

SOUTH AFRICA

at Mid-Century

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IT is reasonable to assume that at the age of 40 one should have reached the age of discretion. Unfortunately, however sound the rule may be in relation to individuals it cannot with confidence be applied to institutions and communities.

The Union of South Africa was 40 in May this year, but few of even its closest friends and admirers would claim for it that shrewd and mellow maturity which brings discernment, responsibility and a true assessment of values.

South Africa is a country compounded of conflict and compromise. It has two capitals, two languages, two flags and two (unofficial) national anthems. And it has two main political parties engaged in a struggle for mastery and both so evenly matched that the only eventual winner, unless they compose their differences, may be the great mass of non-Europeans whom they mutually fear and distrust.

It is a situation fraught with danger not only to South Africa and the small groups of white people scattered about the rest of the African continent but to Western civilization as a whole.

Happily, there are signs among the more enlightened leaders of thought in South Africa of an increasing awareness of the necessity of achieving some measure of agreement both among the two million-odd white peoples in the Union and, in turn, between them and the nine million non-white peoples.

Such a development will not be easy, for this is a strange and complex country, an ethnological patchwork of civilization and savagery, of the Occident and the Orient, of the ruling caste descended from two proud European races whose history, as Alan Paton has described it, lies between them like a sword.

It is not remarkable that from the South African war there should still after 50 years remain a legacy of bitterness between certain sections of the English and the Afrikaners. What is remarkable is that there should be so much genuine friendship between the rest of them.

For over two years the English and the Dutch were in arms against each other and the death and the pestilence and the devastation that ensued left a sullen hatred which in certain quarters has been nourished and perpetuated ever since.

It was something of a miracle that within 10 years of the end of this war the two former republics and the colonies of the Cape and Natal should have united to form a single state, the basis of which was the principle of equal rights for English and Afrikaner and a common allegiance to the Crown.

At that time—in 1910—the whites had the wisdom to realize that if they were to rule or even to survive they would have to close their ranks and form a partnership in which there should be no

more dreams of establishing a paramountcy of one over the other. It was clear to them then that unless they did this they would destroy each other and the Natives would possess their inheritance.

It is a tragedy that the logic of this situation is not appreciated by all the whites in South Africa to-day. The majority are intellectually aware of it, but emotions often outweigh judgment. There are many Afrikaners who still cherish a deep longing for their vanished "independence" and there are a few Englishmen who still have dreams of Empire. Each is watchful of the other—the Afrikaner against any attempt to undermine his separate identity and turn him into an Englishman, and the Englishman against any attempt to turn him into a Boer.

And as the two white races watch each other, the Blacks and the Coloureds and the Indians watch the whites, not yet fully comprehending the deeper implications of the position but slowly growing in perception and becoming more aware of the rising power of the Eastern world and of their own, as yet, somewhat remote association with it. There are nine million non-whites in the Union, 150 million on the whole continent of Africa.

II

THE great majority of African peoples are still in the early tribal stage of social evolution. Even in the Union where for generations many of them have been in close contact with the whites only a few have reached that stage of development which is essential to the proper discharge of political responsibility. Whether the number would increase if the Natives generally were encouraged to take a more active part in government is a question that is not likely to be put to the test in the foreseeable future, for no political party in South Africa that adopted a really liberal policy towards the non-Europeans would have any chance of success at the polls.

Even the late Jan H. Hofmeyr, the most enlightened politician South Africa

has ever produced, who devoted his life to the interests of the Natives, would not go so far as to offer them absolute equality. All that Hofmeyr could do was to pledge himself to a mild programme of reform and to an acceptance of the fact that if white civilization was to survive each racial group should follow its own way of life and develop on its own lines. There should be no racial assimilation.

On that point the parties led respectively by General Smuts and by Dr. Malan, the present Prime Minister, are to-day fully agreed. They are also broadly agreed in principle on restricting the franchise of the non-Europeans and on excluding Natives from certain trades and professions.

With the whites outnumbered by five to one it is obvious to all of them that the granting of identical rights to everybody irrespective of race could only mean rule by the Natives; and further that fusion of all races into one would mean the emergence not so much of a half-caste people as of a new black people with an admixture of white blood.

Until recently the whites and the blacks in South Africa had lived together more or less amicably for half a century. Now, however, there are signs of tension in race relations. All Africa is stirring in its sleep, as the disturbances in Uganda and the Gold Coast have shown, and South Africa also feels the influence of this restlessness.

To complicate matters still further South Africa is at present undergoing what amounts to an industrial revolution with its inevitable accompaniments of the sudden urbanization of great masses of people, the transformation of part of the rural population into an urban proletariat, and the usual consequences in the form of overcrowding, unrest and tensions of all kinds.

While it is undeniable that the Native peoples are subject to certain political, economic and social disabilities, it should be said in fairness to the present Government and its predecessors that a policy of gradually civilizing the Natives has been quietly carried out for the last 50 years and is producing results on an

increasing scale. About half the Native children of school-going age are now receiving some sort of education in State and State-aided schools; the number of such children in school is increasing twice as fast as the Native population as a whole; and if the present rate of progress is maintained the whole population of all races will be fully literate in about 30 years. At the same time adult education for the Native has begun a considerable expansion.

The civilizing policy applied to the Native is essentially a practical and technical matter rather than a political one. Its importance for Commonwealth relations, however, is of an indirect kind, for South Africans have a right to claim that before other Commonwealth countries avert their faces from the Union they should make a careful study of this civilizing policy and of what has actually been achieved by it.

III

IT is well at this midway stage through the twentieth century to ask ourselves and each other in the Commonwealth what we are heading for. All the Dominions to-day are sovereign independent states. India is in the outer circle, Ireland on the remote fringe. Where stands South Africa?

The question is of profound importance to the Commonwealth and of equal importance to South Africa. It is an anxious question and one deserving of careful examination.

A Nationalist government is in power in South Africa and is likely to remain there until its term of office expires in three years' time. The Nationalist Party is a party of the extreme Right, representing various shades of opinion from die-hard conservatism to something hardly distinguishable from Fascism. The Prime Minister, Dr. Malan, is himself a constitutional conservative, and so are many of his followers.

There is, however, an important group within the party which has been strongly influenced by the totalitarian movement

in Europe and which has hankerings, as yet unfulfilled, for a controlled Press, a State-directed trade union movement, a censorship of news and views, and a general system of regimentation by which white supremacy can be ever more firmly entrenched. This was the group which hoped for a German victory in the late war, though the policy of the Nationalist Party itself was one of strict neutrality. The members of this group are not themselves Fascists: what they desire is a system bearing some resemblance to that in force in the Portugal of Dr. Salazar, but with a definitely South African character, based on racial hierarchy, Calvinist religion, and the Afrikaner way of life.

As long as the Nationalist majority is as small and precarious as at present Dr. Malan will be able to keep this group in check, though its members still seek to lay the foundations of future control by using their influence to secure the appointment of their own nominees to key posts in the State. If Dr. Malan had a larger majority or if his declining health forced him to lay down the leadership, the position might be different.

The most ardent supporters of the republican movement are associated with this group, and we have the paradox that the more firmly a South African is attached to democratic principles the less likely he is to be republican. This may seem strange to Canadians, but so must many other things in South Africa.

Dr. Malan gave an assurance to the South African House of Assembly in May last year that during the life of the present Parliament his Government would take no steps to form a republic. Mr. J. G. Strydom, Minister of Lands and a politician with a big following among the Afrikaners, has taken his stand that the party's policy is to bring about a republic separated from the British Empire and the Crown. In his view the only question is when and how this is to be achieved. He considers that the example set by India might be followed.

Mr. C. R. Swart, Minister of Justice and leader of the Nationalist Party in the Free State, has declared that as a republic South Africa would always work

in the happiest co-operation with Britain and the members of the Commonwealth. It is clear then that while the idea of a republic constitutionally separated from the Commonwealth still has a strong hold on many minds, there is acceptance of the view even in extremist circles that if for no other reason than her own interests South Africa must maintain a close relationship with the Commonwealth.

Nobody attempts to deny that South Africa already enjoys the full substance of sovereign independence, internationally recognized by the exchange of ambassadors with foreign countries, and that the proclamation of a republic would mean a change of names rather than of things. The aim of the secession movement is thus to achieve an emotional satisfaction rather than a practical gain of any kind, and even the emotional force of the demand has gradually diminished as the Commonwealth ties have changed their character.

Hitherto we have spoken mainly of the Afrikaner community, both because it forms 55 to 60 per cent of the white population of South Africa and because the Government now in office is purely Afrikaner. (It should be borne in mind, however, that the United Party, led by General Smuts and now in Opposition, also includes a considerable number of Afrikaners.)

The English-speaking population, it need hardly be said, remain firmly attached to the Commonwealth and the Crown and flatly deny the existence of any conflict of interests between South Africa and the Commonwealth as a whole. They have acquiesced in all the movements towards fuller sovereignty which have finally been crowned by the achievement of full independence, but they would not acquiesce in any plan for taking away their allegiance to the Crown, which they regard as a totally different question.

They are strong enough to ensure that their views shall be reckoned with, both because their numbers, though less than those of the Afrikaners, are still considerable and because they control a large part of the economic life of the country. It is not without note, also, that in a country

where Afrikaans is spoken in 60 per cent of the homes the combined circulation of the whole of the Afrikaans daily Press is only equal to that of one of the big English daily newspapers in Johannesburg or Cape Town.

IV

DESPITE the lines of cleavage followed by South African party politics there is unity among all parties on the big question of external policy. In the great debate between the Soviet-dominated group of countries and the Western group headed by the United States, South Africa is solidly on the side of the West. The Smuts party supports the United States, the Commonwealth and Western Europe because it believes in Western democracy, while the Government supports the same group because they have a deep horror of Communism and regard Russia, the "Godless and the colour blind", as the enemy of God and man.

The reason South Africa has not signed the Atlantic Pact is because she is disqualified from doing so by her geographical position, but the Government have let it be known that they would favourably consider an extension of the Pact. To this the Opposition would be unlikely to raise any objection.

South Africa, indeed, regards with some misgiving and many anxieties the change brought about in her own position in the world by the events of the second world war and the post-war years. The appearance of huge convoys in Table Bay, the sinking of ships off our coasts and other such happenings brought home to us the fact that the Cape of Good Hope has regained its old importance as the great seaway to the East, while the Japanese conquest of Indonesia and the threat to Madagascar reminded us, with something of a shock, of the fact that we have a frontier on the Indian Ocean. Since then India, Pakistan, Burma, Ceylon and Indonesia have become independent, China has fallen to Communism, and white imperialism in Asia is defending its last outposts in Malay

and Indo-China. Asia, in short, has come back into history, the West has retreated, and the Eastern frontier of Western civilization is no longer Hong-Kong but Durban. These are great events, comparable only to the withdrawal of the legions of Rome fifteen centuries ago, and Africa is profoundly shaken by them.

As between West and East, South Africa is unequivocally on the side of the West. This attitude is not merely ideological; her own security is involved in the debate. We South Africans know, perhaps better than most others except military experts, how weak and almost defenceless are all African countries from the Limpopo to the Mediterranean, and we also know that the Middle East will be one of the great strategic objectives of any future world war. If the Middle East is to be defended by the West, this defence will entail once more the passing of huge convoys round the Cape.

But that is not all. If an advance base is to be established in Kenya, it cannot be much more than an outpost. The real base will have to be in a country of large-scale industry and fully developed resources of all kinds; in other words, in the Union of South Africa. And if the Middle East and North Africa were to fall, there would be nothing to stop an enemy army between the Sahara and the Transvaal.

V

THIS brings me to the point made at the beginning of this article—that the situation in South Africa is fraught with danger not only to the white peoples who have made their homes on the African continent, but to Western civilization as a whole.

Africa is to-day the bastion between East and West and in any future world war it would be of vital importance. The Western world must maintain its lodgement on the African continent if for no other than strategic reasons, and more attention should be given to strengthening and developing the Union of South Africa. A serious responsibility rests upon America and Canada in this respect. Britain has done, and is doing, everything she can to support and encourage the growth and expansion of this dominion. But with the best will in the world she is not able to do enough.

America could make a major contribution both in capital and in trade—and, let it be said, in understanding also. For the difficulties in South Africa are not fully appreciated in Canada and the United States, and the moral influence of these two great countries would be of inestimable value to the enlightened section of the white community in South Africa who are earnestly seeking a pattern of life into which all the peoples in the country, whatever their race and colour, could fit harmoniously and to their mutual advantage.

If this could be achieved, there would be a great future for South Africa and for the African continent as a whole. But the ideal will not be promoted by the vapourings of visionaries who know nothing about Africa and its problems. Informed criticism is good for everybody, and South Africa is particularly in need of it. But mere abuse will not help. And people from outside—*uitlanders* they would be called in the Union—should bear in mind that South Africa is not without her candid friends and critics even among her own citizens, as perhaps this article will prove.