

10. THE ROUND TABLE AND THE POSTWAR COMMONWEALTH, 1949-66

"Certainly we have got to have much better management than we now have of our public affairs, and a good deal of luck, to hold our place in the world".¹ Brand's comment of 1949 reflected the toll of a decade of setbacks to British power and prestige, and to the unity of the Empire/Commonwealth. Yet there was still room for manoeuvre, and it was still possible to think of Britain as a "world power".¹ By the 1960s, this was no longer so. Sometimes reluctantly, sometimes with an unseemly haste, successive British governments wound up Britain's extra-European commitments, and adjusted her diplomacy to the realities of her position. The process was uneven, and (even at a very late stage) amenable to temporary reversal; but the underlying trend was all one way. "Imperialism" was dead, and its erstwhile practitioners sometimes uncomfortably "prehistoric".²

How were the Round Tablers to respond to this trend? Clearly there was a range of responses in Britain as a whole, from "diehardism" through a graceful pragmatism to "anti-Imperialism". There were expressions of regret from some of the older Round Tablers; criticisms, also, of the management of Britain's decline. Nevertheless, the general attitude of the Koot was realistic and forward-looking. The Round Table owed its very existence to the apprehension that British power was a limited and declining commodity; but also to the belief that a relationship based on partnership was more valuable than one based on dependence. Necessarily,

1. Brand to J M A Ilott, 16 Dec 1949, Brand Papers, box 171.

2. Hailey to Morrah, 5 March 1964, RT Papers c 868, fol 130.

the Round Tablers re-examined the parameters within which such a partnership could be made to work. Some of the older and (as now appeared) less realistic aspirations were laid to one side. The ignis fatuus of a Commonwealth "world-state" was, at last, decisively rejected¹; even the notion of a common defence and foreign policy was discarded. Instead, the Round Table concentrated on the retention and development of those aspects of Commonwealth co-operation which were likely to survive: "the exploration and cultivation of relationships which are the more numerous and the more stable because of their very modesty".²

Some commentators (especially in Britain) doubted whether the progeny of Empire, the Commonwealth, had any relevance in the modern world. This was not a view which commended itself to the Moot. Indeed, to all the postwar Round Tablers the Commonwealth was a connection whose importance (to its members, and to the world) was far greater than that of a mere "empty shell."³ Rooted in history, intimately connected with "British" political ideals, yet now extended to encompass a diversity of national cultures and traditions, the Commonwealth was still capable of enriching the lives of its member states in a way unique amongst international organisations.

The Moot and the Round Table Magazine

Curtis and Altrincham appear to have been unable to attend many meetings in

¹ Except by Curtis, who continued to preach Western, Atlantic and Commonwealth federation until his death.

² "Empire to Commonwealth and Beyond", *RT*, Nov 1970, p 380.

³ [John Holmes,] "Can the Commonwealth Survive?", *RT*, Dec 1963, p 12.

the early 1950s. (Both died in 1955.) On the other hand, Malcolm was a frequent attender until his death (also in 1955), as were Brand until 1963 and Horsfall until 1965. Hailey was still active until at least 1964, and Brooke until 1966. Macadam, Maud, Morrah and Mansergh continued to participate in Moot activities until the 1970s, Caroe and Marris until the early 1980s. At the time of writing, Hodson remains an active member of the Moot - sixty-four years after first joining it.

The Moot in the 1950s thus consisted of a small number of "aboriginal" members, a larger number of interwar and wartime recruits, and the three members recruited in the late 1940s.¹ Only one member was added in the 1950s, the banker Sir Oliver (Lord) Franks. He joined the Moot in 1954, but appears not to have taken any active part after 1959. Sir Keith Hancock was invited to re-join in 1950, but apparently decided against doing so.

Formal meetings of the Moot took place less frequently after the Second World War than before: with the exception of special meetings, there were on average eight a year in the 1950s, compared to twelve or more before 1939. Nevertheless, these were well attended, and much business appears to have been conducted by informal personal contact and correspondence. It was still possible to say "that the Moot is not a committee, but rather a closely knit working group".²

The primary responsibility for what was published in the *Round Table* magazine was, of course, the editor's. The Moot continued to play an important rôle, however: discussing the choice of subjects, suggesting

¹ Coupland appears not to have attended any meetings after the war; Harlow's membership lapsed in 1951.

² Harlow to Morrah, 20 July 1951 (Moot file,) RT (O) Papers.

authors, and in many cases agreeing the line to be taken on controversial subjects. "Differences of opinion were inevitable, but consensus was still sought, for the most part successfully."¹ The most notable feature of the earlier *Round Table* - that, unless otherwise stated, articles were published as representing the corporate view of the Moot - was, to a large extent, retained. This was one reason why the anonymity of articles was preserved; another was that this practice made it easier to obtain "really informed writing from the fountain-head".²

Individual members of the Moot continued to provide a significant (although significantly diminished) proportion of "policy" articles: some 32% of those identified between 1945 and 1966.³ Morrah himself wrote for virtually every issue before 1965. Hodson contributed at least 19 articles between 1945 and 1966, and Caroe wrote at least 19 between 1948 and 1966 (and a substantial number of signed ones thereafter). Horsfall and Brand contributed articles on a wide variety of subjects. Altrincham wrote on the Middle East, Malcolm on Central Africa, Maud on Southern Africa. Brooke covered British politics between 1949 and 1951. Mansergh wrote occasionally on Commonwealth relations, Marris and Franks on financial and economic questions.

Most of the articles published in the first part of the *Round Table* were now commissioned from individuals outside the Moot. Despite a

¹ H V Hodson to author, 2 Sept 1994.

² Caroe to Col H N (Bunny) Head, nd [Sept 1957] (Dormant file,) RT (O) Papers. *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* adhered also to this practice until the 1950s.

³ See Appendix D, "Round Table Articles, by Author".

relatively low rate of remuneration', the *Round Table* attracted many able and well-informed writers. To the extent that the Moot can be said to have had a preference for a particular type of writer, that preference was still for officials and administrators (either current or former). Amongst the many who wrote for the magazine in the 1950s were Lords Birdwood, Gladwyn, Hilverton and Twining, Sir Evelyn Baring, Sir Alexander Cadogan, Malcolm Macdonald and Romney Sedgwick. Chatham House was undoubtedly an important source of contacts: Macadam was Director-General until 1955, and Morrah himself was "at the hub of things" there.²

Politicians constituted a rather smaller group of *Round Table* contributors. Lord Alport, Joe Grimond and the Labour peer Lord Listowel were among the few invited to write in the 1950s. Academics and journalists were better represented: amongst the former Elizabeth Munro, Max Beloff and Isaac Deutscher, amongst the latter Edward Hodgkin, D H McLachlan and Oliver Woods. All Souls was still an important connection: Geoffrey Hudson, J E S Fawcett and Professor Hanbury were amongst those who wrote for what Morrah called "the College quarterly organ".³

The responsibility for providing quarterly "chronicles" was still in the hands of the local *Round Table* groups in the "old" Dominions. (The group in Newfoundland contributed articles in March and December 1948.) Under the unwritten "constitution of the *Round Table*", these groups enjoyed 'a sort of 'dominion status'', which Morrah interpreted as the right to

1 "Wildly out of line" with payments even in "the most genteel, high-minded, prestigious American market": F W Collins to Morrah, 17 Oct 1963 (US File,) RT (O) Papers.

2 Macadam to Mrs Pat Curtis, 28 Jan 1960, RT Papers c 867, fol 59.

3 Morrah to Prof E E Evans-Pritchard, 27 June 1949 (Dormant file,) RT (O) Papers.

decide editorial policy on local issues.' Articles which did not represent the consensus view of these groups, or which were commissioned directly by London, were published with an editorial disclaimer.

Elsewhere, the *Round Table*'s arrangements were with individual writers. Ireland and the United States presented few problems. From the former, Horgan continued to send "rather provocative" articles² until his death in 1967. John E Sayers of *The Belfast Telegraph* ("about the only medium here which is trying to give a lead in 'healing the history and binding the wounds' of this divided community"³) contributed a regular section on Northern Irish affairs after 1948. In America, Canham arranged for William Stringer (also of the *Christian Science Monitor*) to succeed him from March 1956.⁴ The Moot found it more difficult to obtain dispassionate authors for the UK article. A succession of writers was employed between the late 1940s and early 1960s: Colin Coote, S W Mason and G D Wood of *The Times*, Peter Utley (Morrah's son-in-law), and the Conservative MPs Julian Amery, Iain Macleod, Sir Edward Boyle, Peter Kirk and Thomas Iremonger. Surprisingly, it was the journalists rather than the politicians who were found to be most partisan.

After 1947, the *Round Table* published regular "chronicles" from both India and Pakistan. At first, these were still written by British expatriates: Geoffrey Tyson, G A Johnson and Neil McInnes (all professional

¹ Morrah to C W M Gell, 12 Nov 1953 (SA file,) RT (O) Papers.

² Morrah to Sir David Lindsay Keir, 19 Jan 1948 (UK file,) RT (O) Papers.

³ Sayers to Morrah, 12 Nov 1964 (1964-65 file,) RT (O) Papers.

⁴ At his own request, Stringer alternated with Frederic W Collins (a freelance journalist) from June 1961.

journalists) in India, and F M Innes and Peter Ensor (both ex-ICS, now businessmen) in Pakistan. Not until 1954 was the responsibility for these articles transferred to indigenous journalists. N Majumder provided articles from India until 1960, Eric da Costa thereafter. Osman Siddiqui sent articles from Pakistan until 1966. At first Morrah found these articles "a good deal more tendentious than we have been accustomed to"; but "that I think we must expect if we decide to go on employing aboriginal pens".¹

The *Round Table's* coverage of the dependent Empire (other than India) had been very patchy before 1939. Morrah saw it as one of the tasks of his editorship to rectify this situation.² "Policy" articles on West Africa, the West Indies, Ceylon, Malaya, etc, constituted a significantly increased proportion of the *Round Table* after 1945; nevertheless, regular "chronicles" were ruled out because of considerations of space. An exception was made for Central and (briefly) East Africa. From 1954, the *Round Table* published six-monthly articles by Garfield Todd, D T M Williams and John Spicer on Central Africa, and by Anthony Low on East Africa. Here the Moot was less inclined to employ "aboriginal pens".

When the *Round Table* was first published in 1910, it was a virtually unique source of information on different aspects of Empire politics. After 1945 this was no longer the case. There were now several other journals specialising in Commonwealth affairs (such as *The Commonwealth and Empire Review*, or London University's *Colonial Review*) as well as a host of academic journals on related subjects. Moreover, newspapers, radio and television were now able to provide a far broader coverage of international

¹ Morrah to Hodson, 29 Nov 1954 (India file,) RT (O) Papers.

² Morrah to Brand, 2 April 1948, Brand Papers, box 171.

news, with none of the problems inherent in a publication which, as soon as it appeared, was "two to three months behind events".¹ In 1955 Hodson, with his wide experience in journalism, "raised the question whether it was possible for a quarterly to survive". Nevertheless, the Moot was understandably reluctant to close the *Round Table*: "the general feeling was that provided the magazine dealt with a sufficient number of fundamental issues of long-term interest there was still an important rôle for the journal to fill".²

Hodson had a point, however. The *Round Table's* paid circulation, after reviving briefly in the late 1940s, declined from 2408 in 1950 to 1436 in 1960.³ (The *Round Table's* actual readership was much higher, of course: many subscribers were libraries, banks and companies with an interest in foreign affairs, government departments, officers' messes and the like.) The financial implications were disturbing. By 1960 the *Round Table* was making a trading loss of £2391 pa, rising to £4388 in 1965.⁴ Bailey's £1000 pa came to an end in 1964. The *Round Table's* investments now had to be sold off at an alarming rate. By 1965 the *Round Table* was heading for an unprecedented financial crisis.⁵

1 H Kidd to Macadam, 14 Jan 1959 (SA file,) RT (O) Papers.

2 Minutes of RT meeting, 14 Dec 1955, RT (O) Papers.

3 Minutes, 9 Dec 1959, and Report of the Council for 1960 (Annual Reports file,) RT (O) Papers. By now the US was the largest customer after the UK, closely followed by New Zealand (which took more copies than Canada, Australia and South Africa combined).

4 Annual Reports for 1960 and 1965. (The 1965 figure included Beaton's salary as assistant editor, as well as Morräh's as editor.)

5 Marris, "The Round Table: Investments and Financial Position" [1965] (Beaton file), RT (O) Papers.

Defence and Foreign Policy

The last *Round Table* article to suggest a concerted defence policy for the Commonwealth was published in December 1950.¹ Even before then, however, the Moot had distanced itself from such ideas. Responding to Menzies' call for a Commonwealth committee on the lines of the CID, Morrah observed that "no special apparatus for achieving a united Commonwealth policy either existed or was demanded by member Governments". Nor was it likely that there was a need.² Local and specific collaboration was still possible, as when China threatened India, or Indonesia menaced Malaysia. But the idea of a Commonwealth defence system was now patently anachronistic.

The early Round Tablers had favoured Commonwealth integration partly in order to provide a framework for Britain's own defence. Now Britain clearly derived the bulk of this support from elsewhere. The American alliance was believed to be vital for British security. So, too, was an alliance with other nations in western Europe. The Dominions no longer looked primarily to Britain to supplement their own defence. In the case of Canada, this was implicit in the Ogdensburg agreements of 1940. In the case of the Pacific Dominions, the notion of a British-led defence system survived a little longer³, but finally succumbed under the impact of Mao Tse-Tung and the Korean war. The ANZUS treaty of 1952 passed almost without comment in the *Round Table*.

One Canadian contributor to the *Round Table* asserted that "the common

¹ [Anthony Head,] "Manning the Defences", *RT*, Dec 1950, pp 44-51.

² [Morrah,] "The United Nations in Action", *RT*, Sept 1950, pp 299-303.

³ See, eg, [Sawer,] "Australia: A Debate on Foreign Policy", *RT*, Sept 1948, pp 808-13.

British assumption" was "that Canada and Australia have been seduced from their allegiance by the Americans".¹ This was not the case with the London Round Tablers, who were only too conscious that the "old" Dominions, like Britain itself, were merely asserting their own national interests in a world profoundly different to that which existed before 1939. In the new security systems created after 1945 Commonwealth membership was "simply irrelevant".² "We still seek to preserve world peace by concentrations of unchallengeable force", Morrah observed in 1960; "but the Commonwealth is not one of them".³

If Britain and the old Dominions afforded striking evidence of the redundancy of "Commonwealth unity in defence and foreign policy", the new Dominions provided conclusive proof. Nehru's policy of non-alignment (subsequently followed by Ceylon, Ghana and other Afro-Asian member-states) was the negation of the old conception of Commonwealth unity. The *Round Table's* Indian correspondent was often savage in his attacks on Nehru's policy.⁴ The Moot was far more circumspect. Hodson merely suggested that, by keeping India in the Commonwealth, Nehru tacitly admitted "that complete national independence is an illusion".⁵ On the whole, Hodson recalled, "there was no feeling that 'he who is not for us is against us'. India's non-alignment was regretted but her reasons were well understood".⁶

1 [Holmes,] "Can the Commonwealth Survive?", *RT*, Dec 1963, p 14.

2 [Sydney group,] "The Commonwealth: An Australian View", *RT*, 9.60, p 355.

3 [Morrah,] "The Commonwealth: A United Kingdom View, *ibid*, p 335.

4 See, eg, [Majumder,] "The Foreign Policy of Mr Nehru", *RT*, Sept 1954, pp 363-68.

5 [Hodson,] "The Future of the Commonwealth", *RT*, June 1956, p 220.

6 Hodson to author, 2 Sept 1994.

The Commonwealth had thus "quite ceased to be a unit of power in the sense that Curtis postulated".¹ But if Curtis's vision was no longer relevant, other ideas of the early Round Tablers still were. In particular, Kerr's "larger idea" seemed more realistic now than when it was first enunciated. As Brand put it in 1946, "the problem of the British Commonwealth" was "more or less merged . . . in the problem of the English-speaking nations".²

In his inaugural lecture as Smuts Professor at Cambridge, Mansergh suggested that if "the United States is not within, equally it is not altogether without the contemporary Commonwealth".³ Most overseas writers for the *Round Table* also assumed that the Commonwealth as a whole was intimately linked to the United States, as a result of Britain's "special relationship". The Canadian and Australian contributors to the September 1960 *Round Table* agreed that their Commonwealth links enhanced their countries' ability to "exert the proper suasion on American leadership".⁴ Even the Indian contributor gave the Geneva Conference of 1954 as an example of the fact that, as a result of her links with Britain, India "could not be ignored by the United States".⁵ The American contributor, for his part, saw the Commonwealth as "a bridge to the whole uncommitted world".⁶

1 [Morrah,] "The Commonwealth: A UK View", *RT*, Sept 1960, p 335.

2 Brand to Lippmann, 30 Dec 1946, Brand Papers, box 171.

3 Mansergh, *The Name and Nature of the Commonwealth* (Cambridge, 1954), p 28.

4 [Brady,] "The Commonwealth: A Canadian View", *RT*, Sept 1960, p 343; cf [Sydney group,] "An Australian View", *ibid*, p 350.

5 [Majumder,] "An Indian View", *ibid*, p 377.

6 [Canham,] "A View from the United States", *ibid*, p 390.

To what extent, therefore, did the Round Tablers see the "special relationship" as a means of extending (or, at least, prolonging) Britain's global influence? Were they, like Macmillan, tempted to see Britain's rôle as playing Greece to America's Rome? The answers are by no means straightforward. Certainly, the most common image of America was still that of a "young" nation: naïve, but teachable. Britain, for her part, was "full of garnered knowledge", even if "overcome for a while with weariness".¹ But the Round Tablers were seldom tempted to over-estimate Britain's purchase on American policy, or to under-estimate the countervailing influences operating in Washington.² As one Canadian contributor wrote, America's policy was neither "invariably wise", nor always responsive to the interests of her coalition partners.³

The possibilities but also the limitations of the Anglo-American "special relationship" were perhaps best illustrated in the Middle East. In the early 1950s, this was one area where Britain could still claim to exercise a predominant Imperial power. The "cold war" reinforced the inclination to "hang on", in order to counter Soviet expansion and to retain a leverage on American policy. Both considerations "forced the policy makers . . . into much less flexible postures than they would have liked".⁴

On Egypt the Moot appears to have been divided. The *Round Table* carried contradictory articles: one by Julian Amery arguing for the

1 Caroe, *The Wells of Power* (London, 1951), p xviii.

2 See here Hodson, *The Atlantic Future: Problems in Anglo-American Relations* (London, 1963).

3 [Brady,] "A Canadian View", *RT*, Sept 1960, p 343.

4 John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation* (London, 1988), p 145.

retention of Britain's presence, others by Sir Frederick Leith-Ross discounting the strategic importance of the Canal and describing Britain's position as "untenable".¹ But on the general question of Britain's strategic interests in the Middle East there appears to have been little disagreement. Curtis adopted what Brand called "a tough imperialist attitude" after visiting Cyprus: indeed, he thought that the reasons for holding on to Cyprus were "now twice as strong as when Disraeli bought the island".² Caroe also emphasised the strategic significance of the Middle East, although he concentrated on the oilfields of the Persian Gulf rather than on Egypt or Cyprus.

With Curtis's encouragement, Caroe worked up a *Round Table* article of March 1949 into a book, *The Wells of Power*, published in 1951.³ This urged that "something . . . be put in the place of British power as exercised from India". His specific solution was for a "Northern Screen" extending from Pakistan to Turkey, supplied and guaranteed by the Commonwealth and the Atlantic Powers.⁴ After the publication of his book Caroe

"went on a tour of the U.S. for the British Foreign Office . . . and had talks with State Department officials and others on these lines I have more than once ventured to flatter myself that J F Dulles' phrase 'the Northern Tier' and his association of the U.S. with the 'Baghdad' countries

¹ [Amery,] "The Future of the Suez Canal Zone", *RT*, June 1953, pp 220-27; [Leith-Ross,] "The Egyptian Imbroglia", *RT*, March 1952, pp 113-25; [*idem*,] "Cross-Purposes in Egypt", *RT*, June 1954, pp 223-35.

² Brand to Macadam, 31 Jan 1952, Brand Papers, box 171; [Curtis,] "Review of the Survival of Political Man by Errol E Harris", nd [May 1952], *RT Papers* c 865, fols 154-57.

³ Caroe's article was "The Persian Gulf: A Romance", pp 131-37; for Curtis, see Curtis to Sir Wm Haley, 27 Oct 1952, *RT Papers* c 865, fol 202.

⁴ Caroe, *The Wells of Power* (London, 1951), pp 185 and *passim*.

in Asia were influenced by the thinking in *Wells of Power*.¹

Nevertheless Caroe's influence was both limited and short-lived. His insistence that "the prerequisite of any effective policy" was an Anglo-American policy on Palestine "on lines which must commend themselves to Asiatic opinion"² fell on deaf ears. By the late 1950s American policy in the Middle East was "in an awful mess". The new emphasis on "an American M.E. policy 'free of entanglements'" Caroe found "both naïve and disconcerting".³

Caroe's experience thus underlined what was already known in the abstract: that America could not be relied on merely to underwrite British policies. The most striking illustration of this was, of course, the Suez crisis, when the United States showed an "apparently uncritical support for Nasser and his ambitions"⁴, and Britain and France were forced to beat an ignominious retreat.

Commonwealth Relations

The Suez crisis has rightly been seen as a pivotal episode in postwar British policy. It raised fundamental questions concerning Britain's capacity to act as an independent power, the nature of the Anglo-American relationship, the rôle of the United Nations, and the extent of Britain's commitment to the Commonwealth. The crisis divided the Moot, with the

¹ Quoted in C Hitchens, *Blood, Class and Nostalgia* (London, 1990), pp 289-90.

² Caroe, *The Wells of Power* (London, 1951), p 155.

³ Caroe to Morrah, 19 Jan 1958 (Dormant file,) RT (O) Papers.

⁴ [Sir Geoffrey Furlonge,] "The Middle East Imbroglia", RT, June 1963, p 240.

result that "we had to hold three successive dinners . . . before we could get enough agreement . . . to make a leading article".¹ The latter took the patriotic view that the intervention was justified even if it was bungled; but it relied heavily on the government's claim that the aim was to separate the Israeli and Egyptian armies.²

India was especially critical of Britain's action - prompting some members of the Moot to question the value of her continuing Commonwealth membership.³ Canada was also strongly critical, and not just because of the "very inadequate 'public relations' job" which the secretary of the Toronto group blamed.⁴

In its Commonwealth context, the Suez crisis raised an additional question: why it was that Britain failed to consult its partners. As Mansergh later emphasised, this failure "added to the sense of outrage".⁵ Writing for the *Round Table*, Hodson suggested that Britain's partners might have read the signs. But on the whole he thought that Britain's failure to consult them - before acting "outside previously declared policies, in a way that intimately concerned their interests, and might have provoked war" - a lamentable example of a Commonwealth member "unwilling to fulfil the responsibilities of 'belonging together'".⁶ Marris saw the episode as "a

¹ Morrah to J W Collins, 6 March 1957 (NZ file,) RT (O) Papers.

² [Morrah,] "After the Cease-Fire", *RT*, Dec 1956, pp 3-7.

³ Caroe to Morrah, 28 Nov 1956 (ed ctee file,) RT (O) Papers. Indians themselves (including Rajagopalachari) put the same question.

⁴ Macdonnell to Morrah, 23 Jan 1957 (Toronto file,) RT (O) Papers.

⁵ Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience* (London, 1982 edn), Vol 2, p 171.

⁶ [Hodson,] "The Commonwealth and the Crisis", *RT*, March 1957, pp 114-20.

negation of all that the Round Table stood for, not necessarily because the policy of invading Egypt was wrong, but because the action was taken unilaterally".¹

What is perhaps most surprising is the strength of this emphasis on consultation. The Commonwealth was no longer "a unit of power"; only some of its members shared a common foreign policy. Why, then, the need for consultation? And yet the need was felt. Clearly, therefore, the Commonwealth had a continuing function in the formulation of its members' foreign policies, which the Round Tablers and - to judge by their reactions to the Suez crisis - most of the member governments still thought to be important. But Suez inevitably had an impact on this aspect of Commonwealth relations. Before the crisis, it was still possible to talk of Commonwealth members "modifying our own several views by the process of discussing them . . . under the Commonwealth shelter".² After, it was possible only to speak of governments "know[ing] one another's minds".³

The Suez crisis had another effect, in Britain itself, and especially on the right of the Conservative Party: which was to embolden those critics of the Commonwealth who, having always seen it as an instrument of British policy, now derided it as a liability. In the late 1950s these critics were still relatively mute, but with the rapid broadening of the Commonwealth they constituted, by the early 1960s, a vocal chorus. The Round Table characterised them as "the racists, the narrow regionalists and single-minded believers in national sovereignty".⁴ They were thought to

¹ Marris to Macadam, 22 March 1958 (Sydney file,) RT (O) Papers.

² [Hodson,] "The Future of the Commonwealth", RT, June 1956, p 220.

³ [Morrah,] "The Commonwealth: A UK View", RT, Sept 1960, p 338.

⁴ [T Raison,] "The New Round Table", RT, July 1966, p 214.

be unrepresentative of the Conservative party, and certainly a small minority of the British people as a whole.' But the *Round Table* was the first to admit that they had a point. The Commonwealth was the outcome of a "resilient pragmatism"; it had to demonstrate its continuing value if it were to survive. "Is there anything which the Commonwealth does that cannot as well be done without it? . . . Has it still a meaning and is it still worthwhile?"²

In September 1960 the *Round Table* brought together answers to these questions from various parts of the Commonwealth, and from the United States. Most were realistic, unsentimental, yet also profoundly positive about the new Commonwealth which (as most acknowledged) had come into existence as a result of the decisions of 1947-49.

The *Round Table's* Indian correspondent observed that Indians had now forgotten "the bitter memories, and remembered only the pleasant aspects, of their relations with Britain"; and that "the politically articulate sections of the people" were still "steeped in British ways of life and thought".³ Morrah expanded the point. British rule - like the Roman Empire - had brought with it a "stock of possessions" which would continue "to fortify the nations of the Commonwealth": in particular, the English language and English common law.⁴ Other writers cast their nets wider. A *Round Table* editorial of 1966 asserted that the Commonwealth existed partly

¹ [T Raison,] "Is the Commonwealth a Farce?", *RT*, June 1964, pp 215-21; S C Leslie, "British Attitudes to the Commonwealth", *RT*, July 1973, pp 363-75.

² [Hodson,] "The Future of the Commonwealth", *RT*, June 1956, pp 218-19.

³ [Majumder,] "The Commonwealth: An Indian View", *RT*, Sept 1960, pp 372, 376.

⁴ [Morrah,] "A UK View", *ibid.*, pp 339-40.

in order to foster "liberal, constitutional and democratic institutions" in its member-states.

"The political systems of these countries must increasingly adapt to the spirit and character of their peoples. But it is important that they should retain certain essential elements in the British tradition: the independence of the judiciary, the integrity of the public service, a high standard of business ethics and the freedom of the Press."¹

This emphasis on the building-blocks of the "British" inheritance continued to inform a large part of subsequent Round Table discussion of the "meaning" of the Commonwealth.

The assumption that Britain had used its power in the past to promote "British" political values was, at the very least, open to question. But the assumption was not really essential to the argument: the postwar Commonwealth was, after all, a very different creature from the earlier Empire. A more serious criticism might be that the Round Tablers' views were a little fanciful in a Commonwealth which included Ayoub Khan's Pakistan or Nkrumah's Ghana - let alone one which was soon to contain a near-majority of dictatorships and one-party states. Indeed, the secretary of the Sydney group wrote in 1965 that "some members have questioned whether any content remains in the Commonwealth idea when it includes countries with the policy at present carried on by Ghana".² Nevertheless, the revival of democratic values in the Commonwealth, in the 1980s and '90s, reflects well on the Round Table's tenacity.

The Round Tablers' emphasis on a common bedrock of liberal and (as they saw them) "British" values was one answer to the question: what is the meaning of the Commonwealth? But the Round Tablers also offered another

¹ [T Raison,] "The New Round Table", *RT*, July 1966, p 212.

² MacCallum to Marris, 27 July 1965 (1964-65 file,) *RT* (O) Papers.

answer, perhaps more in line with the realities of the contemporary Commonwealth. This was that "it is in the bridge concept that the principal worth of the new Commonwealth resides".¹

The "bridge concept" applied at a non-governmental level: facilitating those "inter-relations of a cultural, professional and private kind" which Hodson described as "the grass-roots of the Commonwealth, little affected by the political mowing-machine".² The "bridge concept" also applied at an official level. If the Commonwealth had lost its value as a "unit of power", by the same token it had gained a valuable new rôle, as one of the few associations which enabled representatives of countries with very different policies to meet "not to agree but to seek to understand".³ There was still much actual co-operation at an official level, on such matters as finance, trade, education and research. The Commonwealth also opened up many bilateral relationships. One weakness of the Commonwealth which the New Zealand contributor identified in 1960 was that in most cases the strongest ties were still with Britain.⁴ But the London contribution welcomed the close ties between Canada and India as an example of what could be achieved, and expressed a hope that in the future "there will be a complete nexus, providing equally firm ties of each with each".⁵

The most important application of the "bridge concept", in Morrah's view, was one which was only made possible by the development of the "new"

1 [Morrah,] "A UK View", *RT*, Sept 1960, p 338.

2 [Hodson,] "The Future of the Commonwealth", *RT*, June 1956, p 220.

3 [Holmes,] "Can the Commonwealth Survive?", *RT*, Dec 1963, p 15.

4 [Aikman,] "A New Zealand View", *RT*, Sept 1960, pp 362-63.

5 [Morrah,] "A UK View", *ibid*, pp 337-38.

Commonwealth after 1947-49.

"The determining feature of the present Commonwealth, and its principal point of contrast with the Commonwealth of the past, is its multi-racial character. It is important to look at this as a positive foundation for the development of the future Commonwealth, and not as a dilution of its more concentrated integrity when under white hegemony."¹

A few of the older Round Tablers found it difficult to look on the multi-racial character of the Commonwealth as a "positive foundation". Brand, for instance, regarded the "old" Dominions as the only "real part of the Commonwealth which still exists".² Nevertheless, by the early 1960s most Round Tablers were at least realistic and often emphatically positive about the multi-racial character of the Commonwealth as a whole. (They were also positive about the increasingly multi-racial character of Britain.³) The contrast with a previous age was often striking. It would not have been possible for Kerr or Curtis, for instance, to have written that West Indians or Africans or Indians "have also a good deal to give to their fellow members of the Commonwealth"; or that "their cultures have riches which we are beginning to appreciate".⁴

Decolonisation

"It is a most difficult thing to judge at what stage . . . a colonial power is to consider it justifiable to hand over authority", Hailey said in

¹ [Morrah,] "A UK View", *RT*, Sept 1960, p 336.

² Brand to Hodson, 21 Aug 1962, Brand Papers, box 171.

³ See, for instance, the three articles published under the title "Britain and Her Immigrants" in June [Sheila Patterson], September [Alfred Sherman] and December 1965 [Sir George Sinclair]. Sherman's was hostile to the new wave of immigration, but was accompanied by an editorial disclaimer. The other two were not.

⁴ [T Raison,] "Is the Commonwealth a Farce?", *RT*, June 1964, p 221.

1955. But he gave it as his opinion that there was

"no other way than to apply the purely pragmatic test that when people really want it they will be able to show it so strongly that it is better to give it to them. Otherwise the whole course of administration is going to be too much of a burden, both to the government and the people".¹

Bailey's judgment might almost be considered an epitome of expert and official British opinion in the age of decolonisation. Nevertheless, there were important exceptions to Hailey's rule of thumb, and it was only after the majority of colonies was firmly on the road to independence that the process was recognised as being "impossible to stop".²

The most plausible accounts of decolonisation emphasise the need for a "pluralist" explanation. Changes in Britain, the colonies, and the wider international context all need to be taken into account; and their interactions in particular circumstances offer the best hope of explaining both individual acts of decolonisation and the general process itself.³

Hailey's observations of 1955 indicate that he laid more stress on the metropolitan and colonial than the international aspects of the problem. This was also true of most contributors to the *Round Table* magazine. In the case of Malaya, the "cold war" clearly delayed the transfer of power. Those writers who saw the possibility of a similar Communist threat in Africa tended to emphasise the importance of preparing colonies more thoroughly for independence.⁴ Other writers, such as Elspeth

1 Hailey, "Post-War Changes in Africa", *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol CIII, no 4955 (8 July 1955), pp 579-90.

2 [Howick,] "Transition in Kenya", *RT*, June 1961, p 272.

3 A N Porter and A J Stockwell, *British Imperial Policy and Decolonization, 1938-64: Vol 1* (London, 1987), pp 3-7; John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation* (London, 1988).

4 Eg, "The Cold War in the Tropics", *RT*, Dec 1960, pp 15-21.

Huxley, discounted the appeal of Communism.¹ The "cold war" was therefore regarded either as an unimportant factor in decolonisation, or as a reason for delaying the process - not as a reason for hastening it. American anti-colonialism was less of a worry, too. Morrah believed that it was on the wane.² Hailey reacted furiously when one article invoked it. "Since when have we come to welcome the US as a partner in the control of our dependencies?"³

Most of those associated with the *Round Table* thus saw decolonisation primarily as the outcome of the metropolitan-colonial relationship. Hailey thought that the two most important factors involved were Britain's reluctance to incur the financial and political costs of repression, and the inevitability of the growth of local nationalism. The first governed attitudes to the second, so that (Hailey implied) nationalists would effectively be knocking at an open door. Perhaps the classic example of this was the Gold Coast. Oliver Woods argued in the *Round Table* that the "all-pervading" support for Nkrumah's CPP made self-government unavoidable.⁴ But most writers in the *Round Table* were unhappy with the simple formula of nationalist demands leading to metropolitan concessions, even if they recognised it to be basically true. A larger rôle was still envisaged for the metropolitan power. As Sir Evelyn Baring (Lord Howick) put it, the government's aim should not be to gain "a perhaps transitory popularity with the more impatient and vocal . . . Nationalists", but to

¹ [Huxley,] "The Ethos of Negro Africa", *RT*, Dec 1960, pp 7-14.

² [Morrah,] "The Commonwealth: A UK View", *RT*, Sept 1960, pp 336-37.

³ Hailey to Morrah, 25 June [1962] (Rhodesias file,) *RT* (O) Papers.

⁴ [Woods,] "Self-Government in the Gold Coast", *RT*, Sept 1952, pp 326-32.

give "as good a chance as . . . possible . . . to a new and independent government to succeed".¹ What, then, were the conditions of success? Alternatively, what were the preconditions of British departure?

First it is necessary to draw a distinction between those colonies which contained a significant number of white settlers and those which did not. Central Africa clearly came into the first category. Kenya and Tanganyika were also conceived in the same terms until the late 1950s - both initially received "multi-racial" (ie weighted) constitutions. The *Round Table* had adopted an equivocal line on East Africa in the 1930s, torn between the settler and trusteeship ideals. The same was true in the 1950s. Elspeth Huxley argued that the British government was honour-bound not to give in to the "rising [African] racialist tide".² In the same issue, however, Anthony Low argued that "the years of multiracialism are already numbered", and that "concessions will be forced from the Government and the Europeans unless they make them gracefully".³ Low reiterated his doubts in subsequent articles. The demise of "multi-racialism" in East Africa was therefore something for which *Round Table* readers should have been prepared.

The problem of co-existence between different ethnic groups was not confined to the areas of European settlement. It was perhaps at its most acute in Malaya. Sir Sidney Caine, writing in 1953, believed that Malaya would have to remain under British rule for "at least a generation", if "acute internal dissension" were to be avoided.⁴ (Four years later, he

1 [Howick,] "Transition in Kenya", *RT*, June 1961, pp 272-77.

2 [Huxley,] "Economic Man in East Africa", *RT*, Sept 1955, pp 323-33.

3 [Low,] "East Africa: The Royal Commission", *RT*, Sept 1955, pp 419-24.

4 [Caine,] "Malaya after the Emergency", *RT*, Sept 1953, pp 350-58.

was welcoming Malayan independence, albeit sceptically.) Inter-ethnic rivalry was again a recurrent theme of the *Round Table's* coverage of Africa. Elspeth Huxley asserted that "fitness for self-government presupposes a political unit which is, so to speak, self-governable". She went on to list examples of the way in which the "cartographer-countries" of Africa flew in the face of ethnic facts, and suggested a need for redrawing boundaries to create "viable political units" before further moves towards self-government.¹ Ethnic tensions were seen as one reason why Ghana and other countries descended into one-party rule so soon after independence.²

The need to create "viable political units" was believed to work also in the opposite direction, in favour of amalgamation or federation on a regional basis. This was, of course, believed to apply with special force to Central and East Africa. In the latter case, Howick argued for the maintenance of existing (High Commission) co-ordination even after the demise of "multi-racialism".³ Another area where federation was believed to be an essential prerequisite to independence was the British Caribbean. In 1949 G N N Nunn listed the (mainly economic) reasons: the need for planning development, raising loans, redistributing population and encouraging agricultural diversity rather than inter-island competition.⁴ The demise of the short-lived West Indian Federation was thought to leave a question-mark over the viability of many of the smaller

1 [Huxley,] "African Independence and After", *RT*, Dec 1955, pp 17-26.

2 [Ali Mazrui,] "Constitutional Experiment in Africa", *RT*, June 1963, pp 241-49.

3 [Howick,] "Transition in Kenya", *RT*, June 1961, pp 272-77.

4 [Nunn,] "Federation in the British Caribbean", *RT*, June 1949, pp 234-39.

islands.¹

One consideration which applied to all colonies approaching independence was the need to build up a cadre of indigenous administrators. The progress made in this direction in the Gold Coast was thought to be one reason why self-government was possible at such an early stage there.² Elsewhere, progress was not so good. Hailey's main criticism "of the pace adopted by us" in Africa was that, unlike the comparable situation in India, "little or nothing has been done in the years gone past to prepare the African by experience of administration to take up the new powers that are being given to him".³ Most writers thought that the newly-independent countries would have to rely on British or European expatriates for some time to come. In some cases (such as Nigeria) the generous pensions for administrators taking early retirement were criticised, on the grounds that more encouragement should be given to them to stay.⁴

The counterpart to administrative preparation was political preparation, and here again there were grounds for thinking that the pace of decolonisation was too fast. Hailey, after writing a memoir on Curtis and dyarchy in India, opined to Morrah that a similar "school for embryo ministers" would have been useful in Africa.⁵ Hailey's doubts went further. As he earlier wrote to Curtis, in his heart of hearts he believed that parliamentary self-government was "not suited to oriental or African

1 [Lady Huggins,] "Failure of a Federation", *RT*, June 1962, pp 273-78.

2 [Woods,] "A Nascent Dominion", *RT*, March 1955, pp 149-55.

3 Hailey, "Post-War Changes in Africa", *loc cit.*

4 [Sir Henry Willink,] "Nigeria: The African Giant", *RT*, Dec 1959, pp 55-63.

5 Hailey to Morrah, 18 Sept 1960, *RT Papers* c 867, fols 73-74.

social conditions".¹ Most contributors were optimistic regarding the future of parliamentary institutions in Britain's ex-colonies.

Nevertheless, many shared Hailey's doubts about the pace of reform. As Elspeth Huxley wrote in 1955, parliamentary government was "as much a European invention as the internal combustion engine or the dynamo; and like these, it needs a certain grasp of technique . . . to make it work".²

Two questions might be put in conclusion. How did the Round Tablers view the process of decolonisation as a whole? And was the Round Table an influence on government policy? It is perhaps easier to answer the second question than the first. There is little evidence to suggest that contributors to the *Round Table* attempted to influence short-term policy. Most articles were retrospective comments on British moves: it was the government which set the agenda, and forced the pace. The Moot itself was more interested in the effects of newly-independent countries on the Commonwealth than in the processes which led to independence. In most cases it is not clear what the Moot's views were. But if the contributions of outside writers are taken as a guide, it is clear that attitudes to decolonisation were, at best, equivocal. Most writers recognised what Anthony Low described as the "Scylla and Charybdis" of British policy: the dangers of going too fast or of going too slow.³ Many writers (but not Low) erred on the side of caution. "What is needed above all else is time", Elspeth Huxley wrote in 1955.⁴ Yet time was in perilously short supply. Most writers therefore simply made the best of the circumstances.

1 Hailey to Curtis, 17 April 1947, Hailey Papers, MSS Brit Emp s 343.

2 [Huxley,] "African Independence and After", *loc cit.*

3 [Low,] "East Africa", *RT*, March 1956, pp 202-08.

4 [Huxley,] "Economic Man in East Africa", *RT*, Sept 1955, p 332.

South Africa

Historically, the Round Table was linked in a peculiar degree to South Africa. The older Round Tablers (Altrincham and Horsfall, as well as the "Kindergarten" members) always retained a sympathy for the position of the whites in Africa, and for the notion of a white cultural (and, in a few cases, racial) superiority. Yet the Round Table was also in the forefront of those extolling the Commonwealth as a "bridge" between races. The contradiction was always latent in Round Tablers' views. After 1948 - with a South African government wedded to discrimination not "as a phase" but "in perpetuity" - the contradiction had to be faced. Inevitably, different members responded in different ways. Even if all could agree in rejecting the policies of the Nationalist government, apartheid raised fundamental questions which were painful, discomforting and divisive.

Curtis's response to the South African situation was idiosyncratic. Although no "racist" in the modern sense of the word - he came "to realise our own crime in treating the Native majority as helots", and protested strongly against the unofficial "colour bar" in his London club² - South Africa was still his blind spot. In 1947 and again in 1952 he argued for what was, in effect, total apartheid. The instrument of his proposal was the creation of a "Negro Dominion" (initially under international, including South African, control) north of the Zambezi, which would, in his view, exercise an "overpowering" attraction to the millions of black South

¹ [Morrah,] "A Leaf Falls", *RT*, June 1961, pp 219-23.

² Letter to *Johannesburg Star*, reprinted in *Windows of Freedom and Other Papers* (Oxford, 1952), pp 39-42; Curtis to Philip Radcliffe (Oxford & Cambridge Club), 31 Aug 1955, *RT Papers* c 866, fol 195.

Africans, who would migrate north, and "the dream of a white South Africa would be realised".¹ Curtis had two main points: first, that South Africa should be allowed to expand to include South-West Africa, Southern Rhodesia and the Protectorates; and secondly that apartheid should be treated with sympathy, to the extent that regional policies should be governed by the attempt to make "white South Africa" a reality.

Curtis was alone in favouring South African absorption of Southern Rhodesia: most of the Moot supported the alternative policy of Central African Federation, partly as a counter-weight to "Afrikaner" domination to the south. The transfer of the Protectorates was no longer considered a serious proposition, either. Indeed, the *Round Table* now published articles by Romney Sedgwick, Sir Evelyn Baring and Maud, all arguing strongly against transfer and in favour of a more active British policy of development.²

On the second point Curtis clearly struck a chord amongst older Round Tablers, but on the question of solutions he was again largely isolated.

In Brand's view, the determining factor was that

"black and white are inextricably mixed in South Africa. If the whites went, the blacks would sink back into barbarism; if the blacks went, the whole of the South African economy would be irretrievably ruined".³

Brand recognised that apartheid was a sham. Nevertheless, his opposition to racial discrimination was limited by his continuing belief in the

¹ Curtis, "South Africa's Future in the Commonwealth", *Listener*, Vol XXVII, (3 April 1947), pp 489-91; *Windows of Freedom*, *loc cit.*

² [Sedgwick,] "A Trust in Africa", *RT*, March 1950, pp 121-26; [Baring,] "The High Commission Territories", *RT*, March 1952, pp 141-51; [Maud,] "The High Commission Territories", *RT*, Dec 1963, pp 26-50. Baring was British High Commissioner in South Africa 1944-51, Maud 1959-63.

³ Brand to Curtis, 3 April 1947, Curtis Papers 98, fol 145.

necessity of a gradualist, "Rhodesian" solution. In 1961 he deplored international condemnation of South Africa, reiterating his belief in a "northern European" antipathy to intermarriage, and asserting that democracy in South Africa was "totally impossible at present" because it would threaten the foundations of a "great commercial, industrial and financial state".¹ Horsfall held similar views, and in 1960 he contributed a *Round Table* article "to argue for a more sympathetic understanding of the complicated situations you [South Africans] have to face".²

Other members of the Moot were more perceptive in realising that the fundamental problem was not just the short-sightedness of the ruling Nationalist party, but the racial aspirations of the white electorate. Hailey - perhaps exceptionally amongst the older generation of Round Tablers - argued such a case after reading an article by Edgar Brookes on the erosion of civil liberties in South Africa.

"I accept the conclusion it draws, namely, that the maintenance of White supremacy must inevitably involve a régime which makes it impossible to maintain civil liberties . . . but I do not find that this conclusion shocks the White population here (British or Afrikaner) as much as it should do. It seems to me that most White people here are content to feel that if White supremacy cannot be retained without offence to the principle of Civil Liberty, then so much the worse for the principle."³

Hailey's attitude to apartheid was again different in that he understood clearly the international implications involved. Whereas Curtis, Brand and Horsfall all saw apartheid as a "South African problem" - and argued that

1 *Hansard (Lords)*, 5th series, Vol 229, (23 March 1961), cols 1259-62.

2 Morrah to Kidd, 29 April 1960 (SA file,) RT (O) Papers; the article was "The South African Tragedy", RT, June 1960, pp 221-33.

3 Hailey (from South Africa) to Hodson, 13 Oct 1959 (SA file,) RT (O) Papers.

criticism from Britain or elsewhere was inappropriate - Hailey realised that failure to criticise South African policies "will discount the estimation in which the Commonwealth is held and will certainly impair the influence it can exercise in world affairs".¹ This consideration - as well as opposition to the effects of apartheid in South Africa itself - weighed heavily also with the younger Round Tablers. Hodson, Maud and Mansergh were all committed to the extension of liberal-democratic values and to the vision of a multi-racial Commonwealth. Writing in the *Round Table*, Hodson made clear that there could only be one answer if the Nationalists forced Britain and her other partners "to choose between a uni-racial Commonwealth with South Africa as a member and a multi-racial Commonwealth without her".²

Morraah was concerned to handle the question of apartheid "with special editorial punctilio"; indeed, "the more we oppose apartheid the more careful we must be to do justice to its advocates".³ This reasoning led the *Round Table* to publish a statement of the Nationalist view, approved and amended by Verwoerd after an interview by Brand and Erwin Schuller.⁴ (The *Johannesburg Star* re-printed the article, with the comment that it had had to go "far afield" to find such a reasoned statement of the government's case.⁵) The Moot was also anxious to publish more radical

1 Hailey, "African Colonies and the Crown", *Listener*, Vol XXXVII, (10 April 1947), pp 542-43.

2 [Hodson,] "Dr Malan and the Commonwealth", *RT*, June 1951, pp 219-26.

3 Morraah to Lord Gladwyn, 9 Dec 1964 and 11 Dec 1964 (1964-65 file,) RT (O) Papers.

4 [Schuller/Verwoerd,] "Apartheid in Practice", *RT*, June 1954, pp 259-63.

5 *Johannesburg Star*, 2 Aug 1954.

criticism of the government's policies than was obtained through the South African group. At the cost of friction with the latter, the London group obtained articles from Pat Duncan and C W M Gell, both of whom argued that only extra-parliamentary agitation would bring about the fall of the Nationalist government.¹

The South African group included notable liberals in the form of Leo Marquand, Harry Lawrence and Edgar Brookes. But the majority of the group consisted of supporters of the United Party, including its leader, Sir J P de Villiers Graaff. The group found it difficult to conceive of an opposition to apartheid which was not constitutional (and therefore purely white). There was little attempt to cover what Pat Duncan described as "the vital political struggle . . . the acharné struggle for the soul of the rising African political movement".²

The South African group's UP connections also tended to colour its reporting of apartheid legislation. Marquand and Brookes contributed some hard-hitting articles, but the group often insisted on an editorial disclaimer. Other articles gave the impression of extenuating Nationalist policies. Generally, the majority of the group seemed to accept the UP belief that "any fast move in the direction of integrating the non-European peoples" would "alarm the White electorate", and was therefore a political impossibility.³ As Duncan observed. "in stated policy [the UP] differs hardly at all from the Nationalists".⁴ The younger members of the Moot

¹ [Duncan,] "Satyagraha in South Africa", *RT*, March 1953, pp 130-37; [Gell,] "New Parties in South Africa", *RT*, Dec 1953, pp 48-56.

² Duncan to Morrah, 19 Nov 1952 (SA file,) *RT* (O) Papers.

³ "South Africa", *RT*, Dec 1959, pp 90-94.

⁴ [Duncan,] "Satyagraha in South Africa", *RT*, March 1953, pp 130-37.

agreed. In 1954 Morrah reported them as being "disappointed that the United Party has not . . . put up more of a root-and-branch resistance to the policy of apartheid".¹ Morrah was also increasingly critical of the UP, which he came to regard as "ultimately somewhat acquiescent" in the "malpractices" of the Nationalist government.²

Verwoerd's announcement, early in 1960, of a referendum on the republic brought to a head the divergence of opinion between South Africa and the rest of the Commonwealth. Morrah was not optimistic.

"If the republic has to come, I think the prevailing U.K. view would be strongly in favour of keeping it in the Commonwealth. But I don't feel at all confident that all, or even the majority, of the other countries concerned would agree My impression is that the voters on October 5 who think they can have a republic within the Commonwealth for the asking are living in a fool's paradise."³

And so it turned out. The *Round Table* argued in vain for the continued membership of South Africa in order that its government might "be converted to a more humane view of race relations".⁴ Verwoerd himself answered that argument, by his conduct at the Prime Ministers' meeting of March 1961.

Central Africa and Rhodesia

Central Africa raised much the same questions as its neighbour to the south, with two important differences. On the one hand, the white minority

1 Morrah to Mrs James Carruthers (Violet Markham), 9 Dec 1954 (SA file,) RT (O) Papers.

2 Morrah to Kidd, 30 July 1963 (SA file,) RT (O) Papers.

3 Morrah to Kidd, 29 Sept 1960 (SA file,) RT (O) Papers. The Canadian group was of "the general view . . . that S.A. should be kicked out": H W Macdonnell to Morrah, 25 Jan 1961 (Toronto file,) RT (O) Papers.

4 [Morrah,] "A Republic of South Africa", RT, Dec 1960, pp 3-6.

was very much smaller. On the other, it was (until about 1958 or 1959) officially committed to an ideal of "multi-racialism" which deflected some, at least, of the criticism directed at its neighbour. Again there appears to have been a division within the Moot, roughly between older and younger generations.

The older generation was certainly in the ascendant in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In 1949 Elspeth Huxley was commissioned to write on "Greater Rhodesia". She listed the reasons which made federation an "economic necessity", then stated the one reason which counted against federation: the deep cleavage, even opposition, between the native policies of Southern Rhodesia and the territories of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Some compromise on both sides was a necessity.

"The British Government may have to sacrifice, as trustee, some measure of ultimate African self-rule in return for greater security and prosperity. The Europeans of Southern Rhodesia, on the other hand, will have to yield some measure of their resolve to confine the development of each race in separate channels."¹

Malcolm, who wrote on Central Africa the following year, was less restrained. In his view, the British government should seek to persuade Africans that unity was "in their best interests", but it could not allow them to influence its policy. Power must, "so far as human foresight can go, be strictly reserved for the White race".²

Malcolm supported amalgamation of the three territories on the same basis as the Southern Rhodesian constitution - not federation. In 1951 he wrote a trenchant critique of the proposals drawn up by the London

1 [Huxley,] "Greater Rhodesia", *RT*, June 1949, pp 227-33.

2 [Malcolm,] "One Rhodesia or Two?", *RT*, June 1950, pp 220-25.

conference of officials.¹ Altrincham tried to persuade him to moderate his criticism, and arranged a meeting with Welensky, who was prepared to accept the proposals.² Morrah conveyed Sir Evelyn Baring's opinion "that closer union is essential . . . if any balance is to be preserved with the Union at all, and that we are now approaching our last chance to achieve it".³ Malcolm remained impervious. Reserving powers would merely produce friction, without placating African "minority [*sic*] opinion, and that not of a highly enlightened character".⁴

Despite differing on the constitutional question, Altrincham's views were not far out of line with Malcolm's. Commemorating the centenary of Rhodes's birth, he recalled that Rhodes had been a lifelong opponent of "Downing Street", and asserted that black-white relations in Africa were being "embittered by well-meaning interference from oversea". Unlike such "ignorant" meddlers, Rhodes would never have dreamt of "surrendering [Africa's] defence and guidance to its present-day black inhabitants".⁵

Ironically, it was through Malcolm's contacts in the British South Africa Company that Garfield Todd, Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia from 1953 to 1958, was induced to act as the *Round Table's* correspondent.⁶ Todd was a *rara avis* - a liberal white Rhodesian. His articles emphasised that all hope of stability depended on the growth of a more "liberal spirit"

¹ [Malcolm,] "Parturiunt Montes", *RT*, Sept 1951, pp 337-43.

² Altrincham to Morrah, 28 July 1951, and Morrah to Altrincham, 31 July 1951 (Rhodesias file,) *RT* (O) Papers.

³ Morrah to Malcolm, 10 Aug 1951, *ibid.*

⁴ Malcolm, "Closer Union", 19 Sept 1951, *ibid.*

⁵ [Altrincham,] "Rhodes and Rhodesia", *RT*, March 1953, pp 103-17.

⁶ Ellis Robins to Malcolm, 22 March 1954 and cable 27 April 1954 (Rhodesias file,) *RT* (O) Papers.

amongst his white countrymen. After he was ousted by a party coup, Todd grew increasingly outspoken in his attacks on white Rhodesian politics, prompting frequent complaints of bias from Rhodesia House. By 1960 it was clear that Todd's views no longer accorded with the dominant opinion in the Moot. While Morrah expressed the view that the Federation still represented a "middle way" of "partnership", Todd quoted Lord Malvern as speaking of partnership between "the rider and the horse", and called on Britain "to suspend the Southern Rhodesian constitution and to send troops to the Colony".¹

Because of support from younger members of the Moot, Todd was allowed to continue writing for the *Round Table* until June 1962. But his contribution to that issue, again calling for British intervention, was too much for some members. Horsfall thought Todd's views "intolerable", and Todd himself "simply a discredited politician who has lost any support he had in his own country".² Horsfall's view prevailed, and Morrah therefore wrote to Todd to terminate the agreement. The Moot, he said, had asked him to find a correspondent "more in sympathy with official policy both in Salisbury and in Whitehall".³

Harry Grenfell of the Chartered Company then provided a one-off article more on the lines which Morrah required.⁴ A more permanent arrangement was made with D T M Williams, a journalist and public relations officer employed by the Federation. Again he took a strong pro-settler

¹ [Morrah,] "A Republic of South Africa", *RT*, Dec 1960, pp 3-6; [Todd,] "The Monckton Report", *ibid*, pp 22-28.

² Horsfall to Morrah, 18 July 1962 (Rhodesias file,) *RT* (O) Papers.

³ Morrah to Todd, 1 Aug 1962, *ibid*.

⁴ [Grenfell,] "Central Africa in 1963", *RT*, Sept 1962, pp 361-67.

line. In his view the African was "a born dictator". The United Nations he compared to a Nazi rally; and he suggested that the British government was "going back on its word", out of an "inexplicable desire to bow down to the will of Africanism".¹ Morrah considered Williams's articles "a useful corrective". Nevertheless, "the younger members of our editorial committee thought you were pushing us too far towards the other extreme".² At Maud's request the British High Commissioner found a new correspondent, John Spicer ("intelligent, liberal, balanced and with very sound judgement"), who wrote from December 1965 onwards.³ (By then, of course, Hailey was the only member of the older generation still alive.)

Smith's decision to declare independence in November 1965 at last forced the Moot into accepting the position which Todd had been urging: that of calling for direct rule by the British government.

"There are two main reasons for this. First, it has been openly and blatantly humiliated Secondly, it would be wrong to leave the territory under the control of a small minority, however much they may represent the most advanced elements of the population. Government on the basis of race is bad government and can only endure by becoming steadily worse."

Even at this stage, the *Round Table* opposed handing Rhodesia over to majority rule, because "this would lead to a break up of White Rhodesian society and the ruin of the economy". Instead, Britain should assume responsibility for "the next decade at least". If sanctions did not work, force - "overwhelming and decisive" - would have to be used.⁴ Otherwise

¹ [Williams,] "Rhodesian Divorce", *RT*, Sept 1963, pp 342-52; [*idem*,] "Rhodesia and Nyasaland", *ibid*, pp 409-14.

² Morrah to Williams, 23 March 1964 (Rhodesias file,) *RT* (O) Papers.

³ Jack Johnston to Maud. nd [Dec 1964] (1964-65 file,) *RT* (O) Papers.

⁴ [Beaton,] "A Policy for Rhodesia", *RT*, March 1966, pp 107-11.

the Commonwealth would break up; and it was "difficult to imagine a more squalid end to so hopeful an experiment".¹

The Common Market

As early as 1926, Harold Butler had predicted that "unless Great Britain forms part of a larger economic unit, she cannot avoid becoming part of a European economic union".² At the time, his observation was to be understood as part of a plea for the liberalisation of intra-Commonwealth trade. The disappointment of such hopes under the Ottawa system perhaps gave force to the observation.

A generation later, the idea of an opposition between Commonwealth and Common Market was clearly no longer realistic.

"The nations of the Commonwealth, for as long as they have enjoyed sovereign control of their own fiscal systems, have been accustomed to adjust them to a strict calculation of their own material advantage They will scarcely complain . . . if in the hard bargaining necessary in Brussels British Ministers give first though not exclusive consideration to tangible British interests."³

The *Round Table* was firmly of the belief that British entry into the Common Market conformed with "tangible British interests". Three main reasons were adduced for this view. First, "we cannot help being a European Power". It was better to be in Europe, in a position of leadership, than outside and unable to influence. Secondly, "America prefers to deal with Europe as a unity, and regards England as part of Europe". The alternative to entry into Europe might not include a continuing "special relationship".

¹ D Austin, "Why not Surrender to Mr Smith?", *RT*, July 1966, pp 238-44.

² [Butler,] "Europe at the Cross-Roads", *RT*, June 1926, pp 476-501.

³ [Morrah,] "Commonwealth and Common Market", *RT*, June 1962, pp 223-27.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, Britain's economy was "distinctly sluggish", and threatened to remain so without new opportunities for expansion and access to larger markets.¹

Morrah persuaded Eric (Lord) Roll ("the official nearest to the centre of negotiations"²) to write a key-note article for the *Round Table*. Roll acknowledged that the views of Commonwealth governments ranged "from the cautionary to the almost plainly hostile". Were there any grounds for hoping that the negotiations could clear some of the obstacles? Roll thought so, if the problem could be "taken apart into its main constituents". Moreover, it was necessary "to compare not what is with what is proposed, but what is proposed with what might otherwise be". And in this connection, a Britain "with a faster rate of economic growth, with wider trading possibilities, with a stronger voice in Europe, must be a more useful member of the Commonwealth".³

The Moot was primarily interested in the long-term political consequences of entry. Roll expressed the opinion that many of the political aspects of the Treaty of Rome might never be implemented. Morrah was less cynical. Despite the fact that the Common Market possessed no federal institutions "it cannot be immune to the natural processes of mutation". Indeed, "it is . . . bound . . . to change its attitude as new problems emerge". Federation was therefore likely to be on the future agenda.

"The political right of secession scarcely touches the economic impracticability of unscrambling the eggs. If

¹ [Morrah,] "Britain in Europe", *RT*, Sept 1962, pp 323-26.

² Morrah to Kidd, 29 Sept 1961 (SA file,) *RT* (O) Papers.

³ [Roll,] "Commonwealth and Common Markets", *RT*, Dec 1961, pp 7-19.

we enter Europe we enter for good; and we cannot be sure that the Europe we enter will remain immutably a confederation of sovereign states, and will never develop on organic lines."

Britain could participate in both the Common Market and the Commonwealth "without incompatibility", precisely because the Commonwealth "no longer has any political structure in the domain of foreign policy and defence", whereas the Market existed in order to pursue "a joint policy", in ever increasing fields. Whether "the British people are psychologically ready for so momentous a change" was another matter.¹

The Round Table groups also contributed to the debate. On the whole, they were more sympathetic to the British position than were their own governments. According to the Melbourne group, Menzies's criticism of Britain "surprised not only Mr Sandys but also many Australians". There were good grounds for thinking that "the short term losses might be less and the long-term gains greater than government spokesmen suggest".² From Canada, Macdonnell reported that opinion was coming round to the

"*Toronto Globe and Mail* point that if joining the Common Market will mean increased prosperity for Britain, she will be a better market for Canada and other Commonwealth countries than a Britain in the doldrums".³

In New Zealand opinion was very largely against British entry; but the New Zealand group was divided⁴, and there were those who saw "considerable attraction . . . in the idea that preferences . . . might be surrendered in

¹ [Morrah,] "Britain in Europe", *RT*, Sept 1962, pp 323-26.

² [Melbourne group,] "Australia and EEC", *RT*, Dec 1961, pp 43-48.

³ H W Macdonnell to Morrah, 25 Oct 1961 (Toronto file,) *RT* (O) Papers.

⁴ G Wood to Morrah, 11 Oct 1961 (NZ file,) *RT* (O) Papers.

return for assurances of expanding outlets in a united Europe".¹

De Gaulle's veto necessitated "an exercise in what Delane used to call 'the delicate art of journalistic curvature'".² The search for a wider economic unit went on. In 1967 the *Round Table* supported calls for a North Atlantic free trade area.³ When the debate on the Common Market was reopened in the early 1970s, the *Round Table* once again joined the advocates of British entry, emphasising the advantages to be gained by all Commonwealth members from a stronger and more European Britain.⁴

The New Round Table

"Like a familiar landscape, the British Commonwealth changes gradually, almost imperceptibly, but in the long run radically No single event, even if noticed when it happens, is more than a passing wonder, yet in a couple of generations the changes may leave only the broad contour of hill and valley to recall for the returned exile the scene of his childhood."⁵

Hodson's choice of simile was peculiarly apt. Even the most radical changes in the structure of the Commonwealth - such as the Statute of Westminster, or the London Declaration - were mainly symbolic, confirming trends which were already apparent. The most significant changes were cumulative. Some the Round Tablers had welcomed; others they made the best of. But the Commonwealth of the 1960s was a far cry from that of 1910, when the original Round Tablers had set out on their mission.

1 [NZ gp,] "NZ: Concern over UK-EEC Negotiations", *RT*, March 1962, pp 410-15.

2 Morrah to H W Macdonnell, 6 Feb 1963 (Toronto file,) *RT* (O) Papers.

3 [Beaton,] "An Important Proposal", *RT*, Jan 1967, pp 3-5.

4 "Britain, the Commonwealth and Europe", *RT*, Oct 1971, pp 431-35.

5 [Hodson,] "The Future of the Commonwealth", *RT*, June 1956, pp 215-21.

In 1963 the death of the last aboriginal Round Tabler, Lord Brand, prompted the Moot to decide on a special meeting at Ditchley, to consider the Round Table's future. Invitations were sent to the overseas groups, but, as the disgruntled secretary of the Sydney group later commented, the notice given was "short, very short if there was a genuine desire to seek opinion".¹ Nevertheless, three of the five groups sent memoranda. The New Zealand group was generally content with existing arrangements.² The South African group called for more articles from the newly independent countries, and suggested that each issue should concentrate on a single topic.³ The Sydney group was primarily concerned to forestall the possibility of the *Round Table* being re-constituted as a "Commonwealth-American" review.⁴ In later communications the group was more ambitious, proposing an enhanced editorial rôle for the overseas groups, including "much more pre-publication comment" and "a more vigorous expression of sentiment". The group also wanted more coverage of the "old" and less of the "new" Commonwealth.⁵

The Ditchley meeting considered the various options. Marris was inclined to think closure inevitable, but the rest of the Moot was strongly in favour of continuing. The need to bring the magazine "more up-to-date", as the first step towards increasing its circulation, was realised. No

1 MacCallum, "The Round Table", 17 March 1965 (Sydney file,) RT (O) Papers.

2 "The Round Table . . . Views of the NZ group" [1963] *ibid.*

3 H M Robertson, "SA and the Round Table", 30 Nov 1963 (Beaton file,) RT (O) Papers.

4 D MacCallum to Morrah, 29 Nov 1963, *ibid.*

5 D MacCallum, "The Round Table", 17 March 1965; MacCallum to Morrah, 13 April 1964 (Sydney file,) RT (O) Papers.

firm decisions were reached, but there was an agreement to look into the possibilities of forming groups in the "new" Commonwealth and of introducing signed articles. It was also agreed that the Moot should be strengthened by recruiting "younger members who have already shown their interest in the contemporary problems of the new Commonwealth", and also a new editor. (Morrah was now 67 and anxious to retire.)¹ The banker Sir Jeremy Morse and the former Colonial Secretary Viscount Boyd had already been recruited in 1960, the journalist and future minister Timothy Raison in 1962. Five new members were added in 1964: the Africanist Dennis Austin, the journalist Leonard Beaton, Richard Hornby MP, the diplomat Sir Robert Wade-Gery and the insurance broker Sir Robin Williams. All were, in Morrah's description, "young progressive Conservatives".²

Beaton was taken on as assistant editor, with the intention that he would replace Morrah. (He did so at the end of 1965, earlier than expected, because of Morrah's illness.) Canadian-born, he was (like the rest of the Moot) a strong believer both in the American connection and in the "modern" Commonwealth. Indeed, for him the two elided, and there were only two real models for the developed world, the "British" and the Communist. Nevertheless, he was at home in India (and France, where his wife was born), more so than in Australasia, where he found the general view of the Commonwealth "adolescent".³ In 1965 he was sent on a tour to establish contact with the existing groups, look into the possibility of

1 Marris to John [Cadwallader?], 11 May 1965 (Beaton file); Macadam to Sir Robin Williams, 20 May 1964 (Moot file,) RT (O) Papers.

2 Morrah to MacCallum, 22 June 1964 (Sydney file,) RT (O) Papers. Boyd dropped out of the Moot in 1964.

3 Beaton, "Report on Round Table Trip" [1965] (Beaton file,) RT (O) Papers.

forming new ones, and gather impressions as to the best way forward for the *Round Table*. He came back with the firm conclusion that the magazine should drop its rule of anonymity, partly in order to move with the times, partly in order to attract new readers with "names", and partly because the *Round Table* had lost some of its "authority" amongst the general reading public.¹

Although he made contact with several suitable group members in India and Pakistan, Beaton confessed himself "baffled about just how we can make effective use of the groups". He found the Canadian group virtually non-existent. The Australasian groups were still strong and intellectually distinguished, but they "have never concerned themselves with Commonwealth affairs and really have no views on them".² This problem of the groups was never really resolved. An Indian group was started in 1967, but within a few years it and the Canadian, South African and New Zealand groups had become virtually moribund, with the result that articles were commissioned directly from London. This left the Australian groups in an anomalous position. The practice of publishing signed and more controversial articles made group editing redundant, but the Australian groups were still jealous of their responsibility for commissioning articles. Paul Daniell, employed as a promotional consultant by the Moot, suggested that these last remaining groups should be wound up, since there was no longer any "driving purpose behind their existence".³ The London group neither wound up the

¹ *Ibid.* Hodson had suggested relaxing the rule of anonymity as early as 1935: Minutes of RT meeting, 12 to 15 Jan 1935, RT (O) Papers.

² Beaton to Wade-Gery, 1 June 1965 and 14 June 1965 (Beaton file,) RT (O) Papers.

³ J P S Daniell, "Some Thoughts on Round Table Groups", 31 March 1969 (Moot file,) RT (O) Papers.

groups nor attempted to revive them. From Leonie Foster's account it is clear that the manner of the Australian groups' demise left a sense of resentment.¹

In July 1966, the "new" *Round Table* was launched, with a vigorous editorial setting out the "central objectives" for the Commonwealth, and promising "strong views on public issues".² The "new" *Round Table* consisted largely of signed articles - unsigned chronicles came to an end in 1967, except in the case of Rhodesia. They were often written by the leading experts in their fields, more often now academics than officials. Steadily, the *Round Table's* circulation climbed back up; and the immediate financial danger was met by a very successful appeal (bringing in some £25,000 over three years). Another financial crisis closed the publication between October 1981 and January 1983, before the *Round Table* returned in its present form, with a new publisher, but still fulfilling the same function, as both advocate and "think tank for the contemporary Commonwealth".³

1 Foster, *High Hopes* (Melbourne, 1986), pp 153 ff.

2 [Raison,] "The New Round Table", *RT*, July 1966, pp 211-14.

3 [P Lyon,], "The Round Table Revived and the Contemporary Commonwealth", *RT*, Jan 1983, p 10.

II. CONCLUSIONS

Earlier historians have generally portrayed the history of the Round Table as an anticlimax. Starting out full of vigour and confidence, the Round Tablers (according to this view) were quickly frustrated in their original aims, and consequently drifted on with a disintegrating sense of cohesion and a diminishing sense of purpose.

There is something to be said for such an interpretation. By the 1950s and '60s the Moot was clearly no longer a cohesive group in the sense that the original Moot was. Nevertheless, it is important not to underestimate the differences within the earlier group, nor to overestimate those within the later group. The most significant single issue in Edwardian Imperial politics, the tariff question, was left to one side, the subject of an agreement to disagree. There were frequent reports of "fearful ructions" within the Moot. The wartime disagreements within the group were perhaps the most bitter of all. Yet the Moot carried on. In the 1920s and '30s new issues divided the Moot: Kenya, China, Germany. But in some respects the interwar Moot was more cohesive than before. Certainly, it was able to reach a consensus on many important policy matters. Even after the Second World War, with the predominance of "Kindergarten" members broken and a whole range of contentious issues brought to the fore - the Cold War, Indian independence, decolonisation in Africa, apartheid, Suez, Europe - the extent to which the Moot both sought and reached a consensus was remarkable.

The "failure" of the Round Table "movement" has tended to obscure both the extent of disagreement between Curtis and his

colleagues before the publication of his *Problem of the Commonwealth* and the persistence of a belief in ultimate "organic union" thereafter. There was much common ground between Curtis and his critics before 1916, but also significant differences over tactics, timing and the powers of a federal government. These differences were undoubtedly important in preventing the group from carrying out its original strategy. Federalism was always more attractive as an abstract and undefined idea than as a concrete scheme. John Kendle was undoubtedly right in identifying Dominion nationalism as another major obstacle to the realisation of the group's original aims. Nevertheless, it is by no means clear that either the differences within the Moot or the form which Dominion nationalism took would have been the same had it not been for the outbreak of war.

In the 1920s and '30s, most members of the Moot combined an acceptance of the impracticability of immediate federal union with a belief in its ultimate realisation. With hindsight this seems remarkably optimistic. The trend of Anglo-Dominion relations continued to be towards greater independence. Yet the Round Tablers interpreted this as clearing away the deadwood, in order to build on surer foundations. They were wrong: but were they inevitably so? At the time there seemed good reason to believe as they did. Few Dominion nationalists (even in Canada and South Africa) conceived of a future outside the Empire; and the Round Tablers were perhaps more realistic than their critics in thinking that there were powerful inducements to unity. Certainly they were more realistic in thinking that the long-term alternative to "organic union" was not unity derived from co-operation. Curtis was more prescient than Jebb.

Only in the late 1940s did the belief in Imperial unity become untenable. It is sometimes said that America killed the British Empire. It would appear from an examination of the Round Tablers' views in this crucial period that this was partly the case - in the sense that Britain, no less than the "old" Dominions, now looked to America rather than the Empire for the framework of its security. This in turn reflected the long-term decline in British power, which had prompted the Round Table's creation. Even so, the Round Tablers believed that the Commonwealth still had an important rôle to play - now defined in terms of diversity rather than unity: and as a "bridge" rather than as a "unit of power".

Both the tenacity and the adaptability of the *Round Table* magazine and its editorial Moot can be seen throughout their history. Those who constituted the earlier Moot were certainly tenacious in clinging to the idea of Imperial or Commonwealth unity. At the same time, they were also realistic in responding to the inevitability of change. They were seldom tempted to retreat into a purely negative and reactionary "diehardism", and they were perhaps important in countering the influence of those who were.

The extent of the Round Table's influence is, of course, very difficult to assess. The Round Tablers were an undoubted influence on some aspects of Lloyd George's policy, especially in India and Ireland. It is one of the ironies of Round Table history that a movement founded to strengthen the Empire should have as its most enduring achievement the fact that it helped to smooth the Empire's disintegration. Nevertheless, the Round Tablers were not conscious of the process. They believed that they were helping to save the Empire by revitalising and

redirecting the Imperial ethic: stabilising and enhancing the Imperial connection by basing it on surer foundations.

Even in the case of India and Ireland, the Round Table appears to have been less significant as a direct influence on government policy than as an interpreter of policy shifts. Once some change in policy became inevitable, there was a market for serviceable ideas. The Round Table's interpretation of the Imperial ethic helped to accommodate change without allowing the whole Imperial position to slip, by providing the language in which concessions could be portrayed as the natural outcome of previous policy. Thereby the Round Table helped to limit change, as well as making it respectable. It is this mediating rôle, between conservatism and radicalism, and between officialdom and opinion, which is the most striking aspect of the *Round Table* magazine as a whole.

Despite their close contacts with officials and policy-makers, as a group the Round Tablers were ultimately somewhat marginal to the real political process. They were seldom able to influence the making, as opposed to the interpretation, of British policy. This in itself says something about the nature of British Imperialism. The Empire was useful to the extent that it served British interests. As far as those in positions of power were concerned, it was hardly an end in itself.