

A SOUTH AFRICAN SNAP-SHOT

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WHEN I sit down to attempt, in a short article, an outline sketch of the highly complex and deeply significant social-economic situation that has developed in South Africa, I realize how much easier the task might have been, had my experience of South African life been of shorter duration. Then I might have felt less alive to the risks of conveying a false impression, and I should have had fewer friends in Africa who might feel misjudged by what I said.

But rather more than eighteen years of work as Professor of Education at Cape Town,—work that involved in increasing degree study and analysis of the complex social and economic conditions amid which educational effort had to proceed,—have brought so much more of depth into the picture that a sharply-etched foreground seems a sure means of deception. Behind, in the shadows of the background, some of the most essential factors may be. South African thought is itself increasingly fearful of that background, and the “complex” which would deny its existence is daily gathering strength. An observer does not even begin to understand South Africa until he takes a hint from the psycho-analyst, and draws a firm distinction between principles and motives that the South African openly avows, and those deeper, unavowed motives that do, in fact, determine personal conduct and public policy. One might almost be justified in describing South Africa as a land where things are, characteristically, other than they seem, where the thing that is said is not usually the thing that is meant. To say this is not to accuse the South African of dishonesty, though his critics are ready enough to bring the charge. It is rather to say that his deepest and strongest motives are such as he does not care to avow. His speeches and statements are a “rationalization” of the true motives whose operation is to be perceived in his actions and practical policies. The most discriminating commentator on South African life would thus be an acute psychologist with a profound knowledge of the country’s history.

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The prevailing motive is, *tout court*, just fear; and all the fine blazonry of a “White South Africa” policy, so far from concealing

the fact, does but confirm it in the eyes of such as are able to see. Again, let there be no misunderstanding. "Fear" is not here spoken of as a craven terror, or the obverse of mere cruelty. At its best it is more like the fear we speak of so approvingly in the phrase "The fear of God". It means the dread of a falling away from grace. Of the loss of a way of life that has supreme value, of the destruction by corrosion of a precious inheritance. It means that there is a standard up to which I must live, and by which my descendants must live, and yet there are influences at work to corrupt and destroy that standard. What, then, must I do to secure the future for posterity?

Such, to take it at its best, is the form of the fear motive. More and more consistently does the White South African speak of himself and his way of life as *European*. What he means is clear enough. He is thinking of that for which he fears; and the greater the fear, the sharper will be the definition of its object, and the more drastic will be the measures for security.

This is the real theme for any study of contemporary South Africa that is worth while, and the starting-point for any prognostications of the future. Anglo-Dutch rivalry is, after all, only an episode, just as Anglo-French rivalry in India was. In both lands that temporary phase of interest has passed away, submerged in the larger and more permanent issue. In future, if a policy of secession is advocated in Africa, it will be no longer a merely "Dutch" policy, springing from a feeling among a strongly-knit section of the population that a traditional way of life is menaced by interference from outside. The threat now comes from another quarter, and it is seen as a menace not only to the life of the Dutch Afrikaner, but to the life of the white man—the "European" as such. So "Dutch" and "English" combine to meet the common threat, and in so doing become more fully African in spite of themselves. Settlers of strong English tradition in Kenya are now more likely to combine with a Dutch Hertzog or Grobler in South Africa to "keep the native in his place," than with English South Africans to maintain purely "English" interests. The desire to remain within the Empire is still strong among British settlers in Africa. But it is not strong enough to upset a policy, directed from England, that would bring the native out of his "place." The declaration of the East Africa White Paper of 1923 that, where interests conflict, those of the native must be regarded as paramount, has already stimulated joint action between "European" interests in East and in South Africa, and has played a not insignificant part in recent South African elections.

The tendency amongst whites to co-operate in face of the "threat" must inevitably grow; and if there is to be a movement of secession in the future, it could hardly be confined to South Africa alone, nor would the active participants be exclusively Dutch in racial extraction. The parallel with the Secession movement in the American South, of last century, is almost too unpleasantly obvious. Though we need not dwell upon it, its significance can never be far from the minds of those who are watching the evolution of twentieth century Africa. It may be well, then, to take a glance at the present social-economic situation in the Union, the one strongly organized "European" state on the African continent, and therefore the main enunciator of European-African policies. States of more recent origin, like Rhodesia and Kenya, cherish hopes that they may be able to avoid the typical South African mistakes, as they conceive them. The Union itself may be stimulated by their example to an effort aimed at reversing the course of history, so as to undo what it has not been able to avoid. But whatever differences may emerge, the Union presents too many of the permanent features of the African scene for its experience to fail altogether to be typical. Its much longer history and more developed state afford an opportunity of reading in advance, as it were, the history of its younger confrères.

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The present order of things in the Union may be described shortly, if a little crudely, by saying that here is a state of about 7½ millions of people governed by its European minority of less than two millions. Further, that minority, while regarding itself as a democracy, is of such a temper that no Government which seriously contemplated conditions of social and political equality for the subject mass with the white could live for a day. Nor is there any certainty that this state of things will change within any period that can be foreseen. Between South Africa and South America there is thus a gulf for deeper and wider than any South Atlantic. To the European South African in general, equality between black and white is simply unthinkable. The passing of General Smuts into what looks like lasting exclusion from power marks the emergence into South African politics of this major factor. The count against him was not merely that he had exercised power as protagonist for a cause that had become *vieux jeu*; not only that, as was alleged, he had "betrayed" his fellow Afrikanders. Far more serious was the suspicion, engendered by stirring events on the Rand in 1922, that he was in league with wicked capitalists to destroy "civilized" standards by letting in the flood of native

labour to do "skilled" work ("skilled" work must here be taken to mean occupations paid at a "white" rate, and jealously guarded as the economic citadel of the white worker).

On this issue, English artisans in the towns and Dutch cultivators in the backveld were as one. With its emergence, the waving of the Union Jack lost its talismanic power in South African politics. Once the great issue was formulated, it became clear that the old party lines had now little significance. Two of the most unqualified assertions of the principle of white supremacy and of inequality for the black come to my mind as I write. Both were by prominent members of General Smuts's party; one had been a cabinet minister, and the other a party chairman. And each man bore a British name!

Yet even in these conditions the force of popular feeling could be used with effect against Smuts. His cause in a recent election was badly shattered, in spite of all he could say, by an astute Nationalist manifesto which asserted that he favoured a black Dominion in Africa, since he had co-operated in African policy with a British Government that had issued the East Africa White Paper already referred to. Those who know anything of recent South African history will appreciate the effect of this. The mere suggestion of any affinity with policies that contemplated, in any circumstances, the "paramountcy" of native interests was enough.

Such, then, is the basis of South African politics to-day. Before giving way to righteous and inexpensive indignation, citizens of this Northern Canadian State, who know not what a "mixed" population really is, would do well to pause awhile in order to seek causes, for the South African is no monster of oppression. He is the creature of his situation, just as the Canadian is. Moreover, the shop window display of heroic virtues that we are never called upon to practise is a debilitating form of moral recreation that Canadians can well leave to be indulged in elsewhere on this continent, if at all. Once the circumstances are understood, the immensity of the moral demand that we make upon the South African when we call upon him to practise altruistic virtues that seem to us so easy (in church or on the platform) becomes clear.

What, then, are the circumstances? The answer would be a reasoned history of South Africa. Here we can give only the barest outline. Of a population of $7\frac{1}{2}$ millions, fewer than two millions are white. At least five millions are "natives" of the Bantu race, divided into many tribes (now breaking up), living at various levels of culture, and differing in the forms of economic service by which they maintain themselves in a modern state.

Rather more than two millions are in the all too exiguous "Reserves" where, even if they hold land, they can seldom hold enough for full maintenance. Male adults must seek labour—usually of a temporary and migratory kind—in the white man's service outside the Reserves.

About two millions more are servants on the farms of Europeans, whether as "squatters" with ill-defined tenure (but well-defined duties), or as labour-tenants, or as just farm-hands. There can be little doubt that the economic condition of this group has deteriorated, relatively if not absolutely. Of all natives, these are least capable of helping themselves.

A third group, steadily increasing, consists of "de-tribalized" natives now permanently resident in the towns and having no tribal *pied a terre*. On a conservative estimate, there must be about half a million of these. Their condition, having to meet urban expenses on a native wage set by conditions of mine and farm-labour where most of the labourer's wants are met in kind, can be imagined. They constitute a grave problem in every South African town. In illustration, one fact can be quoted: in some urban areas along the Rand, the infantile death rate among natives reaches and even exceeds 600 per thousand.

The "mixed" half-caste people are mainly in the Cape. They number altogether about 600,000. Present policy is to assimilate them to the whites in some degree, enough at least to separate them from the natives. But their growth is to be checked, at least in the legal sense; for the proposed new franchise law, which is to exclude the native from the general franchise, treats as "native" any person whose father or mother was a native.

Interesting as these "coloured" people are, they are not the Bantu. It is with the Bantu that the European-Africans have to reckon, not only with more than five millions within the Union, but with many more beyond its borders. Indeed, as has already been suggested, South African opinion is becoming acutely sensitive towards "native" policies pursued by European governors elsewhere in Africa. It would dictate policy to the whole sub-continent, if it could.

Such are the barest facts of the present situation. What of the forces at work? Here a glance at South African history is necessary. For the attitude now taken by the Dutch Afrikaner, and communicated in increasing degree to his English fellow, is itself an historic growth from African soil. Even with his very different traditions, and in a widely different economic setting, the English South African often enough develops much the same psychology.

Once he has cast in his lot irrevocably with the country, and has to think of the future of his children, he too is ready to see the native as a "menace," protection against whom must be the cardinal principle of all policy. To him, meditating defensive legislation, the native is very much what the U. S. A. salesman is to some Canadians. From such examples one gathers some idea of what a ubiquitous Devil must have meant for the Middle Ages.

To understand how this attitude has come to be taken by both Boer and Briton, it is necessary to appreciate the process of adaptation which has produced the Boer type. Policies are governed by a dominant race-psychology, which evolved first in the Boer, and then communicated itself to the Briton under the stress of the competitive conditions of a modern industrial state.

Quite early in the history of the colony, "Dutch" inhabitants became pastoralists and trekkers. Here we cannot pause to analyse the historical and geographical factors that account for this. But the fact itself is all-important. Now, once the narrow coast-plain was crossed and the plateau-barrier surmounted, the trekker found himself in a wide semi-desert, thinly peopled by a degenerate race (Hottentots and Bushmen), demanding the use of wide areas for the support of stock, and encouraging in a hundred ways a nomad life of pastoralist and hunter. Thus a type was produced that was half-Esau, half-Jacob, marked by Old Testament piety and relentlessness, schooled to rely on its own strength and cunning, and ill-disposed to book interference from any Government near or far.

Steadily the trekkers pushed eastwards, until in the middle of the 18th century they clashed with the advance guard of the Bantu, moving from the North into the well-watered lands of South-Eastern Africa from which they expelled the weaker Hottentots and Bushmen. Then followed a century of unremitting conflict for land between white pastoralists and black. No Government, whether Dutch or British, was ever in real control of the frontier situation. Later, the lure of gold was added to that of pasture, and land-seekers as late as the '90's of last century pushed into what is now Rhodesia.

One attempt at control produced the Great Trek of 1837-40, which led directly to the foundation of the Transvaal and Orange Free State Republics, new political organizations where an Afrikaner race-psychology, now fully formed, could have free scope. For it the native was first an enemy to be conquered, and then a labourer to be brought under servitude. Thus the Boer solved for himself the purely local problem that was set him, fiercely repelling all attempts at outside interference, and he did achieve an equilibrium that, at least, worked.

Then came the discovery of diamonds, later of gold, and soon the whole flood of modern industrialism. The resisting Boer was borne down in three years of stubborn war, and the coming of Union in 1910, still more the World War of 1914, brought South African life into the main stream of world economics. An immediate result was to increase demand for the native's labour, and the same conditions afforded stimulus to the native to provide labour. To-day, quite apart from natives on the farms, there must be considerably more than half a million in the industrial service of the white man. Thus conditions have arisen where the native toiler, working peacefully at his job in the white man's industrial system, is seen as a greater "menace" than the yelling savage, with assagai aloft, raiding the frontier. And so the psychology of the British town-artizan is attuned to that of the Dutch pastoralist, and Radical British "Labour" can unite with Tory Dutch "Nationalist" to form a Government. For the economic and social objective they have in common has power enough to submerge all the differences. The opposition they conceive as the "capitalist", eager to exploit uncivilized labour to the full, whatever may be the consequences for the white man's standards. The term "civilized labour" is now, and has been for some time, on the banner of by far the strongest political movement in South Africa. In practice it means, put brutally, subsidies to the white man just because he is white. It is unpopular to ask who pays the subsidy. The maintenance of white "standards" by any and every means is an interest paramount over all others. The more penetrating and honest observers among South Africans do, indeed, show anxiety at the demoralizing effects of payment thus unadjusted to value of product, and there are not wanting cynics who would describe South Africa as an Oligarchy of Poor Whites. But decisive voting strength is in the hands of the white workers, and no Government which alienated them could stand for long. There is, indeed, a small but highly influential body of opinion, led by an ex-Chief Justice, which would take all the risks and orient policy towards ultimate political equality between black and white. This body may become stronger in time, but at present tendencies are overwhelmingly in favour of what is euphemistically called "segregation". Politically, that means the abrogating of all common franchise between European and native, and the substitution of a communal native franchise, with severely limited representation in Assembly and Senate.

Thus is the stage set to-day, and no man can say what the subsequent acts of the drama will be. In this small compass we can do no more than point to two of the factors that will play a dominant part.

The first is the sheer mass-pressure of the native, exerted mainly in the economic field. Almost, we might say, his strength is made perfect in weakness. He is poor both absolutely and relatively. Absolutely, since his wage-rates are, even in industry, not more than a third of those of the white worker (and much less on the farms), while comprehensive legislation for control of wages tends to stabilize them at that level. Relatively, since his wants are increasing and his aspirations rising as he becomes more desirous of the values he sees in the white man's life. So he will work and he will endure, while the white man suffers from the debilitating effects of artificial support. As a native put it to a white man the other day: "We shall be putting on muscle, while you will be putting on fat."

Thus the native is cheap, he is docile if reasonably well treated, he can be easily regimented, and readily trained in the repetitive processes of modern industry. Thus he has the entrée to the labour market, and his economic strength is increased by the measures taken to limit it. Moreover, the view that sees him only as potential competitor fails to see his value as potential consumer; and the more his buying-power is restricted, the less is the scope for employment even of the white man, in the long run.

He is learning methods of worker-organization; and when he has learned them well enough to bring his real economic strength to bear, all analogous cases show that substantial results must follow. It will not be entirely his fault if he fights and wins *racially*, as a black man and native, rather than as just a worker, with all the momentous consequences that that may entail. If White South African opinion sees him as barbarian rather than as worker, such may not be the view of the outside world,—Russia and India, for example. South Africans appear to be becoming rather uneasily conscious of this possibility.

The second factor is just this South African White opinion. Will it change? At present it dominates the situation. It has deep roots, and is held with intense passion. But it may change. Longer views may uncover the value of a prosperous and contented native population as a market for the products of industry. Further, natives here and there will rise to culture and affluence in spite of everything, and slowly the white man may become accustomed to the sight. (At present the fully "civilized" native is an offence, the insolence of the upstart who does not know his place). Also, the "worker" motif may grow in strength as against the race motif, and mixed Unions of workers may appear. Severe economic distress may help this development, and there are already some

signs of it. Mixed Unions have long been common enough in the Cape as between white and "coloured" (half-caste) workers.

The main responsibility of outside observers is to be fair to the white man, however warm may be their sympathies for the native. For he is the creature of his situation. As Burke says; "The situation of man is the preceptor of his duty" and to the average South African white his holiest duty is to safeguard the future of his children against the corrosions of barbarism that, in his view, threaten it. He may question his methods, as indeed we must, strongly and unequivocally. But we must first understand his motives, and realize that it is possible for a man to be kindly, courteous, religious and cultured, and yet to maintain, in the circumstances, that at all costs the black man must be kept in his place. May the white man not also claim that the values in which the black demands a share are of the white man's creation? It seems not unnatural that the white man should determine the conditions of the sharing. At least, so it seems to him, though there are not wanting those who ask where South Africa would be to-day without the labours of the black men.

Finally, let us remember that if there is exploitation, if there is ready eagerness to seize upon plausible excuses for hamstringing a competitor, if mean fears and greeds array themselves in the decent uniform of "scientific" theory, these things are no monopoly of the South African white. The same identical forms can be found almost anywhere among fumbling, self-blinded humanity. The need of modern democracy is everywhere the same:—Intelligence! Intelligence! and yet more Intelligence! with the moral restraint that far-sighted intelligence can bring. The defect of the South African is there, rather than in his moral sense, and if emotional strain is too much for his judgment, history and the facts of his situation afford some excuse.

So, as we close this all too brief survey of the South African scene, we are disposed to say: "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone," and to remark how comfortably yet fatally easy it is to believe in Freedom's cause

Ez fur away ez Cape Town is.