

APARTHEID IN ACTION

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THE strongest impression that I carried away from a six weeks tour of the Union of South Africa was of the social and political fragmentation that is the deliberate result of the policies of the present Nationalist government.

It is something more than the determined multiplication of barriers between whites and non-whites. It reaches deep into each of these two basic groups, splitting and sub-dividing them, and in effect—and I believe with conscious intent—inhibiting if not actually destroying the possibility of any effective focus of opposition to the current dominance of Afrikaner nationalism.

This is a perturbing situation. Not only is South Africa a Commonwealth member whose potentialities could make her a dynamic and constructive contributor to the greater effectiveness of that peculiar association; she is also an integral part of the non-communist world, with an expanding economy that could be a real factor in free world stability and a strategic position whose importance has been heavily underlined by the Suez crisis. To play her full role, however, she needs the solid base of a united community with an internal harmony and a sense of common purpose. The present trend is unhappily in just the opposite direction. In place of harmony and unity there is the deliberate creation of permanent divisions, and there are all too many indications that the survival of the Union as a political entity may ultimately come to depend, not on a conscious sharing of common interests, but on a precarious balance of internal antagonisms.

The primary basis for all this is of course the doctrine of apartheid. For practical purposes it can be reduced to a simple syllogism. South Africa must be permanently a white society; there is no place for non-whites in a white society; therefore the two groups must develop along separate lines according to their separate traditions and capacities. Given the initial premise, this thesis can be defended with considerable logic. There is even a genuine if ill-judged humanitarianism on the part of many

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of its supporters, who sincerely believe that only through separate development can the non-whites find those opportunities for advancement which they can never attain in a community dominated by Europeans. The one essential flaw is that it will not work that way—indeed, if it showed signs of actually working, some at least of the nationalist leaders would soon be calling for action to halt such a dangerous process and to keep the natives in their place.

To begin with, the starting point is tribalism. The native, debarred from any possibility of integration into the white community, must seek advancement in terms of his own environment. In fairness it must be recognized that this does not necessarily imply an indefinite perpetuation of tribal conditions. That would mean savagery in the most literal sense. The indigenous tribes have neither art nor literature, only the most primitive political organization, and economies that were based primarily on slaughtering their neighbours and carrying off their cattle. What is intended in theory is that the natives, starting with their familiar way of life, shall acquire by their own efforts the necessary skills to improve that way of life to the extent that their capacities permit.

Now one of the great themes in the recent evolution of the free world has been the effort on an unprecedented scale to transfer the techniques of western industrial civilization to the teeming and underprivileged masses in less developed areas. The older idea that primitive peoples should be left undisturbed in their habits and beliefs has broken down in the face of modern conditions. It is almost impossible for a group of any size to remain isolated from and unaffected by the swiftly changing conditions of this atomic age. Ideas penetrate, aspirations are aroused, and unless knowledge and capacity keep pace with aspirations, new crises and new tragedies are the inevitable results.

Apartheid is presented as one way of avoiding such disasters. Theoretically it could mean more and not less opportunity. The native, relieved from unequal competition and from exploitation by the whites, could develop at his own pace, restricted by no such barriers as he previously faced in his desire to become a doctor or lawyer, or even a skilled workman, in a white-dominated community. If the native could be segregated in his own areas, and those areas treated as trust territories on the model

of Togoland—or still better, the Gold Coast—a sustained and co-operative effort might be possible to guide their evolution toward self-determination and self-dependence.

Two things however make such a development improbable in the case of South Africa. One is the impossibility of complete territorial separation between whites and non-whites. The present native territories, even with improved agriculture, cannot support their present population, let alone provide for its inevitable expansion: and industry and mining in South Africa cannot conceivably dispense with the native labour on which they rely. The second factor is the unwillingness of the government to face up to the practical consequences of the theories it professes. The Tomlinson report showed clearly the efforts and expenditures that would be needed if separate development was to be made a reality. The native does not have the resources, material or intellectual, to lift himself by his own bootstraps. Substantial aid and sustained pressure are needed from the white community if the native under apartheid is to enjoy any opportunities at all. Yet in the government's White Paper the main recommendations of the Tomlinson commission were either rejected or qualified or evaded. One need not minimize what has been done on behalf of native education and housing and employment; but when all that is conceded, there remains the inescapable fact that the nationalists are not prepared to undertake the formidable efforts and expenditures which alone could give reality to the opportunities which separate development pretends to provide.

What is more, the African natives are not the only group affected, though they are the most important numerically. Lumped together with the other non-whites are the Coloured and the Indians, whose cases are completely different from that of the native and whose prospects under apartheid are nothing short of desperate.

The one million Coloured, concentrated mainly in Cape Province, are a mixture of native and European and Malay. They form a group of long standing whose whole orientation is toward the white community. They have no territorial base of their own, no tribal background and tradition, no language other than English or Afrikaans. None of the arguments of apartheid about the advantages of separate development or the desirability of building on tribal traditions and language have any application

to the Coloured. Yet they are to be cut off and isolated from the Europeans on the sole ground of difference in skin pigmentation. None of the nationalists with whom I raised the question had any concrete answer as to what the future could possibly hold for this unfortunate group. The doors to advancement that had previously been opened to them, however narrowly, are now to be slammed shut, and they are to be thrown back toward the natives with their more primitive background and their lower living standards. Fear of being dragged down has produced a sharpened antagonism to the natives as a threat to the Coloured way of life, and a sense of despair about any useful relations with the whites. They have little in common with the natives. They have nowhere of their own to go. Separation holds no hope for them as a community. They are the tragic victims of nationalist racial dogmas.

The half million Indians, the great bulk of them in Natal, are in a plight that is almost equally hopeless. They are regarded on virtually all sides as both alien and unassimilable. In contrast to the Coloured, they have their distinct customs and language and social structure; but many of them are several generations away from the land of their origin, and apartheid offers nothing to them in terms of their continued presence in South Africa. Yet the Afrikaners, who claim that South Africa is their only homeland and that their link with the Netherlands was severed long ago, refuse to admit a comparable attitude on the part of the Indians. The solution which they favour above all is the mass exodus of Indians back to the land of their origin, and some of them would be quite willing to make the position of the Indians so intolerable that they would have no other choice.

To this hiving off of natives and Indians and Coloured from each other as well as from the white community must be added the further policy of dividing the natives themselves. In the new native locations the principle has been adopted of grouping them on a tribal basis, with their own housing areas and shopping centres and schools. Education is to be on a tribal basis throughout, beginning with primary instruction in the various vernaculars and carrying right up to the university level. This multiplying of barriers that create the sense of separatism and even of antagonism undoubtedly favours the ability of the white minority to maintain its ascendancy without too great a risk of serious trouble. This may not be the initial motive, but it can hardly

fail to be appreciated as an incidental advantage—indeed, one observer commented to me that the only thing the nationalists had borrowed from the British was the principle of divide and rule.

In the face of the tremendous issues and implications raised by apartheid, it is easy to forget that there were acute divisions between Boer and Briton before they were overshadowed by the problem of Boer versus Bantu. A visitor is not very long in the Union before he is made conscious that these divisions are still very much in evidence. While the questions raised by the policy of separate development are in the forefront of public preoccupations, the white community is itself divided by factors which are often merely incidental to this overriding issue or are even unconnected with it.

The roots go deep. There are memories of Dutch occupation of the Cape two centuries before the British arrived, of the Great Trek which led to the establishment of two Afrikaner republics and their survival until overcome by British arms, of subsequent political struggles to achieve independence from Westminster within the evolving Commonwealth. There are economic divisions between the big business groups under English-speaking control and the Afrikaner farmers of the veldt. And there is the determination of the nationalists to maintain the political domination that they have now acquired and to implement their own views with a minimum of concessions to critics and opponents.

It would be over-simplifying matters to claim that political divisions are entirely along racial lines. There are English-speaking supporters of the nationalists, as there are Afrikaner opponents. None the less, the hard core of the Nationalist party is unquestionably Afrikaner, while the main strength of the United party is in the English-speaking areas. Different economic interests and divergent social aims, in addition to historical factors, find their reflection in this tendency toward political organizations in which racial divisions are among the important determinants.

The nationalists, naturally enough, are vocal in their professed desire for unity among the whites in a common front against the great non-white majority. At the same time their own attitude raises two major obstacles. One is their blank refusal to accept any racial policy that holds the slightest pos-

sibility, however remote, of the integration of whites and non-whites into a common community—which means in effect an insistence on the acceptance of apartheid as the price for white political unity, with a resulting strengthening of Afrikaner political ascendancy. The second is the tendency to reinforce the solidarity of the Afrikaner group by accentuating the separatist factors that divide it from the English-speaking community. One sign of this is the effort to get rid of dual-language schools, where English and Afrikaner pupils are taught on a bilingual basis, and to bring about a complete educational separation based on the two languages. There are further examples, such as the founding of a Bureau of Racial Affairs which rejects any effective contact with the older Institute of Race Relations, and a recent suggestion for the creation of an Institute of International Affairs in virtual disregard of the existing South African Institute. I heard repeated regrets from English-speaking liberals about the lack of social or intellectual contacts across racial lines; and while this is the result of faults on both sides, there are few signs that an attempt to remedy it on a basis of genuine co-operation would meet with any real welcome from Afrikaner nationalism.

Within the English group there is a good deal of political restiveness and a groping for a more effective medium than the United party as an alternative to the nationalists. Liberal and Federalist parties have been organized, as well as the South Africa Bond which seeks to provide a common platform for English and Afrikaners. There is little indication that these have attracted any substantial measure of popular support. There is too little in the way of effective leadership, and perhaps too little genuine liberalism within the English community—particularly on the racial issue—to provide a basis for a really solid movement. For all the criticism of the United party, it is likely to remain the chief medium of political opposition to the nationalists—and to remain an opposition party unless it develops a more clear-cut alternative policy.

The nationalists also have their restive elements. Within the ranks there were mutterings and heart-searchings over the packing of the Senate, and uneasiness over the tepid attitude toward the Tomlinson report as expressed in the government's White Paper. Recent applications of the Group Areas Act, involving the uprooting of substantial numbers of people from their homes

and occupations, have brought protests on humanitarian grounds, and there are elements in the Dutch Reformed Church whose consciences are becoming seriously troubled by the practical consequences of apartheid in action.

As yet however there is little indication that such doubts will lead to any serious revolt within the party. The discipline, not only of the party but of the Afrikaner community, is strong and stern. Criticism within the ranks meets with prompt and effective rebuke; open divergence is answered by virtual excommunication of the heretic from the community itself. The nationalists have coined the word "liberalist," which in their vocabulary is a dirty word indeed, and the intellectual who yields to liberalist aberrations is regarded and treated as an active enemy.

For the Afrikaner intellectual who happens also to be a nationalist by conviction, there is therefore little alternative to conformity. Unless he abandons his convictions, including his belief in the philosophy of apartheid, he has nowhere to go outside of Afrikaner nationalism. He may be perturbed by the way the policies are being applied, but in the end he is likely to be reduced either to a smouldering submission or to an exercise in rationalization that quiets his doubts at the expense of his intellectual honesty.

The application of apartheid is only now beginning. It has as yet touched only a few of the larger urban centres; it is still far from tackling the vast problem of territorial separation based on enlarged native reserves which was so central a feature of the Tomlinson report. Yet already it has shown the vastness and complexity of the problem, and the cost in human terms of the dislocations and uncertainties that it involves.

It would of course be open to the nationalists to argue that it is unfair to pass judgment at this early stage, and that time is essential to carry out so gigantic an experiment. Yet there is some ground for the belief that the political leaders have abandoned the aim of affecting complete apartheid, if indeed they ever actually held it, and are pursuing a pragmatic policy designed primarily to segregate and control the native without too much attention to the long range opportunities that separate development was supposed to offer. If this is so, criticism is likely to grow, both from those who feel that an essential principle has been abandoned and from those whose humanitarian feelings are affronted by the methods adopted. The practical effect of

such criticism is quite another question. There is as yet no indication that South Africa is prepared to reverse its basic racial policy, or that public opinion is ready to consider an attempt to create an integrated society, even to the extent that is being advocated in the neighbouring Central African Federation. A united South African community is at present outside the realm of practical politics. Whether current politics are any more practical is something about which this observer, for one, retains the gravest doubts.