

Social Relations in a Common Society

[1959?]

I have suggested that it is not only desirable but possible ~~for~~ even in South Africa for peoples of different racial groups and varying cultural backgrounds ~~to~~ living in a common society to have their social relations conducted on a wholesome basis of mutual respect and a proper regard for one another's human aspirations. Admittedly at the present time with things as they are in South Africa this sounds like a counsel of perfection. Ever since Union but even more so during the last ten or twelve years the different racial groups having have been moving steadily but surely into opposing camps between which social relations have become more and ~~more~~ more hostile. The laws which we have placed on the statute book, the way in which we have organised our public services and public institutions have been governed by the idea that there is not or ought not to be any love lost between the different groups that make up our permanent population. We have assumed that enmity between these different groups is inevitable and therefore our policy has been directed towards reducing social relations between them to a minimum ^{it is argued,} so as to avoid ^{it is argued,} the conflict and the friction which we believe to be unavoidable. Not only have we striven to build up barriers between white and non-white, so as to ~~keep~~ keep alive this fiction of mutual hostility between them, but we have gone further and have divided ~~Africa~~ from the non-whites into watertight compartments of Afrikaners, Indians and Coloureds and latterly even the Afrikaners into seven or eight groups that are supposed to be kept away from one another. All this ~~is~~ has been done among people who live together in one country, ~~and~~ owe loyalty to the same state and are almost

daily brought into contact with one another in varying capacities.

The ~~trouble~~ ^{tragedy} about all this is that the varying groups have learnt the evil lesson of separation so well that many of their ordinary members who do not take the trouble to analyse the situation have begun to take this situation for granted and some even to ~~invest~~ appeal to ~~the~~ biblical or divine authority to justify ~~present~~ ~~status quo~~ the status quo. The white man who tries to bridge the gulf between ~~himself and the~~ white and non-white finds that he is looked upon with suspicion and distrust on both sides of the colour line. The African who tries to work for peace and harmony between the different racial groups in South Africa runs the risk of being described as a collaborator or quisling by his people or a hireling of the foreigner. Increasing mutual estrangement is the terrible price we are called upon to pay for the luxury of the policy of apartheid. Indeed some people would go so far as to say that things have gone so far that they are now beyond repair and that all we have to do is to wait for the inevitable holocaust towards which we are heading. Each group naturally hopes that when that day comes and when the smoke of battle is dispersed, they will appear on the ~~the~~ victorious side. There are however those who are satisfied that although we have followed unwise policies in the past we have not yet passed ^{beyond} the point of ~~return~~ no return and that it is still possible for us to build up here a society inspired by different motives and different ideals. What practical steps could we take to order our social relations in a manner more commensurate in keeping with the ^{attitudes} ~~spirit~~ which ought to prevail between members of a common society?

I want to suggest that the best way of promoting healthy social relations between ~~people~~ human beings is to promote ~~healthy~~ wholesome social contacts between them. By wholesome social contacts I mean contacts which are not by their very nature characterized by superiority on the one side and subordination on the other. Thus although Africans and Europeans have numerous contacts with one another in everyday South African life, the African almost invariably meets the European in the master-servant or employer-employee ^{complex} relationship, or in the relationship of an official representing the government giving orders to a ^{subordinate} subject. For too seldom do Europeans and Africans meet in any other capacity as ordinary South Africans. Hence it would be by no means easy to get them out of their customary attitudes towards one another. One way in which it might be possible to develop different attitudes is to get Africans and Europeans to work together on projects or causes which take them out of themselves, as it were, in which they work together for an object which is for the common good rather than for the benefit of ^{a particular} employer or ^{particular} employee. I am thinking here rather of the idea of the Inter-Racial Commission, a technique which was used in the Southern States of America to get public-spirited Southern Whites and Southern Negroes to work together for the betterment of race relations in their areas. The evil of lynching could not be eradicated either by the Whites alone or by the Negroes alone, but working together Whites and Negroes could investigate and report upon the underlying causes of these outbursts of human irrationality and strive to work for remedies which would obviate their repetition or to mitigate

the exacerbation of inter-racial illfeeling to which they give rise. We have of course some experience with bodies of a similar nature in South Africa. I refer to the ~~good~~ movement of Joint Councils of Europeans and Africans which in the thirties were to be found in some of the principal cities of the Union, although Joint Councils still lead a somewhat fitful existence in a few centres in the Union, ~~the~~ the movement may be said to have largely died out in South Africa. A variety of reasons may be given for their ~~failure~~ failure to captivate the imagination of all sections of the responsible leaders of thought and action in all sections of the population. The main reason ~~is~~ probably is that the Joint Councils tended to develop into or to be looked upon as bodies working ~~for~~ rather than with Africans, Coloureds or Indians as the case might be. With their wider knowledge and greater experience Europeans tended ~~to~~ or appeared to dominate the proceedings and activities of these bodies with the result that the non-whites lost interest in them. Moreover, the Europeans to be found in these bodies tended to be drawn from the English-speaking section of the white population with the result that they were looked upon with suspicion by the Afrikaans-speaking section of the population who rightly or wrongly felt that their particular point of view did not receive proper consideration in these bodies which they believed to be dominated by what they called "Kafferboeties" (nigger-lovers as they would be called in the Southern States of America). Admittedly the Afrikaners have always found it more ~~difficult~~ difficult than the English to work together with Africans or other non-whites. Their whole background and tradition have been against this sort of thing and with

the emergence of the policy of apartheid the idea of white and black together in any mixed body has become more anathema to them than ever. Their opposition to what they call "deurmoedkaarboerdery" is not responsible for such laws as the separate Amenities Act or the "Church clause" in the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1957 or the separate councils and separate senates of the separate university colleges for non-whites. But ^{unless and} until the Afrikaners and other whites who think like them get rid of their complex in this matter of working with Africans and other non-whites on a basis of mutual respect, the building up of healthy social relations between the different groups represented in South Africa will prove abortive.

And it is not as if there is a dearth of problems requiring the joint efforts of black and white in this country. Although much progress has been made in almost every field of life in South Africa, compared with other countries in the continent of Africa, a great deal still ^{remains} needs to be done. The vast majority of the population of the country especially the Africans are still in a state of backwardness in various fields aspects of their lives. No country can afford, ~~to~~ in the modern world, to allow ~~to~~ three-fourths of its population to jog along at a snail's pace in the jet age. A vast programme for the education and the socio-economic development of all its peoples, as fully ~~and~~ as completely and as rapidly as possible will have to be set in motion if South Africa is to take its proper place among the states of Africa. Such a programme cannot be carried out by the

the whites alone, however well-intentioned or by the Africans or any other non-white section alone. The idea that each group must be responsible for its own progress in its own areas is a heresy which has already proved too costly for it to become a permanent feature of our national policy.

It is not suggested that the different groups should lose their separate identity and that they should be reduced to a sort of colorless uniformity in every aspect of their lives. But what is suggested is that where people are destined to live together permanently in a common country it is the path of wisdom for them to combine their efforts ~~as~~ as much as possible in seeking to face their common future. No single section of such a community, however well-intentioned, can hope to satisfy the aspirations of the other sections without consulting with them and working with them for their common good.

In the political sphere it has been pointed out times out of number that the South African Constitution which was based ~~in~~ drawn up by whites only and was based on the assumption of the permanent political subordination of the non-white groups has outlived its usefulness and that the time is overdue for a new South African constitution to be drawn up not by a national convention of whites only but one in which all sections of the population can be represented and in which the rights of all sections of the population can be adequately safeguarded, not so ^{much} by the checks and balances provided for in the constitution ~~by~~ but ^{by} the concurrence, and the goodwill and the good faith of all those who have had a share in its making. What is true in the political sphere also applies in the social sphere.

Apart from the idea of working together on matters of common interest as a method of improving social relations between persons belonging to different groups mention must be made also of the value of personal contacts not necessarily on an official or a business basis. Far too many South Africans, especially white South Africans rise to positions of eminence in the country without knowing ~~any~~ or ever having met any person of note in the other sections of the population. How many South African members of Parliament, for example have ever met Chief Albert Buthe or Dr Xuma or Dr Moroka, among African leaders or Dr Niicker or Advocate Mall or Attorney J. N. Singh among the Indians or Dr van der Ross or George Solding or Benny Kries among the Coloureds. They may see their names in newspapers in which statements attributed to them may appear but they have not got the foggiest notion of what sort of individuals they are. And there are hundreds of such important personalities among the groups, individuals who wield influence in their communities in various ways. How can the rulers of a country expect to make a success of their job without ever meeting the persons who have a following of one kind or another in the communities they are seeking to rule. It is not sufficient to see such persons through the eyes of information officers or the reports of members of the Security Branch of the South African Police. The idea of the South African Bureau of Racial Affairs of seeking to make contacts with non-white leaders of all shades of political opinion is entirely commendable however much it may be condemned by hard-boiled politicians.

The same may be said about the policy of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) which has steadily adhered to the idea of ~~bringing~~ bringing together, from time to time, as students and not as Europeans or non-European students, from all institutions of higher learning - universities, university colleges and training colleges. In their conferences and other activities students of different racial groups have come together as students, rubbing together their minds which is more important than the mere rubbing together of shoulders. Even the members of the Afrikaner Studente Bond, the ~~do~~ organisation which brings together students from the Afrikaans-speaking ~~universities~~ universities, are not averse to meeting with non-white university students provided the latter come from their own university colleges and do not purport to represent white university students at the so-called 'open universities'. These students recognise that nothing but good can come from wholesome contacts between students of different racial groups when they meet on the basis of their common interest in student problems affecting university students. Their elders of course fear that such contacts may lead to social intermingling - to mixed dancing, mixed meals and generally to the "bont gejolle" (mixed parties) which they ~~do~~ dread so much. To stress these aspects of contact is to give undue importance to the least valuable and the less abiding aspects of social contact and to miss the essence of such contact which is the increase of mutual respect and understanding between persons who are destined to ^{and work} live together permanently in the same country.

It may be suggested of course that the different racial groups in South Africa have gone their separate ways for so long that it would be impossible for them to retrace their steps and to place their relations on a different footing. Separation has been given legal sanction legislative and conventional sanction - for so long that it would be difficult if not impossible to break down the barriers which we have erected.

I would suggest that one of the most important commissions in a country which has referred so many important questions to commissions for investigation and report would be a Commission to investigate and report upon all those measures legislative and otherwise which make difficult or impossible contact to or mutual understanding between members of the different sections of our population. Such a Commission would have to be a mixed commission representative of all sections of the population so as to ensure that all views are given proper consideration. As no South African Government would probably be willing to take the risk of appointing such a Commission it would probably be better for the Commission to be an unofficial commission ~~of~~ including, among others, expert social scientists. It ought not to be impossible for funds to finance such a Commission to be provided by some of the leading philanthropic institutions of the world. After ^{all} the problem of race relations in South Africa is crucial to the future of black-white relations not only in South Africa but in the continent as a whole, and any

money spent on a search for a solution of the intractable social problems of South Africa would be money well spent. The report of such a Commission would probably contribute more to the welfare of South Africa than did the massive report of the Poor White Commission or the ~~equally~~ even more comprehensive report of the Tomlinson Commission. The report of such a Commission could be made the basis of programmes for the removal of those legislative and other barriers which are responsible for the rigidities in the South African social system and which would make possible experiments in inter-racial co-operation.

Thus while we may continue to have separate schools for those who desire to have them, ^{legal or other} no obstacles ought to be placed in the way of those who wish to establish or to attend schools open to children drawn from all racial groups. The same applies to other social or educational institutions. The establishment of international or inter-racial clubs or inter-racial fellowship centres such as the one at Welge's Spruit where individuals from different racial groups can meet or work together or study together as ordinary members of society would do much to promote healthier social relations among the peoples of South Africa. The open university ^{and} the open theological college where the future leaders of the different groups can meet together on a basis of mutual respect and equality would contribute greatly to the development of that enormous loyalty to the same ideals on which alone a secure future for South Africa can be built.

It has been said times out of number that the problems of South Africa are unique and that no ready made solution can be provided for them. If that means anything at all, it ought to mean that the problems of South Africa should be approached in an open-minded way which allows for flexibility and experimentation in different techniques and methods. The parrot-cry of ^{either} apartheid or integration tends to oversimplify the complex human problems with which we are confronted. It is only when we get away from the craze for uniformity and recognise the possibility of varieties of approach to our problems, as long as they are all inspired by a common love for and loyalty to South Africa that we shall be able to meet the challenge of our times.