

SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS (INC.)
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THE NEXT TWENTY-FIVE YEARS IN RACE RELATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA.

by

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Nothing would have given me greater pleasure than to be able to say that I believe that the next twenty-five years will witness a great improvement in race relations in South Africa. Looking at the matter from the African viewpoint, however, I regret to say that I cannot find any solid ground on which to base such optimism.

I cannot say that I am favourably impressed with what I have observed in the limited contacts which I have been able to make with average Europeans in the course of my public work. Nor indeed have I emerged from occasional visits to the House of Assembly with anything but thoughts of dire foreboding for the rising generation.

At a recent political meeting addressed by a Nationalist aspirant for Parliament - the meeting being attended by Europeans by no means below the average as far as either their intelligence or their general social outlook is concerned - I was taken aback, not so much by the reactionary character of the utterances of the chief speaker, but by the obvious ignorance of the audience regarding the basic issues involved in the perennial problem of South African politics - the black-white problem - and their tame acceptance of statements and viewpoints which the speaker could not have got away with if he had been addressing an audience of African secondary school pupils.

Rightly or wrongly the only conclusion I could come to was that the audience which was composed mainly of United Party supporters was in substantial agreement with the speaker whether they were going to vote for him or not. This must account for the fact that even when the United Party is in power the policy which they carry out as far as Africans are concerned is Nationalist in practice, if not in theory.

It is not for me but for experts on European public opinion to say whether there will be any change for better as far as this sort of thing is concerned in the next twenty-five years. It may be that Europeans will in increasing numbers espouse a sounder theory of race relations in South Africa than that of "apartheid" and will endeavour to extend the hand of friendship to their African neighbours.

In my opinion the signs indicate that increasingly the African will spurn the European hand of friendship. That will, of course, heighten rather than relieve the tension between black and white in this country. The European would-be friends of the African will naturally be distressed to find that their genuine and interested efforts to bridge the gulf between themselves and the African are met with suspicion, mistrust and even positive antagonism. It may be that the majority of such friends will not stop to ask themselves why it is that the African about whom they had always been assured that he was so happy-go-lucky, always appreciative of the least little thing done for him, always ready to befriend the stranger at the gate, has undergone such a transformation of his traditionally amiable character.

Perhaps this group, having become disillusioned, will hasten to abandon their decision to befriend the African and will go to swell the ranks of the anti-Africans among the Europeans. But I believe that there will be a minority among them - such minorities are the salt of the earth - who faced with this rebuff on the part of the African will pause and examine the history of race relations in South Africa during the last hundred years.

That history will show them that the conquest of the African by the European was brought about not only by the superior military weapons or strategy which the European possessed, but was in no small measure due to

the fact that in practically every conflict between black and white, there were always some blacks who stood on the side of the whites or who at least did not make common cause with their fellow blacks against the whites.

These were the blacks who thought that they saw in the white man the bearer of a superior civilization inspired by higher spiritual values as well as better material standards than those of their forefathers. These were the blacks who were often known as "the friendly tribes", who were sometimes rewarded for their loyalty during times of war between black and white with the grant of land to be held under individual tenure as against the traditional communal tenure of the African. These are the Africans who sometimes individually and sometimes collectively took vows to embrace this superior civilization and to transfer to its representatives the loyalty which they formerly gave to their own traditional leaders.

The Fingo still celebrate annually the famous vows they took "to be loyal to the King, to support the missionaries and to educate their children". The gradual pacification of the country saw more and more Africans, without taking any formal vows, nevertheless abandon their pristine hostility to the white man and endeavour to adjust themselves to the new civilization in the pathetic hope that in time they would be welded into one nation with the European and would then be subject to a common citizenship, with common rights and privileges, common opportunities and responsibilities.

In this fond hope the African embraced European Christianity, entered schools giving a European type of education, entered the service of the white man in various capacities and to varying degrees adopted his material culture. In many of these directions the African proved an apt pupil.

Here and there, of course, the African met with disappointments. He encountered laws whose purport he could not understand. Sometimes he endured kicks and floggings and other forms of ill-treatment for which he could see no justification. But in, and through, it all he thought that he would be able slowly but surely to demonstrate by his patience and loyalty to the white man that he harboured no ill-will against him and desired no more from him than to be allowed an equal opportunity with other people to live the life of a normal human being, not that of an outcast, in the country of his birth, in return for which he was prepared like any other member of the community to bear his legitimate share of the responsibilities of citizenship.

But with the passage of time it became clearer and clearer to him that, try as he might, he could not convince the white man of his essential friendship towards him. Especially since Union has he found himself regarded with greater and greater aversion by the white man. The greater his approximation to European standards in his way of life the greater seems to be the aversion. Restrictive and oppressive laws directed against him have become the order of the day. Instead of being regarded more and more as a member of the same nation he has found himself looked upon more and more as a menace to the welfare of the white man. He has found responsible white leaders demanding that he should be treated literally as a thing apart. He has found his rights as an individual whittled down until his hope of ever being counted among the citizens of the country has faded into nothingness.

The cumulative effect of these experiences has led to the widespread disillusionment and sense of frustration which we find in African circles in 1948. The next 25 years will, in my opinion, see a rapid increase in the number of disillusioned and frustrated Africans who are convinced that the the road of friendship and co-operation with the white man leads to the cul de sac in which their forebears have been cribbed and confined since the end of the period of the so-called Kafir Wars.

In the years to come just as every white man who today advocates a better deal for the African is condemned as a "kafferboetie" who must be ostracised in white society, similarly every African who advocates co-operation with the white man will be condemned as a quisling who must be cast out of African society.

Just as European children seem to be taught in their homes, in their

schools, in their literature and otherwise to look down upon every African man, or woman or child and to regard them as potential enemies, so African children are going to be taught to look upon every European as a traditional oppressor, as an inveterate usurper of other people's lands or other property or rights with whom relations, if any, must be on a strictly business basis, between whom and themselves not even ordinary courtesies must be exchanged.

The beginnings of this attitude which, I suggest, will be widespread by 1970 unless there is a radical transformation in our whole Native policy in the near future, are already discernible in African educational institutions in which a state of tension is becoming more and more endemic; in the boycott movement in political circles which although it may today look like a small cloud in an otherwise blue sky will grow until it develops into a vast civil disobedience campaign; in the growing number of unauthorised strikes in industry although the African worker is not supposed to have the right to strike, and generally in the increase of lawlessness among an otherwise law-abiding people.

It may, of course, be argued that the African will not gain anything by the adoption of such an attitude, that he will only thereby estrange the sympathy of those among the Europeans who believe in the rightness of his cause and are prepared to make his welfare their concern. The obvious answer to this is that to call upon frustrated people to reflect calmly upon any course they are bent upon following is a counsel of perfection. Modern psychologists have taught us something about the correlation of frustration and aggression, but none of them has ever suggested that the aggressive tendencies which invariably follow frustration are ever based upon a nice calculation of end results. The obvious public duty of those who believe that a state of affairs such as I forecast here in regard to race relations in the next quarter of a century will not be in the interest of either the African in particular or the country in general is not to indulge in pious admonitions to the African to be patient and to wait, Micawber-like, for something to turn up, but to make strenuous efforts to bring about the removal of the root causes of this growing sense of bitterness and resentment among Africans, to fight with all their might against those things in our social, economic and political system which are searing the soul of a loving and lovable people and are thus poisoning the relations between peoples who by their common experiences in every aspect of our national life have become common heirs to this fair land.

NOTE: - This article was written with expression of view before the General Election.