THE WHITE MAN IN SOUTH AFRICA - THE POLITICS OF DOMINATION, ISOLATION AND FEAR.

by

Leslie Rubin:
In 1963 Dr. Verwoerd, speaking as Prime Minister in the South African Parliament, said, "reduced to its simplest form the problem is nothing else than this: We want to keep South Africa White. 'Keeping it White' can mean only one thing, namely white domination, not 'leadership' nor 'guidance' but 'control', 'supremacy'. If we are agreed that it is the desire of the people that the White man should be able to continue to protect himself by retaining White domination... we say that it can be achieved by separate development." Addressing Parliament again last month, he reaffirmed the determination of his government "to maintain white leadership for all time.. by force if necessary." But he was less confident about the practicability of separate development. "We will not hurry the process of development," he said, added that territorial separation was not the essential part of the policy of apartheid, and went on to emphasize the need for creating and maintaining separate amenities for Africans in the White areas.

It has been clear for some time that there is a steady flow of Africans from the reserves and the rural areas to the White man's towns, which continues to grow. The demand for industrial labour has proved stronger than a mass of controls and restrictions. Economic fact has repudiated racist theory. With an irreversible process of African movement to the towns, territorial separation is seen to be impossible. But this latest version of apartheid is more than the recognition of incontestable facts; it also implies a hardening of South Africa's attitude towards international criticism. In the past, the emphasis has been on the objective of self-government for the African people in their traditional homelands. Today Dr. Verwoerd speaks boldly of the forcible maintenance of White domination, but no longer deems it necessary to stress the old argument that the Bantustans will compensate the African for the fact that in 87% of the total area of South Africa, he has no political rights, few civil rights, and severely limited economic opportunities.

The Nationalist Party, which Dr. Verwoerd leads, has been in power for nearly seventeen years. There is nothing to indicate that it will be removed from power by the electorate. On the contrary, popular support for the Party appears to be growing. Although it remains the expression of Afrikaner nationalism and is buttressed by the Broederbond (a sinister secret society designed to ensure the political and economic dominance of the Afrikaner), it is attracting English-speaking support and sympathy. More and more Dr. Verwoerd is being accepted as the champion of White South Africa as a whole; the protector of the White man against the twin threat of African Nationalism and international hostility; the strong man who has crushed resistance to his policies, and established order throughout the country.

A buoyant economy, a marked increase in immigration from overseas, the arrival of White settlers from Kenya, evidence that attempts to boycott South African products have, so far, had a minimal effect on the expansion of South African industry, the fact that some African states continue to trade with South Africa - all these are factors which have helped to reinforce the image of Dr. Verwoerd and his government as the effective guarantee of the preservation of "White civilization."
Within the ranks of Afrikaner nationalism a few significant dissident voices have been raised. Ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church have called for a change in race policies. Intellectuals have emphasized the dangers of a situation in which there is a complete absence of communication between the government and the real leaders of the African people. Afrikaner big business has criticized apartheid restrictions in the towns, and frequently emphasized the necessity for taking account of world opinion. Until now, however, these expressions of internal concern with present trends, have made no real impact on the mass support which the Government continues to command.

The Nationalist Party speaks for the overwhelming majority of 1,800,000 Afrikaners and a small but growing number of English-speaking South Africans. It has their support for a policy which responds to the threat of subversion by the use of force and the apparatus of the police state; to mounting international criticism, by defiance; to the hostility of independent Africa, by military preparation on an enormous scale.

Parliamentary Opposition to Apartheid

The United Party, which represents most English-speaking voters and a small number of Afrikaners, opposes apartheid but stands for white supremacy, supports much of government racial legislation, and adopts the government's attitudes toward independent Africa and world opinion. It has 50 seats in Parliament against 105 held by the Nationalist Party, although it probably enjoys the support of almost half the electorate. It rejects separate development and puts forward as an alternative, a somewhat vague policy called "race federation" which would permit the Africans and other non-White groups to participate in the government of the country within the framework of "the maintenance of white leadership for the foreseeable future." Its weakness as a political opposition to the Government lies in the fact that it continues to nurse the illusion that it can weaken Afrikaner support from the Nationalist Party. This prevents it from formulating its own policy in unequivocal terms, and causes it frequently to meet government measures and statements of policy with a response ranging from qualified opposition to outright support. Above all, the United Party contributes to the air of political unreality in South Africa, by making no provision whatsoever for effective consultation between the 3 million whites and the 11 million Africans.

Unequivocal opposition to the government is provided by one member of the South African parliament, the solitary representative of the Progressive Party. In 1959 11 members of the United Party broke away to form this party, but at the general election in 1961, 10 lost their seats to United Party opponents. The Progressive Party stands for "the maintenance and extension of the values of Western civilisation, the protection of fundamental human rights, and the safeguarding of the dignity and worth of the human person, irrespective of race, colour or creed." It proposes a non-racial but qualified franchise, under a constitution entrenching fundamental human rights and providing for a parliamentary structure designed to prevent the domination of one race by another.
Helen Suzman, the party's sole Parliamentary representative, has a magnificent record of sustained single-handed attack on government policy, and courageous defence of African rights, but she speaks for a party which has clearly failed either to win over the white voter or to attract significant support from the disenfranchised African. The history of the Progressive Party underlines the problem which faces South Africa: for the White man its policy goes too far in making concessions to African demands; for the African it does not go far enough.

In 1960 the Liberal Party had four representatives in Parliament, all representing the African. In that year they lost their seats with the abolition of African representation in terms of the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act. Founded in 1953, the Party is the only political body in South Africa which stands for a franchise available to all adult persons. It advocates a constitution incorporating an entrenched Bill of Rights and declares that "the future constitution of South Africa must be establishment by the consent of the people as a whole, and this consent can best be expressed by a National Convention, representative of every section of the people."

The policies of the Liberal Party have been rejected by the white electorate, but its influence in strengthening progressive trends among the whites, and building support for a non-racial society among the Africans, has been considerable. During their seven years in Parliament its members consistently exposed the harmful effects of apartheid, and provided an effective platform for the expression of African grievances. Outside Parliament the Party has continued, in the face of increased interference by the Government, to build a membership which is predominantly African, with whites and Africans sharing office in national and regional committees, campaigning together in elections, combining in the few protests and demonstrations still permitted, and cooperating in many other activities.

In 1961 leading members of the Party, including the National Chairman, were detained. At present many of its leaders are in exile or subject to restriction. Alan Paton, the National President, was deprived of his passport. Peter Brown, the National Chairman, and a number of other officials, are confined to specified areas and prevented from participating in public activities. Several members of the Party were among the victims of the recent "90-day" detention law. The Party is under constant attack by the government which frequently uses the familiar "smear" technique. Dr. Carel de Wet, at present the South African ambassador to the United Kingdom, told the South African Parliament in 1962, "The liberal trend of thought is today the best propagandist for communism, and liberalism is nowadays a powerful front organisation for communism."
The Government's concern over the activities of the Liberal Party is understandable. In its refusal to be intimidated, in its patient day to day maintenance of the few remaining bridges between black and white in South Africa, the Liberal Party strikes at the very roots of the ideology of apartheid. Until its turn comes - following the African National Congress, the Pan Africanist Congress, and the Indian National Congress - to be prescribed, it will continue to act in accordance with the belief that the only hope for a stable future in South Africa for all its people, lies in the existence of a non-racial society.

Extra-Parliamentary Opposition to Apartheid.

The Church (excluding the Dutch Reformed Churches), the National Union of South African Students, the South African Institute of Race Relations, and the Black Sash, are some of the more important institutions which continue to criticise and oppose apartheid.

Christian leaders have played a prominent part in efforts to create an awareness of the effect of government policies and administration on the African people. Anglicans like Joost de Blank, former Archbishop of Cape Town, Ambrose Reeves, former Bishop of Johannesburg, the Roman Catholic Archbishop, Denis Hurley, and leaders of the Methodist and other churches have displayed considerable courage in standing up to government pressure. In doing so they have often had to contend with the prejudiced views of their own congregations. The extent of prejudice in one section of the Anglican church was described by the Reverend Christian Molefe, African rector of a mission church in Johannesburg: "The Anglican Church in the Diocese would like the world to know that there is no colour bar in its ranks. But in point of fact there is in this Church not only a colour bar, but colour prejudice of the worst kind. I have worked in this diocese as a full-time catechist and priest for twenty-six years. During all these years it has always been most painful to attend Synods and to observe the outward multiracialism of the Church when in reality this was not so."

In 1963 the Minister of Foreign Affairs said that the time had come to tell the Bishops to confine their activities to the spiritual care of their congregants and to stop intervening in political matters. Notwithstanding pressures of this kind -- and the ever present threat of the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1957 which empowers the government to prevent Africans from attending church services in a white area -- religious leaders continue to speak out against the denial of fundamental human rights to the non-white.

The National Union of South African Students has, for many years, provided vigorous opposition to apartheid. In 1962 it announced its acceptance of the obligation "to speak and act against those measures of government, not necessarily concerned with education, but which . . . seek to destroy the democratic rights of opposition." Since then it has come increasingly under
direct government attack. In 1963 the Minister of Justice described the Union as "a cancer to be eradicated," called on students to resign "in the interest and for the sake of our country," and went on to say that it "has become the mouthpiece of leftists and liberals, that it is tainted with communism, and has been for many years." Since then offices of the Union have been raided by the Special Branch of the Police force, and officials of the Union have been detained in solitary confinement. Last year a former President of the Union, who had spent several months in detention, gave evidence for the State in charges of sabotage against a number of students, and implicated former student leaders who were then out of the country.

The South African Institute of Race Relations describes its aims as follows: it "furthers inter-racial peace, harmony and cooperation in South Africa by seeking the truth in all inter-group relations and situations, and by making it known, whether it be popular or unpopular with any Government, party or group... membership is open to all, irrespective of race, colour or creed... It opposes injustice and unfair discrimination, and it seeks to further the social, economic, and political development of all communities in South Africa." The Institute serves an invaluable purpose by providing documentation, analysis of legislative and administrative measures, and statistical information. Its publications are rightly recognized as authoritative. It has more than once given direction to a parliamentary debate on an important question, by the prompt production of a memorandum. It frequently issues statements to the press, which draw public attention to a racial problem. Avoiding partisan political activity, but adhering courageously to its aim of "seeking the truth," it has become one of the important factors in the extra-parliamentary fight against apartheid.

In 1955 the Women's Defence of the Constitution League was formed to protest against the government's plan to circumvent the Constitution for the purpose of removing the coloured voters from the common roll. Later known as the Black Sash, from the emblem worn by its members during public demonstrations, it has since extended the scope of its activities to include political education, the exposure of such social evils as the grossly ill treatment approximating conditions of slavery - of farm labour in parts of the country, and assistance to the victims of apartheid. The Black Sash has made a considerable impact on public opinion. Its dignified demonstrations in the early days of its existence - women wearing the black sash, standing silently with heads bowed, outside the entrance to Parliament, other public buildings, airports and railway stations, at a time when Ministers were expected to arrive or depart - embarrassed the Government sufficiently to make many Ministers keep their movements secret. Charles Robberts Swart, today President of the Republic, then Minister of Justice, once hastily climbed over a railing while about to enter Parliament for his official duties, in order to avoid the ordeal of walking between two rows of silent women wearing the eloquent black sash. It continues to organize protests against discriminatory laws and harsh administrative measures, and to undertake a variety of activities designed to assist African women and their families, who are affected by the implementation of apartheid laws.
Isolation and Fear

Beneath the White man's prosperity, his apparent unconcern with the pressures from independent Africa, and his aggressive defiance of world opinion, there lurks a persistent sense of isolation and fear. Save for a small number who adhere, with a splendid courage, to their faith in the principles of freedom and equality, 3 million people appear to have been persuaded that a white fortress built out of military power and the apparatus of a police state, can withstand the forces of the outside world. But the reality of white South Africa is different. More and more there is an uneasy awareness of an Africa of 280 million people united in a determination to ensure the speedy eradication of apartheid; of an international community displaying mounting concern about the threat which this white fortress presents to world peace. There is the darkening shadow of a day of reckoning for a society which has failed to exclude from its midst, a growing mass of voteless and voiceless men and women filled with bitterness and despair. But the White man will not, it seems - or cannot - turn back from a course which, he is slowly coming to realize, must lead to disaster. Will the world outside turn him back? Can he be turned back in time? These are questions that can no longer be ignored.

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