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**TITLE: THE D'OLIVEIRA AFFAIR 1968/9:
THIRTY YEARS AFTER**

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The D'Oliviera Affair 1968/9: Thirty Years After

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I The D'Oliviera Affair and the Isolation of South African Cricket

The 'D'Oliviera Affair' of 1968/9 was a decisive event in precipitating South Africa's isolation from international test match cricket. In the view of many at the time--and since--Basil D'Oliviera, the South African-born Coloured cricketer who played for England, warranted inclusion in the MCC team to tour South Africa in 1968/9 when it was first selected on 27 August 1968. The fact that he was not included caused an uproar in Britain; the allegation made was that the selectors had not chosen the team purely on merit, but had instead capitulated to South Africa's apartheid government, which would have refused to admit an MCC team with D'Oliviera in it. When on 16 September Tom Cartwright, a medium-paced bowler, dropped out of the team through injury, D'Oliviera, regarded essentially a batsman who also bowled, was immediately selected in his place. As represented by the Vorster Government, this amounted to a capitulation by the MCC to political pressure from the anti-apartheid movement, and it refused to accept a team which it alleged was no longer that of the MCC. 'Whereas we are and always have been prepared to play host to the MCC', Vorster announced at the National Party congress in Bloemfontein on 17 September, 'we are not prepared to receive a team thrust on us by people whose interests are not the game but to gain political objectives which they do not even attempt to hide.'¹ The tour was consequently cancelled, and a huge impetus given to the movement to exclude South Africa from test match cricket. As the Rand Daily Mail predicted, '[Mr Vorster's] decision to bar not only Basil D'Oliviera but the MCC team as a whole means, without a shadow of a doubt, South Africa's exclusion from the world of Test cricket.'² Within three years that exclusion was complete.

Throughout the 1960s the movement to ban South Africa from international sport had been building up momentum, spurred by the efforts of the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC). Formed in October 1962, and moving into exile in 1966 when Dennis Brutus left South Africa for London on a one-way ticket, SANROC's primary focus was on the Olympic arena, where it sought to secure

1. Rand Daily Mail, 18 September 1968.

2. Ibid.

either non-racialism in South African sport, or failing that, the expulsion of South Africa from the Olympics and international sport more generally. In 1964, and again in 1968, South Africa was excluded from the Olympic Games. In cricket, however, South Africa's position still seemed reasonably secure. To be sure, South Africa's status in international cricket had been uncertain ever since it forfeited its membership of the Imperial Cricket Conference (ICC), as a consequence of South Africa's departure from the Commonwealth in 1961, and the success of India, Pakistan and the West Indies in blocking the award of associate membership, but tours and tests between South Africa and its traditional rivals, England, Australia, and New Zealand, nevertheless continued to form part of the ICC programme. Initially, these 'tests' were classified as 'unofficial'--those between South Africa and New Zealand in 1961/2 were reduced to four days--but Australia insisted on giving 'official' status to the 1963/4 series in Australia and the 1966/7 series in South Africa, and English players were awarded full 'caps' for 'tests' in the 1964/5 series in South Africa and the 1965 series in England. The attitude of cricket administrators in England, Australia and New Zealand in the 1960s to playing with South Africa was aptly summed up by Jack Bailey, then assistant secretary at Lord's:

South Africa, as represented by the South African Cricket Association, was in 1968 an important senior member of the international cricket fraternity. It was a founder member of the International Cricket Conference with MCC and Australia, and arguably the foremost cricket nation in the world at international level. The cricket world was strongly inclined to getting on with the game with South Africa--or anybody else--leaving politics to the politicians. It was, and always will be, an attitude of substance if your brief is the administration of your sport and the well-being of your sport and your penchant is loyalty to good, time-honoured and loyal friends, and if you believe contact is more productive than isolation. If politics were to be an issue when opponents in sport were under consideration, there were, even then, a number of countries who might be left out of the reckoning.³

Cricket administrators in England, Australia and New Zealand were simply unwilling to allow political considerations to interfere with traditional sporting relationships.

Prior to the D'Oliviera Affair, public protests mobilised against sporting ties with South Africa had done virtually nothing to alter the perception of cricket administrators. Following in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre, the South African cricket tour of England in 1960 attracted the first bout of organised protests, co-ordinated by the recently formed Anti-Apartheid Movement and the Campaign Against Race Discrimination in Sport, which called for a public boycott of the tour. However, the demonstration that greeted Jackie McGlew's team at London

3. Jack Bailey, Cricket in Conflict (London, 1989), 48.

Airport was dismissed by Ronny Aird, the MCC secretary, in the account he gave to Algie Frames, the secretary of the South African Cricket Association, as 'a very feeble affair'.⁴ The protests against Peter van der Merwe's 1965 team made even less of an impact. As the Anti-Apartheid Movement recorded in its annual report for 1965, 'The press was generally unsympathetic to our campaign although local newspapers gave widespread coverage to action taken in their areas'.⁵ The one element disturbing to cricket administrators was the prominent status of some of those involved, including members of the cricketing fraternity, in the campaigns against racially-based South African teams. The Campaign Against Race Discrimination in Sport counted among its patrons John Arlott, the celebrated BBC cricket commentator, and the Reverend David Sheppard, the Sussex and England player, who refused to play against the Springboks. 'I am sorry to say', Aird reported to Frames on 11 April 1960, 'that David Sheppard, who feels very strongly on racial matters, has today announced that he will not accept any invitations to play against the South African team, and is giving his reasons why, which of course are not personal ones against any of the South African cricketers. He feels that by doing this he can express his sympathy with the coloured people in South Africa.' The D'Oliviera Affair both widened the circle of critics in the cricketing fraternity, and gave a decisive new edge to the mobilisation of public protest. 'Sanroc', the Rand Daily Mail commented after Vorster imposed his ban on D'Oliviera, 'could never have achieved results more to its liking'.⁶

The initial exclusion of D'Oliviera from the England team to tour South Africa in 1968/9, in the wake of his match-winning innings of 158 in the fifth test against Australia at the Oval, provoked outrage in Britain. 'No one of open mind', Arlott bluntly asserted, 'will believe that he was left out for valid cricket reasons.'⁷ Several members of the MCC resigned in protest, while a group of critics, led by Sheppard, demanded a special general meeting of the MCC to consider a vote of no-confidence in the MCC Committee. A preliminary meeting with the Sheppard group on 12 September brought home to the MCC Committee that the fundamental division between it and the dissidents was over the very question of playing cricket with South Africa. The minutes recorded that there was 'a strong feeling among certain Members that, as a matter of principle, there should be no cricket played against South Africa while the South African Government's racial policy existed' and 'that whereas the Committee's actions had sprung from a desire to

4. Aird to Frames, 19 April 1960, South African Cricket Association correspondence.

5. Anti-Apartheid Movement Annual Report, September 1965, Rhodes House Library.

6. Rand Daily Mail, 21 September 1968.

7. D.R. Allen, Arlott: The Authorised Biography (London, 1994), 273-4.

play cricket against South Africa, if that were at all possible, the Committee's critics had never felt that this would have been a good thing under any circumstances in existing conditions'.⁸ The special meeting of the MCC was finally held at Church House, Westminster, on 5 December 1968. Three resolutions were put to the meeting. The first expressed 'regret' at the MCC Committee's 'mishandling of affairs' leading up to the selection of the team to tour South Africa, the second moved that 'no further tours to or from South Africa be undertaken until credence can be given of actual progress by South Africa towards non-racial cricket', and the third that a special committee be established to monitor such progress. All three resolutions were defeated at the meeting, and by substantial margins in the subsequent postal vote. The MCC consequently decided to proceed with the South African tour of England in 1970. However, the fact was that the exclusion of South Africa from test match cricket had made its way on to the agenda at Lord's.

With the immediate prospect of a South African tour of England in the summer of 1970, the denouement was fairly rapid. L'affaire D'Oliviera kept on unravelling. In April 1969 two startling revelations were made. The first was that Tienie Oosthuisen, representing the Rembrandt Tobacco Corporation, the sponsor of the South African Sports Federation, had clandestinely approached D'Oliviera to make a 'fantastic' offer for him to coach in South Africa on condition that he render himself unavailable for the MCC tour. The second proved directly damaging to the reputation of the MCC leadership. It was that Lord Cobham, a former President of the MCC, had interviewed B.J. Vorster, the South African Prime Minister, in March 1968, and on his return to England had passed on to the Secretary of the MCC, Billy Griffith, the information that Vorster had intimated that 'were D'Oliviera to be chosen the MCC tour to South Africa was most unlikely to take place'. Griffith consulted with Arthur Gilligan, the MCC President, and Gubby Allen, the MCC Treasurer, and they decided against conveying the information to the full MCC Committee so as to avoid prejudicing the selection process given that two of its members, Doug Insole and Peter May, were selectors. 'In the past few days,' Michael Parkinson fulminated in the Sunday Times, 'that fossilised relic, commonly known as the Marylebone Clodpoles Club, has been revealed to everyone in all its pathetic, doddering incompetence.' He added: 'If the MCC believes that it can allow South Africa to tour this country in 1970, and that their matches will be played without hindrance, it is even more barmy than I now think it to be. Already various organisations are making plans to ensure that if the South Africans do tour, their games will be disrupted. And they will be right to do so'.⁹

Organised pressure against the tour thereafter mounted relentlessly. In May 1969 SANROC held a public meeting in London to discuss plans for forcing a cancellation of the tour, and in September the 'Stop the Seventy Tour' campaign was launched by a coalition of eight anti-

8. MCC Committee minutes, 12 September 1968.

9. Sunday Times, 13 April 1969.

apartheid organisations with Peter Hain, a South African student at London University, at the helm. In November and December the Cricket Council and the Test and County Cricket Board (TCCB), which had taken over the administration of English cricket from the MCC, both announced that the tour was still on, but the disruptions caused by demonstrators during the Springbok rugby tour of Britain and Ireland in the winter of 1969/70, and the sabotage of a dozen county cricket grounds one night in January 1970, prompted the Cricket Council to reduce the tour from twenty eight matches to twelve. The prospect was of the tour taking place under siege conditions. While a public opinion poll undertaken by the Opinion Research Center for the Evening Standard indicated that 62 per cent of the British population supported the tour, Harold Wilson, the Labour Prime Minister, denounced the decision to proceed with it as 'a big mistake'. In a BBC TV interview on 16 April he went so far as to encourage people to 'demonstrate against the South African tour'. From that point on the political pressure for cancellation became intense, with the House of Commons staging an emergency debate on 14 May, in which the Denis Howell, the minister responsible for sport, announced that twelve of the eighteen nations due to compete in the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh had already withdrawn in protest at the forthcoming cricket tour, and that another three were uncertain as to whether to participate. Four days later, in a last desperate bid to save the tour, the Cricket Council reached its fateful decision that the tour would go on but that 'no further Test tours will take place between South Africa and this country until such time as Test cricket is played and tours are selected on a multi-racial basis in South Africa'. The next day, 19 May, the Home Secretary, James Callaghan, summoned representatives of the Cricket Council to meet him at the Home Office, and requested them to call the tour off 'on grounds of broad public policy' and in the light of the threat of civil disorder. On 22 May the Cricket Council announced, with deep regret, that the tour was cancelled. After eighty years of test match contests, cricket relations between England and South Africa had been severed.¹⁰

That left Australia and New Zealand as the only redoubts for South African international cricket, with South Africa scheduled to tour Australia in 1971/2. Despite the D'Oliviera Affair, the stand taken by the Cricket Council on future tours between England and South Africa, and the cancellation of the 1970 South African tour of England under threat of public disorder, the Australian Board of Control for International Cricket, under the chairmanship of Sir Donald Bradman, decided to proceed with its invitation for South Africa to tour. Bradman believed very strongly in keeping 'politics' out of sport, and evidently had little foreboding of the grave trouble a South African tour of Australia might

10. For fuller accounts of the above see R.E. Lapchick, The Politics of Race and International Sport: The Case of South Africa (Westport, Connecticut, 1975), chap 4; Andre Odendaal (ed), Cricket in Isolation: The Politics of Race and Cricket in South Africa (Cape Town, 1977), chap 1; Derek Birley, The Willow Wand (London, 1979), chap 12; Tony Lewis, Double Century: The Story of MCC and Cricket (London, 1985), 311-17; Jack Bailey, Conflicts in Cricket, chap 3; and Kenneth O. Morgan, Callaghan: A Life (Oxford, 1997), 313-14.

provoke. The Springbok rugby tour of Australia in July and August of 1971 changed that. Bradman personally witnessed the test between the Wallabies and the Springboks in Sydney, and the mayhem caused by the protestors despite a formidable police presence. As he reported back to the Board it was simply impossible to proceed with a cricket tour under such conditions, and at the annual general meeting of the Board on 8 September 1971 it was unanimously decided to cancel the tour.¹¹ The proposal of the South African Cricket Association that Australia tour South Africa was quietly dropped.¹² Precisely three years after the D'Oliviera debacle, South Africa found itself isolated from the world of international test match cricket.

II Vorster and D'Oliviera

Despite the vast literature on the D'Oliviera Affair, two questions have remained essentially unanswered; they have served as objects of speculation rather than certainty. The first is whether the Vorster Government would have accepted D'Oliviera as part of the MCC touring team had he been selected in the first instance. The second is, if not, whether this was made known to the MCC and their selectors, and whether it consequently influenced the decision not to include D'Oliviera in the initial touring party. The opening to scholars of the Cabinet minutes of the South African Government up until 1974 now makes it possible to give a clear answer to the first question.

Following a parliamentary debate on the D'Oliviera Affair on 21 April 1969, in which Vorster simply evaded all questions, John Wiley, the United Party MP for Simonstown, dropped Frank Waring, the Minister of Sport and Recreation, a note:

Dear Frank,

When you were speaking the other day I missed the first few minutes of your speech. When I came in, you were talking of the MCC & D'Oliviera. I tried to ask you a question but you refused to give way.

What I wanted to ask you was really more for information and interest rather than anything else--namely, if the MCC had selected him in the first place, would he have been allowed to come to S.A.?

If you wish to reply to this question I will keep it to myself--but I am interested naturally and for this reason I am asking.

Regards

Yours sincerely

John Wiley

PS My own view, for what it is worth, is that you would have accepted him.¹³

11. Charles Williams, Bradman: An Australian Hero (London, 1996), 268-9; interview with Sir Donald Bradman, Adelaide, 2 February 1998.

12. South African Cricket Association annual general meeting, 25 September 1971, verbatim minutes.

Wiley was wrong in his view. At its meeting on 27 August 1968, the day the MCC selectors met to decide on the team to tour South Africa, the Cabinet resolved, 'M.C.C. kriekettoer 1968/69. As D'Oliviera gekies word is die toer af' ('If D'Oliviera is chosen the tour is off').¹⁴ The hand-written minute book, effectively a record book of Cabinet decisions organised under ministerial portfolios--in this instance the portfolio of 'Sy Edele Eerste Minister B.J. Vorster'--contains no details of the Cabinet discussion.

The question which must now be asked is why, contrary to Wiley's assumption, the Vorster Government was never prepared to allow D'Oliviera to tour with the MCC? Wiley had good reason for assuming that D'Oliviera would have been accepted if selected in the first instance. The Vorster Government was in the process of 'liberalising' its sports policy in the effort to retain South Africa's traditional sporting links in the outside world, and the acceptance of D'Oliviera would have been entirely consistent with such 'liberalisation', while rejection would have been a self-defeating exercise. Why, then, was it impossible for Vorster and his Government to accept D'Oliviera?

The build-up to the D'Oliviera Affair extended over a good few years. Prior to the 1960s, before the beginning of the onslaught on racism in South African sport, the general rule observed by South Africa's traditional sporting rivals was not to include 'non-whites' in the teams to tour South Africa. In practice, this applied particularly to New Zealand rugby teams, which excluded Maoris. 'The New Zealand Rugby Union', the NZRU Council announced in June 1959, 'has decided not to include Maori players in the New Zealand team to visit South Africa in 1960.' It added: 'In reaching this decision, the Union has been concerned with the best interests of its Maori players. The Union must make it quite clear that the South African Rugby Board, in issuing its invitation, left the composition of the team entirely to the discretion of the New Zealand Union'.¹⁵ For the projected New Zealand rugby tour of South Africa in 1967, there was no prospect that the NZRU would continue to collaborate with South Africa in excluding Maori players, and press speculation was that Maoris would probably be allowed into South Africa. However, on 4 September 1965, in his notorious Loskop Dam speech, the then South African Prime Minister, Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, intimated that Maori players would not be welcome, and his position was later ratified by the Cabinet.¹⁶ The New Zealand Rugby Union was

13. Wiley to Waring, n.d., in Press Cuttings: D'Oliviera and the MCC Tour, State Archives, Pretoria, MSO MS7/4/1.

14. CAB 1/1/4, 1968 Notuleboek, State Archives, Cape Town.

15. Richard Thompson, Retreat From Apartheid: New Zealand's Sporting Contacts with South Africa (Wellington, 1975), 20.

16. The Cabinet minute for 7 September 1965 for Internal Affairs stated: 'Insluiting van Maoris in New Zealandse span na SA-- E[eerste] M[inister] se optrede word goedgekeur'. CAB1/1/3, Notule Kabinet 14.9.64-1.12.65, State Archives, Cape Town.

consequently invited by the South African Rugby Union to send a team 'on the same basis as in the past'--that is without Maoris--but in February 1966 the NZRU Council decided it was unable to accept the invitation 'in its present form', and the tour was cancelled.¹⁷ Billy Griffith, the MCC Secretary who was then managing the MCC side in New Zealand, indicated that if the MCC ever found itself in the same position as the NZRU, it would likewise cancel.¹⁸

As perceived by the South African Cricket Association, from the outset there had been an 'unwritten agreement' between it and the MCC that no 'non-white' cricketers would be included in MCC teams to tour South Africa.¹⁹ According to Rowland Bowen, in 1929 the South Africans even successfully objected to having K.S. Duleepsinhji play against them in England.²⁰ No Maoris or Aborigines were ever selected to play test match cricket for their countries, but the dark-complexioned Grahame Thomas, reputedly of Cherokee Indian descent, was included in the Australian cricket team that toured South Africa in 1966/7. No objection was raised at the South African end, though the Australian Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, an ardent cricket follower, had found it expedient to take the precaution of showing some photographs of Thomas to the South African ambassador in Australia, who assured him that there would be no difficulty as 'the objection on the part of his people [was] to people who presented what he called a "negroid" appearance'.²¹

In June 1966, D'Oliviera started his international career for England, winning his first cap in the Lord's test against the West Indies. At the end of the year Griffith visited South Africa to ascertain, among other things, the prospects for an MCC tour with D'Oliviera in the team. He reported back to the MCC Committee that he was warmly received, that he saw some 'magnificent' cricket, and that he had some 'interesting' discussions with the South African Cricket Association, which was anxious to be readmitted to the ICC. On the question of whether an MCC team with D'Oliviera in it would be accepted in South Africa, Griffith told Crawford White of the Daily Express 'this is a matter that must be left until after the situation arises'.²² To help clarify what the situation would be the Sunday Express in Johannesburg asked P.M.K. le Roux, the

17. Ibid., 38-42.

18. Peter Wynne-Thomas and Peter Arnold, Cricket in Crisis: The story of major crises that have rocked the game (Feltham, 1984), 114.

19. D.C. Bursnall, Hon Secretary and Treasurer of SACA, to the Australian Board of Control for International Cricket and the New Zealand Cricket Council, 16 September 1969, 'Non-White Cricket' files, SACA correspondence.

20. Rowland Bowen, Cricket: A History of its Growth and Development throughout the World (London, 1970), 166.

21. Gideon Haigh, The Summer Game (Melbourne, 1997), 223-4.

22. MCC Committee minutes, 18 January 1967; Basil D'Oliviera, The D'Oliviera Affair (London, 1969), chap 7.

Minister of the Interior who owed his position in the Cabinet to his loyal support of Dr Verwoerd, for his thoughts on the matter. On 22 January 1967 Le Roux was reported as saying: 'Our policy is clear. We will not allow mixed teams to play against our white teams here. That is our policy. It is well known here and overseas'. Later, after reportedly being

reprimanded by the Prime Minister, B.J. Vorster, and taunted in the House of Assembly by the United Party MP, Marais Steyn, for doing 'something which no politician should ever do, he answered a hypothetical question', Le Roux denied making the statement. However, he made it clear that 'We simply do not want other countries to force us here to depart from our traditional point of view and policy'.²³

The furore Le Roux's reported statement caused in Britain included the tabling of a motion in the House of Commons, signed by 200 MPs of all parties, calling on the MCC to cancel the tour. After consultation with the General-Purposes Sub-Committee of the MCC, Denis Howell, the minister responsible for sport in the Labour Government, assured the House that: 'The MCC informed the Government that the team to tour South Africa will be chosen on merit and in this respect any preconditions that the host country lay down will be totally disregarded. The Government are confident that if, when the time comes, any player chosen for the touring side were rejected by the host country, then there would be no question but that the MCC would find such a condition wholly unacceptable and the projected tour would be abandoned'.²⁴ At its meeting of 1 February, the MCC Committee accepted that Howell's statement 'conformed to MCC's views', though the Treasurer, Gubby Allen, believed the minister 'should not have been so definite or so strong' without the MCC Committee having first considered it. Allen added that if it appeared likely that D'Oliviera would be selected for the South African tour, it would be essential to make a definite decision before the 1968 season.

It was at this juncture that Balthazar Johannes Vorster decided to intervene. Following the assassination of Dr Verwoerd in September of the previous year, Vorster, hitherto Minister of Justice, had been unanimously elected--as the compromise candidate--by the National Party parliamentary caucus as party leader and Prime Minister. It was during his premiership that the first cracks began to show in the apartheid wall constructed by his predecessors, and that the attempt to 'reform' apartheid was initiated. At the outset, Vorster's primary thrust was towards arresting South Africa's slide towards international isolation through his so-called 'outwards policy', which involved establishing diplomatic relations with independent African states, accepting black representatives of foreign governments, and staving off sporting isolation by relaxing apartheid restrictions on visiting teams. He was simultaneously intent on making the National Party the home for a broader white South Africa nationalism rather than a narrow ethnic Afrikaner nationalism. With the cancellation of the New Zealand rugby

23. House of Assembly Debates, vol 19, 8 February 1967, 928-34.

24. Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), 5th Series, vol 740, 30 January 1967, 34-5.

tour behind him, and the possible cancellation of the MCC cricket tour looming in front, Vorster thrashed out a new sports policy in the Nationalist party caucus in the face of fierce opposition from ultra-conservatives, including P.M.K. le Roux, later labelled 'verkramptes', who resisted all attempts to 'reform' apartheid as marking the beginning of the end for apartheid.²⁵

On 11 April 1967 Vorster announced his new sports policy to the House of Assembly. While he insisted that no mixed sport would be permitted between white and non-white South Africans within South Africa--an insistence which made it impossible for the Indian golfer, 'Papwa' Sewgolum, to continue to play in 'white' tournaments in South Africa--matches involving inter-state relations were in a different category. In the case of countries with which South Africa had traditional sporting ties, notably the British Isles, France, Australia and New Zealand, mixed race teams would in future be allowed to tour South Africa, though on the conditions that this concession did not impair relations with other countries, was not exploited for political purposes, and did not disturb relations between the people of South Africa. At the time, Vorster's speech was perceived as clearing the way for D'Oliviera to tour South Africa with the MCC. The general sense was summed up by Sir John Nicholls, the British ambassador to South Africa, who reported to the Foreign Office that Vorster 'made it quite clear that Maoris might be admitted as members of an All Black rugby team; and, although he did not say so specifically, it is a reasonable assumption from what he said--and one that everyone has made--that Mr Basil D'Oliviera may come here as a member of an M.C.C. team'.²⁶ However, as commentators later came to appreciate, Vorster's statement was 'cloudy and cryptic', and his last proviso related directly to D'Oliviera.²⁷ Politically, Vorster's speech was a masterpiece of its kind; it forced no hands, refrained from interfering in the affairs of other countries, and kept all possibilities open.

Thereafter Vorster and his Government refused to be drawn in public on the D'Oliviera issue. As Vorster specifically warned in his April speech, it was not in 'the interests of sport in South Africa' for people to name an individual long before a tour was due to take place, and ask 'Will you or will you not receive him'? It was only on 27 August 1968, the very day that the MCC selectors met to choose the team for South Africa, that the Cabinet formally decided not to admit an MCC team with D'Oliviera in it. Vorster's strategy until then was to avoid staking out a fixed position on an issue that was potentially as explosive as it was hypothetical, and to avoid giving any public appearance of dictating team selections to another country. R.J. Holyoake, the New Zealand Prime Minister, had complained that Verwoerd

25. John D'Oliviera, Vorster--The Man (Johannesburg, 1977), 215-20; Dan O'Meara, Forty Lost Years (Randburg, 1996), 150-59.

26. Sir John Nicholls to Foreign Office Savingram No 14, 14 April 1967, Public Record Office (PRO) FCO 25/709.

27. Sunday Times, 22 September 1968.

wanted to dictate to New Zealand as to the composition of its teams; central to Vorster's whole public stance was that he was not a selection committee. 'In a sense,' the Johannesburg Sunday Times commented, 'the Prime Minister was taking a gamble, in the hope that the whole thing would sort itself out with the omission of D'Oliviera.'²⁸ For a while it seemed that the gamble would work. D'Oliviera had a somewhat disappointing tour of the West Indies in 1967/8, and although he scored a sound 87 not out in the second innings of the first Ashes test against Australia in June, he was thereafter dropped from the England team, and his form in county cricket was generally unremarkable. It was the unexpected return of D'Oliviera to the England team for the final Ashes test in August, and his outstanding performance, that obliged Vorster and his Cabinet to make the definite policy decision that there would be no tour if D'Oliviera was included in the MCC team.

But while it was not until late August 1968 that Vorster and his Cabinet made the decision not to admit D'Oliviera, it was very much earlier in the year that Vorster reached the conclusion that it would be politically impossible to allow an MCC tour with D'Oliviera in it. That is what he communicated to Lord Cobham in March. As a relative junior in the Nationalist ministerial hierarchy when he became Prime Minister, and widely criticised in the early years of his premiership as a weak leader, Vorster was struggling in 1968 to establish his leadership and to assert his ascendancy over the *verkrampptes*. To allow D'Oliviera into the country as part of an MCC team would simply galvanise *verkramppte* opposition to him, and perhaps imperil his leadership. If the first major test of Vorster's new sports policy had been a handful of Maori rugby players, Vorster might have stood his ground, but for a South African-born Coloured to be the first beneficiary of the new policy was more than the bulk of Nationalists could tolerate, and not only the *verkrampptes*. 'The party, in fact,' the Star commented on 20 September 1968, 'is not behind any permissive sports policy at all. It did not want D'Oliviera here in any circumstances.' The Rand Daily Mail concurred in its editorial of 21 September:

The truth is that the Nationalists have never really accepted the idea of non-Whites in visiting sporting teams. The rumblings of discontent at recent Nationalist congresses show this clearly. Some have got as far as saying well, if it's absolutely unavoidable, we'll put up with the odd non-White player but there must be no fuss, otherwise we'll have to clamp down. For at the back of their minds there is the ancient, lurking fear that if people get used to seeing Whites and non-Whites playing together with no consciousness of any distinction between them this will slowly undermine traditional attitudes here and open the doors to alien ideas about equality and brotherhood.

What Nationalists feared more immediately was the 'hullabaloo' that would accompany D'Oliviera. South Africa would be invaded by the British media to cover every aspect of what happened to D'Oliviera, almost inevitably there would be incidents off the field, and perhaps even

28. Sunday Times, 22 September 1968.

crowd disturbances at match venues. 'And it would have lasted for four months,' the political columnist in the Burger, 'Dawie', commented, 'four months of malicious reports in the British Press, and here as well, four months of tense crowds, and different races around our cricket fields, four months of delicate social situations during and between matches.'²⁹

The attitude of the Nationalist rank-and-file was made quite evident at the party's provincial congresses in August and September. At the Transvaal congress in Potchefstroom Louwrens Muller, the new Minister of Police, interrupted his speech to announce that D'Oliviera had not been selected by the MCC. The announcement was greeted by loud cheering. When Vorster informed the Free State congress in Bloemfontein that he would not accept the last-minute inclusion of D'Oliviera in the MCC team, the applause was prolonged and deafening. As J.H.P. Serfontein, the political correspondent of the Sunday Times, reported 'Mr Vorster received the most frenzied and enthusiastic ovations a Nationalist Prime Minister has received in many years'. He added: 'I regard this reaction of the audience as evidence of the relief felt by rank-and-file Nationalists who have been worried over stories that Mr Vorster was a "liberal" and that his outward policy would affect apartheid'.

It was Serfontein who revealed at the time, in the Sunday Times of 22 September, that the South African Government would not have allowed D'Oliviera to tour with the MCC cricketers even if he had been selected in the first instance; this he was told by Nationalists 'very close to the Party leadership'. The decision to refuse entry to D'Oliviera was represented by Serfontein as a strategic political victory for Vorster, making his position as National Party leader 'impregnable'. As one 'key' verkrampste told him, 'It has set us back for some years. Mistakenly many verkrampste Nationalists will regard this action of Mr Vorster as proof that he is not a liberal but a conservative'. For all that it was a significant, if temporary, setback for Vorster's new sports policy. His first attempt to move beyond Verwoerd's granite-like stance had failed, and it was a failure that helped ensure South Africa's cricketing isolation.

What enabled Vorster to disguise his retreat was the MCC's mishandling of D'Oliviera's selection. It provided the South African Prime Minister with the opportunity to claim that the MCC bowed to political pressure by belatedly including D'Oliviera in the team, and to consequently suggest that political intervention by South Africa's 'political enemies' had forced his hand. Vorster even went so far as to assure the British ambassador, Sir John Nicholls, that had D'Oliviera been included in the MCC team in the first instance, the tour would have gone ahead. As Nicholls cabled the Commonwealth Office on 17 September:

M.C.C.'s decision to include D'Oliviera after all is likely to run us into serious trouble. Prime Minister raised the subject with me yesterday, before he knew of the M.C.C.'s decision. He said that, had D'Oliviera been chosen in the first place, his presence in the side would have caused him

29. Burger, 21 September 1968.

a good many headaches but he would have accepted it on the principle that it was not for him to select visiting teams. He had accepted the M.C.C. decision to omit D'Oliviera at its face value--i.e. a decision reached on straight cricket grounds. But the mounting agitation in the United Kingdom had unfortunately made this into a political issue. If D'Oliviera came, either as a journalist or as a replacement, he would now be the object of demonstrations and counter-demonstrations, and he himself would be under strong attack from many of his party supporters, who would believe that the M.C.C. had given way to politically motivated agitation. He attached importance to good relations with the United Kingdom in the field of sport as in every other but it would not be conducive to good relations if D'Oliviera were now to come and be used as a political catspaw by the opposing groups in South Africa.³⁰

By not selecting D'Oliviera in the first instance, the MCC had let Vorster off a major hook.

III The MCC and D'Oliviera

At the end of a visit to South Africa in early 1967, which coincided with P.M.K. le Roux's 'idiotic' statement about not permitting 'mixed' teams into South Africa, C.M. Le Quesne, the head of the West and Central African Department of the Foreign Office, minuted: 'The one thing which we must now hope for is that Mr. D'Oliviera keeps his form, and the M.C.C. their nerve'.³¹ He was to be disappointed on both counts, more particularly the latter.

When on 28 August 1968 the MCC team for South Africa was announced, Doug Insole, the chairman of selectors, explained that D'Oliviera had been left out of the team for cricketing reasons alone. D'Oliviera had been considered purely as a batsman, and the balance of the team required Tom Cartwright's medium-paced bowling skills more than D'Oliviera's batting skills. The claim that D'Oliviera had been omitted for purely cricket reasons was met with general disbelief, and it was widely assumed that the MCC had left him out for political reasons, so as not to imperil the tour. 'Their motives may have been as lily-white as their team,' the Star commented, 'but inevitably there are those who think otherwise.' The assumption was that the MCC Committee and selectors had acted in the knowledge, or simply the belief, that if D'Oliviera was included the Vorster Government would disallow the tour. The chief criticism levied by the Sheppard group was that the MCC Committee had failed to secure in advance a firm commitment from the South African Cricket Association (SACA) that D'Oliviera would be acceptable, and thus the selectors had been forced to make their choice under duress, realising that his inclusion might well prejudice the tour.

30. Sir John Nicholls to Commonwealth Office, 17 September 1968, PRO FCO 25/709.

31. C.M. Le Quesne, 13 February 1967, PRO FCO 25/709.

On 5 January 1968, following the advice of Denis Howell, the MCC did in fact write to SACA requesting assurances that no preconditions would be laid down regarding their choice of players, and that all members of the MCC team would be accorded the 'usual courtesies'.³² The response of the SACA Board of Control, at its meeting of 24 March, was to form a sub-committee of E.R. 'Wally' Hammond, the SACA President, Jack Cheetham, the Vice-President, and Arthur Coy, to 'deal with the matter on a confidential basis'. Hammond 'reported fully on what had transpired to date' and advised that the Board would be kept informed of developments. Matters thereafter were so confidential that nothing was committed to writing. No formal answer was sent to the MCC, and no reports to the Board were minuted. Everything was handled by word of mouth, including a visit to England in July by Coy.

At its own meeting of 21 March, the MCC Committee, noting that 'no definite reply' had been received from SACA, agreed not to press the issue but instead to proceed with the tour arrangements 'on the assumption that the selected team would be accepted by the South African Government when the time came'. This it did on the advice of Sir Alec Douglas-Home, the former Conservative Prime Minister and former President of the MCC, who had spoken to Vorster and SACA officials during his visit to South Africa in February. The chief purpose of Home's visit, undertaken in his capacity as Opposition shadow minister of foreign affairs, had been to speak to Vorster about South Africa's policy towards Rhodesia, which had declared its unilateral independence of the British Crown in 1965, but as Home was a firm believer in maintaining bridges with South Africa, cricket relations also featured on his agenda.³³ Home's advice to the MCC Committee was 'that it would be wrong to confront the South African Government with individual possible selections until they were made, as this would undoubtedly result in a refusal to answer hypothetical questions of this nature', and that there would be 'more chance of the selected team being accepted if we waited until the selection was actually made'.³⁴ Whether Home's advice was determined more by his discussions with SACA officials than with Vorster, is a matter of conjecture, but it was the advice of a seasoned politician, and was accepted unanimously. At the next meeting of the MCC Committee on 24 April, Home's advice that Rhodesia should not be incorporated in the South African tour was accepted with one dissentient vote.

The MCC Committee's decision to proceed on the assumption that whatever team was selected would be accepted by the South African Government was never formally reconsidered, even though evidence to the contrary filtered in. No sooner had the MCC Committee decided to act on Sir Alec Douglas-Home's advice, than Lord Cobham informed Billy

32. MCC Committee minutes, 21 February and 21 March 1968.

33. For Home's visit to South Africa see Lord Home, The Way the Wind Blows (London, 1970), 223-8.

34. MCC Committee minutes 21 March 1968; draft of the MCC Committee's statement for the special general meeting of 5 December 1968.

Griffith, the MCC Secretary, that his discussion with Vorster indicated that an MCC team with D'Oliviera in it would be unacceptable. This information was not conveyed to the full MCC Committee, though it was given in confidence to the Reverend David Sheppard.³⁵ In July Arthur Coy visited England on behalf of SACA, and while he made no 'formal representations' to the MCC 'he expressed the view privately that D'Oliviera's selection would endanger the tour'.³⁶ Like Lord Cobham, the SACA executive appreciated that D'Oliviera's selection would prove fatal to the tour. When Vorster finally announced his ban on D'Oliviera, Wally Hammond told the press: 'We understood the position for some time, and have done everything possible to obviate any misunderstanding'.³⁷ The implication was that, even in the absence of a formal written answer to the MCC's inquiry in January, the MCC had been fully apprised of Vorster's attitude.

The selection committee that met on the evening of 27 August, following the Oval test against the Australians, consisted of Doug Insole, as chairman, Alec Bedser, Don Kenyon and Peter May together with Colin Cowdrey, as England captain, Leslie Ames, as tour manager, Arthur Gilligan, as MCC President, and Gubby Allen, as MCC Treasurer. Billy Griffith and Donald Carr were also present as part of the MCC administration. The selectors, evidently, were kept hermetically sealed from the fore-warnings of Lord Cobham and Coy, except that Gilligan and Allen had been informed of Cobham's meeting with Vorster. Insole and May, as members of the MCC Committee, were fully aware of the MCC's failure to secure guarantees from SACA that anyone they selected would be accepted by the South African Government, as was Cowdrey. During the first test against the Australians in June Cowdrey--as he recounted in his autobiography--had spoken to Sir Alec Douglas-Home, who advised him that he opposed the MCC 'attempting to force the issue by insisting on a South African reply to their January letter', and that they should simply go ahead and 'pick the strongest team, whether it included D'Oliviera or not'.³⁸ Evidently, again, the MCC Committee had not provided the selectors with a firm injunction to pick the strongest team on the assumption that it would be accepted by the South African Government. According to Peter May, in his autobiography, 'no instructions were given us by MCC'.³⁹ From all accounts, the selectors, half of whom were anyhow members of the MCC Committee, were left to their own devices, to reach their own conclusions. After a marathon six-hour meeting, lasting until 2am the next day, the selectors produced

35. Cape Argus, 8 April 1969.

36. SACA Board of Control minutes, 28 July 1968; Lawrence Marks, 'Inside Story of the Dolly Row', Rand Daily Mail, 26 September 1968.

37. Star, 18 September 1968.

38. Colin Cowdrey, M.C.C. The Autobiography of a Cricketer (London, 1976), 195-6.

39. Peter May, A Game Enjoyed (London, 1985), 151.

a list of fifteen names, D'Oliviera not being among them. At its meeting on 28 August, the MCC Committee duly accepted the team as selected, and appointed Insole as their spokesman in dealing with the press. In response to questions from the press, Insole explained that D'Oliviera had been left out for purely cricketing reasons.

Even before the selection committee meeting Gubby Allen had let it be known that he thought D'Oliviera would be a bad choice for cricketing reasons, and he was reportedly surprised at how many of his co-selectors agreed with him.⁴⁰ Peter May was one of them. As May recounted in his autobiography:

Since playing in the First Test Basil had taken 40-odd wickets for Worcestershire but he had not done much with the bat. He had also not had a great tour of the West Indies the previous winter and as the summer passed we had ruled him out of the team which we were pencilling in for that winter's tour of South Africa. We were already overstocked with batting candidates. After Basil had made 158 at the Oval we reconsidered the position but, as he had been dropped twice early on, came to the conclusion that his innings, valuable though it had been in its context, did not alter the judgements made over the cricket of the past year.⁴¹

According to Jack Bailey, who accompanied Cowdrey from the Oval test to Lord's for the selectors meeting, the England captain told him: 'It's good to have beaten the Aussies. It looks as though we shall have problems with South Africa, though. They can't leave Basil out of the team. Not now'. Press speculation was that Cowdrey 'almost certainly' went into the meeting in favour of D'Oliviera, although in his autobiography Cowdrey implies he had reservations on the 'purely cricketing grounds' that a specialist seamer was required on the tour.⁴² In the end, according to the statement Billy Griffith made to the press, D'Oliviera missed selection by 'a bee's whisker'.⁴³

In the midst of the furore over D'Oliviera's omission, the selection committee was scheduled to meet again on 16 September to consider reserves. Following its preliminary meeting with the Sheppard group on 12 September, the MCC Committee braced itself to send the following message to SACA:

D'Oliviera is a reserve for the England XI. We have always assumed that purely as a cricketer, he will be acceptable. In view of the recent doubts which have arisen about his eligibility to enter South Africa, would you please confirm

40. Marks, Rand Daily Mail, 26 September 1968.

41. May, Game Enjoyed, 191.

42. Bailey, Conflicts, 52; Cowdrey, Autobiography, 199-200.

43. Star, 18 September 1968.

his acceptance as a cricketer. For obvious reasons, it is important that we have your assurance by the end of the month.

The message was never sent. That day Tom Cartwright dropped out of the team as a consequence of a recurring shoulder injury, and after a brief consultation the selectors nominated D'Oliviera as his replacement. From the standpoint of SACA, thus ended 'a 90-year old unwritten agreement between MCC and the South African Cricket Association'.⁴⁴ Within a few years it was also to mean an end to South Africa's participation in international test match cricket.

IV. Conclusion

In retrospect, after thirty years and the opening of some confidential files, the initial omission of Basil D'Oliviera from the MCC team to tour South Africa in 1968/9 emerges as even more of an elaborate charade than E.W. Swanton, the cricket correspondent of the Daily Telegraph, suspected at the time. The charade was directed by B.J. Vorster. His parliamentary address of 11 April 1967 suggested a shift in Government policy towards the racial composition of international visiting teams, but was otherwise ambiguous. From at least March 1968, if not before, Vorster's concern was to ensure an MCC tour of South Africa without D'Oliviera, but without being seen to require D'Oliviera's omission. Even after D'Oliviera's eventual selection, and the scrapping of the tour, Vorster maintained the charade. He assured the British ambassador that he would have let D'Oliviera in had he been selected in the first instance, and he was quite within his rights to reassure the House of Assembly that 'no official communications whatsoever went out from either the Government or the Cricket Association in South Africa' concerning D'Oliviera's selection.⁴⁵ That had been seen to. The question posed to him by Sir de Villiers Graaff, the United Party leader, in the House of Assembly on 21 April 1969 as to whether he would have admitted D'Oliviera if selected in the first instance he declined to answer:

If I were to reply to that question, just as the hon. the Leader of the Opposition put it, I would not be doing sport a favour... It is not only because it is a difficult question to answer, but also because it could give rise to implications. If I were to say now that I would have accepted D'Oliviera, or that I would not have accepted him, I would surely be placing myself in a terribly vulnerable position. Then I might, in regard to future tours, be asked whether I would accept A, or whether I would accept B, or whether I would

44. D.C. Bursnall, Hon Secretary and Treasurer of SACA, to the Australian Board of Control for International Cricket and the New Zealand Cricket Council, 16 September 1969, 'Non-White Cricket' files, SACA correspondence.

45. House of Assembly, vol 26, 21 April, 4405.

accept C or D. Surely this would lead to an absurd position... The attitude I have adopted all along is that I am not prepared to act as the selection committee.⁴⁶

In January 1968 the MCC threatened to put an end to the guesswork when it requested from SACA an assurance that D'Oliviera would be admitted if selected, but another politician, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, thereupon intervened to ensure a continuation of the charade. His was not a purely cricketing agenda. Home's overall concern was to build and maintain bridges with South Africa in the belief that 'perception and understanding would bring apartheid to an end far more quickly than boycott'.⁴⁷ His advice not to press for an assurance was gratefully accepted by the MCC Committee, and the MCC selectors were consequently drawn into the charade. What irritated the likes of E.W. Swanton was the contribution the selectors made to the charade by attempting to justify the omission of D'Oliviera on cricketing grounds. 'To say that there were "several better batsmen" after a Test innings of such calibre,' he asserted in the Daily Telegraph of 4 September 1968, 'to assert on the one hand that the South African pitches are expected to be grassy enough to suit Cartwright and on the other that D'Oliviera's bowling did not come into consideration: this in the language of ordinary followers was merely adding insult to injury.'

For some among the more politically sensitive, the real complaint against the MCC Committee and their selectors was that they did indeed think in purely cricketing terms, that their vision did not extend beyond the boundary. As was widely canvassed in the press prior to the selection of the MCC team, D'Oliviera's inclusion would represent the first real test of Vorster's new sports policy. By omitting D'Oliviera the MCC evaded the test and with it the opportunity to begin whittling down apartheid barriers in South African sport. Even the Star, the moderate English-language Johannesburg daily, believed the MCC selectors had 'dropped a dolly' and done South African sport a disservice by not putting Vorster's policy to the test. 'Something needed to be proved internally as well as externally,' the Star commented on 30 August, 'the inward policy as well as the outward.' Alan Ross in the Observer was more forthright in asserting that 'any sophisticated committee with a healthy sense of priorities' would have made a different choice: 'In a flexible situation the wrong gamble was taken'. Instead of seizing a 'golden opportunity' to confront sporting apartheid and encourage black cricketers in South Africa, the MCC gave comfort to 'the sweating but complacent apostles and fellow-travellers of apartheid'.⁴⁸

The D'Oliviera Affair occurred at the end of a decade in which the Nationalists consolidated their hegemony within South Africa. The African National Congress, the Pan Africanist Congress and the South African Communist Party had all been banned, and even liberal

46. Ibid., 4448.

47. Home, Wind Blows, 228.

48. Reprinted in the Rand Daily Mail, 4 September 1968.

organisations were in disarray, most notably with the dissolution of the Liberal Party as a consequence of the Prevention of Political Interference Act of 1968. It was only in the realm of international sport that the apartheid regime was being at all successfully challenged, particularly with the exclusion of South Africa from two successive Olympic Games. The meaning of the D'Oliviera Affair was that neither the South African Cricket Association from within the country, nor the MCC from without, was at all willing to take a principled stand against the crassest form of sporting apartheid, the exclusion of 'non-whites' from touring teams to South Africa.