

THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICAL SCENE

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THE story is told of a distinguished French writer who, on returning to Paris after a prolonged visit to South Africa, was asked by an acquaintance whether South Africa was not a very rich country. "It is", replied the Frenchman, "a country with unlimited material resources; and it is rich in insoluble problems." Perhaps the greatest problem confronting South Africa arises from the multi-racial character of her society.

At the general election held in April 1953 the European voters endorsed by a substantial majority the racial policies of the Nationalist Government which they returned to office. After this the most fateful election in the country's stormy history Prime Minister Daniel Francois Malan (Dutch Reformed parson turned politician) could claim, with justification, that he had received a mandate from the people to implement his policy of "apartheid"; and that it will be pursued with vigorous, even fanatical determination seems certain. The issue thus raised is essentially a moral issue, rather than political; and it is one that concerns the whole civilised world, but particularly the other members of the British Commonwealth. In order to appreciate the nature of the problem it will be necessary to outline briefly the part played in South African history by each of the three principal actors in the contemporary political scene: Bantu, Boer and Briton.

When the first Dutch colonists landed at the Cape three hundred years ago they found a pleasant land sparsely inhabited by roving bands of Hottentots and Bushmen. There was plenty of room for all and, as the Colony prospered, the frontiers were pushed to the East and to the North into what is now the Province of Natal. It was during the early nineteenth century that the hardy Dutch frontiersmen or Boers (meaning "farmers") came into violent conflict with the Bantu hordes moving down from the North. Of these, the most warlike were the Zulus. It was not until about the last quarter of the century that the Boers felt themselves comparatively safe from the Bantu. This sense of safety—which never amounted to a feeling of security—was however achieved only at great cost to Boer blood. Instances of treachery and massacre, sometimes of defenceless women and children, were not easily forgiven or forgotten, and in the Boer mind the Bantu appeared as the traditional enemy—defeated, but not crushed; apparently content to serve the white man, but never to be trusted.

During the early years of the present century it seemed that Boer and Bantu were settling down more or less happily in a master-servant relationship which, generally speaking, seemed to be mutually beneficial to both. To the sturdy, simple, honest and still deeply-religious Boers, descendants of men who had trekked with their families into the unknown, often with the Bible as their only book, trusting equally in God and in their rifles—to such as these it seemed that it was God's will that the Bantu should serve the white man. This, so it seemed to them, was part of his order and scheme of things on earth. It did not occur to them that this order might change. But, in fact, it was changing. As General Smuts, that greatest of Boer leaders once said with prophetic insight: "The tents have been struck, and mankind is once more on the march."

In South Africa the Bantu, unlike the Hottentot and Bushmen, has shown a surprising capacity for adapting himself to the ways of the white man. Attracted to the towns and cities by the high wages paid by the mines, commerce and industry, he has shared in the general economic prosperity and has at the same time broken away from the restraining influences of his tribal chief and kraal. The result has been the emergence, especially in and around the larger towns, of a Bantu proletariat which is beginning to question the view held by the white man that he—the white man—rules by virtue of some immutable Divine right. The white South African, both Afrikaans (Boer) and English, is highly conscious of this challenge, and also of the fact that while the South African whites number two and a half millions, the Bantu and coloured people number nearly ten millions.

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After the Napoleonic wars the Cape finally passed from Dutch into British hands. Immigration from Holland ceased and English settlers came out to the Cape in increasing numbers. Most of the new immigrants, though not all, made their homes in the more settled areas of the Eastern Cape. It was the Boers who, trekking with their ox-wagons into the interior, met and broke the military power of the Zulu nation. But it was Englishmen, among them Cecil Rhodes, who developed and exploited the fabulous wealth of the Kimberley diamond mines. And it was Englishmen who, to the annoyance of that stalwart but reactionary patriarch, President Kruger, discovered and exploited the gold of the Witwatersrand in Kruger's Transvaal Republic.

For half a century, since the days of the Great Trek in the 1830's, the Boers—rugged, sturdy individualists, acknowledging no authority other than their own and fearing only God—had been trying to free themselves from British rule. To President Kruger and his Volksraad (parliament) it seemed that whenever the Boers pushed the frontiers forward, the ubiquitous British moved in just behind. Kruger was determined that this time, gold mines notwithstanding, the Boers were not moving out. Nor were they going to permit themselves to be outvoted by the Uitlanders (foreigners) in their own country. And so, though the revenues from the gold mines filled the coffers of the Transvaal Republic, Kruger set his face stubbornly against any concessions to the Uitlanders.

The Boer War which followed (1899-1902) seemed to nearly all Boers an unjust war. They were defeated in the field, after a bitter struggle, and Kruger fled to Switzerland, where he subsequently died. But if the war itself was unjust, the peace which was concluded by the British government was a generous one. For the first time in the history of war compensation was paid by the victors to the vanquished for damage to property. Lord Milner laid the foundations of sound government and within four years after the conclusion of hostilities the former Boer republics had been granted responsible government by the new Campbell-Bannerman administration in London. "They gave us back" said General Smuts—"in everything but name—our country. After four years. Has such a miracle of trust and magnanimity ever happened before?" Many of the Boers resolved to support the policy of their two former generals, Botha and Smuts, and work for a united South African nation. Unfortunately many others among the Boers could not easily discard the hatred for all things English which had been engendered by the war. They felt that England was an "imperialist" power and not to be trusted; and that association with England would inevitably result in the loss of their language and identity as a separate nation.

It is against this historical background that contemporary South African politics must be viewed. Two factors emerge which are of paramount importance: the first is the fear of the Afrikaner—shared to some extent by all Europeans in South Africa—that the Bantu is again about to challenge European supremacy. The second is the fear of the Afrikaner that he may lose his identity as a separate "volk" or nation.

Dr. Malan's Nationalist Party consists almost exclusively

of Afrikaans speaking people and the policy of that party is the expression of the fears, prejudices and aspirations of the Afrikaner people. Above all the Nationalist Party is pledged to "maintain white civilisation in South Africa"—i.e. to maintain white supremacy in South Africa. At the same time they are prepared, say the Nationalists, to encourage the Bantu to develop, and to become his own master, in the native reserves and in other areas to be set aside for his exclusive occupation, to which he is to be encouraged to move. In the areas set aside for white occupation however all opportunity for advancement and all rights are to be denied him—except only the right to sell his labour, on such conditions as may be prescribed by the white man. This, then, is "apartheid".

The answer of the Opposition parties to apartheid is that it won't work. It simply isn't practical, they say; and there is no doubt that this is so. The native reserves are already overcrowded and there is not enough suitable land on which to settle the Bantu. Moreover without native labour it would have been impossible for the mines, industry and commerce to have developed and prospered to the extent to which they have done; and without a continuing supply of native labour it would be impossible for industry to carry on—for there are not enough Europeans to perform the work being done by the natives. Bantu labour has become an integral and essential factor in the South African economy; that labour could not now be abstracted without dislocating the economic structure of the country and very materially reducing the standard of living of all sections of the population. And yet it was the slogan "apartheid", impractical and indeed preposterous though it may be as a policy, which won the last two general elections for the Nationalists. It was Hitler who wrote in *Mein Kampf* that if you tell a little lie you are likely to be disbelieved; for, said that modern Michaeveli, the people themselves tell little lies, and they will suspect you of doing the same—but they will not suspect you if you tell a big lie.

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What then is the alternative to apartheid? It is at this point, and on this most vital issue, that the Opposition finds itself in a painful dilemma: for the basic consideration in South African politics is that the overwhelming majority of the European population is strongly opposed to the granting of political concessions to the natives, since it is feared that this policy

would in due course inevitably lead to the Europeans being outvoted by the natives. The essential weakness of the United Party, which is General Smuts' old party and still the principal opposition party, lies in the fact that, on the one crucial issue, that of native policy, they have no positive alternative to offer to apartheid. United Party native policy, never very carefully defined, appears to be one merely of alleviating the conditions of the native population, particularly in the field of health and housing.

While the first plank in the Nationalist platform is apartheid, the second is the preservation as a separate entity of the Afrikaans people and its language, culture and traditions. The abiding fear of the Nationalist is that his people will be assimilated by the English speaking (white) South Africans, as the French Huguenots who came to the Cape were assimilated by his own forbears. United Party talk of a united South African nation, Boer and Briton going forward together, is anathema to the Nationalist. It is this fear of assimilation which provides the key to an understanding of much which would otherwise be inexplicable in the Nationalist character. It accounts for his anti-British and republican propaganda. Although since the Statute of Westminster (1931) South Africa has been a completely independent Dominion, the symbol of the British Crown is regarded as an alien and unwelcome intrusion by the Nationalists, and they feel they owe no allegiance to the Crown. The attainment of a republic is high on their agenda.

The Nationalists' fear of being assimilated by the English finds further expression in the government's immigration policy, which is to encourage immigration from Holland and Germany and to discourage immigration from the United Kingdom. Special mention should also be made of the Transvaal Language Ordinance. This Ordinance, which was forced through the Transvaal Provincial Council against sustained and bitter United Party opposition, makes it compulsory for all children to be taught in their own vernacular: children of English speaking parents in English medium schools and children of Afrikaans speaking parents in Afrikaans medium schools. The provisions of this Ordinance bear particularly harshly on Afrikaans speaking persons many of whom, realising the value of a thorough knowledge of English, used to send their children to English medium schools. Now however under the Ordinance school inspectors are required to remove from any English medium school any child whose home language is found

on enquiry to be Afrikaans. This in fact not infrequently happens, to the indignation of the parents concerned.

The Transvaal Language Ordinance well illustrates the authoritarian trend among the Nationalist extremists—a trend towards a philosophy which is, unhappily, not very far removed from that of the Nazis. This philosophy may be briefly expressed as follows: The interests of the Afrikaner people are paramount; any action which promotes those interests is justified; the Nationalist Party is the vehicle for the promotion of those interests; therefore anything which promotes the interests of the Nationalist Party is justified. It follows that, to the Nationalist, it is perfectly proper to deprive parents of their natural right to send their children to a school of their own choosing; to deprive coloured voters in the Cape Province of their franchise rights guaranteed to them under the Constitution; to discredit the judges of the Supreme Court; to undermine the authority of the trade unions; to enact oppressive and unjust laws; and to countenance the breaking up of Opposition political meetings by young Nationalist hooligans—provided only that in each case the interests of the Nationalist Party appear to be advanced.

The opposition United Party includes among its members most of the English speaking section of the population and in addition many Afrikaners who disapprove of Dr. Malan's policies and who believe that, as between English and Afrikaans speaking South Africans, the past should be forgotten and that both sections should cooperate for their mutual benefit in building up a united (white) South African nation. It is this group which, in the past, has produced men of the calibre of General Louis Botha, General Smuts and Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr. Since the policy of the United Party is the building of a united South Africa its appeal is addressed equally to both sections of the white population, and since no person with an English name or background would be acceptable to probably a majority of Afrikaners, top leadership in the United Party is invariably in the hands of the Afrikaner.

At the general election in April the United Party was supported, in the so-called United Front opposing the government, by the Parliamentary Labour Party and by the Torch Commando, a non-political, independent, anti-Nationalist organisation founded by war veterans and led by Group-Captain "Sailor" Malan. Since the election this facade of a united front has crumbled and two new political parties have made their ap-

pearance: a Liberal Party, founded by a small band of former United Party members who favour a progressive native policy; and a Union Federal Party drawing its support from former members of both the Torch Commando and the United Party. Neither of these new parties is of much significance except as pointing to the general dissatisfaction which exists in the United Party with the leadership of a party which is now united only in name.

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What of the future? The indications are that South Africa's ten million non-Europeans will not indefinitely be content with their present position of inferiority. Although today the demand is for greater economic opportunity, in particular opportunity to move into certain skilled and semi-skilled occupations—a right which is at present denied them—it cannot be doubted that with growing political consciousness will come demands for political rights. The Bantu, though for the most part still a primitive savage with many unsavoury characteristics, has nevertheless shown himself capable of assimilating and benefiting from the white man's civilisation. A few leaders of substantial calibre have emerged, men of vision and understanding. Unless the natural aspirations of such men are permitted some form of legitimate expression the danger is that they may become discredited in the eyes of their own people, who may then choose other leaders less democratic in their outlook, less anxious to co-operate with the Europeans.

The Europeans of South Africa are faced with a problem of immense difficulty and complexity. They are hopelessly outnumbered by the non-Europeans, people of an inferior culture from whom they differ widely in manners and customs. It is not reasonable to expect any group of people, such as the Europeans of South Africa, deliberately and with a full realisation of the consequences, to embark on a policy of political harkari. That however is exactly what the Liberals would have them do: for it is idle to suppose that economic concessions granted today would not be followed by political demands tomorrow; and it would then be only a matter of time before political power passed into the hands of the non-Europeans. This is a corollary which is perceived very clearly by the Nationalists, with a feeling akin to horror. Their objective is the maintenance of white supremacy. If the pursuit of this objective involves the deliberate and calculated denial to some ten mil-

lion human beings of rights which elsewhere in the civilised world are regarded as elementary, that is perhaps unfortunate, but certainly not a matter to which any weight should be attached. The question which does not appear to have occurred to these God-fearing people is whether any race can indefinitely hold another race in subjection—assuming that it has the physical means of doing so—without sowing within itself seeds of moral decay which in due season will encompass its destruction as effectively as might be done by any foreign invader.

Cicero once said: "Ex Africa semper aliquid novi" (there's always something new coming out of Africa). This saying is as true today as it was 2,000 years ago. What that new thing is to be in the case of South Africa will depend on the measure of foresight, good will and human understanding displayed by whites and blacks alike in the years that lie ahead.