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SOUTH AFRICA'S WITHDRAWAL FROM COMMONWEALTH

Statement by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies

The Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Mr. R.G. Menzies, said today that the Government had been considering the practical consequences, as they would affect Australia, of South Africa's ceasing on 31st May to be a member of the Commonwealth.

Certain consequences would follow automatically. South Africa would no longer participate in Commonwealth Conferences or in various Commonwealth Committees and schemes set up for the benefit of Commonwealth countries. Also the designation of the Australian representative in South Africa would be changed from High Commissioner to Ambassador and the formalities for this were in hand.

Mr. Menzies pointed out that Australia's relations with South Africa went back over a long period and covered a wide field. In some matters, such as trade, finance and civil aviation, these relationships were not dependent on Commonwealth membership and would be unaffected by South Africa's ceasing to be a Commonwealth country.

In a number of other matters, however, the relationships between the two countries were covered by legislation. In some cases, South Africa was referred to by name; in others, it came within the scope of the laws concerned by virtue of being part of Her Majesty's Dominions. The need to make any legislative adjustments to meet the new situation was now under study. However, the Government did not propose to make any alteration in existing legislation for the time being.

Mr. Menzies referred specifically to the Nationality and Citizenship Act. This Act, as it stood, offered the same treatment in Australia to South African citizens as to other British subjects. No alteration to the Act was contemplated for the present at least.

In conclusion, Mr. Menzies said that the Australian Government would be guided by the desire to avoid any abrupt or unnecessary disturbance to existing arrangements with South Africa which served the mutual convenience of both countries. However, there might need to be some adjustments over a period in the light of particular developments, including the policies which might be adopted by South Africa itself.

CANBERRA,

25th May, 1961.