

[Jan 1943]

Dear Advocate Buchanan,

Thank you for your letter of the 28th inst in which you enclosed a copy of a letter you have written to the officers of the Institute of Race Relations in which you express your views regarding the policy of the Institute. In response to your request for my comments on the same subject I should like to make the following observations:-

1. I am in full agreement with your view that it is absolutely essential for the Institute to define its policy clearly and unambiguously if it is to command the confidence of those interested in Race Relations in South Africa in general and of non-Europeans in particular. I do not think I am revealing any secret when I say that in non-European circles, certainly among Africans, the Institute of Race Relations does not arouse the enthusiasm nor the confidence which a body with avowed intentions and its wide activities ~~might~~ in their behalf ought to. Rightly or wrongly while the Institute is much appreciated among Africans as a body pursuing the objective indicated as (b) in your letter, its activities under (a) of your letter are either privately or openly resented or suspected of being pro-European, if not anti-African. In other words the Institute has come to be looked upon as a body which exists to persuade Africans to accept half-measures in matters affecting their welfare and to persuade the Government to apply its repressive Native policy with less harshness without working for any fundamental alteration or abandonment of that policy. Now as I say this may represent a complete misunderstanding of the policy, i.e. the action policy of the Institute on the part of Africans, but this view certainly obtains among the intelligentsia in African circles. The question arises as to what is responsible for this attitude. In my opinion there are two reasons for this. Firstly the so-called "non-political" character of the Institute. Secondly, the lack of contact with Africans and all non-European groups", to quote your phrasing of the matter.

2. I take it that by declaring itself to be a "non-political" body the Institute desired to attract men and women of goodwill of all shades of political i.e. party political opinion to tackle the problems of Race Relations in South Africa. This was an entirely worthy objective. But there are at least two sections of our population in South Africa for whom the term "non-political" is meaningless, namely, the Afrikaners and the Africans. Consequently the Afrikaners have taken the view that whatever its protestations to the contrary the Institute is a political body which espouses the Native cause, while the Africans have taken the view that it is ~~not~~ a political body which stands for a kind of enlightened despotism of white over black in South Africa. I am quite sure that the Institute regards both these views as erroneous, but serious attention will have to be given to how they can be combatted. Now this can be done is not easy to say offhand, but I think that "the withdrawal of the Institute from its present activities in the sphere of practical affairs and its concentration on research" would do much to remove this misunderstanding. In the sphere of practical affairs I think what is required is the encouragement of non-European organisations themselves to take action to bring about changes in their status and situation. Neither the Institute nor any other European body can ever take the place of non-European organisations in this regard. I am aware that most of these organisations at the present time are weak and ineffective and it is not surprising that those Europeans who have the welfare of the non-Europeans at heart should succumb to the temptation to do for the non-Europeans what they are apparently unable to do for themselves, but I feel that in the long run it would be better for such Europeans to do all they can to encourage and strengthen those organisations both financially and otherwise so that they might become better able to discharge their functions rather than to supplant them, either actually or by implication.

I hope that the discussion of this subject at Cape Town will result in the Institute emerging as a much stronger body with a policy which will command the unqualified approval of all sections of our population.

With kind regards,
Yours sincerely,