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# Keeping Britain ‘in the Fore’: The Establishment of the British Council in South Africa and Its Contribution to the 1960 Union Festival

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## ABSTRACT



This article discusses the establishment of a British Council presence in South Africa through the appointment of a cultural advisor at the British High Commission in 1958. It analyses the role of cultural advisor, what policymakers hoped to achieve by creating it, and why they were initially hesitant about establishing a British Council presence in South Africa. The article will highlight how the decision to appoint a cultural advisor was predicated on fears that the rise of Afrikaner cultural nationalism jeopardised British interests in South Africa. It, therefore, contributes to the emerging scholarship which positions Britain’s relationship with the independent Commonwealth members in the 1950s and 1960s within the established literature on the political decolonisation which was taking place at that time. The article also analyses the cultural advisor’s initial work focussing, in particular, on Britain’s contribution to the 1960 Union Festival. The debates over how best to represent British culture at the festival will be highlighted, and the reasons why a tour by the Royal Ballet Company was ultimately chosen as the main contribution will be discussed. Finally, the article will analyse the controversies surrounding this tour, and how the British government responded to them. This included the omission of Johaar Mossaval, a South African-born ‘coloured’ dancer from the touring party, and the decision to complete the tour as planned in the aftermath of the Sharpeville Massacre.

## KEYWORDS

UK–South Africa; Union Festival; Royal Ballet Company; apartheid; Sharpeville Massacre; cultural boycott

## Introduction

In May 1960, apartheid South Africa celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Act of Union. This was a key moment in South Africa’s history, amalgamating the self-ruled Cape Colony and Natal with the former Boer Republics of Transvaal and the Orange Free State, both of which had been under direct rule from London since Britain’s victory in the Boer War in 1902. South Africa was

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granted considerable autonomy over its domestic affairs and this was the first step towards full independence, albeit within the Commonwealth. To mark the anniversary a 'Union Festival' was organised in Bloemfontein, which involved musical and dance performances, a parade, and a flyover by the South African Air Force. In addition, there were smaller celebrations across the Union throughout 1960.

In the context of increasingly strained relations between the UK and South Africa, due mainly to attempts by Pretoria to re-assert its symbolic independence and calls for the country to become a republic, British officials felt it was important that there was a strong British contribution to the festivities to demonstrate the non-political links between the two countries. A tour by the Royal Ballet Company (RBC) was viewed as a good vehicle to do this, and was given a guarantee against potential losses by the British Council, whose main role, while semi-autonomous from the government is to promote UK culture overseas. This article analyses the planning of the RBC tour, including the debates surrounding the controversial decision not to include coloured South African-born dancer Johaar Mosaval.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the article will highlight the tour's contentious nature, as it took place against a backdrop of civil unrest in the Union while the racist regime resorted to increasingly draconian methods in an effort to nullify the growing threat posed by anti-apartheid African nationalism.

This article also aims to build on the work of Antony G. Hopkins which positions South Africa, as well as the other 'white' dominions, within the broader literature of decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>2</sup> While clearly this was very different to the African and Asian states that threw off the shackles of colonial rule in these decades, the efforts by the National Party (NP) government to reassert its symbolic independence from Britain means that this work contributes to the growing literature on 'cultural decolonisation'.<sup>3</sup> In the case of South Africa, both academic and popular interest in cultural decolonisation has grown rapidly in the aftermath of the 'Rhodes Must Fall' protest and subsequent demands for the removal of tuition fees and calls to 'decolonise' the country's universities' curricula.<sup>4</sup> There have also been efforts to change the medium of instruction to English at Afrikaner institutions like the University of Stellenbosch as the current practice of using translators in lectures for non-Afrikaans speakers is seen to disadvantage these students.<sup>5</sup>

These efforts have not been restricted to university campuses, however. Indeed, there have been a number of campaigns to remove statues of leading Afrikaner figures and rename streets, towns, and cities to more adequately reflect the diversity of South African society.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, several Afrikaner groups have reacted angrily to what they perceive to be an assault on their cultural identity and history.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, it should be noted that, owing to the complex history of South Africa, Afrikaner politicians and cultural organisations had themselves undertaken similar campaigns to re-assert their

own cultural and symbolic independence from Britain in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

The nature of these changes was viewed as significant by British policy-makers in the 1950s who feared that they jeopardised their country's interests in South Africa. These interests were considerable and have attracted scholarly attention. Britain was the largest overseas investor in South Africa and there were extensive trade links between the two countries.<sup>9</sup> South Africa's role as a supplier of key strategic minerals was particularly important for British industry,<sup>10</sup> while South African gold was considered vital to the Bank of England's management of sterling as an international currency.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to this, British policymakers viewed South Africa as strategically important. Ian Phimister argues that in the years immediately following World War II British officials saw great value in 'the "strategic partnership" forged between Britain and the southern dominions of Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand'.<sup>12</sup> These officials hoped that closer military links with these 'white' dominions could help Britain maintain a significant role in international affairs.<sup>13</sup> Even after the NP's victory in the 1948 elections close military links with South Africa were maintained via the Simonstown Agreement. While this transferred control of the Simonstown naval base to Pretoria, it allowed the Royal Navy to continue to use its facilities, guaranteed arms sales from Britain to South Africa, and saw regular joint exercise between the two countries navies.<sup>14</sup>

Conversely, British officials feared that the rise of Afrikaner nationalism posed a threat to their control of Southern Rhodesia, and, more broadly, to their hegemony in southern Africa. This was one of the key reasons why the British government oversaw the amalgamation of Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland in 1953 to form the Central African Federation which, as Ronald Hyam argues, British officials hoped would act as 'a pro-British buffer-state between South Africa and the colonial office African territories'.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to these more tangible assets, British officials were also concerned about the growing strength of Afrikaner cultural nationalism, which they feared, could negatively impact the position of the English language in South Africa. It was believed that this would lessen the effect of UK–South African cultural relations thus limiting British influence there in years to come.<sup>16</sup> In his seminal work, *Decolonising the Mind, The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o emphasises that 'for the British, and particularly the English' the English language is inseparable 'from its use as a tool of communication, a carrier of their culture and history'.<sup>17</sup> While the experience of Afrikaners under British domination was very different to that experienced by black Africans, language and education had been used as a tool to subjugate them in a similar way to Ngũgĩ's own experience of schooling in British ruled Kenya.<sup>18</sup>

British policymakers felt that action had to be taken to limit the potential impact of Afrikaner cultural nationalism on their influence in South Africa. From 1947, the possibility of establishing a British Council presence in the country was discussed. Despite agreeing that a British Council representative 'would find great scope for his [*sic*] work in the Union' the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) initially rejected this proposal fearing that it would be considered 'politically repugnant' by South African officials.<sup>19</sup> However, when British officials in South Africa revived the idea of establishing a British Council presence at the High Commission in the mid-1950s it was more positively received, in part because Pretoria had recently established a similar role at South Africa House, London.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, it was felt that as the NP government was now more self-confident having entrenched its political power and would therefore be less likely to resent a British Council presence in South Africa.<sup>21</sup> After careful consideration, it was agreed that a cultural advisor would be appointed in 1958.

The role of a cultural advisor has received very little scholarly attention.<sup>22</sup> However, many nations appoint cultural advisors to direct their cultural diplomacy in a particular target country. The purpose of the post is best articulated by Richard Arndt, who worked in a number of senior positions in the United States Information Agency (USIA), the organisation responsible for co-ordinating much of Washington's cultural diplomacy. According to Arndt, the cultural advisor 'represented and sought to transmit the "deeper values," the less transient values, of a nation, a society and a culture'.<sup>23</sup> Raymond Butlin, an English Language teaching specialist with a long career working with the British Council, was appointed as a cultural advisor at the High Commission in Pretoria.<sup>24</sup> Shortly after arriving in South Africa, the 1960 Union Festival gave Butlin the ideal opportunity to demonstrate the best of British culture and the benefits of continued contact between the two countries. Indeed, High Commissioner Sir John Maud, argued that it was important to keep 'Britain in the fore in a year when, because of the Union Festival, the emphasis in South Africa will be on the Afrikaner tradition'.<sup>25</sup>

This article will also add to the growing academic interest in British efforts to utilise cultural diplomacy in recently decolonised states, or states who were previously part of Britain's sphere of influence. James R. Vaughan, for example, has analysed the role of British cultural diplomacy in the Middle East from 1945 to 1957.<sup>26</sup> Vaughan argues that 'a particular and historically specific interpretation of British identity, society and culture' was 'mobilised as a diplomatic weapon against the spread of Communism and Soviet influence in the region'.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Darius Wainwright's PhD thesis examines the role of American and British soft power in Iran from 1953 to 1960 which he argues 'aimed to persuade and attract Iranians away from the Soviet Union and more towards Western Powers'.<sup>28</sup>

Wainwright and Vaughan are not alone in emphasising the importance of the Cold War to those engaging with cultural diplomacy in the 1950s and 1960s. Understandably, much of the literature on the use of cultural diplomacy at this time centres its analysis on the Cold War context, either in building greater understanding between the peoples of the East and West, or as part of efforts by larger powers to improve their standing amongst the people of the newly independent nations of the developing world.<sup>29</sup> J. M. Lee even goes as far to argue that when analysing British cultural diplomacy from 1945 to 1961 'it is difficult to disentangle the desire to counter Soviet influence in the cold war from the concern to retain a presence overseas after the loss of empire'.<sup>30</sup>

However, while the East–West rivalry was clearly important to British policymakers, it was not at the forefront of considerations about UK–South African relations. Indeed, in a similar vein to Matthew Connelly's call to 'take off the Cold War lens' when looking at US policy towards the Algerian War for Independence, the same approach should be adopted when analysing Britain's approach to South Africa in this period.<sup>31</sup> This special relationship was focussed far more on bilateral considerations both economic and strategic, but also cultural as 'kith and kin' bonds facilitated close ties between the two countries. In the context of growing Afrikaner nationalism, and debates over whether 'South Africa will continue as a monarchy or become a republic' Maud contended that there was a 'tremendous job for the British Council to do' to 'feed and sustain' the country's 'links with the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth'.<sup>32</sup>

While there were similarities in the approach British policymakers took towards cultural relations with all countries, South Africa's increasingly ostracised position also makes this a unique case. Indeed, one of the main tactics employed by anti-apartheid activists was a 'cultural boycott' which made it very difficult for British policymakers to fully utilise cultural diplomacy in South Africa.<sup>33</sup> The literature which examines the cultural boycott of South Africa focuses mainly on the role of activists and largely ignores government policy towards their campaigns. This article, therefore, makes an important intervention by analysing British policy toward cultural contact with South Africa, highlighting how the government reacted to attempts to ostracise the country in this realm by utilising the British Council's apparent autonomy to distance itself from criticism from opposition MPs and activists.

This article also builds on the literature on the cultural boycott by directing attention to a much earlier period than has previously been examined. Critically, most scholars working on this topic have tended to focus on campaigns which took place in the 1970s and 1980s. By this time, the boycott was more fully established and had garnered support from many prominent performing artists. Nevertheless, the idea of a cultural boycott was first suggested in 1955 by Father Trevor Huddleston, a British priest working in South Africa at the time

who later went on to become president of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM).<sup>34</sup> Huddleston contended that a boycott of this nature would 'give White South Africans an opportunity of tasting the medicine they so freely give to their Black fellow-citizens – the medicine of deprivation and frustration'.<sup>35</sup> However, it should be noted that this was not a call for a total cultural boycott of South Africa as it was mainly designed 'to dissuade foreign artists from conniving at racially segregated performances'.<sup>36</sup> It was only after the Sharpeville Massacre that African National Congress (ANC) President Albert Luthuli called for greater efforts to ostracise South Africa which included expanding the cultural boycott from 'a protest against racism in the arts' to 'an integral facet of a global campaign to rid South Africa of apartheid'.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, when the RBC tour was first announced it was positively received by some staunch critics of apartheid in both the UK and South Africa. Labour MP John Dugdale, who had previously been highly critical of South Africa's domestic policies, stated that he was very pleased the RBC would perform in front of 'non-white' audiences and 'even, what is much more remarkable, before a mixed audience in Pietermaritzburg'.<sup>38</sup> Dugdale emphasised the importance of the visit stating; 'that is the kind of thing which influences the Government of South Africa'.<sup>39</sup> Alex La Guma, leader of the South African Coloured People's Organisation who had been one of the accused at the Treason Trial (1956–1961), used his column in the left-wing newspaper *New Age* to exclaim that 'there's no doubt many of us black folks are looking forward to seeing the Royal Ballet Company when it visits our sunny land'.<sup>40</sup> While La Guma was not sure whether the RBC would play in front of racially mixed audiences, he still felt that their decision to 'accept Equity's decision to dance for Non-Whites is a big dent in the cultural colour-bar curtain'.

However, support was not universal, and the omission of South African-born coloured dancer Johaar Mosaval from the touring party drew criticism from opposition MPs in the UK.<sup>41</sup> The rapidly changing situation in South Africa also saw the presence of the RBC become increasingly controversial. By the late 1950s, anti-apartheid activists had increased the tempo of their campaigns against the NP government. The Defiance Campaign, had seen the ANC's membership increase from fewer than 7000 members at the start of the campaign to over 100,000 by the end of 1952.<sup>42</sup> By the middle of the decade, a number of anti-apartheid groups representing a broad spectrum of South African society came together under the leadership of the ANC in what became known as the Congress Alliance.<sup>43</sup> In 1955 the Congress Alliance organised a mass gathering referred to as the Congress of the People which produced the Freedom Charter which advocated a redistribution of wealth and provided a multiracial vision of South Africa's future.<sup>44</sup>

While the Treason Trial stunted the success of anti-apartheid activists by the end of the decade a significant number of the accused had been acquitted and the Congress Alliance regrouped. In December 1959, a vote was unanimously



passed at the ANC's annual conference to initiate a countrywide campaign against the hated pass-laws on 31 March 1960, which would culminate with a great bonfire of passes on 26 June 1960.<sup>45</sup> However, the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), which was formed by a breakaway group of ANC members, stole a march on the ANC when its leader Robert Sobukwe made an announcement on Friday 18 March calling for anti-pass demonstrations to begin the following Monday.<sup>46</sup> At one of the demonstrations that followed, at the PAC stronghold of Sharpeville, the police opened fire on the protestors killing far in excess of 69 individuals (most while trying to flee) and injuring many more.<sup>47</sup> This incident drew greater international attention to events in South Africa and led to an increase in anti-apartheid protests in many other countries. In this context, there was pressure on the British government to intervene and call for the touring party to be withdrawn in protest. However, British officials remained steadfastly opposed to such intervention, claiming it would cause considerable damage to UK–South African relations and be resented by the majority of white South Africans. This emphasises the priorities of British officials both in London and South Africa; despite the horrors committed by the apartheid regime against black South Africans it was business as usual as far as cultural relations with white South Africa were concerned.

### **The Rise of Afrikaner Cultural Nationalism**

After its surprise victory in the 1948 election, the NP gradually improved its performance at both the 1953 and 1958 elections to firmly establish the Afrikaner's grip on power. This was particularly apparent under the leadership of Hendrik Verwoerd. As Henry Kenney notes in his biography of Verwoerd, although 'he did not invent the term or the policy' he 'fully deserves to be called the architect of apartheid'.<sup>48</sup> Christi van der Westhuizen contends that Verwoerd 'was the first and last NP leader to hold a firm conviction that he knew what apartheid was'.<sup>49</sup> In addition to his desire to further cement 'separate development' of the races in South Africa through the implementation of 'Bantu' self-government, Verwoerd also hoped to establish the country as a republic, removing the last major symbolic tie with Britain.<sup>50</sup> This dream came to fruition when the white South African electorate narrowly voted in favour of becoming a republic in a referendum on 5 October 1960.

Only a generation earlier, things had been very different for the Afrikaners, in contrast to the political control they exercised in 1960, the very future of their language and cultural autonomy appeared in jeopardy after their defeat to the British in the Boer War (1899–1902). In the years immediately following the conflict Britain occupied the Transvaal and the Orange Free State; the formerly independent Boer Republics who had fought against Britain. British policymakers hoped to pacify the Afrikaners and incorporate them into the British imperial framework. While this is a different context, these factors do suggest



that the experience of the Afrikaners should be analysed in a similar way to that of other colonised peoples on the continent. While the Afrikaners were treated significantly better than the black inhabitants of southern Africa, their language, culture, and history were still viewed as inferior by British imperialists as well as their English-speaking compatriots.

High Commissioner for Southern Africa Alfred Milner hoped British domination of southern Africa could be achieved by increasing immigration from Britain, appointing British officials to important positions in the country, and by utilising British cultural imperialism to pacify the Afrikaner community and promote allegiance to the crown. Key to this were efforts to 'anglicize the Boers' through an education system which prioritised English over Dutch.<sup>51</sup> E. B. Sargent, Milner's Director of Education went further in asking educators to teach 'the children of the burghers [Afrikaners] our language and our ideals ... and eventually our great Imperial ideals'.<sup>52</sup>

Despite Milner's belief that direct rule should be maintained over the Transvaal and the Orange Free State until the Afrikaners 'accept out flag' and membership of the British empire in good faith' policymakers in London moved quickly to grant them self-government by February 1907.<sup>53</sup> The Liberal Party had come to power in 1906 and while the new British Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman wanted to retain British supremacy in southern Africa, he felt this would be best achieved through 'conciliation and friendship' rather than 'domination and ascendancy'.<sup>54</sup> After several years of negotiation, the Act of Union was passed which amalgamated the two former Boer Republics with the self-governing colonies of the Cape Colony and Natal. While much of the country's economic power lay in the hands of the English-speaking whites, the political power was essentially transferred to the Afrikaners, who made up the majority of the electorate.

The Union's first two prime ministers, Louis Botha and Jan Smuts, proved loyal supporters of the British Empire, despite having fought against Britain during the Boer War. However, under J. B. Hertzog, prime minister from 1924 to 1939, a number of policies were enacted to emphasise South Africa's independence from Britain and to improve the position of the Afrikaners. This included replacing Dutch with Afrikaans as an official language in 1925, and the establishment of a new national flag in 1928. While this still contained a small union flag, it also included the flags of the Orange Free State and Transvaal, with the dominating three colours taken from the former Boer Republics.<sup>55</sup> Importantly, South Africa's political independence from Britain was further entrenched by the Balfour Declaration (1926) which recognised the 'dominions' as 'autonomous communities within the British Empire',<sup>56</sup> and the Statute of Westminster (1931) which confirmed their full legislative independence.<sup>57</sup>

Efforts to assert Afrikaner cultural and symbolic nationalism were also facilitated by extra-parliamentary campaigns led by the *Broederbond*, a secretive

group of leading Afrikaner businessmen and intellectuals formed in 1918 to promote Afrikaner advancement.<sup>58</sup> The Broederbond set up a number of organisations to help this aim under the umbrella of the Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Associations (FAK), formed in 1929. The FAK sought to create 'cultural self-sufficiency' for the Afrikaner community by promoting Afrikaans literature and music.<sup>59</sup> In a 1934 circular the Bond re-emphasised its aim to raise 'the self-consciousness of the Afrikaner by cultivating love for their own language, religion, traditions, country and people'.<sup>60</sup> This growing cultural nationalism was epitomised by the celebrations to mark the one-hundredth anniversary of the 'Great Trek' in 1938, which culminated in a ceremony just outside Pretoria where the cornerstone for the Voortrekker Monument, which would open in 1949, was laid. As Herman Gilliomée argues this 'provided the forum for the expression of the heightened cultural awareness' of the Afrikaners.<sup>61</sup>

While South Africa came out on the side of Britain in World War II, there was by no means unanimous support for this in the country and it is unknown what would have happened if Hertzog had been able to dissolve parliament and call an election over the issue as he wished.<sup>62</sup> While the United Party, under the leadership of Jan Smuts, won a resounding victory in the 'khaki election' of 1943, this masked the growing discontent amongst a significant portion of the Afrikaner population over South Africa's involvement in the war as many heeded the call of the *Ossewabrandwag* to boycott the elections.<sup>63</sup>

In the years immediately following the war, Smuts was recognised as a key international statesman, playing an important role in the establishment of the United Nations (UN). However, he neglected his domestic responsibilities and his popularity within South Africa contrasted considerably to his international acclaim. In addition to this, many Afrikaners feared that Jan Hofmeyr, Smut's Deputy Prime Minister and heir apparent, was a liberal reformer who intended to dismantle the system of segregation which had been designed to keep the races separate in South Africa.<sup>64</sup> This allowed the NP to play on white fears of being 'swamped' by the black population migrating to urban areas and pull off a surprise victory in the 1948 election.<sup>65</sup>

Upon coming to power, the NP government, with the help of the Broederbond, implemented what Deborah Posel describes as 'a tacit policy of affirmative action' to increase the number of Afrikaners in 'positions of influence in as many social, political and economic organizations as possible'.<sup>66</sup> Frans Erasmus, Defence Minister from 1948 to 1959, purged the military of Anglophone and anglophile officers, changed the uniforms, and introduced a new 'Boer' ranking system to replace the one that was based on the British military.<sup>67</sup> While, as Gilliomée notes, 'the "Afrikanerization" of the civil service was nowhere near as rapid' as that of the armed forces, by 1960 the previous dominance of English speakers had been re-dressed and its 'composition now reflected that of the white community'.<sup>68</sup> Importantly, this trend was much

quicker amongst the senior ranks of the civil service and by 1959 out of over 40 government departments and sub-departments only six were headed by English-speakers.<sup>69</sup>

The NP government sought other ways to demonstrate Pretoria's autonomy from London. In 1950, British citizenship was abolished, as was the right to appeal to the Privy Council,<sup>70</sup> while in 1957 'The Call of South Africa' replaced 'God Save the Queen' as the country's national anthem.<sup>71</sup> The fissure between the two countries was exacerbated in January 1960 when Verwoerd announced that there would be a referendum held to decide if South Africa should become a republic, thus removing the British monarchy as the head of state and further solidifying South Africa's symbolic independence.

The following month UK–South African relations soured further when British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan shocked the all-white South African Parliament when he warned that 'a wind of change is blowing through this continent. Whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact'.<sup>72</sup> Unsurprisingly, the speech was not received warmly by Macmillan's white South African hosts. Verwoerd responded by stating: 'On an occasion like this when we can be perfectly frank we can say we differ from you'.<sup>73</sup> As Saul Dubow argues, the speech helped 'empower Verwoerd' and solidify his dominance over South African politics as it allowed him to 'make two hitherto separate strands of his political career seem mutually reinforcing: republican nationalism on the one hand and Apartheid ideology on the other'.<sup>74</sup>

### **The Establishment of the British Council in South Africa**

The 'wind of change' speech is often portrayed in popular mythology as a watershed moment in British policy towards Africa, and UK–South African relations in particular. Nevertheless, most historians agree that Macmillan never intended the speech to mark a break in the many close political, economic, and cultural ties that existed between London and Pretoria.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, the tone of the speech was generally warm, and Macmillan started it by stating that it was a 'special privilege' to be in South Africa in the 'golden wedding of the Union'.<sup>76</sup> He also praised South Africa for its economic and industrial achievements while emphasising the many close bonds that existed between the UK and South Africa.

Macmillan also alluded to the potential benefit of cultural diplomacy in state-to-state relations contending that 'nothing but good' can come from 'extending contacts between individuals' and the 'exchange of visitors'.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, the establishment of a British Council presence in South Africa to promote such contact had proved a protracted process. When it was first discussed in 1947, High Commissioner Sir Evelyn Baring feared that it could aggravate Afrikaner nationalists and be viewed as propagandist.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, at the time displays of

British propaganda had the potential of having a negative impact on UK–South African relations. For example, that same year Field Marshall Montgomery visited South Africa to promote the cause of Commonwealth unity. However, Ian Phimister contends that his visit to South Africa may in fact ‘have aggravated Afrikaner hostility to Imperial Britain’.<sup>79</sup>

The nature of the British Council’s presence was one of the main causes of disagreement between Baring and the Under-Secretary for the Commonwealth Sir Eric Machtig, who wanted the British Council’s staff to work independently in South Africa rather than as part of the United Kingdom Information Office as Baring had suggested.<sup>80</sup> Agreement could not be reached, and the matter was put to one side. In fact, the Drogheda Report (1953) into the British Council’s work stated that ‘We are satisfied that, owing to the political situation in South Africa, it is wise to keep the British Council out of this country for the time being’.<sup>81</sup>

However, according to the Deputy High Commissioner to South Africa Arthur Snelling, none of Britain’s representatives in South Africa were consulted by the Drogheda Report’s authors and he contended that the situation there was quite different.<sup>82</sup> In 1955, he wrote to the Assistant Under-Secretary for Commonwealth Relations, William Hamilton, who was also responsible for new overseas appointments, and urged him to consider establishing a British Council presence in South Africa. Snelling contended that ‘the English language, the British way of life and the British connection are in retreat in South Africa’ due to ‘the rise of Afrikaans language and Afrikaans culture’.<sup>83</sup> Snelling listed the various cultural organisations such as the FAK and the South African Academy for Art, Language, and Science which he claimed were responsible for the ‘assiduous propagation’ of ‘*kulture*’ amongst the ‘*volk*’. Snelling felt it would no longer be ‘politically provocative’ to establish a British Council presence particularly as France, the United States, West Germany and the Netherlands were all actively working in the cultural field in South Africa.

The following year the High Commissioner to South Africa, Sir Percivale Liesching, followed up Snelling’s initial proposals by sending a lengthy report to the Earl of Home, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations. Liesching contended that the NP’s entrenchment of power had ‘strong linguistic and cultural implications’ and posed a ‘considerable danger to the future of cultural association with the United Kingdom’.<sup>84</sup> Liesching was particularly concerned that the NP’s ascendancy had seen ‘an acceleration of the rate at which Afrikaans is replacing English as the first language of the White South African’. He argued that the British government needed to redouble its efforts in the cultural field to reverse this trend. While his main emphasis was on helping recruit high quality English teachers for South Africa’s schools, he also felt there would be considerable benefit in supporting other cultural manifestation such as regular tours by ‘first-class’ British theatre

companies. He argued that the 'intervention of the British Council' was needed to mitigate against the 'gradual decay of the British cultural connections' with South Africa.

Upon reading Liesching's dispatch the Secretary of State wrote that 'I think this may be worthwhile'.<sup>85</sup> The biggest issue was persuading the British Council Director-General Paul Sinker of the merits of the appointment as he was unenthused by the idea due to the potentially contentious nature of a presence in South Africa. However, the CRO staff put together a strong case, contending that there was 'little doubt' that there was 'great demand' for this sort of work in South Africa and the case for appointing a British Council representative was 'very strong'.<sup>86</sup> These arguments proved successful and the role of a cultural advisor was created at the High Commission in 1958. Despite the apparent autonomy the British Council had from the government it was clear this role had a diplomatic remit. While the British Council paid the cultural advisor's salary the role had diplomatic privileges and saw other costs, for example office equipment and one local employee, paid for by the CRO.<sup>87</sup>

Care was taken to ensure that a suitable candidate was selected for the role of cultural advisor. Deputy High Commissioner, John Belcher, contended that it was important that whoever was appointed had knowledge and experience of South Africa and would avoid any 'evangelism in the Union's internal political affairs' which might antagonise the Afrikaner nationalists.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, courting influential Afrikaners was seen to be a key part of cultural advisor's remit. While the High Commissioner saw merit in undertaking cultural work directed towards the English-Speaking South Africans, he contended that it was 'even more important to influence the Afrikaner' as 'the tide is flowing strongly in the Afrikaner's favor'.<sup>89</sup> This would be achieved by maintaining close relations with influential Afrikaners, particularly those working in the country's universities. It was also hoped that this would, in turn, help forge connections with the younger generation through the award of scholarships and bursaries to study in Britain.

Raymond Butlin, an experienced British Council officer and English Language Teaching specialist was appointed to this role, owing partially to his personal ties with South Africa. Butlin was married to a South African of mixed Afrikaner and British heritage, and he had visited the country several times.<sup>90</sup> Butlin set out his own interpretation of the role shortly after being appointed, and emphasised that he should 'avoid involvement in apartheid issues' and focus his work primarily on the white South Africans. The following year the Deputy High Commissioner, John Johnston, stressed the sensitivity of the role and warned that 'to fulfil our mission here we have to behave in a way acceptable to the authorities' which meant avoiding work with 'non-Europeans' and instead trying to make white South Africans 'less illiberal and less introspective'.<sup>91</sup>

## Planning the British Contribution to the Union Festival

In the context of South Africa's efforts to assert its cultural independence, British policymakers felt it was important that Britain made a significant contribution to the Union Festival celebrations. The biggest input to the festivities was a tour by the RBC which commenced on 30 January 1960 and lasted 13 weeks.<sup>92</sup> In addition to the Union Festival, 1960 also saw celebrations to mark Natal University's fiftieth anniversary. The British Council contributed to these celebrations by funding British actor Rosalind Fuller's travel costs to visit the Union where she delivered over 100 performances at universities and schools across the country.<sup>93</sup> Fuller was 'presented' at an RBC gala performance at the University of Natal in March 1960. The British Council also provided funding for two exhibitions in South Africa in 1960; one on Shakespeare and the British Theatre, and the other an exhibition of books from 1480 to 1940.<sup>94</sup> These were exhibited in Durban (in connection with the Jubilee Celebrations of the University of Natal), the South African Public Library, Cape Town, the State Library, Pretoria, and at the Johannesburg Municipal Library.<sup>95</sup>

UK officials, particularly those based in South Africa, also advocated financial support for a British folk dancing group to participate in the competition organised as part of the Union Festival. While ballet would have been popular with some in the country, Alexander Clutterbuck, CRO Permanent Under-Secretary, contended that 'folk dancing in South Africa is a countrywide activity and has a special place in [white] South Africa's affections'.<sup>96</sup> Dr Pellissier, Chairman of the South African National Council for Folk Songs and Folk Dances, approached High Commissioner Sir John Maud with a request for British folk acts to participate in the climax of the Union celebrations in Bloemfontein.<sup>97</sup> Maud was enthusiastic about the idea, and argued that 'although folk dancing is not a cultural field in which the Government would normally want to invest' as it was popular amongst the Afrikaner community, 'participation by a United Kingdom team or teams in the Union Festival should be regarded as a "must"'.<sup>98</sup> This was a view also shared by C.J. Barnard, the South African Cultural Attaché to the UK.<sup>99</sup>

It was Barnard who first proposed the idea of funding a visit of this kind through the British Council.<sup>100</sup> He explained that the South African High Commissioner was worried that a British group would not be in attendance and was being pressured by Pretoria to act. The total cost for this visit was estimated to be £3300. However, it was felt that funding this was not a priority for the British Council.<sup>101</sup> Barnard suggested that even a contribution of £500 or £1000 would be very helpful as the rest of the funds could be brought in from private British firms who had interests in South Africa.<sup>102</sup> In spite of these requests, officials refused to support the visit, particularly as the British Council had 'past unhappy experiences in this field'.<sup>103</sup> Maud was very disappointed as he felt it presented an excellent opportunity to improve relations with white South



Africans and believed the British dancers would 'steal the show', and offer a positive representation of British performing talent.<sup>104</sup> Maud was concerned that there would be teams present from a number of different countries, and if Britain was unable to provide a team, it would reflect very poorly on their commitment to continued cultural relations with South Africa, particularly in a field that was popular amongst the Afrikaner community.<sup>105</sup> Ultimately, the English Folk Dance and Song Society, and the Royal Scottish Dance Society did visit South Africa as part of the Union celebrations. However, the tour received no financial support from the British government or the British Council and was only made possible by the 'obstinate fund-raising efforts of the indefatigable' Dr Pellissier.<sup>106</sup>

There was considerably more enthusiasm when the British Council was approached with a request for assistance for the RBC tour, which is perhaps indicative of the type of South African the British government wished to 'attract'. When the British Council established a presence in South Africa through Butlin's appointment at the High Commission, it was agreed that Afrikaners should be the focus of its work. However, the attitude of officials in London towards the proposed folk dancing group indicates a lack of interest in more traditional Afrikaner cultural practices that were popular with the working classes and those in rural areas. Instead, these policymakers were more interested in utilising forms of 'high' culture and promoting contact with urban elites such as Joyce Newton-Thompson, the British-born Mayor of Cape Town, who had recently written to the British Council with a request for British ballet dancers to perform in the city.<sup>107</sup> This shows that despite an apparent focus on forging ties with Afrikaners, the cultural diplomacy British officials chose to engage with was far more in line with the interests of Anglophone or anglophile South Africans than those who needed to be 'won over'.

The RBC tour needed to be handled with care, particularly as the Actors' Equity Association (the union that represented the RBC's members) was beginning to implement measures to ensure its members gave some performances that were open to black South Africans. After consultation with Equity, the RBC agreed to perform in South Africa if they were able to make at least three performances to 'non-European' audiences.<sup>108</sup> Equity's insistence that the RBC offered performances to black South Africans created another problem; because of the gross inequalities of apartheid the majority of these communities were seriously economically disadvantaged and were unlikely to have money to spend on going to the ballet. In an effort to ensure black South Africans could see the RBC a reduced price was set for performances to these communities to encourage attendance. Even then it was still felt possible that these shows would not sell out, potentially leading to a loss for the RBC. The company requested a guarantee of £10,000 from the British government to safeguard against any potential losses this could incur.<sup>109</sup> The RBC



claimed that they had already been in touch with High Commissioner Maud, who had stressed the importance of the tour to his superiors. After some negotiations, it was agreed that the British Council would offer £2800 to guarantee against any losses in the tour.<sup>110</sup>

### **Johaar Mosaval's Exclusion from the Royal Ballet Company Touring Party**

The RBC tour faced another major issue as a result of South Africa's racialist policies. One of the RBC's most experienced dancers, Johaar Mosaval, was a coloured South African. As one of the first people of colour to work with the RBC, Sandie Bourne contends that Mosaval broke 'the colour barriers in the ultimate ballet institution'.<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, while Mosaval's success in the UK made him a trailblazer for diversity in an industry previously dominated by white performers, his presence in the RBC touring party of South Africa would not be viewed positively by much of the white South African public. Indeed, John Maud argued that:

it is unlikely he would be allowed to live in European hotels. There would be few parties given in honour of the company to which he would be invited. He would certainly not be invited to any reception at which officials or ministers would be present.<sup>112</sup>

However, rather than criticising Pretoria for these policies, it is clear Maud wanted Mosaval to be excluded from the tour group. He warned the British Council that his inclusion 'would cause unhappy complications' including possible protests from the Union government.<sup>113</sup> While the British Council felt it could not intervene at this stage, as it had not yet agreed to provide any financial support to the tour, the RBC decided to leave Mosaval out of the touring group. This was justified by the RBC's General Administrator David L. Webster as 'it is not our policy to send any member of the company where they might become embarrassed'.<sup>114</sup> The British Council believed that in coming to this decision the RBC 'must have been approached through other channels (presumably their impresario)'.<sup>115</sup>

When the decision to exclude Mosaval from the touring party was announced in December 1959, it was met with a hostile response in parliament by opposition MPs.<sup>116</sup> Labour MP Tom Driberg asked the Prime Minister:

- (1) if he is aware that a South African dancer of non-European descent is prevented by South African law from taking part in the Royal Ballet's forthcoming tour of South Africa; and if he will instruct the Minister of State for Commonwealth Relations to consider the possibility of cancelling the provision of funds for this tour;

- (2) if he is aware that a South African dancer of non-European descent is prevented by South African law from taking part in the Royal Ballet's forthcoming South African tour; and, in view of the damaging effect of such incidents upon relations between the two Governments, whether he will make representations on the matter to the Prime Minister of the Union.<sup>117</sup>

Home Secretary and Leader of the House of Commons 'Rab' Butler (who had been asked to respond on the government's behalf) contended that the British government had no right to 'intervene in the internal affairs of another Government'. He also claimed that the RBC was not actually in receipt of any 'official funds', just a 'small contingent guarantee against loss' from the British Council, and it was thus not the government's place to intervene with the company's decision.<sup>118</sup> This reflects the useful nature of the British Council's semi-autonomous status, which allowed the government to dissociate itself from the controversy while still reaping the benefits of cultural diplomacy. Butler also argued that it would not be fair to the RBC to withdraw the funding now as plans were at an advanced stage. Indeed, the RBC was clearly angered by Driberg's comments, and after the debate attempted to de-politicise Mosaval's exclusion, contending that he 'is a good artist and he is being used here'.<sup>119</sup> Butler also explained how the government had been informed by High Commissioner John Maud 'that it would be valuable that this tour should take place'.<sup>120</sup> Maud was a firm believer in the value of UK cultural diplomacy in South Africa and regularly called on the work of the British Council to be expanded there as he argued it provided a 'wholesome and liberalising influence' on the country.<sup>121</sup>

## The Royal Ballet Company Tour

While there were political disagreements over the tour in London, there was great excitement amongst certain sections of the South African public in advance of the RBC's arrival. Prior to leaving the UK, the RBC's general assistant John Tooley told the *Rand Daily Mail* (a prominent English language newspaper in South Africa) that 'the enthusiasm for ballet in your country must be enormous. Little girls in Durban, ballet teachers in the Karoo, promising talent in Johannesburg – we have heard from thousands of them'.<sup>122</sup> In advertisements for the performances, the RBC was billed as 'the world's most famous ballet'.<sup>123</sup> Around 1000 people came to Jan Smuts airport on 31 January to welcome the touring party.<sup>124</sup>

The dancers' presence in South Africa was clearly a novelty to many and they were viewed as celebrities. Indeed, the Mayor of Johannesburg hosted a tea party in the gardens of the city's zoo to celebrate ballerina Antoinette Sibley's twenty-first birthday on 27 February,<sup>125</sup> while several members of the touring party were 'guests of honour' at a cocktail party given by the Transvaal Press

Club in Johannesburg on 16 March.<sup>126</sup> According to Eva Mayer Schay, one of the members of the RBC's accompanying orchestra, the final two performances in Johannesburg on 19 March were particularly well received and the audience gave a 'stupendous applause' and showered the dancers with 'gaily coloured streamers'.<sup>127</sup>

While the touring party was enjoying a warm reception in South Africa, the situation in the country deteriorated dramatically. The PAC launched its anti-pass demonstrations on 21 March 1960. At a police station in Sharpeville, a township 70 kilometres south of Johannesburg, police opened fire on unarmed protestors. On 30 March the South African government declared a state of emergency.<sup>128</sup> Pretoria faced international condemnation for this gross mistreatment of black South Africans. Tom Lodge argues that this was 'most demonstrably evident in London, where a meeting on 27 March organized in Trafalgar Square by the Labour Party succeeded in drawing a crowd of over 15,000, one of the biggest open-air gatherings in the vicinity since VE day in 1945'.<sup>129</sup> Despite these protests, Britain continued its previous policy of deflecting international criticism of South Africa at the UN. On 1 April 1960, the British representative abstained on the historic UN Security Council Resolution which condemned the Sharpeville killings and demanded that Pretoria abandoned apartheid.<sup>130</sup>

The RBC's presence in South Africa during these events led to further criticism of the British government in the House of Commons. On 7 April, Driberg called for the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations 'to consider, in consultation with the British Council, the possibility of cancelling the remainder of the tour'.<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, Butler provided a similar response to the one he provided over Mosaval's exclusion, emphasising that 'no official funds were provided' by the government 'only a small contingent guarantee against loss' so any decision to withdraw the touring party rested with the RBC itself. He went on to exclaim that:

I hardly think it would be appropriate to use the Ballet as a means of making a political gesture, the more so as we understand that the Ballet has been very successfully performed before Europeans as well as non-Europeans. In each case, its performances have been very well attended.<sup>132</sup>

Key policymakers believed that the RBC's presence in South Africa was good for British influence and growing domestic pressure did little to change this view. In advance of the parliamentary question, there was consultation amongst CRO officials and diplomats in South Africa. John Maud reaffirmed his commitment to the tour and, while he could not 'forecast [the] security situation with certainty', he argued that there was 'no reason why [the] Ballet should not continue [the] tour successfully and safely'.<sup>133</sup> Maud also claimed that the tour was proving to be 'very popular' and 'doing an excellent job in Union/United Kingdom Relations'. He contended that to withdraw

the tour as a 'political gesture' would not only be damaging to government to government relations, but would also be resented by the 'greater majority of white South Africans'.<sup>134</sup>

Despite the tense situation in South Africa, the RBC carried on the tour and delivered a gala performance at Durban to celebrate the University of Natal's golden jubilee on 24 March 1960 as planned. The performance was attended by the university's hierarchy, leading members of the diplomatic corps, the armed forces, and the police; influential individuals who would have been a prime 'target' of British cultural diplomacy.<sup>135</sup> Prior to the performance, the audience sang both 'God Save the Queen' and the 'The Call of South Africa'. John Maud introduced the performers after delivering an impassioned speech in which he praised the university for its strive to achieve academic excellence, efforts to educate South Africans of all races, and for taking an outward looking stance by bringing experts from overseas for the recent education conference held at the university. He finished by exclaiming 'God for Ballet, England and Natal'.<sup>136</sup>

Ernest Gideon Malherbe, the University of Natal's Vice Chancellor, was impressed by Maud's speech as he felt it 'brilliantly summed up the purpose of the Jubilee Celebration'.<sup>137</sup> The fanfare the touring party received in Johannesburg was more than matched in Durban with the university organising a *braaivleis* [BBQ] in their honour at its principal's residence, while artist Neil Sack threw a party at his house on 27 March.<sup>138</sup> The positive reception the RBC's visit to Natal is unsurprising as this was one of the few areas of the country where South Africans of British descent outnumbered Afrikaners. The University of Natal's Chancellor, Denis Shepstone, who had previously been the Administrator of Natal (1948–1958), was a descendent of the 1820 settlers, the first significant influx of British migrants that arrived in South Africa with financial support from the British government. He was a staunch opponent of the NP and fiercely pro-British. This loyalty to the crown was recognised by the award of the Order of St John by the Queen in 1959. Malherbe was an Afrikaner but was also pro-British. He served as Head of Psychological Warfare in South African Military Intelligence during World War II and produced a report detailing the structure of the Broaderbond.<sup>139</sup> He also unsuccessfully lobbied Smuts to take a tougher stance against the organisation which he saw as a threat to South Africa.

While Maud had focused his arguments for the continued support of the tour on how well it had been received by prominent white South Africans like Malherbe and Shepstone, Butlin claimed that the 'non-European performances have been well attended' and that it was 'unlikely that the British Council's guarantee would be called upon'.<sup>140</sup> Butlin argued that the tour had been 'an unqualified success and the bookings for the remainder are well up to expectations'.<sup>141</sup> He contended that the tour had been 'of great value in providing a visible non-political link with Britain for tens of thousands of South Africans, both European and non-European'.<sup>142</sup>

In his report on the British Council's first two years in South Africa, Butlin emphasised the importance of the RBC tour, describing it as 'the outstanding event of the period'. Butlin went on to state that he had been pleased that 'wiser councils prevailed' and the tour was not withdrawn after the 'trouble'.<sup>143</sup> Butlin in fact argued that the RBC's presence during a time of unrest was an excellent demonstration of 'higher values'.<sup>144</sup> However, it is difficult to imagine that the presence of the RBC made any difference to the violent response of the apartheid state to the pass laws protests. Butlin also emphasised that:

by visiting South Africa in the year of the Festival of Union, a Festival of almost exclusively local character, the Royal Ballet ensured that the historic links with Great Britain, which would otherwise have received scant recognition, were brilliantly illustrated.<sup>145</sup>

In May 1960, Maud re-iterated the success of the tour in a letter to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, in which he argued it was 'a remarkable demonstration of friendliness between Britain and South Africa at a time of strained political relations' and 'shone like a good deed in a naughty world'.<sup>146</sup> Maud also emphasised how well the tour was received in South Africa, claiming that it received positive reviews in the local press and that influential individuals who saw the performances were also greatly impressed.<sup>147</sup> He claimed that J.J.P. O'pt Hof, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, told him how happy he was that the RBC was in South Africa during such a difficult time and was a 'sign of our friendly co-operation in the cultural field despite differences in others'.<sup>148</sup>

Clearly British officials in South Africa valued cultural diplomacy as a way of maintaining influence in the country regardless of the widespread international condemnation of Pretoria's violent racist domestic policies. While both the RBC's touring party members and British officials emphasised how popular the tour was with black South Africans, the Union Festival itself was a target of protest for the Congress Alliance. Indeed, its supporters were encouraged to picket the festivities and 'wear black as a token of mourning' for the 'misery and suffering' most black South Africans had suffered in the fifty years since the formation of the Union.<sup>149</sup> The Congress Alliance also held protests at the Natal Jubilee celebrations, including the RBC's performance, which was 'placarded' by activists.<sup>150</sup>

The RBC was also accused of failing to fulfil Equity's requirements for allowing its members to take part in the tour. George Golding, President of the South African Coloured People's National Union (CPNU), argued that Equity wanted performances in front of unsegregated audiences rather than separate shows based on colour.<sup>151</sup> In contrast to the Congress Alliance, the CPNU was a much more conservative political organisation which favoured negotiation and compromise to direct action. Nevertheless, Golding was clearly unhappy

with the nature of the RBC tour. He was particularly critical of the venue chosen for the performance to the coloured community in Cape Town stating that the 'drab municipal hall' selected was not appropriate for the ballet.<sup>152</sup> He argued that the Hofmeyer Theatre should have been used because this venue allowed for performances for both whites and coloured audiences.<sup>153</sup>

Responding to these claims, British officials in South Africa retorted that performances to 'non-European' audiences 'more than fulfils requirements of British Equity'.<sup>154</sup> The condition was that there must be some performances available to black South Africans. These officials also argued that the venue used in Cape Town was regularly used for performances by Eoan, a ballet company made up of coloured South Africans based in Cape Town.<sup>155</sup> However, this was a somewhat misleading claim, as the Eoan group had received funding from the apartheid government in 1956, and as Juliana M. Pistorius explains, it had become 'part of the apartheid propaganda machine' by 'performing for segregated audiences and participating in nationalistic celebrations of the regime'.<sup>156</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Eoan group had received some 'stinging' attacks from individuals like La Guma, who described it's decision to perform to a "European Only" audience in 1956 as reminiscent 'of the slave period when the farmers hired Coloureds to perform for them, their masters'.<sup>157</sup> Maud also claimed that the RBC found the 'Cape Town City Hall superior for an audience's point of view to many halls in which they have performed in other countries'.<sup>158</sup> Maud defended the RBC, claiming it did the best it could under difficult circumstances and that the performances were very well received by black South Africans; the shows in Johannesburg and Cape Town for example were both to sell-out crowds.<sup>159</sup>

Maud also praised the dancers and the tour organisers for being equally good ambassadors off stage, as they were on it, acting as appreciative guests at innumerable parties, and happily signing autographs for South Africans of all races. The dancers and organisers seemed keenly aware of this responsibility and the value the government placed on their presence in the country at this time, on his arrival in the country Tooley stated (in what essentially mirrored the British government's view of the tour):

what delights me most is that the Royal Ballet Company will perform so early in your festival year here in the Union. We are happy to be able to begin, as it were, the cultural side of this your festival.<sup>160</sup>

Maud emphasised the direct contact the group had with black South Africans, explaining how after the shows in Johannesburg and Cape Town the dancers met with leading members of these communities who were interested in music and stage.<sup>161</sup> Maud stated that 'a particularly friendly relationship' was developed with the Eoan group. John Field and Henry Egerton, the Ballet Master, paid a special visit to the Eoan's ballet school and after returning home from the tour the RBC later sent a crate of 'sorely needed' ballet shoes

to the group.<sup>162</sup> While this was clearly a kind gesture it would have been resented by many politically active black South Africans who viewed the Eoan group as 'stooges'.<sup>163</sup>

## Conclusion

A number of conclusions can be made by analysing the establishment of a British Council presence in South Africa and the British government's contribution to the Union Festival. Most importantly, British officials placed significant importance in continued cultural relations with South Africa and were willing to overlook the flagrant human rights abuses the apartheid regime committed against the black majority. This manifested itself in the British government's refusal to call for the RBC to cancel the remainder of the tour following the Sharpeville Massacre. However, this is perhaps unsurprising as in Macmillan's 'wind of change' speech he criticised attempts in Britain to organise a consumer boycott of South African goods and stated that it was wrong to try and 'influence the internal politics of another Commonwealth country'.<sup>164</sup> Additionally, in the cultural field, a key prerequisite of the creation of a cultural advisor was that the role would avoid passing any judgement on South Africa's domestic affairs and focus its work on the white communities.

It should also be noted that the UK was, after all, still a colonial power in 1960, exercising similarly undemocratic control over many parts of Africa. While a number of countries had been granted independence, and there was an acceptance that most others would soon follow, British colonial officials were still willing to use extreme levels of violence to maintain law and order. For example, the previous year 11 Mau Mau prisoners were murdered by British guards at the Hola detention camp in Kenya,<sup>165</sup> while a state of emergency was declared in Nyasaland following an increase in anti-colonial protest. While these incidents, particularly the Hola Massacre, had soon afterwards become an embarrassing scandal for the British government, they do offer some explanation as to why Pretoria's violent response to its own indigenous anti-colonial nationalists did not draw a tougher response from London.

It is clear that British officials, particularly those based in Pretoria, valued a bridge-building approach as opposed to one of isolating South Africa. They defended continued cultural relations with the country, arguing that this form of contact was beyond politics so should be maintained in spite of Pretoria's racist domestic policies. Their arguments informed British policy. Indeed, Rab Butler's response to criticism from Labour MPs mirrored the opinions of the High Commissioner and Cultural Advisor in the Union that any action taken to cancel the RBC's tour in response to Mosaval's absence, and the brutality of the Sharpeville Massacre, should be ruled out as it would be seen as a political gesture by Pretoria and most white South Africans.



Officials both in London, and especially those in Pretoria, felt that promoting cultural links and performing arts tours could help maintain British influence in South Africa and act as a counter against Afrikaner cultural nationalism. These forms of contact were considered so important that, at times, British officials were willing to placate the racist system in the country to allow them to continue. Mosaval's absence from the touring party is a prime example of this, and Maud's attitude is highlighted in a comment he made after the tour:

the Ballet (sensibly in my opinion) did not include in the touring company Johaar Mosaval. It was alleged that he was being left behind because of the Union's racial policies and, by implication that he ought to be included as a gesture against them.<sup>166</sup>

Removing the financial support the British Council provided the RBC, or putting pressure on it to withdraw from South Africa in the aftermath of the Sharpeville Massacre would clearly have been a political decision. However, it would no doubt have made more of a positive impression on the country's black communities who protested against the Union Festival, and on emerging nationalist governments in recently decolonised African states, than the close relations the RBC apparently forged with the Eoan Group. Indeed, members of this group were viewed as 'stooges' of the apartheid state by supporters of the Congress Alliance for their willingness to accept funding from the NP government. However, interference by the British government would have, in Maud's words, 'been deeply resented by nearly all white South Africans'.<sup>167</sup> This could have placed further strain on relations with Pretoria, something policymakers were keen to avoid, emphasising how maintaining cordial links with whites was prioritised over relations with the black South Africans.

Additionally, this article also highlights the usefulness of the British Council's role as a semi-autonomous organisation. As the RBC tour received financial support from the British Council rather than directly from the government, this allowed ministers to relinquish any responsibility for the RBC tour when it was criticised by opposition MPs for Mosaval's omission. However, it is clear that relations between the British Council and the government were far more porous than ministers were willing to admit. This overlapping relationship is epitomised by Butlin's role as cultural advisor. This position was based at the High Commission and had diplomatic privileges, but had its salary paid by the British Council.

While the British backed performances and exhibitions in South Africa to celebrate the Festival of the Union were hailed a success by British officials, and were largely appreciated by those who saw them, their overall effect has to be considered quite limited. Only a small percentage of South Africa's populations would have seen these 'manifestations' of British culture, and just because they did so there was no guarantee this would help to maintain British influence in the country. Many of those who were attracted to such cultural manifestations were already committed anglophiles like Shepstone and

Malherbe. Therefore, performances and exhibitions of this nature would not have had the desired effect on reaching those in South Africa who needed to be 'won over'. In contrast, the British folk dancers who visited the Union appear to have had much more contact with 'ordinary' white South Africans. Indeed, as John Maud explained 'they stayed, up and down the country, with South African families, many of them Afrikaners; they made a host of friends'.<sup>168</sup>

While the British government and the British Council in particular, were unwilling to provide financial support for the folk dancing tour, it appears it would have been a more worthwhile investment to improve Britain's standing amongst white South Africans, which was the main remit with which the cultural advisor post had been created. The lack of interest amongst policymakers in supporting the folk dancers contrasted considerably with their attitude to the potential RBC tour. This shows that despite the apparent focus of British policymakers on forging better relations with Afrikaners, elements of snobbery still existed towards their cultural practices and the 'high art' of the ballet was viewed as a more appropriate means to project British culture in South Africa.

While British officials in the Union praised the RBC performers for their attitude to the black South Africans they met, and claimed the performances to these communities were well attended, the sincerity of these comments must be called into question. Performances were offered to these communities at the behest of Equity rather than a decision taken by the RBC or the government. These appear to be token gestures simply made to ensure the tour could take place. While officials emphasised the contact with black South Africans (particularly when they feared the tour might have been cancelled in Sharpeville's aftermath), this appears simply to be window-dressing to mask the driving force behind such visits, namely maintaining cordial relations with white South Africa. This is exemplified in Maud's relaying of how the RBC 'went out of their way to heel any wounds caused by Johaar Mosaval's exclusion' by visiting his mother and family at their home in Cape Town, providing them with two boxes for one of the performances, and presenting Mrs Mosaval with a radio-gramophone and records.<sup>169</sup> Maud claimed that although 'this was done quietly and without ostentation ... gestures of this kind do not go unnoticed amongst the many non-Europeans who look to the United Kingdom for sympathy and understanding'.<sup>170</sup>

In spite of the efforts of British officials in South Africa to emphasise the importance of maintaining cultural ties, visits like that of the RBC became increasingly difficult for the British government to support financially. South Africa grew more isolated over the course of the 1960s. On 5 October 1960, the all-white South African electorate voted to become a republic and was ultimately forced out of the Commonwealth in 1961. Despite initially abstaining from the April 1960 Security Council resolution condemning apartheid, in March 1961, less than a month after Verwoerd withdrew South Africa's application to retain its membership of the Commonwealth, the British representatives at the UN voted in support of a General Assembly resolution which

described apartheid as a 'flagrant violation' of the UN's charter.<sup>171</sup> Ronald Hyam and Peter Henshaw contend that 'while the precise reason for this major policy shift remains unclear' it appears Britain was following the US government who had 'led the way by voting for the Security Council Resolution' and was bowing to 'the pressure of world revulsion' to apartheid which 'was becoming stronger all the time'.<sup>172</sup>

Moreover, the growing number of independent African, Asian, and Caribbean countries continued to vocalise their disdain for South Africa's racist domestic policies, and used Commonwealth and UN meetings to attack countries that maintained cordial relations with Pretoria. There was also a growth in domestic criticism in the UK for the government's lack of action against the apartheid state. The AAM and other similar groups sought new ways to ostracise the Republic. In June 1963, 48 playwrights from both the UK and US signed a declaration forbidding their works from being performed in front of segregated audiences. Roger Fieldhouse contends that this action 'really launched the cultural boycott'.<sup>173</sup>

Both Equity and the Musicians Union continued to take a tougher stance over their members' performances in South Africa. Equity had already introduced rules in 1957 which insisted that any performances in South Africa had to feature a proportion of shows for black audiences.<sup>174</sup> In 1961, however, Equity members who had visited South Africa raised concerns that this was 'an unsatisfactory safeguard for non-European audiences' and that 'performances for them have often been in tin huts rather than theatres'.<sup>175</sup> This was in direct contrast to the arguments Maud put forward that the RBC performers found the venues used for performances to black South Africans better than in some other countries where they had performed. In response, Equity tightened restrictions on its members stipulating that they should only perform in South Africa when they had assurances that they could deliver performances for black audiences in the same venue as those used for performances for whites. The Musicians Union went even further, issuing a total ban on its members performing in South Africa in 1961.<sup>176</sup> The British government was unwilling to come into conflict with these trade unions and, while there was clearly a desire to continue to promote cultural contact with South Africa, it did not offer support to any tours which did not have the relevant trade unions' blessing. Clearly, while British officials wished to maintain close relations with apartheid South Africa, there was only so far they were willing to go to achieve this, and pressure from anti-apartheid campaigners and the international community could force the government to make modest changes to its policies.<sup>177</sup> This was a major barrier to the British government's ability to use performing arts tours in its cultural diplomacy in South Africa to the extent officials had hoped. While British performing artists still performed in South Africa throughout the years of apartheid, officials could not direct the flow of such contact to correlate with British interests.

## Notes

1. It should also be noted that coloured is not an offensive term in South Africa but refers to a specific ethnic group of mixed racial heritage.
2. See Hopkins, "Rethinking Decolonization," 211–47; Hopkins, "Globalisation and Decolonisation," 729–45; Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, Chaps 21 and 26; Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace*; Buckner, *Canada and the British Empire*.
3. See for example Popescu, "The Battle of Conferences," 163–82; Huygens, "Developing a Decolonisation Practice," 53–81; Oyedemi, "Postcolonial Casualties," 214–22.
4. See Knudsen and Andersen "Affective Politics," 239–58.
5. Dube, "Afrikaans Must Fall," 13–27.
6. See Labuschagne, "Memorial Complexity," 142–54.
7. See Nomaswazi Nkosi, "Street Name Battle in Pretoria." *IOL News*, Jan 12, 2016. Available at <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gauteng/street-name-battle-in-pretoria-1969633> [Accessed 2 Aug 2021]; Kabelo Khumalo, "Battle for Soul of Afrikaans at SA Universities Rages." *Sunday World*, Aug 17, 2020. Available at <https://sundayworld.co.za/education/battle-for-soul-of-afrikaans-at-sa-universities-rages/> [Accessed 2 Aug 2021].
8. Oyedemi, "Postcolonial Casualties," 216.
9. Hyam and Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok*, 14; Berridge, *Economic Power*, 35–36; Barber and Barratt, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, 51.
10. See Berridge, *Economic Power*, 65; Barber and Barratt, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, 51.
11. Henshaw, "Britain, South Africa and the Sterling Area," 197–223; Dubow, "New Approaches to High Apartheid," 314.
12. Phimister, "Developing and Defending Britain," 751.
13. See Mlombo, *Southern Rhodesia – South Africa Relations*, 176–77.
14. See Berridge, *Economic Power*, 69–107; Spence and Berridge, "The Simonstown Agreements 1955," 195–202; Henshaw, "The Transfer of Simonstown," 419–44; Hyam and Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok*, 230–53.
15. Hyam, "The Geopolitical Origins," 146. For more on the CAF see Mlombo, *Southern Rhodesia – South Africa Relations*; Cohen, *The Politics and Economics of Decolonization*.
16. Percivale Liesching, British High Commissioner South Africa, to Earl Home, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 26 July 1956, The National Archives (TNA), London, DO/35/9459.
17. Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 13.
18. Ibid., 12. When using the term black I am referring collectively to African, Asian and Coloured South Africans as has become common practice in most literature on the subject.
19. Percivale Liesching, British High Commissioner South Africa, to Earl Home, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 26 July 1956, The National Archives (TNA), London, DO/35/9459.
20. Martin to Cockram, 30 Jan 1956, TNA, DO35/9459.
21. Liesching to the Earl of Home, 26 July 1956, TNA, DO/35/9459.
22. Notable exceptions include Jablonski, "The Road Taken," 153–65; Kizlari and Valenza, "A Balancing Act?" 1–26.
23. Richard Arndt cited in Jablonski, "The Road Taken," 153.
24. E.E.R. Church, Controller Establishments to O.G. Forster, CRO, 10 Feb 1958, TNA, DO35/9459.

25. Background Note on Royal Ballet Tour to South Africa, Comments by British Council, Dec 1959, TNA, BW/1/308.
26. Vaughan, "A Certain Idea of Britain," 151–68.
27. *Ibid.*, 152.
28. Wainwright, "A Special Relationship," 5.
29. See for example Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War*; McDaniel, *American–Soviet Cultural Diplomacy*; Miller-Davenport, *Gateway State*; Geduld, "Dancing Diplomacy," 44–81; Gerits, "Hungry Minds," 594–619; Parks, *Hearts, Minds, Voices*; See Nicholas, "Fellow Travellers," 83–105; Gonçalves, "Ballet, propaganda," 171–86.
30. Lee, "British Cultural Diplomacy," 113.
31. Connelly, "Taking Off the Cold War Lens," 739–69.
32. Council Work in South Africa, The British Council Executive Committee, 3 May 1960, TNA, BW/107/9.
33. For more on the cultural boycott see Stevens, "Boycotts and Sanctions," 82–104; Toulson, "Culture is a Weapon," 25–79; Morgan, "Into the Struggle," 98–152; Nixon, *Harlem, Homelands and Hollywood*, 155–72. Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid*, 63; Fieldhouse, *Anti-Apartheid*, 103.
34. Stevens, "Boycotts and Sanctions," 91.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Nixon, *Harlem, Homelands and Hollywood*, 157.
37. *Ibid.* 158.
38. Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 615, 7 Dec 1959, 107–78.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *New Age*, 10 Dec 1959, 6.
41. Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 615, 9 Dec 1959, 516–20.
42. Clark and Worger, *South Africa*, 60.
43. See Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, 72. These groups included the ANC, the Indian National Congress, the South African Congress of Trade Unions, the Coloured People's Congress and the South African Congress of Democrats.
44. Frankel, *An Ordinary Atrocity*, 8.
45. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 279.
46. Lodge, *Sharpeville*, 71.
47. Frankel, *An Ordinary Atrocity*, 150–56.
48. Kenney, *Architect of Apartheid*, 10.
49. Westhuizen, *White Power*, 39.
50. Dubow, "Macmillan, Verwoerd," 21.
51. *Ibid.*, 34. While Afrikaans was the language spoken at home by most Afrikaners, Dutch was used in more formal settings such as education.
52. Sargent cited in Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 361–62.
53. Barber, *South Africa*, 33.
54. *Ibid.*, 48.
55. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 398.
56. Inter-Imperial Relations Committee, Report, Proceedings, and Memoranda, Imperial Conference 1926, available at [https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/cth11\\_doc\\_1926.pdf](https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/cth11_doc_1926.pdf) [Accessed 19 Aug 2021].
57. Statute of Westminster, 1931, available at [https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1931/4/pdfs/ukpga\\_19310004\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1931/4/pdfs/ukpga_19310004_en.pdf) [Accessed 19 Aug 2021].
58. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 400–01.
59. *Ibid.*, 401.
60. *Ibid.*, 422.

61. Ibid., 491.
62. See Welsh, *The Rise and Fall*, 16; Mlombo, *Southern Rhodesia – South Africa Relations*, 121.
63. Welsh, *The Rise and Fall*, 17. The Ossewabrandwag was a right-wing paramilitary organisation with connections to Nazi Germany. It implemented a sabotage campaign against the Smuts government in an effort to derail the war effort. Several of its members, including future Prime Minister John Vorster, were interned during World War II. See Kleynhans, *Hitler's Spies*.
64. Dubow, *Apartheid*, 5.
65. Ibid., 5.
66. Posel, "Whiteness and Power," 104.
67. Boulter, "Afrikaner Nationalism in Action," 437–59.
68. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 493.
69. Posel, "Whiteness and Power," 105.
70. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 494.
71. Hopkins, "Rethinking Decolonization," 211.
72. Prime Minister's African Tour, April 1960, TNA, CAB/129/101.
73. *The Guardian*, 4 Feb 1960, 1.
74. Dubow, "Macmillan, Verwoerd," 21.
75. The literature on the 'wind of change' speech includes, but is by no means limited to Makin, "Britain, South Africa and the Commonwealth," 74–88; Dubow, "Macmillan, Verwoerd," 20–47; Ovendale, "Macmillan and the Wind of Change," 455–77.
76. Prime Minister's African Tour, April 1960, TNA, CAB/129/101.
77. Ibid.
78. Snelling to Hamilton, 26 Oct 1955, TNA, DO/35/9459.
79. Phimister, "Developing and Defending Britain," 763.
80. Snelling to Hamilton, 26 Oct 1955, TNA, DO/35/9459.
81. Overseas Information Services: Report of the Drogheda Committee, 13 Nov 1953, TNA, CAB/129/64.
82. Snelling to Hamilton, 26 Oct 1955, TNA, DO/35/9459.
83. Ibid.
84. Liesching to the Earl of Home, 26 July 1956, TNA, DO/35/9459.
85. Smedley to Martin, 17 Sep 1956, TNA, DO/35/9459.
86. Martin to Garner, 17 Sep 1956, TNA, DO/35/9459.
87. Wright to Miles, 28 Aug 1958, TNA, DO/35/9459.
88. Belcher to Cockram, 24 Feb 1958, TNA, DO/35/9459.
89. Liesching to Home 26 July 1956, TNA, DO/35/9459.
90. Church to Forster, 10 Feb 1958, TNA, DO/35/9459.
91. Johnston to Cockram, 16 Sep 1959, TNA, DO/35/9460.
92. Office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in the Union of South Africa: Report of the Cultural Advisor, Oct 1958 to April 1960, TNA, BW/107/26.
93. Office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in the Union of South Africa: Report of the Cultural Advisor, April 1960 to March 1962, TNA, BW/107/26.
94. Butlin to Newton Thompson, 20 Aug 1959, TNA, BW/107/3.
95. Office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in the Union of South Africa: Report of the Cultural Advisor, April 1960 to March 1962, TNA, BW/107/26.
96. Clutterbuck to Miss Haddon, Secretary Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, 22 March 1960, TNA, BW/107/3.
97. Extract from Note on Proposals for Cultural Projects in the Union of South Africa Festival, 1960, enclosed with Mr Jasper's letter to Controller, 27 Aug 1959, TNA, BW/107/3.

98. Ibid.
99. Dundas to British Council Director General, 4 Dec 1959, TNA, BW/107/3.
100. Ibid.
101. Telegram CRO to United Kingdom Information Office Johannesburg, 14 Nov 1959, TNA, BW/107/3.
102. Dundas to Director General, British Council, 4 Dec 1959, TNA, BW/107/3.
103. Telegram CRO to Pretoria, 14 Nov 1959, TNA, BW/107/3.
104. Dundas to Regional Officer, South Africa, 16 Dec 1959, TNA, BW/107/3.
105. Telegram Pretoria to CRO, 17 Nov 1959, TNA, BW/107/3.
106. Maud, Golden Jubilee Celebrations in South Africa, 8 Sep 1960, TNA, DO/35/10574.
107. Butlin to Newton-Thompson, 20 Aug 1959, TNA, BW/107/3.
108. *The Guardian*, 25 Oct 1959, 17.
109. The British Council Executive Committee, Royal Ballet Visit to South Africa, 5 Jan 1960, TNA, BW/1/308.
110. Ibid.
111. Bourne, "Black British Ballet," 204.
112. Background Note on Royal Ballet Tour to South Africa, Comments by British Council, Dec 1959, TNA, BW/1/308.
113. Ibid.
114. *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 Dec 1959, 1.
115. Background Note on Royal Ballet Tour to South Africa, Comments by British Council, Dec 1959, TNA, BW/1/308.
116. Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 615, 9 Dec 1959, 516–20.
117. Ibid.
118. Ibid.
119. *The Guardian*, 10 Dec 1959, 2.
120. Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 615, 9 Dec 1959, 516–20.
121. British Council Executive Committee Meeting, 4 Oct 1960, TNA, BW/107/9.
122. *Rand Daily Mail*, 16 Dec 1959, 16.
123. *Rand Daily Mail*, 22 Jan 1960, 10.
124. *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 Feb 1960, 19.
125. Ever Mayer Schay, *Of Exile and Music*, 158.
126. *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 March 1960, 7.
127. Ever Mayer Schay, *Of Exile and Music*, 159.
128. Lodge, *Sharpeville*, 148.
129. Ibid., 236–37.
130. Dubow, *Apartheid*, 81.
131. Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 621, 7 April 1960, 561–62.
132. Ibid.
133. Telegram Cape Town to CRO, 4 April 1960, TNA, BW/1/308.
134. Ibid.
135. Malherbe, *Never a Dull Moment*.
136. Ibid., 316.
137. Ibid., 315.
138. Ever Mayer Schay, *Of Exile and Music*, 159.
139. Dubow, "Scientism, Social Research," 134.
140. Parliamentary Question, 7 April 1960, Notes for Supplementaires, TNA, BW/1/308.
141. Telegram Pretoria to CRO, 4 April 1960, TNA, BW/1/308.
142. Parliamentary Question, 7 April 1960, Notes for Supplementaires, TNA, BW/1/308.



143. Office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in the Union of South Africa: Report of the Cultural Advisor, Oct to April 1960, TNA, BW/107/26.
144. Ibid.
145. Ibid.
146. Maud to Earl of Home, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 24 May 1960, TNA, BW/1/308.
147. Ibid.
148. Telegram Cape Town to CRO, 29 April 1960, TNA, DO/35/9460.
149. *New Age*, 3 March 1960, 1.
150. Kader Hassim Interview, 24 June 2002, "Voices of Resistance", University of Durban-Westville Documentation Centre Oral History Project, 46. Available at <https://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/Kader%20Hassim%20interview%202002-06-24.pdf> [Accessed 16 Aug 2021].
151. Telegram Cape Town to CRO, 11.45, 26 April 1960, TNA, BW/1/308.
152. Ibid.
153. Ibid.
154. Telegram Cape Town to CRO, 17.30, 26 April 1960, TNA, BW/1/308.
155. Ibid.
156. Pistorius, "Coloured Opera as Subversive Forgetting," 231.
157. La Guma cited in Roos, *The La Traviata Affair*, 3.
158. Telegram Cape Town to CRO, 17.30, 26 April 1960, TNA, BW/1/308.
159. Ibid.
160. *Rand Daily Mail*, 29 Jan 1960, 2.
161. Maud to Earl of Home, 24 May 1960, TNA, BW/1/308.
162. Ibid.
163. Roos, *The La Traviata Affair*, 5.
164. Prime Minister's African Tour, April 1960, TNA, CAB/129/101.
165. See Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*.
166. Maud to Earl of Home, 24 May 1960, TNA, BW/1/308.
167. Ibid.
168. Maud, Golden Jubilee Celebrations in South Africa, 8 Sep 1960, TNA, DO/35/10574.
169. Maud to Earl of Home, 24 May 1960, TNA, BW/1/308.
170. Ibid.
171. Hyam and Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok*, 165.
172. Ibid., 261.
173. Fieldhouse, *Anti-Apartheid*, 103.
174. The Colour Bar, 1965, Actors' Equity Association Archive, London, GSO1, File 1.
175. *The Guardian*, 29 March 1961, 1.
176. Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid*, 63.
177. This is best emphasised by the failed attempt by British Ambassador to South Africa, Sir John Nicholls, to persuade the Foreign Secretary to sanction a 'fact finding mission' to South Africa in 1968 in an effort to persuade Equity and the Musicians Union to moderate their policies. Nicholls felt the stipulations the unions placed on their members made it very difficult for the British government to fully utilise the potential of performing arts tours of South Africa. See Nicholls to Brown, 8 Jan 1968, TNA, FCO/13/102.

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