THE AFRICAN RESPONSE
To Racial Laws

By Z.K. Matthews.

TO THE obvious embarrassment of the democratic nations of the world, race problems in South Africa attract constant and bewildered attention beyond the borders of the Union. The Western nations earnestly desire cordial relations with the Union of South Africa, and she has done much to earn their friendship. Her soldiers fought magnificently both in World War I and World War II, under the leadership of Field Marshal Smuts. Her reputation as a nation pledged to defend the cause of freedom, peace and international security in the modern world was enhanced when she became a signatory to the United Nations Charter. And her recent contribution of an air squadron to the forces of the United Nations fighting in Korea showed that she was once more prepared to play her part in resisting totalitarian aggression.

On the other hand, the categorical refusal of the government led by Field Marshal Smuts, himself one of the architects of the United Nations Charter, to submit an agreement for the transfer of the Mandated territory of South-West Africa to the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations led to widespread comment; and when the Indian and Pakistan Governments submitted to the U.N. Assembly the question of the treatment of Indians within the Union of South Africa, the Union's colour policy evoked much troubled discussion. The change of government in South Africa in May 1948, when the United Party led by General Smuts was replaced by a coalition of Afrikaner parties led by Dr. D.F. Malan, intensified foreign misgivings about the Union's non-white policy.

Repeated efforts have been made in South Africa to find a solution to the racial problem. Commissions of experts have studded the issues involved and made recommendations...
recommendations to various South African governments. Parliamentary Select Committees have heard voluminous evidence. Innumerable individual studies have been made and various schemes have been tried in the search for a political system which would safeguard the rights of all sections of the population. But South Africa is no nearer the solution of her race problems than she was in 1910, when the Union was consummated. Indeed, the past forty years have been characterized by the widening of economic opportunity and the broadening of democratic rights for whites, but by the contraction of economic opportunities and the narrowing of political rights for non-whites. The result is widespread resentment, frustration and disaffection.

The conviction that some way must be found to halt this process of whittling down the rights of natives led the African members of the advisory body known as the Native Representative Council to embark upon the series of adjournments of Council meetings which ultimately led to its abolition. Actually its passing is not lamented by non-whites, since the government had never seriously heeded its advice. The passive resistance movement of the Indians in Natal, about which so much was heard at Lake Success and elsewhere, stemmed from the same feeling that something must be done; so did the widespread boycott of the Colored Advisory Council, a nominated body somewhat similar to the Native Representative Council. Now violence is becoming more and more common. A demonstration of protest against apartheid (the policy of complete May separation) which took place in 1950 on the Witwatersrand resulted in disastrous clashes between the police and the demonstrators. A more widespread stoppage of work among non-Europeans took place on June 26, 1950. And after the removal of the colored voters from the common roll, a widely-publicized protest against the trend of legislation in South Africa was organised, on May 7,1951, by white war veterans who felt that the undermining of the rights of non-Europeans was an abandonment of the principles and ideals for which they themselves fought and their comrades died in two world wars.
One must take an effort to see the issues involved in this problem of race relations in perspective. The Union of South Africa is the most powerful and probably the most advanced state on the continent of Africa. It is an independent country, with Dominion status within the British Commonwealth of Nations. The wealth of the country in natural resources such as gold, diamonds, iron, coal, manganese and other basic minerals has made possible the development of a relatively high standard of Western civilization. Although large parts of the country are arid, and though it is not rich agriculturally, exports of wool, fruit, wine and other farm products are considerable. South Africa also plays an important part in international trade, as a market for the industrial products of Great Britain, Canada, the United States and the European nations. The climate is temperate and the region is eminently suitable for white settlement. The white population consists mainly of persons of British and Dutch origin, but South Africa received in addition an important infusion of French Huguenots in the seventeenth century; and other European countries have also made their contribution to white immigration. In 1952, South Africa will celebrate the 300th anniversary of the landing of van Riebeek and his small band at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. The settlement was established, on behalf of the Dutch East India Company, as a halfway house to India and the East. From those small beginnings white settlement at the southermost point of Africa has grown until today more than half of the white population of the whole of Africa is to be found within the Union.

The white inhabitants believe that they have a great mission in Africa, namely, to work out a basis on which white and non-white can live side by side, to the mutual benefit of both. They are convinced that in South Africa they are destined to develop a form of Western civilization which is appropriate to Africa. They regard themselves as the champions of the white man not only in South Africa but throughout the whole continent, and the influence of the Union's point of view
on relations between blacks and whites is felt in Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Kenya.

Although the Union contains such a large proportion of the continent's white population, the whites are heavily outnumbered by the non-whites; the former number approximately 2,500,000 while the indigenous African population is approximately 8,000,000. Asians (mainly Indians) who entered the country about the middle of the nineteenth century number some 300,000; and the Coloreds (persons of mixed blood) constitute another 1,000,000. To these figures must be added the populations of the mandated territory of South-West Africa (about 300,000 non-whites and 40,000 whites) and of the British High Commission Territories of Basutoland, Swaziland and Bechuanaland Protectorate (approximately 1,000,000 non-whites and about 6,000 whites). Altogether, therefore, the non-whites in greater South Africa outnumber the whites by something like four and five to one.

For many generations the different sections of the population lived together in comparative peace, and by their joint efforts built a state to whose progress and prosperity all have in varying degrees contributed. Their social and economic interests became inextricably interwoven. But the common life of whites and non-whites in the country inevitably gave rise to many perplexing political, social and economic problems. The general problem stems from the fact that a system of government which had grown up among peoples with similar historical background and in countries with fairly homogeneous population, racially and culturally, was transplanted to a country where there was sharp racial and cultural diversity, but in which all political power over the destinies of other groups was vested in one particular group.

The two great fears of the whites in South Africa are that they will lose their physical identity as a result of racial intermixture, and that they will lose their political supremacy as a result of the social and economic advancement of the non-whites. The history of race relations in South Africa may be said to consist of the....
consist chiefly of the measures proposed or taken by various governments to ward off what they consider the twin evils of physical absorption and political subordination.

There are two main schools of thought among white South Africans regarding the problem of devising an appropriate political system for such a multi-racial country. Both schools proceed on the assumption that it is in the interests of the country as a whole that political supremacy should for all time remain firmly in the hands of the white section of the population. But while one group believes that the attainment of this objective is not incompatible with the grant of a strictly limited measure of political power to the non-white groups, the other is convinced that if anything is conceded everything will be lost.

The principles underlying the moderate point of view were set forth as far back as 1903-05 by the Inter-Colonial Commission appointed after the South African War to inquire into, among other things, a uniform native policy for southern Africa. The Commission concluded that in the interests of both races it was desirable to allow the native population "some measure of representation in the legislatures of the country". It laid down the following main principles as the basis of native representation:

1. That no native should vote in the election of any member or candidate for whom a European had the right to vote. 
2. That the number of members granted to native constituencies should be settled by each legislature, and that "at least one such seat should be granted in each of the self-governing Colonies in South Africa now, and in each Colony or Possession as it becomes self-governing". 
3. That there should be separate voters' lists, and separate candidates for natives only. 
4. That the qualifications for the native voters should be the same as for Europeans. 
5. That the qualifications of members to represent the natives should be determined by each legislature. These are the axioms to which, in varying degrees, men like Smuts and Hertzog subscribed. They formed the basis of the Representation of Natives Act of 1936 under which......
which the African population was provided with a system of separate representation. The Asiatic Representation Act of 1946 did the same for the Indians, while the Separate Registration of Voters Act of 1951 envisages the same system for the colored population of the Union.

The other school of thought is of the opinion that the inevitable result of such schemes would be equality between black and white. According to the report of the Commission appointed by the Nationalist Party to draw up its color policy, "a policy of equality or any form thereof must necessarily lead to the undermining and eventual destruction of the white race as an independent and ruling people. This is the logical consequence of the numerical superiority and the rapid development of the non-white races. Any other interpretation of the position is wishful thinking and self-deception."

In this view the only policy which will permanently guarantee the racial purity and the political supremacy of the white man is the policy of apartheid. Only by following that road can "the character and future of each race within its own area be protected and safeguarded." Each race, "in its own home" will be ensured full opportunity to develop, and "the fundamental right of self-determination and self-realization can be assured without the interests of one group coming into conflict with the interests of another, and without the one group feeling that the status and development of the other is an undermining of and detrimental to itself. Any middle course or compromise is at best of a temporary nature and purely patchwork". The adherents of this school of thought held the reins of government in South Africa since May 1948.

The policy contemplates not merely separate political representation, but the setting aside of areas in which the interests of the various racial groups in South Africa shall be paramount. As Dr. W.M. Eiselein, the present Secretary for Native Affairs, has described it, the different groups will be separated into "separate self-sufficient socio-economic units", that is to say, there will be total separation into distinct white and non-white "areas of liberty". But the result of the steps which....
which have been taken to implement the policy of apartheid is not liberty for the non-whites.

The Group Areas Act was passed in 1950 and brought into operation in March 1951. It empowers the Government, through the Minister of the Interior, to set aside areas for the different racial groups. In such areas, no person who does not belong to the group for which it has been set aside shall have property rights (except under permit from the responsible Minister). A Land Tenure Advisory Board has been set up and local authorities have been asked to consider how the Act can best be implemented in their areas. Under this law the property rights of non-whites have been placed in a more precarious position than ever before. The hard-won earnings of Africans which have been invested in better homes for themselves and their children, have depreciated in value overnight, for the character of any area may be altered without adequate consultation and without compensation for those affected. Non-European "group areas" which have been in existence for many decades, such as the non-European townships in the western areas of Johannesburg, have come to be regarded as "black areas" which must be removed. The sense of insecurity among those affected is great. This Act purports to be designed to reduce, remove or prevent any deurmekaarboerdery (intermingling) between white and black; but experience has taught the non-Europeans that where any such deurmekaarboerdery is to the advantage of the European, some plausible reason will be found for not interfering with it. Whenever abolition of it appears advantageous to the non-European, however, it is represented as a menace which cannot be tolerated.

Other laws to implement this policy have been put on the statute books. By the Separate Registration of Voters Act, the Coloreds have been deprived of their ordinary franchise rights and placed on a separate roll; they are to be provided with a system of separate representation similar to that which was made law for the Africans in 1936. The object of this law is to render the colored population innocuous as a political pressure group. Much of the discussion about it has centred around the fact
that the government did not comply with the two-thirds majority rule laid down for this kind of legislation in the South Africa Act of 1909. But whether any group is deprived of its voting rights by a two-thirds majority or a bare majority is of course irrelevant as far as those who have lost their voting rights are concerned; the Africans do not feel the loss of their franchise rights any less keenly because in their case the change was brought about by a two-thirds majority.

The significant development since 1936 is simply that, after one group was deprived of its rights with impunity, it became easier to tamper with the rights of others. The next step may well be that so-called "Communists", of whatever color, will be deprived of their rights merely by inclusion in a list drawn up by an administrative officer, without any reference to Parliament. Those who think they are safe today may, like the Coloreds of 1936, live to regret their failure to make common cause with the Africans in their struggle against the dictatorship of the minority.

And now the system of separate representation for Africans established in 1936 has begun to disintegrate, as African leaders predicted it would. The Native Representative Council which its creators had hoped would develop into a kind of Bantu Parliament is to be replaced, under the Bantu Authorities Act passed in the last days of the recent session of Parliament, with a system which is described as a "Magna Carta for Africans" but which to Africans seems a long step backward. The real effect of the Bantu Authorities Act will be to widen and strengthen European authority. The Bantu will be divided into a multitude of units, each with the shadow instead of the substance of power. The purpose is to delay indefinitely the development of a sense of national unity among Africans. The African people were not consulted about the Act; had they been, their leaders would have rejected it, for the efforts of all responsible leaders of the African people are directed toward welding the different tribal groups together.

The Nationalists have also declared their intention to abolish Assembly Representation...
representation for Africans, and this will probably be done in the next session of Parliament. But the African people have ceased to be interested in representation by Europeans. Human history has not yet produced a group of men who can so impartially divine what is good for others that self-government can be dispensed with. Africans will continue to believe that, in dealing with their white fellow countrymen, they are dealing with fallible human beings. Such schemes as the Bantu Authorities Act and the system which it is designed to inaugurate may be forced upon certain sections of the African people, but will never command assent.

III

The government is proceeding with the execution of its apartheid policy in other directions. The Native Building Workers Act which has been brought into operation is intended to protect white labour against non-white competition. It restricts African construction workers to African areas, whether urban or rural, or to working for Africans. The whole community will suffer, for the shortage of white building workers is officially admitted and there is an acute scarcity of housing for all sections of the population, especially in the urban districts. A piece of legislation called the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act makes more difficult the occupation by Africans of land not specifically set aside for them, and the proposed Native Laws Amendment Bill (which, happily, has not yet been passed) would remove the present legal necessity for the Government to find accommodation for Africans who have been rendered homeless as a result of the application of the restrictive provisions of the Natives Land and Trust Act of 1936.

Drastic changes in native education are feared as a result of the recommendations of the Native Education Commission appointed a couple of years ago. The Commission's report has not yet been published, but such previews of it as have been given by responsible Ministers indicate that it will propose that native education be transferred from the departments which deal with the education of other sections of the population to the Native Affairs Department. This is the Department which is entrusted with the administration......
administration of the restrictive laws affecting Africans. The Nationalist Party has a program of "Christian National Education" which it believes is particularly suitable for Africans. It has set itself the task of fighting against "such activities on the part of church societies and institutions as tend to undermine constituted authority, or propagate antagonistic and foreign ideologies and which distort the principle of separate development." It is hardly necessary to add that the African people will never subscribe to any policy under which artificial limits are set to education. African children are entitled, in so far as the capabilities of each child permit, to enter into the heritage built up for all mankind by the contributions of the best minds of all ages in every field of human endeavour.

Perhaps the most dangerous onslaught upon the liberties of the people of South Africa is the passing of the amended Suppression of Communism Act. This Act purports to strike at the Communist Party of South Africa (now dissolved) and at Communism. South Africa is not alone in regarding Communism as one of the greatest evils of modern times. Few among the African people are in favour of Communism, and the Communist Party of South Africa made no significant headway among the African people or in African organizations. But the word "Communist" seems to have lost all meaning, and the definition of it laid down in the amended Act is so comprehensive that it can take in practically everybody whose expressed convictions happen to be different from those of the government. The Act appears to be intended not only to muzzle future critics of government policy but also to make it possible to deal retrospectively with past critics. African leaders who are not Communists, and who would never be admitted to the company of Communists, may find themselves dealt with under this law.

The policy of apartheid is not confined to legislative measures. Its influence is felt in the services rendered to non-Europeans in post offices, railway stations, government offices and other public places. The discourtesy and incivility toward
non-Europeans always associated with such places have, if anything, become worse.
Uncouth youths who as a rule have little more than their white skins to justify their
being placed in positions of authority over non-Europeans have come into their own.
Their behaviour toward non-Europeans does little to relieve the mounting tension
between the races in South Africa.

IV

The assumption of the policy of apartheid, in sum, is that Africans are so utterly
different from Europeans that common ground upon which black and white can work
together politically is forever impossible of achievement. As I have suggested, there
has always been a strong flavor of this premise in governmental measures in the Union
of South Africa. But in the past there have been helpful moderating influences. Now
restraints upon the full application of this bitter doctrine seem removed. The pretense
that rigid separateness separation in the organisation of the national life of the Union
will enable Africans to develop their possibilities better is rejected by every lesson
of experience. As has truthfully been said, "the economic system of the country depends
for its very survival upon the employment of Africans in non-African areas." Studies
are available which indicate the degree to which administration schools and services
in the Reserves are dominated by Europeans. The purpose of intensifying the principle
of separation is to intensify the exploitation of blacks by whites.

The opposition of the other sections of the non-European population - the Coloreds
and the Indians - to the policy of apartheid is now as strong as that of the Africans.
Practically all existing organisations of non-Europeans, both official and unofficial,
have adopted resolutions of opposition to it. There have been one or two instances
of support for some aspect or other of government policy by bodies with special axis to
grind. A group described as the Native Medical Council of Natal, consisting mainly of
African herbalists, has come out in support of the government's policy in regard to
mixed marriages or sexual relations between the racial groups; and an association of
ministers of African separatist churches has declared itself in favour of apartheid.

These......
These organizations carry little weight.

The two principal African political organizations are the All-African Convention and the African National Congress. The All-African Convention arose out of the agitation of the African people against the Bantu Native Bills of 1935-36. It purports to be a federal body, seeking to weld social, religious, sporting and cultural associations of various kinds into a fighting unit. It has adopted a ten-point program through which it hopes to achieve democratic rights for all non-European groups. This program involves, among other things, a complete boycott of all separatist political institutions set up for non-Europeans by the government, and a propaganda campaign against all those connected with such bodies. The influence of this body is confined to certain parts of the Cape Province. It cannot be said to offer an adequate reflection of African public opinion.

The African National Congress, a much older body, has been in existence since 1912. It was established as a reaction against the union of white South Africa in 1910. The African leaders of the day were convinced that the only defence against a united white South Africa was a united black South Africa, and formed the African National Congress to bring into one body the different political organisations then existing among the African people. Since its inception, the A.N.C. has endeavoured, as its original constitution indicates, to place its organisation on a mass basis. Chiefs and commoners, literate and illiterate, tribal and detribalised Africans in all parts of the country were sought as members. Although the original constitution has been replaced by a much less pretentious one, the A.N.C. still has as its ideal the welding of the African people into a nation which can stand up to, if not alongside, the white nation established here in 1910. The A.N.C. has not, however, captured the masses of the African people and its accomplishments do not altogether justify its claim to speak for them effectively. But whatever its defects, there can be no doubt that the A.N.C. commands a greater allegiance among Africans than any other existing organisation.
organization. In 1949 it adopted a program with the following preamble:

The fundamental principles of the program of action of the A.N.C. are inspired by the desire to achieve national freedom. By national freedom we mean freedom from white domination and the attainment of political independence. This implies the rejection of conceptions of segregation, apartheid, trusteeship or white leadership which are all in one way or another motivated by the idea of white domination or the domination of the whites over the blacks. Like all other people the African people claim the right of self-determination.

The 1949 Conference of the A.N.C. declared that the adoption of this new program meant that the African people would have to embark upon a policy of non-cooperation. Dr. J.S. Moroka, the President-General of the A.N.C. described the policy more positively as one of cooperation with all on terms of equality only. This formulation is more constructive, and refutes those who accuse the African people of being bent upon establishing here a nation consisting exclusively of Africans, with Africans dominating minority groups. In fact, the African people have no desire to dominate any group. All they wish to emphasize is that in the future their cooperation – with the government or with anyone else for that matter – will be given only on terms consistent with dignity and self-respect, that is to say, equality.

Can South Africa accommodate within her borders two nations – the white nation and the African nation? The A.N.C. stands for one South African nation in which all peoples shall enjoy equal rights of citizenship. The African's desire for equality is represented in some quarters as an artificial product of "agitators", or, as they have been recently described, "learned Natives discussing high politics." Every responsible African believes that the political education of his people is a necessary task; but, in fact, African leaders spend much of their time trying to calm the feelings of people who have been enraged by the words and deeds of non-Africans, and in preventing rash actions.

The situation in South Africa is explosive. The two main sections of the community whites and non-whites, are almost at daggers drawn. Many serious men believe that unless...
unless wiser counsels prevail, and emotions subside on both sides of the color line, a clash that could have disastrous consequences for the country will sooner or later occur. The Europeans of South Africa believe that this clash can be avoided by the permanent denial of any political power to the non-white groups; and as a corollary, by keeping the armed forces of the country a monopoly of the white man. It has recently been stated that in the event of a third world war, the first duty of South Africa's white army will be the defence of the country against its internal "enemies" - the non-whites. In previous world wars, the internal security of the country was never threatened by any non-European group. The government of the day did not have to spend any sleepless nights over the loyalty of the non-Europeans. (The same could not be said about all sections of the Europeans.) The explanation given for doubting the loyalty of the non-Europeans now is that, if there is a third world war, it will be between Communist and non-Communist countries; and the governmental pretense is that all or most non-Europeans in South Africa are potential Communists who will turn against their own country. The African people, and the other non-white groups in the country, do not need any Communists to teach them about the nature of conditions under which they are compelled to live. They ask for reason, and fair dealing. And they hope for peace.