

BULAWAYO DIARY

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BULAWAYO is a large town by African standards (European population: 47,000; African: 94,000; Coloured and Asian: 3,700), but it has all the attributes of a provincial village. In contrast to the fevered erratic boom-town of Salisbury, Bulawayo offers a life of measured complacency, being surrounded by a vast and exploitable labour supply which facilitates easy European living. Nobody ever hurries here, and there is always time for the interminable Rhodesian sundowner.

It lies in the scrubby uninteresting veld of South West Rhodesia and is an important commercial junction with South Africa, which supplies it not only with commercial goods but also with political ideas. Dominated as it is by six great cooling towers, Bulawayo is hardly an attractive city, although it is logically- and well-planned on the American pattern, with tree-lined avenues and treeless streets intersecting in an unvaried fashion. Rhodes showed unconscious foresight in stipulating that all Rhodesian streets should be wide enough to turn a span of oxen in, and thus anachronistically solved the parking problem that so harasses other cities.

Bulawayo is an architectural curio shop; in the exclusive suburb of Kumalo one can buy a pseudo-medieval castle or a glass walled, Hollywood-styled villa complete with swimming pool, barbecue and all the accoutrements of the American way of life. The town itself can boast of only two skyscrapers, and the low rambling buildings—completely devoid of any individuality or interest—reflect the personalities of their designers, builders and occupants.

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The insularity of Bulawayans is proverbial even in the Federation—the whites here form a number of closed cliques, the nucleus and rallying point of each being the accumulated gossip common to all its members.

There is the cultural clique dominated by dramatic societies which have, or so they appear to think, a monopoly of cultural knowledge and creative ability in the town. In fact, the cultural activities here are confined mainly to amateur dramatics of a good school standard and occasional visits by celebrities—usually on

their way to the Falls. These clubs are not open to non-Europeans—in the most recent production, a group of non-Europeans who tried to book seats were categorically refused the privilege. Of course a number of excuses were given, for in this country it is always the other fellow who minds—the City Council being the other fellow this time. This means that non-Europeans are unable to see any local talent—perhaps a blessing in disguise. In the case of visiting celebrities who play in the City Hall, non-Europeans may have an apartheid peep from two miserable rows in the darkest section of the hall at the back.

Territorial Election Day in Bulawayo was as dull as any other week day. I have never yet heard politics discussed in buses, cafés and shops, as in South Africa. The standard of political meeting during the elections was uniformly low. Todd was outstanding among a colony of dull, mediocre and misinformed politicians. And no doubt that produced reason enough for his rejection, even if his point of view had not been considered too liberal for the forward-looking whites of Southern Rhodesia.

As it turned out, the reactionary Dominion Party, with both its eyes fixed on South Africa, gained 3 out of the city's 7 seats. In the Federal elections, however, partly because the United Federal Party has been moving steadily right, partly because, with the approach of the 1960 Constitutional Conference, the electorate felt itself safer in the hands of the more politically experienced Welensky, the U.F.P. swept the Bulawayo board.

The "Bantu Mirror" is owned by African Newspapers and its policies are pro-Government. African Newspapers also own "The African Daily News". The only independent African newspaper is "The Workers Voice", run by a level-headed and progressive trade union leader. Unfortunately it confines itself to trade union matters. There is a crying need for an independent African daily or even weekly.

The resuscitated African National Congress has a strong Bulawayo branch led by Mr. Nkomo, the president. Despite the general white hostility to Congress, Nkomo is quite often quoted by the press and has addressed a Rotary luncheon.

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The political and economic need of the Bulawayo African is paralleled by his need for social amenities. Living conditions in what are euphemistically known as the "townships" are almost uniformly atrocious, though Dr. Ashton, Municipal Director of African Administration, is a great deal more liberal

than most of his counterparts throughout the Territory.

The arid and over-populated townships like Mpopoma and the old locations are breeding grounds of disease, ill serving the needs of the 94,000 Bulawayo Africans. It would not be difficult to direct a stranger there, because a thick pall of black smoke hangs oppressively over these areas, shedding its grimy "fall-out" over the townships.

The density of the townships—in a country where there is an average of one person to two square miles—is so fantastic that it can be compared only to the most congested areas of South East Asia. The worst and largest of these black spots is the old location, which consists of a jumble of square brick hutments in various stages of decay. The denizens of these depressed areas are the industrial workers and the "boys" and nannies of the white aristocracy. During the rainy season, the dust lanes which serve for streets become impassable mudbaths.

The moral fraud of the African Home Ownership scheme is second in its disregard of all decent norms only to the perpetration on Lobengula of Rhodes's "rat concession". The match-box like houses which are jerrybuilt and sub-economic in cost are paid for at least twice over. An example is offered by Mpopoma Township, where the houses were built at a cost of £330 each. £1 8s. 6d. a month covers services outside of electricity; and the minimum monthly re-payment—worked out on a 25 year basis—is £2 2s. 9d. in redemption and interest at 6%, or over £630 in all. When one considers that the minimum wage for unskilled African labour is 30s. a week (plus £1 a month extra for rent), rising round 5s. a week at six-monthly intervals, the philanthropy of subsidized housing at 6% can perhaps be more cold-bloodedly gauged.

Living for the Coloured is not so difficult. Barham Green, a township, the work of two neo-liberals, segregates the majority of Coloured people from other non-Europeans, as well as from the Europeans. Drainage and road conditions are shocking and make it inaccessible during the rainy season, but there is not the inhuman squalor of the African areas.

"The Coloured community", as it is labelled by the local sociologists, live as individuals and do not function, as the term would suggest, in a fixed racial pattern. They differ in interests and attitudes as much as the whites—in fact they are unified only by their lack of facilities. In conformity with Bulawayo custom, few rise to the distinction of a white-collar, but are

principally cabinet-makers, railway-workers and builders.

The Asians here are in the main economically secure. They enjoy the great privilege of being allowed to live in two streets in the western section of the city, and as a whole their standard of living is high. It has been a great drawback that the single high school catering for Coloured and Asian "Founders" was established only in 1952. Previously all high school education had to be obtained in the Union of South Africa, which precluded Indians, or in India or England, the cost of which was naturally prohibitive. There are few opportunities for professional Asians to embark on successful careers, however, an example being the case of one Asian who, despite holding two law degrees, is unable to find a European firm (and there are no others) to article him.

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Inter-racial contact exists on three levels in Bulawayo. First there is the crossing of the colour bar by people who are bound together by genuine friendship.

Then there is the inter-racial mixing dictated by intelligent self-interest on the part of the whites, who realize that a stable middle-class of "educated" (and not "extreme") non-whites will form a bastion against mob unrest and the finality of revolution. Into this category fall the Inter-racial Association, the Capricorn Africa Society and the Constitution Party. Some of the white members are undoubtedly sincere and would welcome the development of a non-racial society. But many too are looking for a compromise that would allow the extension of rights to the reliable, while placing their own privileges upon a foundation less shaky than force. Government officials in the Native Affairs Department are also found in these groups, surely there with the idea of keeping an eye open for danger. Of course, politics are not discussed at the Inter-racial Association.

Ironically, the Inter-racial Association has its meetings in the museum, and is, therefore, Government-sanctioned. It is in fact the only organization that civil servants are able to join.

A certain amount of good does, however, spring from the Inter-racial Association. A night school is run for Africans, staffed by voluntary teachers recruited from the Association. Incidentally this is the only secondary school for Africans in or around Bulawayo! The school recently produced "Hamlet".

The third level is the "Sunday Best" meeting. Some churches

are attended by white and non-white together; though of course, during the busy weekdays, the Europeans usually forget to greet their Christian brothers.

Naturally there is a fourth level, but it is so much part of white colonization that one tends to forget it—or rather take it for granted. It might be called “night mixing”. Thus it is that, although stricter and more discriminatory legislation has recently been passed against miscegenation, the Coloured community grows largely through the willing help of the segregation-minded European.

Bulawayo is an outcrop of Paradise for the white urban worker. The many settlers soon adopt the pattern of living of the indigenous white—it must be remembered that before a European immigrant is selected for entry to the Federation, he is fairly effectively screened for political creed and social outlook. Nevertheless, a few inflexible progressives have slipped through the net, and most of them are deported without very much ado.

The demands of the white Bulawayan are pretty uniform, a house, a garden, a motor-car, at least two good “boys” (one house—, one garden—), a beer in the evening and a sports-club for the week-end. It is best not to probe too deeply into the prohibitive cost of this in terms of human life and suffering.



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