On the eve of the crucial Commonwealth mini-summit in London, FT writers assess the leaders' attitudes

Head to head over sanctions and South Africa



THATCHER

Minister, that not everybody

ONE POINT about Mrs Thatcher, the British Prime

realises is that her bark canbe worse than her bite. She can seem at her most aggressive when she is about to change her mind.

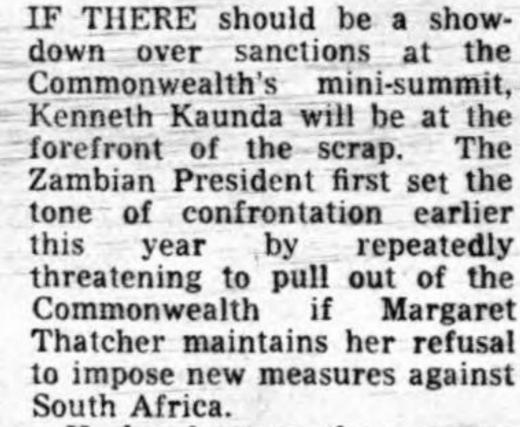
When she took office in 1979 she did not expect that Britain would shortly be coming to terms with Mr Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. Under the guidance of Lord Carrington, her first Secretary, she

allowed it to happen. Another point about her that is sometimes overlooked is that she is a very good politician. She wins elections.

Africa has always been a difficult subject for the Tories. The party was divided over the granting of independence to the East African states in the 1960s, its attitudes towards the Central African Federation and again in its approach to the illegal declaration of independence

be the most difficult problem of the lot, especially since the Conservative Party is no longer the party of the Commonwealth. Mrs Thatcher has reached the end of a Parliamentary session with unity just about intact and an all party Select Committee acknowledging the near inevitability of further

Where she may have got into a tangle was in persuading herself that President Botha would take the bold course and opt for substantial reform. She says that that is what she would have done in his position. She was wrong, but may still entertain lingering hopes.



He has kept up the pressure since then, publicly carpeting Sir Geoffrey Howe, the British Foreign Secretary, on both his recent visits to Lusaka

In his 23 years in office, KK, as he is widely known, has suffered the effect of a series of independence wars in neighbouring territories: Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Namibia.

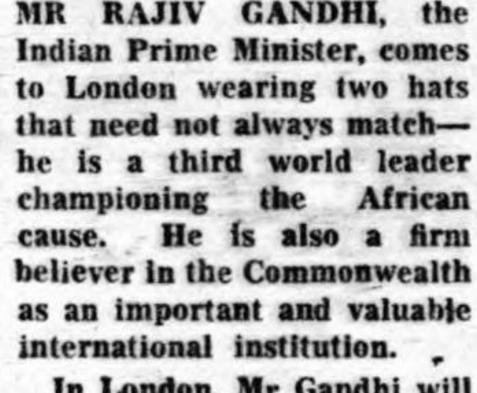
Now Zambia, which provides the African National Congress (ANC) with its administrative headquarters, is in the front line of the most serious upheaval of all.

garet Thatcher.

An earlier confrontation ended happily. After a sometimes acrimonious Commonwealth conference in Lusaka in 1979, when Rhodesia headed the agenda, the two protagonists ended the conference on the dance floor doing the foxtrot.

Commonwealth chemistry, the mediating role of the Queen and, above all, the emergence of a strategy for Rhodesia's independence had brought them together. This weekend sanctions and South

Michael Holman



GANDHI

In London, Mr Gandhi will be flexing his international muscles in favour of the frontline African states. In the process, he could find himself on the side of forces that will strain the Commonwealth because of the threat of clash with Mrs Thatcher.

The Prime Minister has in recent weeks launched his own brand of quiet diplomacy. He has spoken on the telephone to the Canadian and Australian Prime Ministers and with the frontline African leaders. This has led him to believe that a united stand is possible to put pressure on Mrs Thatcher to agree

The Indian leader played a major role at the last Commonwealth summit at Nassau.

What worries Mr Gandhi is that Mrs Thatcher is avoiding enforcing even the limited package of measures worked out there. This is the minimum that Mr Gandhi hopes Britain will agree to.

Mr Gandhi is unlikely to mince words in London. As one of his senior aides says: "The Prime Minister values the Commonwealth as much as his mother and grandfather did. But ending apartheid is even more important."



But attendance at the London meeting is vital in his view. After all, he was one of those at the Nassau meeting who initiated the creation of the Eminent Persons Group and convinced the hard-liners to give dialogue with the South African Government a chance before jumping into sanctions. Since the EPG had failed to bring the white government to the negotiating table, he is frustrated, and feels the need to push on with the work.

Mr Hawke, 56, is bringing to London his distinctive style of persuasion, arbitration and bargaining so famous among Australians. Since his days as a union leader and as president of the Australian Labor Party, he has built a reputation as a arbitrator who alternately bullies and cajoles disagreeing parties. A cult had developed around his image as a larrikin, fearless tough-talking yet charming Aussie lad.

Mr Hawke has criticised Britain and Mrs Thatcher for failing to understand that in order to retain British involvement in South Africa, the UK must not stand in the way of change but be associated with

"Now if Mrs Thatcher can to understand that, think she will see that sanctions are going to be necessary to get the South African regime to talk," he said recov.



MUGABE

WHEN Robert Mugabe won Zimbabwe's independence election in 1980 whites were stunned. They regarded the man as a terrorist, leader of guerrilla army in a war which cost over 25,000 lives. Within hours of his success, the Prime Minister made a remarkable plea for tolerance, urging reconciliation

between the races. Friends and critics alike acknowledge the steely will of a cold enigmatic man who emerged from ten years in detention under white rule with a string of degrees to his name. The singleminded ness with which he sought Zimbabwe's independence has been brought to bear on his support for efforts to end apartheid.

Mr Mugabe, who next month hosts the non-aligned summit in Harare, comes to the conference as dismissive as President Kaunda of the European peace initiative's prospects for success, and equally impatient for the Unlike his neighbour, however, he has not threatened to leave the Commonwealth

The need for southern African states to prepare for the consequences of the growing conflict in the republic, and to play their role in the ending of apartheid, is a frequent theme of his speeches.

He is acutely aware of Zimbabwe's own vulnerability Africa. Some 5,000 of the soldiers country's in neighbouring deployed Mozambique, protecting vital road, rail and oil pipeline "corridor" to the Mozambican port of Beira, which has frequently come under attack by South African-backed

Michael Holman

NOTHING would please Mr Brian Mulroney more than to receive at least some of the credit for whatever action the Bahamas. Commonwealth decides to take against South

Gently nudged by the British. the affable Canadian Prime Minister has latched on to the South African issue in the past year as a way of asserting Canada's view of itself as a international trouble spots, and of boosting his own political standing at

In addition, the Commonwealth has a special significance for Canadians beyond whatever Mr Mulroney's private political ambitions may be. It is one of the few international bodies in which Canada can take a leading role without being overshadowed by the US.

Mr Mulroney has tried take a lead in bridging the gap between Britain and the Afro-Asian and Caribbean members of the Commonwealth. He has appointed a special envoy (Mr Bernard Wood, respected head of the North-South Institute in Ottawa) to visit other Commonwealth countries in search of common ground. He imposed a package of sanctions against Pretoria earlier this year.

But the Canadians have been careful not to do anything too drastic. They did not join the Commonwealth Games boycott The sanctions they have imposed so far-like a voluntary ban by travel agents on promoting tourism to South Africa and the withdrawal of Canadian accreditation from Pretoria's labour and agriculture attaches based in the USfell far short of the tough measures which Mr Mulroney and his ministers often talk

Bernard Simon

PINDLING

IN 1967 Prime Minister Sir Lynden Pindling sought and achieved peaceful transition to black majority rule in the

Nineteen years later Sir Lynden, who will be chairing the weekend meeting, is convinced the same "quiet revolution" can end apartheid in South Africa - if Western leaders are prepared to apply mandatory economic sanctions now.

Judged alongside many Commonwealth leaders, the 56-year-old British educated lawyer might be considered conservative.

The chairman's mandate is clear: seek the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa and the establishment of a nonracial representative government as a matter of urgency. In this he has the support of the 13-member Caribbean Community (Caricom) following their meeting last

A charismatic man, known for his restrained life style he neither drinks nor smokes and is an early sleeper - he can be brutally frank. He recently chastised President Reagan and Mrs Margaret Thatcher for their opposition to sanctions.

He is likely to emphasise the point that the West is fast losing its opportunity to influence the future of Africa through its refusal to respond to demands for change by the black majority in South

Sir Lynden is facing an election within the next year. If as chairman he is able to steer the Commonwealth toward consensus on the sanctions issue, the benefits in terms of his domestic popularity could be significant.

Nicki Kelly

monwealth Games, knowing how harmful the effect could be on British opinion. He was also upset by President Kaunda's outburst at Sir Geoffrey Howe; apartheid " kissing by Rhodesia. episode. emotionalism of President Kaunda is a problem; so too, is the uncertain attitude of Nigeria

RAMPHAL

wealth Secretary-General, No

Secretary-General likes to see

the organisation over which he

presides disintegrate, so ignore

any stories that he would prefer

to see a Commonwealth without

Britain or would be uncon-

cerned about (say) a Zambian

walk-out. His job is to hold

Ramphal, only the second

holder of the post, gave the

Commonwealth new life when

he took over 11 years ago. He

is a lively, charming man. As

a Guyanese, he comes from a

country perhaps more torn by

racial conflict than almost any

other. He has an acute aware-

ness of how bad racial strife

He tried almost to the very

last day to prevent the with-

drawals from this year's Com-

can be.

the Commonwealth together.

line state. His view of the mini-summit that starts tomorrow is that it should be a success provided that the participants argue about means, not ends. Mrs Thatcher, he thinks, still has to convince some of the other leaders that she is as opposed to the present South African system as they are.

which led the withdrawal from

the Games, but is not a front

He has no objection to holding a second meeting in two months. The essential point, he says, is to keep the Commonwealth process going.

Malcolm Rutherford Malcolm Rutherford year by repeatedly

So it will be KK, impassioned emotional, with his But South Africa was bound characteristic starched white handkerchief clutched in his left hand to wipe away the odd tear, who will lead the call for sanctions, and take on Mar-

> Africa may prove a tougher nut to crack.

K. K. Sharma

Emilia gaza