 and 756 of December 13 to the Canadian High Commissioner in Der-es-Salaam. Letters were written by Pearson.

²⁴¹ PRO, Prem 13/776, Record of Lagos Telegram No. 1768 to Commonwealth Relations Office, December 9, 1965.

conference, some of the other nations might be able to talk freely without feeling the need to condemn Wilson's Government. The British replied that Her Majesty's government could not accept the idea of Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting to which Britain was the only country not invited.²⁴² Britain did feel that there was some value to having an all African Commonwealth meeting, but invitations were extended on December 11, 1965, to all Commonwealth members to attend the first ever Prime Ministers Conference held outside of London²⁴³

Wilson was not anxious to attend the meeting; he "did not wish to go to Lagos merely to be boycotted or to have a pistol pointed at his head."²⁴⁴ Although holding such a meeting might provide some "breathing space" and go along way to help ease the more radical African nations and consequently prevent a split in the Commonwealth.²⁴⁵

Pearson was also wary of such a conference, but for different reasons. For Canada the new session of Parliament was scheduled for January 16, 1966 and Pearson was "quite anxious" to be in Ottawa for preparations.²⁴⁶ Indeed, Pearson tried to have the meeting changed to a later date more convenient for him and other Prime Ministers, but was adamant that he would attend the conference whatever the date.²⁴⁷

While Tafelwa had come up with the idea, it would be up to Pearson to ensure that it worked. The old boys were apprehensive about attending a meeting in someone else's clubhouse. Canada's role would once again be fundamental to Commonwealth

²⁴² PRO, Prem 13/776, no. 2119, Telegram December 9, 1965.

²⁴³ PRO, Prem 13/776, no. 1792, Telegram from Lagos to Commonwealth Relations office, December 11, 1965.

²⁴⁴ PRO, Prem 13/776, Meeting held at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, New York between Prime Minister Wilson and Commonwealth representatives, December 16, 1965.

²⁴⁵ PRO, Prem 13/776, Rhodesia-Lagos The Dangers Ahead, December 13, 1965.

²⁴⁶ PRO, Prem 13/776, ME 750, Telegram from External Affairs in Ottawa to London, December 13, 1965.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

solidarity. Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies had cabled the British Prime Minister to express his regrets that he would not be attending the conference, explaining “I would not shrink from doing battle at Lagos; but I have no right to involve Australia in the consequences. The position would be quite different if a reasoned and civilised debate could be expected. But my experience of the last two conference gives me no hope of that.”²⁴⁸ The summit meeting would prove almost impossible to carry off. By the end of December, there were indications that Pakistan, Sierra Leone and Trinidad would not be attending the conference. Presidents Nkrumah and Nyerere were more vocal, letting it be publicly known that they would not be attending the meeting. New Zealand would be represented by a junior minister, as would India, Ceylon, Zambia and Malawi.²⁴⁹ With the hostility towards holding such a meeting in Africa, “eyes therefore switched to Canada and to its internationalist Prime Minister, Lester Pearson. Ottawa seemed the perfect answer.”²⁵⁰ “Because of its reputation as a fair broker,” journalist Derek Ingram later speculated, “the crowning achievement of a great diplomatic career... could be chairmanship of this conference. No doubt the idea appealed to Pearson, but he was deeply immersed in the problem of his withdrawal from political life and how he might effect a transfer of leadership that would keep the Liberal party in power.”²⁵¹ Whatever the truth of all this, there was not much enthusiasm for the conference in the form it was assuming.

²⁴⁸ PRO, Prem 13/776, Canberra telegram No. 1583 to Commonwealth Relations Office, December 24, 1965

²⁴⁹ PRO, Prem 13/776, Meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Memorandum, December 30, 1965.

²⁵⁰ Derek Ingram, “Commonwealth Prime Ministers, 1969: The End of Disenchantment?” *The Round Table*, no. 232, 358.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Wilson would travel to the United States and Canada for high level meetings to assess the positions of its closest allies. Wilson stopped in Washington to see what America's position was and to enlist financial support.²⁵² He arrived at Lester Pearson's residence just before Christmas 1965 for a high level meeting involving External Affairs Minister, Paul Martin, Secretary of the Cabinet Gordon Robertson, Paul Hellyer, the Minister of Defence, Undersecretary of State for External Affairs Marcel Cadieux, and Lionel Chevrier, the Canadian High Commissioner in London.

It was a Sunday afternoon. Wilson expressed his appreciation for the support Canada had shown Britain in the difficult times since Rhodesian independence. A frustrated Wilson explained the complexity of the British position trying to entertain four different audiences: public opinion in Rhodesia, Britain, the Commonwealth and the United Nations. Wilson had been sorry that the United Nations had become involved, but was aware that Britain could no longer handle the situation alone.²⁵³ He adamantly reiterated to the Canadian officials the necessity that Britain control its own situation. At the UN Chapter VII would soon be invoked; "and, once that chapter was invoked, it would be very easy to slip from Article 41 to Article 42. If we reach the latter, a very grave situation would arise, particularly in the light of the temptation to powers such as the Soviet Union to intervene."²⁵⁴

Britain's next concern, as expressed to the Canadian delegation, was to ensure proper governance in Rhodesia once the illegal regime fell. The British would not give the Canadians any specifics about how or when the illegal regime would die but did

²⁵² Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government : A Personal Record, 1964-1970*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson and Michael Joseph, 1979), 184-190.

²⁵³ PRO, Prem 13/776, Meeting held at the Residence of the Canadian Prime Minister, December 19, 1965.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

assure them that “our economic measures were now beginning to exercise a cumulative effect and we must be ready for the time when we could re-assert our authority in Rhodesia.”²⁵⁵ Wilson was still unsure what type of government would be installed, but recognized that the transition government might have to be in place for a considerable length of time while Africans were trained.²⁵⁶

Pearson expressed his doubts about the possibility of the African Commonwealth members acquiescing in such a “protracted solution” if direct rule was to be instigated. Britain was desperately trying to maintain control of the situation in the face of unremitting criticism coming from African nations. Wilson told the Canadian delegation that he was refusing to commit to the Lagos conference because of the freeze in the relationship that had formed between his country and the African Commonwealth.

Pearson interjected to subtly suggest an alternative view. While the Commonwealth was changing and developing, Britain was still its leader. If Britain was to absent itself from the conference, it might give other nations an excuse not to attend. In fact, Pearson was not terribly enthusiastic about attending the conference either, but if the conference failed, in Pearson’s view, “it must be effected by others rather than by the United Kingdom or Canada.”²⁵⁷

Pearson invited Wilson to comment on Canada’s relationship with the countries that had broken off relations with Britain. Canadian missions in these countries consisted of teachers, volunteers and in some cases military training programs. Ghana received military training from Canada. Wilson and Pearson agreed that, if Canada did remove its personnel from these countries, then something worse might replace them. Communism

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

was the feared unknown.²⁵⁸ There was no other elder Commonwealth nation to perform the role of bridge-builder, so much now rested on Canada's approach to the crisis.

Britain needed Canadian assistance in appealing to Zambia to have faith in the Commonwealth and in the West. The British had been looking at safeguarding the Kariba dam and generating station with an armed force. The "venture would depend essentially on the consent of the illegal regime in Rhodesia; and, if they refused to co-operate, there could be no question, in the United Kingdom's view, of any attempt to make an opposed crossing of the Zambezi river." Canada was willing to accept "some responsibility" in this venture, but only as part of international force with some non-white element.²⁵⁹ The force envisaged would resemble a police force rather than a traditional military force. Wilson did admit, however, that the force might comprise more than two battalions – a significant force to protect a power station.

Wilson wanted assistance with an Zambian air lift of oil. Zambia had traditionally been supplied with oil almost exclusively by Rhodesia. In fact, because of Zambia's geography, Rhodesian transportation routes were essential to the Zambian economy. After independence Rhodesia had placed a trade embargo on all products going to Zambia, essentially cutting off their industrial base. Britain was heavily reliant on Zambia for copper, and with no oil to run the factories in Zambia, up to several million Britons could be out of work within months.²⁶⁰ Adding to the chaos of the situation was interest from Communist nations, looking to possibly stockpile copper. In June 1965, the Chinese government had sent a Chou En-lai, a top minister, to explore the possibility of developing a railway to transport Zambian copper. The president of Zambia, Kenneth

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Wilson, *The Labour Government*, 181-183.

Kaunda, was sympathetic to western nations, but realised the benefits of exploring both sides of the Cold War antagonists. The United States countered by offering a highway study project by a US firm.²⁶¹ Finally, on December 7, 1966 Kaunda gave assurances that he would not invite other African nations – nor communist nations – to send in troops.²⁶²

Smith had cut the oil to Zambia on December 18, 1965.²⁶³ President Kaunda had recently contacted the Canadian government and asked for Canadian assistance with the airlift. Wilson told Pearson at their December 19 meeting, “any Canadian help during this very critical period would be invaluable.”²⁶⁴ Pearson announced the following morning that “the Canadian government had decided to participate in an airlift of oil supplies to Zambia.”²⁶⁵ Canada would provide four RCAF Hercules aircraft for one month.²⁶⁶ But one month of assistance would be extended into five to ensure that Zambia could survive after Canada defended its military assistance to Zambia by claiming that a failure to provide assistance would encourage communist encroachment.²⁶⁷

The December 19 meeting between the Wilson and Canadian officials was important for Britain, which was still trying to hold on to the British Commonwealth. Wilson contacted Menzies on his return to England:

²⁶¹ For a complete discussion of the Zambian Railroad problem, and the communist initiative see: Foreign Relations of the United States 1964-1968. Volume XXIV Africa. #465-467.

²⁶² “Wilson rejects OAU demands on Rhodesia,” *Globe and Mail*, December 7, 1966.

²⁶³ Arnold Smith, *Stitches in Time* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1981), 59.

²⁶⁴ PRO, Prem 13/776, Meeting held at the Residence of the Canadian Prime Minister, December 19, 1965.

²⁶⁵ Department of External Affairs, Press Release no. 13, *Zambian Oil Lift*, February 16, 1966.

²⁶⁶ The airlift was extended to the end of February and then again to the end of April. However, Canada’s commitment after February was reduced to two aircraft.

²⁶⁷ Linda Freeman, “Canada and the Front-Line States” in *Canada, Scandinavia, and Southern Africa*. Edited by Douglas Anglin, Timothy Shaw and Carl Widstrand, Uppsala: (Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1978.) 73.

I may say that I had very useful talks on all this [Lagos]with Mike Pearson in Ottawa. He too was fully alive to the dangers. But he was convinced that it would be better for the conference to take place than for us to abandon it and have to face something even worse. His view was that it would be wiser to adopt an attitude of conditional willingness to attend rather than conditional unwillingness.²⁶⁸

It seems, then, that Pearson did have some influence on Britain's decision to attend the conference. Pearson called Wilson on New Year's Eve 1965 and inquired if he would be attending the Lagos meeting. The British Prime Minister was still wary, worrying that the meeting may become an "all-day acrimonious session drafting the communiqué" but did agree to attend with "certain assurances about the handling of the conference."²⁶⁹ Because this was the first conference to be held outside of London as well as the first meeting with an established Secretariat, the British would lose the capacity needed to guide discussion. Nigeria would be partly in charge of the conference, and the Secretariat would take on certain responsibilities. Commonwealth Secretary General Arnold Smith would be a thorn in the British side. He believed that Britain was not fulfilling its responsibilities on the Rhodesia file and that the British government should not hesitate to resort to force.²⁷⁰ Smith recounts in his memoirs, "My own view for a long time had been that Britain should use force against the regime as the quickest and cheapest way of ending the rebellion."²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ PRO, Prem 13/776, Letter from Harold Wilson to Sir Robert Menzies, Undated.

²⁶⁹ PRO, Prem 13/776, Notes for the Record of Telephone Conversation between Lester Pearson and Harold Wilson, Undated.

²⁷⁰ Smith, *Stitches*, 55.

²⁷¹ Smith, *Stitches*, 58.

Pearson assured Wilson that he would send “a personal message to Mr. Arnold Smith telling him not to get too excited.”²⁷² The Canadian government was concerned about Smith’s actions, “There have been several clear indications over the last few weeks that Arnold’s understandable desire to play a constructive role in the Rhodesian crisis has been looked on as anything but helpful in London.”²⁷³ Indeed, the British were feeling isolated, believing that the Asian and Caribbean countries would side with the Africans at the upcoming conference while “Canada will be a dubious ally and Australia conceivably an embarrassing one.”²⁷⁴ Australia had since then refused to attend, but this did not remove the suspicion and cynicism that now characterized the post-UDI climate of the Commonwealth.

Arnold Smith’s position as Secretary General was both a blessing and a curse for Canada. A man of integrity, he was true to Canada’s image as an honest broker. “Under Arnold’s dynamic guidance the Secretariat could obviously do much for the new Commonwealth,” reported External Affairs. But “too obvious partisanship in the African cause at this fledgling stage however could harm the prospects for the future effectiveness of the Secretariat.”²⁷⁵ Pearson cautioned Smith:

There are undoubtedly times when issues should be brought to a head. Equally, and perhaps more frequently in the field of international relations, there are times when the best course may be to strive to avoid a show-down. My own feeling is that, if the Lagos meeting is to serve any constructive purpose, it must find some means of re-establishing mutual confidence without forcing the

²⁷² PRO, Prem 13/776, Notes for the Record of Telephone Conversation between Lester Pearson and Harold Wilson.

²⁷³ National Archives of Canada (NAC), Records of the Department of External Affairs (DEA), Interim Box 37 840/s726-18. Memorandum to the Prime Minister. Rhodesia: Commonwealth Conference. January 1, 1966.

²⁷⁴ PRO, Prem 13/776, Rhodesia-Lagos: The Dangers Ahead, December 13, 1965

²⁷⁵ NAC, DEA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18 conf., Memorandum to the Prime Minister, Rhodesia: Commonwealth Conference, January 1, 1966.

discussion through to what might be counted as a clear win or loss for any given point of view.²⁷⁶

Pearson wanted to avoid a showdown. He did not take the moral high ground. Rather he knew that, if Commonwealth disintegration were to be avoided, consensus would need to be found. It can be argued that he was protecting the British interests, but equal weight can be found in the argument that, if he had been exclusively concerned with British prestige, he would not have pressured Britain to expose itself at the conference in the first place.

Pearson wrote to the Nigerian Prime Minister on January 3. Many nations had said they would not attend, and several members had already stated that they would be sending their foreign ministers rather than heads of government. Pearson asked Tafelwa to attempt to persuade Tanzania, Kenya, and Zambia to attend in a full capacity, and to press as well India and Pakistan. If, however, Wilson decided that he could not attend, Pearson himself would send Paul Martin to represent Canada.

These letters to Smith and Tafelwa demonstrate Pearson's desire to see the process work. After the 1964 and 1965 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting, Pearson had actively pressured Britain to convene some type of conference. Britain failed to do so and Rhodesia declared independence. For Pearson, an international meeting would be the best route to defuse the situation. The letters are an attempt by Pearson to set the terms of engagement. Pearson wanted to curb Arnold Smith's hardline position, ensure Britain's attendance while also working to have as many members of the

²⁷⁶ NAC, DEA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18 conf., Message from Pearson to Arnold Smith, January 3, 1966.

Commonwealth in attendance. It was the classic Canadian search for the middle, for compromise and consensus.

On January 5, Wilson wrote Pearson to inform him that he was leaning towards attending the conference. Tafelwa had given British Official Saville Garner assurances that he would not permit the conference to degenerate into a prosecution of Britain, and that he would do his best to steer people away from the need for a communiqué.²⁷⁷ One of Britain's greatest concerns about the conference, indeed, was the drafting of the communiqué. Wilson "stressed several times his anxiety at the possibility of a long wrangle over a communiqué,"²⁷⁸ for it might push the British government in directions it was not ready to go.

Arriving at the Ottawa airport a few days later, Pearson was confronted by the African Students Association of Ottawa. Enoch Udofia, the president of the group read a prepared statement that concluded, "we would prefer that justice be done by negotiations but to rule out the use of force because of 'kith and kinship' is undemocratic and unjust."²⁷⁹ Pearson made no comment except to say, "Well, I guess I better get on now."²⁸⁰

Pearson left for Lagos on January 9, but his plane was rerouted to Accra, Ghana because of dense fog covering the Nigerian airport.²⁸¹ Pearson was met by Kwame Nkrumah, who took him for a tour of Accra while the morning sun cleared away the fog in Lagos. A statement issued from Nkrumah's office said that the best way to end the

²⁷⁷ PRO, Prem 13/776, Message no. 42, Message from Harold Wilson to Lester Pearson, January 5, 1966.

²⁷⁸ PRO, Prem 13/776, Telegram no. 37, Commonwealth Relations Office to Lagos, January 4, 1966.

²⁷⁹ "PM asked to support use of force against Rhodesia," *Globe and Mail*, January 10, 1966.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ "Pearson Meets Nkrumah on way to Lagos for Rhodesia talks," *Globe and Mail*, January 10, 1966.

rebellion was to force its capitulation. Nkrumah called for an armed force authorized by the UN and supplied by African nations to intervene in Rhodesia.²⁸² The meeting between Pearson and Nkrumah, however, was not as spontaneous as it appeared. During Pearson's telephone conversation with the British Prime Minister, Pearson was asked to stop in on his way to the meeting to see Nkrumah.²⁸³

Upon landing in Lagos, Pearson told reporters "I haven't any particular proposal to put forward, but if we can do anything to help solve the problem – and actually we are up against serious trouble – we will consider it a privilege to do so."²⁸⁴ With the conference set to begin the next day, Nigerian rebels and citizens began rioting to display their dissatisfaction with taxation in one of the northern territories. The result was a Commonwealth conference held in a secured compound called Independence House.²⁸⁵

The first meeting was on January 11, 1966. Tafelwa invited Canada – as the oldest Commonwealth member – to deliver the opening speech. After that representatives delivered their speeches one after another, Pearson not speaking again until the next day. Pearson concern for the situation, as he told the conference, rested with the political freedom of the people in Rhodesia, the principles of democracy and the "fundamental rights of man. In this regard the regime had proved itself immoral."²⁸⁶ While Rhodesia was "essentially" a British problem to which Canada nor any other nation could not lay

²⁸² "Armed Force Sought," *Globe and Mail*, January 10, 1966.

²⁸³ PRO, Prem 13/776, Notes for the Record of Telephone Conversation between Lester Pearson and Harold Wilson.

²⁸⁴ "Nigeria hit by Riots on Rhodesia Talks Eve," *Globe and Mail*, January 10, 1966.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ NAC, EA, RG 25, vol. 3452, file 1-1966/2A, Meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers, January 12, 1966.

down a path for Britain to follow, “These meetings could, however, offer advice and he was sure that this was helpful in influencing the decisions of members.”²⁸⁷

Pearson’s view of Canada’s role had been to assist Britain in co-operation with other countries. The oil embargo imposed by Britain had impressed Pearson. Sanctions in Pearson’s view were the most important action against Ian Smith and the Canadian leader was sure they would succeed in persuading Rhodesians that the Smith regime could not win. But in order for the sanctions to reach this end, the Commonwealth governments would have to strictly enforce them and encourage other countries to do so.²⁸⁸ Pearson had been told by the British in December that the sanctions were having the desired effect and “seemed bound soon to become intolerable; Rhodesians were consequently becoming disillusioned with the regime’s promises and predictions and would soon start to move against it.”²⁸⁹

Sanctions would take time to work. Pearson realised this and held the view that the present meeting could take constructive action by establishing a subcommittee which would periodically review the effects sanctions were having on Rhodesia.²⁹⁰ Pearson took an active part in the discussions that led to the establishment of the sanctions committee and worked to ensure its functions were of some use. “I stressed the importance of the Sanctions Committee being authorized to recommend a full ministerial conference if sanctions didn’t seem to be working effectively.”²⁹¹ The committee, as Pearson

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Pearson had discussed the possibility of setting up such a committee with Arnold Smith on the eve of the Lagos talks. Smith, *Stitches*, 54.

²⁹¹ NAC, DEA, Interim Box 37 840/s726-18 conf., Lester Pearson Diary Memorandum of Discussions of the Continuing Committees, January 13, 1966.

envisioned it, would be representative of different areas of the Commonwealth and would report to governments via the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Pearson suggested that another sub-committee should be set up to consider existing and further aid for Zambia. Pearson also suggested – as long as Britain agreed – that the Commonwealth as a whole should undertake a study investigating possible areas of assistance that member governments could provide Britain in a post Ian Smith Rhodesia. Specifically, Pearson was interested in “mounting a massive programme of education and training for the people of Rhodesia.”²⁹² Pearson concluded:

In 1964, the Meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers had affirmed their high ideals for the Commonwealth. If there was to be a communiqué issued at the end of this meeting, it might be useful to set out again their view of the Commonwealth; but deeds, the aim of which would be to give to all the people of Rhodesia the chance to live together in peace and dignity, would speak much louder than words.

The following day, January 13, the heads of the delegations gathered for a restricted session for which no notes were taken. Prime Minister Pearson, however, did write a memorandum after the meeting which outlined the discussions. Wilson began the meeting by offering up some “very secret” information about the Rhodesian situation. Sanctions, in Wilson’s opinion, were beginning “to bite more and more deeply”²⁹³ and the Rhodesian people would soon grow tired of the hardships and force Smith to yield: “business was becoming alarmed. It would be soon at a standstill. Moderate people

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Lester B Pearson, *Mike The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson Vol. 3, 1948-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 284.

would soon become more articulate.”²⁹⁴ Wilson assured his colleagues that he would not negotiate any further with Smith; rather, the Governor of Rhodesia, Sir Humphrey Gibbs, would handle all further communications with Smith. Contingency plans had been created and after the illegal regime was removed from power there would be a period of direct rule from the United Kingdom, until a constitutional conference that was fully representative of the populace could be convened to establish majority rule.²⁹⁵

Wilson explained that the higher-ranking officers in the armed forces were divided. The loyalists might even defect, causing a split in the military, in which case “there would be no argument against UK troops moving in at once at the request of the loyalists.”²⁹⁶ The British were quick to realise that any type of settlement would include a strong white presence in the government, and that it would be desirable if the British were to encourage dissent or find a white political group in Rhodesia with enough support and set them up for governance after the illegal regime was brought down. Wilson suggested sending troops to Zambia on standby, ready to infiltrate Rhodesia on short notice. Wilson concluded his speech by suggesting that all Rhodesian Front people “weren’t so bad” and that they should not all be eliminated from “post-rebellion political responsibilities.”²⁹⁷ This was astonishing. At a meeting where he was afraid of being put in “the dock” he was empathising with the “enemy.” Wilson asked his critics what options he had to counter Rhodesia’s 23 000 troops “Pull 25 000 British troops out of

²⁹⁴ NAC, DEA, Special Interim Box 37 840s/726-18, Notes of Secret and Restricted Session Lagos, January 13, 1966.

²⁹⁵ Smith, *Stitches*, 54.

²⁹⁶ NAC, DEA, Special Interim Box 37 840s/726-18, Notes of Secret and Restricted Session Lagos, January 13, 1966.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Malaysia, spend two months transporting them to Zambia...and then push them into Rhodesia on pontoons across the Zambezi?"²⁹⁸

African delegates were not as condemnatory as was expected, and for several reasons. First, the chair of the conference did not wish Britain to be put in the dock. Second, Ghana and Tanzania were not present, removing some of the radical pressure. Ghana was Africa's activist leader and without its presence African moderates were more influential. Milton Obote of Uganda, Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore and Donald Sangster of Jamaica argued that sanctions were not working. This prompted Harold Wilson to say that "on the expert advice available to me the cumulative effects of the economic and financial sanctions might well bring the rebellion to an end within a matter of weeks rather than months."²⁹⁹ Wilson added that "if the rebellion had not ended by a certain date, the Prime Ministers would meet again to see what steps should be taken."³⁰⁰ That evening, during dinner, a deadline was inserted into the communiqué: if sanctions had not brought the regime down by July, another Commonwealth Conference would need to be called, a long time, considering that Wilson had just said "a matter of weeks rather than months." Pearson knew the Africans would never have accepted the June date without the provision in the sanctions committee that allowed that body to recommend an earlier meeting if necessary.³⁰¹ The Africans were also brought along by a reference in the communiqué to possible action by the UN if real progress was not made.³⁰²

²⁹⁸ Smith, *Stitches*, 56.

²⁹⁹ Smith, *Stitches*, 56.

³⁰⁰ NAC, DEA, Special Interim Box 37 840s/726-18, Lester Pearson Diary Memorandum of Discussions of the Continuing Committees, January 13, 1966.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² NAC, DEA, Special Interim Box 37 840s/726-18, Lester Pearson Diary Memorandum of Discussions of the Continuing Committees, January 13, 1966.

The Lagos meeting began a process by which the Commonwealth had a “direct, month-by-month involvement with the Rhodesia question.” Although Commonwealth members had no power to persuade Britain to act, the institution’s collective voice was “established as the most powerful influence on Britain in favour of securing majority rule.”³⁰³ A Toronto *Globe and Mail* correspondent reported optimistically after the conference:

The conference ended shortly before midnight in a mood that could bring little comfort to the Government of Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith.

With a blend of grim and buoyant comment, delegates emerging from the meeting left the impression they feel they have the rebel regime on the run, and the Commonwealth will be strengthened as a result.³⁰⁴

Traditionally, Tafelwa had received credit in history for the conference, but it would never have happened had Pearson followed the other elder Commonwealth nations’ lead and decided not to attend. If that had happened Britain would also not have attended.

³⁰³ Smith, *Stitches*, 57

³⁰⁴ “Lagos approves sanctions check urged by PM,” *Globe and Mail*, January 13, 1966.

Conclusion

Contrary to the early optimism about the likely effectiveness of sanctions, the Rhodesian crisis would limp on for another decade and a half. The Commonwealth Conference agreed for July 1966 at Lagos Conference was postponed until September. That conference reaffirmed the principles set out in previous communiqués: the authority for guiding Rhodesia to independence rested with Britain; racism in all its forms was rejected; and the illegal regime must be brought to an end. Britain reaffirmed its commitment to “No Independence Before Majority Rule” (NIMBAR).

But there were no new initiatives at the September conference, and while the meeting agreed that the issue would be kept under constant review, there would not be another Commonwealth Prime Ministers Meeting until 1969. Records of that meeting indicate that the preoccupation was with the settlement proposals that Harold Wilson put before Ian Smith in Gibraltar in 1966 and 1968, the famed *Tiger and Fearless talks*. After the failure of the second round of these talks, two and a half years after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Rhodesia, Britain recommended comprehensive mandatory sanctions. In 1970 Rhodesia declared itself a republic and continued its armed struggle against communist-sponsored guerrillas based in neighboring African countries. Smith’s regime would survive for a total of 15 years before elections in 1980 brought the first majority black government to the new Zimbabwe.

Scholar Linda Freeman has argued that “Canada’s alliance with Britain was more important than African interests in Pearson’s mediation effort in the Commonwealth.” She further argues, “while he eased Britain’s position, he also defused African pressure

for considerably stronger measures than economic sanctions against the Rhodesian regime.”³⁰⁵ This analysis is only partially correct. Canada’s response to the Rhodesian crisis had three distinct stages. At first, during the first year of the Pearson Government, Canada was an interested spectator, worried that the events might affect British prestige and Commonwealth solidarity, but unenthusiastic about involvement. It resisted real involvement in this stage of the crisis on three different occasions: not sending a representative to Rhodesia when asked to by Prime Minister Winston Field; failing to take action at the request of Zimbabwe nationalist Ndabaningi ; and sending a cautious letter to Rhodesia when asked by the Commonwealth Relations Office to weigh in with Canadian influence.

As stage one became stage two, the Rhodesian situation threatened more than just British prestige. It was a potential source of international conflict and more relevant to this study – conflict within the Commonwealth. Ottawa responded by assuming the role of helper-fixer, mediating at the 1964 Commonwealth Prime Ministers Meeting and helping to develop the machinery of the institution to better serve the needs of its newer members. Pearson’s anxieties over the situation were increased after his London meeting with Ian Smith in January of 1965. The Canadian government prepared a contingency plan in case of a UDI in late April of 1965. Pearson would also assume the role of confidant for the British, giving solid and moderate advice during numerous exchanges between Wilson and Pearson.

Pearson once again manoeuvred to find consensus at the 1965 CPMM. Pearson pressured the British at this conference to agree that there would be no independence

³⁰⁵ Linda Freeman, “Canada and the Front-Line States” in *Canada, Scandinavia, and Southern Africa*. Edited by Douglas Anglin, Timothy Shaw and Carl Widstrand (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1978), 73.

without majority rule, but also steered the conference towards reaffirming that the problem remained a British one. The Canadian delegation was instrumental in getting the Commonwealth Secretariat established, as well as in drafting soothing communiqués. The press reported that Pearson had come down heavily on the side of the Africans,³⁰⁶ but Pearson tried in fact to bring the two opposing sides together at the conference. He worked, in the words of a popular song of the era,³⁰⁷ to build bridges over the troubled waters of the Commonwealth. To do this he searched for compromise. Britain originally did not even want to discuss the Rhodesia situation, while the African bloc wanted more concrete action, including the contemplation of the use of force. Pearson decried the use of force, appealing to Africans by insisting that a constitutional conference was the best way to proceed. To gain further weight with the Africans, he tried to bind Britain to holding the conference and to their pledge that there could be no independence before majority rule. For the Africans, and when combined with the new Secretariat and the Commonwealth Declaration on Racial Equality, this was a major step forward.

In the third stage, Canada was deeply concerned bothered by the possibility that African nations would take ‘rash’ action. The need to counteract ‘rash’ or ‘extreme’ actions from African states was the primary motivating factor in Canada’s Rhodesian policy in the period leading up to UDI on November 11, 1965. In October 1965, Canada’s preoccupation shifted from preventing Commonwealth disintegration to avoiding international conflict. With the threat of a black-on-white war, Pearson was quick to suggest that a Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference might cool the heating global situation.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Paul Simon, "Bridge Over Troubled Waters," Best of Simon and Garfunkel, LP Album, Nashville, TN: RCA, 1971.

Throughout the weeks and months following the November 11 declaration by Smith, fears of Communism, a desire to hold the Commonwealth together, and a lingering support for Britain would combine to form the Canadian policy on Rhodesia. Canada represented the interests in London of several African nations that had broken off relations with Britain. It took all measures, short of the use of force, to bring about the regimes, downfall. The threat to the Commonwealth was at its greatest during this time, and Pearson actively intervened to help ensure that the 1966 Lagos Commonwealth Prime Minister Conference would take place. He assisted Britain, making sure they were not put in the dock, but also pressured them to contribute to the compromise, producing British agreement that there would be “No Independence Before Majority Rule.” He elaborated committee machinery that would help the Commonwealth keep tabs on the situation, a move that demonstrated sincerity to the Africans. While Tafelwa had devised the idea of a conference in Africa, it would be up to Pearson to ensure its implementation. The old boys were apprehensive about attending a meeting in someone else’s clubhouse.

Canada’s role would once again be fundamental to a fragile Commonwealth unity. But the actual threat of Commonwealth disintegration was more a creation of the media than it was a likely occurrence. What Canada did do was in its practical diplomatic tradition – providing a more hospitable atmosphere for the new nations of the Commonwealth; creating machinery to meet their needs; demonstration sympathy for the Developing world and a place where its voice could be heard; while at the same time holding fast to its old loyalties to Britain and to the Commonwealth Canada had helped to invent out of empire.

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