

## MCC, English Complicity and The D'Oliveira Affair – The Elusiveness of Truth

*“I come down on the side of honesty, a good honest piece of bungling by good honest men.”*<sup>1</sup>

Thus did Ted Dexter, sometime England captain and one-time prospective Tory MP, famously characterise the most important selection meeting in sporting history. More recently, in the *Sunday Telegraph*, the political columnist Kevin Myers delivered much the same verdict, except that he described the original omission of Basil D'Oliveira from the MCC party to tour South Africa in the winter of 1968-69 as “cretinous”<sup>2</sup>. And not simply because D'Oliveira's century and priceless final-day wicket had just helped England win the final Test to square the Ashes series. In 2003, *Observer Sports Monthly* named his non-selection among its “Ten Worst Sporting Decisions”. But were they all too generous?

History tells us D'Oliveira was summoned as a replacement for the supposedly injured Tom Cartwright three weeks after that selection meeting, whereupon Prime Minister John Vorster denounced the party as “the team of the Anti-Apartheid Movement” and MCC cancelled the tour, fuelling the sports boycott that ultimately did so much to bring down the most despicable regime of modern times. Not for nothing would Nelson Mandela convey his heartfelt thanks to “Dolly”.

It is remarkable that no film producer has yet sought to bring this classic political espionage thriller to the screen – the chief protagonists of which will be on the screen behind me. Even more than *Bodyline*, this is assuredly the cricketing tale that demands to be filmed. It had everything: a battle to beat seemingly insurmountable odds, race, class, Empire and Third World, spies and bribes, a *deus ex machina* to warm the coldest cockles and a stoical hero to match Gary Cooper in *High Noon*. That said, Sam Mendes,

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Hollywood's best-known cricket aficionado, could well be casting right now - Denzel Washington in the lead...Michael Gambon as Vorster...Kevin Spacey as Colin Cowdrey...Sir Anthony Hopkins as Cartwright. The problem, of course, is that, 40 years on, the jigsaw still lies incomplete. Over the past few years, while speaking to some of the major figures, my research has thrown up more questions than answers. Most notably: was D'Oliveira's initial non-selection politically-motivated? Indeed, could the same be said of his demotion to 12<sup>th</sup> man for the Lord's Test two months earlier, a pivotal chapter all too often ignored by historians? Such is the evidence, the reply in both instances should have a strictly rhetorical, distinctly Jewish bent: "How could it not?"

At bottom, it was all about power and white supremacy. Cricket in 1968 was still a game dominated by the white elite. England, Australia and South Africa, the founders of the original Imperial Cricket Conference in 1909, had enjoyed double voting rights until 1958, and the first two would retain their hegemony until India's improbable 1983 World Cup triumph paved the way for the game's biggest constituency to assert itself. When the newly-formed Republic of South Africa left the Commonwealth in 1961, it continued, with the support of England and the Australasians, to blithely wave away any protests by India, Pakistan and West Indies, none of whom had ever played Test matches against the exclusively white sons of Transvaal and Durban.

The central figure, the noble Basil D'Oliveira, may be viewed, and has been depicted, as the ultimate political football, a courageous outsider tossed around by a pair of spiders weaving a complex web of intrigue. Indeed, his autobiography, with no little pathos, begins thus:

*For more years now than I care to remember, one question keeps cropping up. 'If you had the choice,' I'm asked, 'where would you like to have been born?' My honest answer is always 'England'. I'm proud of my colour, of what I've achieved for myself and non-whites all over the world and I dearly love my own people in Cape Town – but I can't*

*deny that I would have been a better person and cricketer if I'd been born a coloured Englishman.*<sup>i</sup>

A determined Cape Coloured who “never had a hatred for the white man”, the young D’Oliveira excelled with bat and ball, captaining the first tour by a team of non-European South Africans, to Kenya in 1958. Cricket, he believed, would be his path to betterment. The Apartheid laws, however, prevented him from being considered for the South African Test XI so he sought a fresh start in England. Enlisting the aid of the BBC cricket commentator John Arlott and favoured by the late withdrawal of the great West Indies fast bowler Wes Hall, he found employment with the Central Lancashire League club Middleton, and brought his young family to England in 1960, soon after the Sharpeville massacre. Acclimatisation was far from easy but by 1964 he was playing in the County Championship for Worcestershire. Subtracting three years from his age in order to make himself more marketable, he made his Test debut at Lord’s two summers later, against the West Indies, whose fielders applauded him after he was run out in freakish circumstances for 27. A number of defiant innings in that series led to regular selection for what proved to be one of the most successful of all England teams. In all, he won 44 Test caps, hitting five centuries and helping his adopted country regain the Ashes in the winter of 1970-71. By the time he retired from the professional game in 1979, he was nothing less than a folk hero, a symbol of possibility and stoical resistance.

The start of the 1968 season, though, found D’Oliveira’s Test career in the balance: a poor tour of the Caribbean had seen his focus and form affected by the brewing controversy over the following year’s tour of South Africa. Knowing the possible repercussions, would he be selected? Finding consolation in alcohol, his tour report was far from blemish-free. Had he written himself out of the script? It would have been enormously convenient for a great many people had he done so.

IN THE SPRING AND SUMMER OF 1968, rebellion was in the air. The civil rights movement in the United States was gaining unprecedented momentum. Martin Luther

King was assassinated in Memphis, sending a wave of race riots rippling through the nation; student unrest erupted into violent clashes across Europe, including the worst streetfights Paris had witnessed since Liberation in 1944. Muhammad Ali was stripped of his world heavyweight boxing crown after stating, having happily flunked his Army exam, that he had no quarrel with the Vietnamese. Come autumn, in Mexico City, Tommie Smith and John Carlos would hoist their Black Power salutes on the Olympic podium. The growth of the anti-apartheid movement was profoundly in keeping with this climate.

As Thunderclap Newman's No.1 hit had it, there was indeed *Something in the Air*. The spirit of disenchantment, dissent and anarchy was captured and bottled by Lindsay Anderson's *If...* a surreal diatribe against public schools, the class system and pretty much everything about England that the director despised. "[It] took a knife and shoved it right through the heart of the Establishment," recalled its young Yorkshire-born star, Malcolm McDowell<sup>3</sup>. "This was empire and gentlemanly behaviour and deference and privilege! This is what this whole fucking country is built on! And we went for them." And if you weren't One Of Us, you could only be One Of Them.

Reviewing Bruce Murray and Christopher Merrett's *Caught Behind: Race and Politics in Springbok Cricket*, Goolam Vahed from the University of Kwazulu-Natal's School of Anthropology supplied the South African context: "The Sharpeville massacre of March 1960 increased international criticism of South Africa. The leaders of the ANC and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in exile were buoyed by support from newly independent Third World countries, which pressured for South Africa's exclusion from international sports." Sport, the authors argue, "became the soft underbelly of the apartheid regime". It was easier to target, reasoned Vahed, "than the might of international capital or military alliances".<sup>4</sup> Besides, white South Africans were fanatical about it. Yet while the new republic was suspended from international soccer in 1961 and the Olympic Games in

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1964, primarily as a consequence of pressure from Communist and Third World countries, England, Australia and New Zealand continued to play in and against South Africa at cricket and rugby union. The latter, according to the sports historian Huw Richards, was “the cherished game of the National Party’s core Afrikaaner voters”<sup>5</sup>, which may explain why it was first to crack: Maoris were permitted to tour as All Blacks in 1970. The home nation’s selection policies did not waver, however, prompting Ken Gray, New Zealand’s best prop, to retire. Cricket appealed to those of Anglo-Saxon rather than Dutch stock, and was hence less integral to the pursuit of apartheid, but was still run along strictly separatist lines. In 1970, the same year it was banished from the Davis Cup and the IOC, South Africa embarked on a 21-year Test exile; the following year, the United Nations backed a general sports boycott.

The teenaged Peter Hain, whose liberal parents had fled South Africa for England in 1966, was already au fait with some of the terrain. During his campaign for Labour’s deputy leadership in May 2007, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland recalled being “outraged” by D’Oliveira’s non-selection. So much so, it would lead him to form the successful “Stop The 70 Tour” campaign that would keep Ali Bacher’s tourists from British shores. “Most Anti-Apartheid activists didn’t care about sport,” Hain believes. “By [August 1968] I was 18 and a rank-and-file activist. I’d already seen D’Oliveira bat for England at Lord’s and The Oval: his story touched me very closely. So when he was excluded I was outraged. All I was aware of was John Arlott writing an article in the *Guardian* for which the headline read something like ‘Nobody will believe D’Oliveira was omitted for cricketing reasons’. *Everyone* knew there was more to it.”<sup>6</sup>

“FAR MORE IS KNOWN about the cabinet meetings of Harold Wilson, or the activities of the secret service in Moscow, or the details of the Poseidon nuclear missile programme, than what the England selectors said and did that night.”<sup>7</sup> So reckoned D’Oliveira’s biographer, the political commentator Peter Osborne, referring to the original

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selection meeting on August 28 that excluded D'Oliveira. Curiously, the minutes, never made public, have reportedly disappeared, though Donald Carr, the man who says he "probably wrote them", assured one interviewer that they never went missing at all. What is certain is that, if they were *ever* written, this crucial piece of evidence has been expertly kept from the public domain.

Osborne also contends that there was "at least one spy" in the room, "feeding information straight back to the South African Cricket Association (SACA), whence it was instantly passed back on to Vorster"<sup>8</sup>. The "clinching" evidence? A private letter sent by the SACA convenor of selectors Arthur Coy, a policeman by profession, to Vorster a week after the party was chosen, promising the "inside story" of the MCC meetings and stating that D'Oliveira was still a candidate. For all his remarkably philosophical mutterings down the years, and that kindly if naïve refusal to believe that his captain, the famously indecisive Cowdrey, who loathed bearing bad tidings, did not back his selection as promised (all the evidence, even Cowdrey's own, is to the contrary), D'Oliveira's immediate thoughts were of racism and political footballs. "I was like a zombie," he would attest. "The stomach had been kicked out of me. I remember thinking, 'You just can't beat the white South Africans.'" <sup>9</sup>

There were at least 10 men in that committee room that long night of August 27-28, in addition to any spy. Or spies. The four Test selectors, Doug Insole (chairman of the panel since 1965), Alec Bedser, Don Kenyon and Peter May; tour manager Les Ames; captain Cowdrey; Billy Griffith and Donald Carr, respectively MCC secretary and assistant secretary; MCC president Arthur Gilligan, a former member of the British Union of Fascists, and the treasurer Gubby Allen, Insole's predecessor as chairman of selectors, a former England captain and long the most powerful figure in English cricket, whose objections to D'Oliveira, he insisted, were on purely cricketing grounds. Bedser would co-found the right-wing Freedom Association, part-funded by the Pretorian government

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(though his artlessness and naivety were both confirmed in 1977 when, after the Commonwealth prime ministers announced the Gleneagles Declaration imposing a sporting ban on South Africa, he wondered: "What's a golf course got to do with it?"<sup>10</sup>); May's wife's uncle was Arthur Gilligan; Insole's commitment to the game was such that he spent the next four decades as a quasi, if benign, Henry Kissinger figure, a shuttle diplomat determined that cricket should always defeat politics, that the show should always go on. In a 41-page chapter about MCC's 1956-57 tour of South Africa<sup>11</sup> in a book wherein the author thought nothing of devoting another chapter exclusively to the idiosyncrasies and sins of the press, Insole contented himself with precisely one sentence about the political climate: "The maintenance of interest in the game is vital to the Board of Control, which is handicapped by the fact that because of the colour problem South Africa has infrequent visits from touring sides, who do most to keep interest alive." Of those present, only Kenyon - the former captain of Worcestershire, D'Oliveira's county club, and hence perhaps slightly biased in his favour - could not be considered a member of the establishment.

Allen remains the key figure. Not only did he have business interests in South Africa; his diary of the 1936-37 Ashes tour revealed him to be something of a racist. After various sightings of aboriginals at train stations along the Nullarbor Plain, he noted: "They really are a ghastly sight and the sooner they die out the better."<sup>12</sup>

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Some in that committee room, if not all, were privy to the fact that, five months earlier, Vorster had informed Lord Cobham, England's senior Viscount, that there would be no tour should D'Oliveira be chosen (their meeting did not become public knowledge until the following year). As a snapshot of Olde Tory England, under threat from women in trouser suits and boardrooms, long-haired popstars, the erosion of deference to alleged elders and betters, a Yorkshire accent at No.10 and a Labour government with a couple of socialist policies, it was perfect. The greatest irony was that Vorster evidently regarded MCC as Harold Wilson's loony-lefty poodle.

But back to Allen. On 5 January 1968, relates Professor Murray, whose tireless research at the National Archives in Pretoria informed Osborne's book, "the MCC had written to the [South African Cricket Association] requesting assurances, and Sir Alec Douglas-Home, the shadow home secretary and recent MCC President, was briefed to assess the situation concerning D'Oliveira during his discussions in February with Vorster and with SACA officials. Hitherto it has always been asserted, including by the MCC, that the MCC never received a reply from SACA to its inquiry. This is not correct. A reply dated 1 March 1968 was taken personally to Lord's by Jack Cheetham, vice-chairman of the SACA. On 6 March a copy was also handed to Vorster by Arthur Coy."<sup>13</sup> It was what the letter didn't say that reveals most. There was no assurance that any MCC team would be permitted to tour; no mention of the attitude of the Vorster Government, or whether it had been consulted. And it was on the advice of Gubby Allen that the letter was never submitted to the MCC Committee, in case its contents were "twisted and leaked to the press".<sup>14</sup> Instead, Cheetham was advised by Allen and Billy Griffith that SACA "need not answer their letter and it has been agreed to continue with the normal preparations and negotiations that are necessary when a tour is due to take place". The South African Tour sub-committee, chaired by Insole, was instructed to proceed but not discuss "(a) Rhodesia, or (b) D'Oliveira", and instead await "direction".<sup>15</sup>

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Jon Gemmell highlighted the mutual interests of Whitehall and Pretoria, Lord's and The Wanderers. "The two countries had been traditionally tied in the Cold War alliance by the twines of trade, political interest, culture, blood and a sense of sacrifice through war. It was considered with contempt that politics within the arena of the cricket field could potentially damage this relationship."<sup>16</sup>

VIEWING SPORT AS "one of the most effective bridges in linking people"<sup>17</sup>, and for all his antipathy towards apartheid, Cowdrey had had little hesitation in accepting the captaincy for South Africa. Albeit only, he would subsequently reveal, after requesting assurances that there would be no political interference in selection. Yet he would later write: "Whatever we might think about apartheid, at least it seems to work in their country; it is none of our business."<sup>18</sup> Indeed, come 1976, he was forgiveness personified: "They have had enough of the admonishing finger."

Cowdrey's role and influence should not be underestimated. When Vorster decreed that his tour party was unwelcome, he wanted to hop straight on a plane to the Republic and talk the PM round. "I had been at the heart of things throughout," he would write, "and could answer every question."<sup>19</sup> One of the era's most influential, complex and contradictory cricketers, Cowdrey was the son of a tea plantation manager, perceived as a gentleman amateur but in essence a pro - or, as Osborne prefers, "a member of the deracinated imperial middle-class"<sup>20</sup>. He wanted the tour to go ahead, just as he would urge that the projected visit by South Africa two summers hence should proceed. "I

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cannot reconcile an isolation policy and boycott with the Christian ethic,” he would tell the *Daily Mail* in 1970.<sup>21</sup>

One who begged to differ was Cowdrey’s one-time England colleague and captaincy rival, the Reverend David Sheppard, who was about to be anointed Bishop of Woolwich and had refused to play against South Africa in 1960 on grounds of conscience. Indeed, when the *Sunday Times* polled the diocesan Bishops of the Church of England in February 1970 about that summer’s abortive South African tour, 13 of the 20 who commented thought it should go ahead while 16 favoured anti-apartheid demonstrations. The Bishop of Southwell, the Rt Rev Gordon Savage, proffered a bright idea: “Let the South Africans tour Britain as ‘The Apartheid Team’.”<sup>22</sup>

Donald Carr insists that, contrary to all previous assertions, D’Oliveira’s candidacy dominated the selection meeting. Other than that Kenyon spoke up for D’Oliveira and Cowdrey, contrary to his personal assurances to Basil, against, nobody knows definitively who voted which way, much less why, though Carr’s experience was probably a common one. “I was genuinely talked around,” he says.<sup>23</sup>

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THE MOST NEGLECTED aspect of this story, one that Osborne conceded he should have pursued further, is D'Oliveira's other non-selection, earlier in the summer, from the England side for the second Ashes Test at Lord's. Although he had just returned from a poor tour of the Caribbean, his first for England, he had been picked for the opening Test at Old Trafford. In a surprise and heavy defeat against opponents England were expected to beat with ease, he was one of only two home players to emerge with credit, making an unbeaten 87 in the second innings; no other England batsman reached 50 in the entire match. Come Lord's, he was 12<sup>th</sup> man.

On cricketing grounds, only hindsight justifies this. Rain scotched England's hopes of a series-levelling win at Lord's but D'Oliveira's replacement, Barry Knight, took three cheap wickets as Australia were hustled out for 78, their lowest Ashes total for 30 years. So far as most were concerned, the selection had been vindicated. D'Oliveira would remain in the cold until the late withdrawal of Roger Prideaux, a batsman, on the eve of the final Test at The Oval. It was there that Dolly promised his wife a century and duly delivered, which in turn led to a public outcry when he was excluded from the South African party.

Wary that England had been fatally cautious in Manchester, desperate to make amends in the 200<sup>th</sup> Anglo-Australian Test, captain Colin Cowdrey wanted a seam bowler such as Cartwright (who was injured) or Knight for Lord's, not a swing bowler like D'Oliveira. But what on earth were the selectors doing going into an Ashes series – a contest England hadn't won for a dozen years – with D'Oliveira as first-change? D'Oliveira was a Collingwood, not a Botham or Flintoff, a partnership-breaker not an initiative-taker.

No fewer than five changes were made for the Lord's Test, Doug Insole reminded me somewhat defensively in 2007, even then smarting from what he remembers as the "massacre at Manchester".<sup>24</sup> And no, he insisted, D'Oliveira was not dropped on anything other than cricketing grounds. Yet this remains every bit as worthy of scrutiny as his overlooking in August, maybe more so. After all, it was made under similarly pressurised circumstances, carried no more cricketing justification and was even more politically expedient.

Stoking D'Oliveira's suspicions was a "curious" incident at the eve-of-Test dinner. "A top cricket official", he would write, said the only way the tour could be saved would be if he announced he was unavailable for *England* but would like to play for *South Africa*. "I was staggered," related D'Oliveira, and angrily said: 'Either you respect me as an England player or you don't.' The next day an eminent cricket writer put the same proposition to me."<sup>25</sup> He was too discreet to say so, but the "official" was Billy Griffith, the "eminent cricket writer" EW Swanton of the *Daily Telegraph*, Gubby Allen's confidante and biographer. The same correspondent who, curiously, would lament D'Oliveira's initial omission from the winter tour party.

ONE OF THE tour's archest proponents was Charles Lyttleton, the 10<sup>th</sup> Viscount Cobham, whose previous guises included Lord Steward, Governor of New Zealand, captain of Worcestershire and, just like his father and grandfather before him, MCC president. He had been targeted as a receptive conduit by Coy. Thus it was that Cobham, whose mother hailed from South Africa and who had extensive business interests there, was summoned, while visiting in March, to meet John Vorster, who told him the tour would be scrapped were D'Oliveira chosen. Which rather belied an assertion by Sir Alec

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Douglas-Home to MCC three weeks earlier, that no answer could be given to “a hypothetical question”.<sup>26</sup>

Advised by Gubby Allen, Cobham relayed the information on a need-to-know basis. Had he simply written to Griffith, as he might normally have done, Griffith would have been obliged to pass the news on to the club, whose official position, encouraged by the ruling Labour Party, was that no interference in selection would be tolerated. Had Cobham acted thus, the tour would almost certainly have been called off then and there. In 1998, the former England captain and Bishop of Liverpool, David Sheppard, recalled to me how he had cut short a visit to Belgium when he heard of D’Oliveira’s non-selection for the tour. He decided to call Cobham to see whether anyone, as he put it, “might want to take up the cudgels on Dolly’s behalf”. When the pair met, recalled Sheppard, “[Cobham] was wildly indiscreet”.<sup>27</sup> Thus did he learn of Cobham’s audience with Vorster. Was it purely coincidental, then, that several South African grandees were due in London for the Lord’s Test, including Coy? It was to Lord Cobham’s box that Coy repaired.

It should be stressed that D’Oliveira was not informed of his exclusion from England’s Lord’s XI until the opening morning, ie. after Griffith and Swanton’s proposals. The backlash was strong, even vicious. The “cynics”, noted Cowdrey, “refused to believe that D’Oliveira’s exit was not some sort of fascist plot”. Letters “rolled in”.<sup>28</sup> Is it that great a leap to surmise that to have him playing in front of Coy and company would have sent a provocative message when conciliation was so plainly the aim of the game? Or was it simply punishment for spurning the advances of Griffith and Swanton?

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BY WAY OF emphasising fate's conspicuous role in the saga, it is worth mentioning that, had Barry Knight not injured an ankle at Leyton a few days earlier, he, not D'Oliveira, would have played at The Oval. While still officially a secret, says Knight,<sup>29</sup> rumours about Vorster's stance had reached the county dressing rooms. "We'd heard, certainly by then, that he'd said the team wouldn't be welcome there if Dolly was included. We thought the MCC didn't have the guts to pick him. When the tour party was first announced, I thought 'They're as weak as gnat's piss. They're kow-towing to Vorster.' The pros were revulsed. It was always them and us. We thought Walter Robins was mad and Gubby Allen was a bleedin' snob. He was a bit of an idiot, a bit up himself. And Basil was one of us."<sup>30</sup>

When I showed my findings to Professor Murray, he had one major reservation. Did I really want to publicly accuse the England selectors of risking losing to Australia in order to keep the South Africans sweet?<sup>31</sup> I admitted that I hadn't considered it that way but yes, I am prepared to make that inference.

ENTER GEOFFREY HOWARD. Shortly after D'Oliveira was finally dismissed at The Oval, the Surrey secretary's phone rang. "The caller was on the line from Prime Minister Vorster's office in Pretoria," recalled Howard. "A fellow called Tiene Oosthuizen... a director of Rothmans, based in South Africa, and he'd been trying to contact [Billy] Griffith... 'I can't get hold of him [Oosthuizen said], so will you take a message to the selectors. Tell them that, if today's centurion is picked, the tour will be off.'"<sup>32</sup> That same afternoon, a well-informed prediction was filed to *The Guardian* by Louis Duffus, South Africa's pre-eminent cricket writer, whose history of cricket in the Republic, published

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by the SACA, would, tellingly, eschew any mention of black players. To him, D'Oliveira was "politically motivated and an opportunist with an axe to grind". "If D'Oliveira is selected," he wrote from The Oval, "South Africa are unlikely to host the MCC tour..."

Tiene Oosthuizen had delivered another message from Pretoria after the Lord's Test, offering the confused and troubled D'Oliveira a long-term coaching job in the Republic, at a salary that would probably secure his family's financial future, if he declared himself unavailable, and duly courted him until late August. D'Oliveira, though, had declined. As he told the *Sunday Mirror* nearly 30 years later, he wanted "to prove that I could bat and that people from the black and coloured community, whatever you like to call it, know how to conduct themselves."<sup>33</sup>

"No way I'm saying that Geoffrey [Howard] didn't tell me of Pretoria's telephone warning," replied Insole after *The Guardian's* Frank Keating had brought Howard's recollection to his attention in 2001, "but, frankly, I don't recall it specifically because at that time every Tom, Dick and Harry was saying what would happen if we didn't pick a certain someone. All I remember is opening a very long meeting by saying 'Gentlemen, forget South Africa, let's just choose the best MCC cricket team...'"<sup>34</sup>

"I think I believed in, or was talked into believing, that it was all on cricketing grounds," concedes Donald Carr. "There had been so much chatter about it. I think there were people high up in the cricketing hierarchy in England who were talking a lot about it and knew what the possibilities could be."<sup>35</sup>

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THE LATEST SUBSTANTIAL PIECE of the jigsaw only emerged with the publication in May 2007 of Stephen Chalke's biography of Cartwright, who died shortly afterwards. I had interviewed him by phone a few months earlier, ostensibly on another topic. I had been utterly unable, that said, to resist congratulating him on what I had long suspected to have been his conscience-driven withdrawal from the 1968-69 South African tour party, a stance reinforced by our mutual friend, the *Guardian* journalist David Foot, who had written a discreetly revealing chapter about Cartwright in his book *Fragments of Idolatory*. At the time, Cartwright sounded sheepish, parrying my interpretation and insisting that, in discussing his replacement with Cowdrey, D'Oliveira had never been mentioned. A few months later we were due to talk about Chalke's book, at Cartwright's request. Apparently, for all his evasiveness during that pre-Christmas conversation, now the book was due to be published he wanted to be more expansive. It remains my biggest regret as a journalist that I did not make that call more speedily. Happily, I did receive confirmation of this twist from another source.

The long-stated cause of Cartwright's withdrawal from the South Africa tour party was a shoulder injury, but there were more extenuating causes. For one, his young son was fed up seeing him spend winters overseas. What seems to have most affected Cartwright, though, was "a little news item" in the *Daily Express*, which reported that, when the party was announced on August 28, National Party members at a congress in Bloemfontein stood and cheered. "When I read that," he recalled, "I went cold. And I started to wonder whether I wanted to be part of it."<sup>36</sup>

Murray and Merrett elaborate: "As J H P Serfontein, 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

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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, the government’s decision not to allow D’Oliveira to tour with the MCC even if he had been selected in the first instance. He had, he wrote, been told this by Nationalists ‘very close to the Party leadership’. Serfontein represented the decision as a strategic political victory for Vorster, making his position as National Party leader ‘impregnable’ ... For all that, the D’Oliveira affair was a significant, if temporary, setback for Vorster's new sports policy. His first attempt at ‘liberalisation’ 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'Oliveira's selection. Had D'Oliviera been selected in the first instance, Vorster's new sports policy would have been exposed as hollow. Frank Waring had already prepared a statement to announce the cancellation of the tour in the event of D'Oliveira's selection. The statement largely reflected Nationalist paranoia. Its thrust was that ‘it would be naïve ... on anybody's part to maintain that there had been no political intervention, not only in this MCC team but also in cricket generally’.”<sup>37</sup>

Cartwright, who had toured South Africa four winters earlier, was an unusual cricketer: politically aware, a proud and vocal Labourite. The flight to the Republic coincided with Polling Day during the 1964 General Election; when he saw the Tory MP Quentin Hogg drive up Baker Street campaigning with a loud hailer, he shook his fist and “shouted something”. In South Africa he and the team had tea with Henrik Verwoerd, the father of apartheid, but what lingered longer was seeing the conditions under which Joe, his driver and a Cape Coloured, lived. When he took his mother to her brother’s hotel in Paarl, Cartwright related, he had to drop her at the front and go round the rear entrance himself. “That was mind-boggling to me, how people could be so inhuman. It was a country without any human dignity at all.”<sup>38</sup>

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Peter Hain confirmed this fresh angle. “Ironically, Tom Cartwright became a constituent of mine in Neath, where he’d moved to and married a local girl. In 1991, my son Drake was training with Glamorgan youth, whom he was coaching, and we became friends. He told me that his ‘injury’ was not the reason he pulled out. Basically, he told the selectors he wouldn’t be fit, but the point was, he didn’t want to go.”<sup>39</sup>

BY ANY STANDARDS, the switch to D’Oliveira after Cartwright’s withdrawal was a leap and a half. Substituting a batsman who bowled a bit for a bowler who batted a bit made little sense - unless one interprets the decision as an attempt to curry public favour and/or correct the perceived error of August 28, when his exclusion was explained away on the ground that he offered little as a bowler. What made his eventual selection even curiouseer was a conversation Cartwright had with Cowdrey while the captain was trying to persuade him to tour. Even if he did fail to regain fitness in South Africa, Cowdrey said, there would be adequate replacements on hand from the ranks of English coaching in the Republic, notably Don Wilson, a *spinner*.<sup>40</sup>

“I think some people [at the original selection meeting] put a lot of onus on Dolly’s poorish tour of the Caribbean, maybe unfairly,” says Donald Carr. “[When Cartwright pulled out] we decided that Dolly was the best bet, but it all looked so fearful. I felt that it had not been very well handled. I don’t think anyone supported apartheid. A lot of people believed in cricket.”<sup>41</sup> While unsure how well his memory serves him, Carr hints at yet more subterfuge: “I think the MCC committee decided we should take this line, to leave or not to include Dolly as a political challenge to South Africa.”<sup>42</sup> For which one interpretation, arguably the only one, is: the original decision to exclude him was done to placate South Africa.

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That MCC and the SACA colluded seems eminently possible, attested the then-South African-based journalist and author Trevor Chesterfield<sup>43</sup>. “Especially,” he wrote, “if private papers are to be believed. The papers support the document shown to [me] by Ben Schoeman, a member of the Vorster cabinet which made the decision to ban D’Oliveira.” That decision was taken on August 27, just hours before the MCC selection meeting. “Not all were in favour,” reported Chesterfield. “Had it not been for a growing right wing revolt there could have been several dissenters. If what Schoeman said could be taken at face value...[Jack Cheetham] was deliberately leaked a report citing reasons for the banning should it be necessary. Not only would Dolly’s selection cut across a variety of apartheid laws; it would lead also to an intolerable situation and the anti-apartheid movement would capitalise on Basil’s presence.”

Chesterfield suspects that the “spy” in the committee room was EW Swanton, a friend and later biographer of Gubby Allen. “My own feeling, and I had this suspicion grow because of the affiliation between E W Swanton and Gubby Allen, is that it was Swanton, fed by Allen. The background to this was the link between Swanton and Coy and the man who Coy fed all his SACA information to, Louis Duffus, a white ant in the woodpile. I first met Duffus in 1960 during the South African tour of England and again in 1963-64 when on tour of Australia as an extra hand needed to do reports for AAP. It was while in Sydney 1963 that I realised to an extent Duffus was a racist when he refused to share a lift with a couple of African types (West Indians I think) who stepped in two floors from the ground and decided to take the stairs for reason of exercise. Earlier in that tour, I recall Garry Sobers scoring a nifty century [for South Australia] against South Africa and Eddie Barlow and Peter Pollock were full of admiration - Duffus dismissed it, and from memory, as ‘an innings quantified by moments of fortune and several fielding errors and he fed on missed chances. It isn't one to remember and of no genuine significance. Certainly Australia have more masterful batsmen in their ranks than this West Indian.’ He was chided at dinner that night for his comments by Jack Fingleton.”<sup>44</sup>

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IT IS HARD not to conclude that the key decisions that summer – the Lord’s XI and the tour party - were taken in part by men with vested interests in keeping D’Oliveira out of his homeland, notably Gubby Allen. Or that others who were party to the tour selection thought they were acting honourably, and wholly in cricket’s interests, when in reality their deliberations, whether consciously realised or not, were inevitably compromised, by knowledge of the likely repercussions. It would have been unnatural had it been otherwise. Even so, Ted Dexter’s talk of “honest bungling” seems naïve at best. When, in response to D’Oliveira’s original non-selection, David Sheppard called for a Special General Meeting of the MCC, the committee, led by Aidan Crawley and Dennis Silk, inferred that South Africa’s domestic policies were no concern of the club, stressing once more the primacy of the game. “This,” argues Gemmell, “was a firm endorsement of the doctrine that politics should not mix with sport in any situation,” which “by definition, was a political position”.<sup>45</sup> Crawley, in fact, had been an MP for both major parties, while Silk revelled in the third name of “Whitehall”. The “Lord’s-centred elite” were not, argued Murray and Merrett, “the helpless victim of the political intervention of the apartheid regime but a willing collaborator with the government in enforcing segregation on the cricket field. White cricket generally showed no interest in promoting black cricket or in pursuing the notion of non-racial cricket.”<sup>46</sup>

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The bottom line seems plain: when moral fibre was called for, the lords of English cricket, and their friends in high places – often one and the same - offered a masterclass in self-preservation. It is worth recalling, too, that 1968 was the year the MCC ceded its traditional power over English cricket to the Test and County Cricket Board: was all this a final flexing of muscles?

Lest we forget, however, there was a happy ending. That Oval victory marked the fourth in England's record unbeaten sequence of 26 Tests, the triumphant Ashes tour of 1970-71 the centrepiece; D'Oliveira, once recalled, was an ever-present and vital cog, scoring four centuries, most notably a match-saving 114 against Pakistan in Dacca, in addition to breaking many a stubborn partnership. Wherever he played, however he fared, the affection, of crowds, teammates and opponents, was unmistakeable. The 1972 Ashes series proved his international farewell but he continued serving Worcestershire until the end of the decade. A stand at the club's home ground, New Road, would be named after him. At the opening of the 2003 World Cup in Cape Town, he was included in a parade honouring South Africa's 50 greatest sportspeople: not bad for someone who had only ever represented his country in the symbolic sense. His tale, warranted John Arlott in 1980, "is the ultimate success story. It provides comfort and hope for non-white-skinned people of many races in South Africa; offering them evidence that no government can completely cut off their right to prove themselves. This is not simply a matter of sport. There have been few comparable achievements in any field."<sup>47</sup>

Let us give thanks, then, to misguided men in old school ties, Barry Knight's dodgy ankle, the *Express* - and Tom Cartwright's conscience. The unexpurgated truth, however, may take another 40 years to emerge. And that may be a conservative estimate. Roll those cameras.

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## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>2</sup> Kevin Myers, "The African anarch v the anoraks of cricket", *Sunday Telegraph* 28 November, 2004
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- <sup>4</sup> *The Word* magazine, August 2007
- <sup>5</sup> Goolam Vahed, "More than a Pastime: Cricket, Culture, and Society in South Africa" (<http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showpdf.php?id=10533>)
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- <sup>11</sup> Frank Keating, "Arlott's imperishable voice will never be forgotten", *The Guardian*, December 10, 2001
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- <sup>13</sup> Brian Rendell, *Gubby Under Pressure: Letters From Australia, New Zealand and Hollywood*, ACS Publications, 2008
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- <sup>20</sup> Ibid
- <sup>21</sup> Osborne (2004)
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- <sup>23</sup> John Lovesey, Nicholas Mason and Edwin Taylor (eds), *The Sunday Times Sports Book*, World's Work 1979
- <sup>24</sup> Interviewed by Richard Evans, March 2007
- <sup>25</sup> Letter to author, March 2007
- <sup>26</sup> D'Oliveira (1980)
- <sup>27</sup> Osborne (2004)
- <sup>28</sup> Interview with author, 1998, quoted in *This Sporting Life – Cricket*, David & Charles, 1999
- <sup>29</sup> Cowdrey (1976)
- <sup>30</sup> Interview with author, March 2007
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid
- <sup>32</sup> Email to author, November 2007
- <sup>33</sup> Stephen Chalke, *At the Heart of English Cricket: The Life and Memories of Geoffrey Howard*, Fairfield Books, 2001
- <sup>34</sup> Mike Langley, "Hello Dolly...", *Sunday Mirror*, July 7, 1996

- <sup>35</sup> Frank Keating, “Arlott’s imperishable voice will never be forgotten”, *The Guardian*, December 10, 2001
- <sup>36</sup> Interviewed by Richard Evans, [www.overtimeonline.co.uk](http://www.overtimeonline.co.uk), March 2007
- <sup>37</sup> Stephen Chalke, *Tom Cartwright - The Flame Still Burns*, Fairfield Books, 2007
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- <sup>39</sup> Chalke (2007)
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- <sup>42</sup> Interviewed by Richard Evans, March 2007
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- <sup>44</sup> Trevor Chesterfield, *Cricket Captains of South Africa* (2003, Zebra Press – unedited manuscript)
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- <sup>46</sup> Gemmell (2004)
- <sup>47</sup> Murray and Merrett (2004)
- <sup>48</sup> D’Oliveira (1980)