

Group I.

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Essay submitted for Royal Empire Society Competition.

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1933
1915
18

The Twenty First Anniversary of the Foundation of the Union of South Africa. A Retrospect and a prospect.

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The Twenty-first Anniversary of the Foundation of the Union of South Africa: A Retrospect and a Prospect.

The Union of South Africa has a dual political personality; it is part of an Empire; it is part also of a Continent. Its history has revolved, and will revolve around two great groups of problems - imperial and continental.

I
" ——— a people same and great
Forged by strong fires, by equal war made one."

On September 1909 the stirrings of three centuries resolved themselves into the Union of South Africa; in 1931 this last dominion attained its majority. There is a remarkable diversity of opinion as to the extent of real union between Boer and British. Some writers consider that today "there is little talk of South African Dutch, or South African British. Most people consider themselves merely Africans."¹ Others say "the dividing line in public life has become more definitely racial."² Both opinions find much justification in history and in the present complexion of affairs.

To pessimists the history of the Union is one of racial struggles dominated by the awful memories of the Boer War. The men who now rule the Union were leaders in that War; the men who will rule tomorrow were born into the bitterness of the concentration camps. Beaten in battle the Boers turned to their culture, and forged in language

1. Sarah G. Milner. *The South Africans*. p. 170.

2. L. E. Neame. "Is South Africa becoming Anti-British?" *Fortnightly Review*. 1927.

and literature stronger weapons for a more subtle fighter. This cultural reaction was given ~~by~~ political expression by the formation of the Nationalist Party in 1912. Upon this ferment of racial self consciousness came the Great War renewing old memories and emphasising nationalism. The smouldering bitterness of the Boers broke out in the "armed revolt". This period saw also the rapid growth of the Nationalists by appeals to Dutch sentiment. Pessimists say that post-war history has but continued the sad tale of new problems dominated by old hatreds. Educational policy has delayed bilingualism. The Nationalist Party has had a steady growth culminating in the victory of 1924 "obviously an appeal to Dutch sentiment." The pessimists say that the political unanimity of today corresponds to nothing in cultural and social relations and is in any case only temporary. They see in South Africa today "a fight^{en} between the political, religious and social ideals of the two races".

On the other hand are those who regard the history of the Union as the gradual triumph of friendship over bitter memories. They point out that the Boer War brought a good deal more than bitterness; it removed at least the technical objections to Union. The cultural reaction, moulded into a political force by Hertzog, while it produced strife, was an ultimate force for Union because it gave the Boers that sense of equality without which union is impossible. The optimists point to the grant of responsible government in 1907. The Union on the basis of equality of two peoples so lately at war is in itself a remarkable achievement. They point to the magnanimous Botha guiding his country along a path of conciliation.

1. Nathan. "The Union of South Africa"

As to the Great War they doubt whether the motive for rebellion was entirely a desire for independence; while the fact that it was quelled so soon, in large part by Boers, and the help given by the Union generally in the War are very strong proof of the loyalty of the Boers. "Moreover" says Lord Buxton "the differences which arose out of the war were rather between two sections of the Dutch speaking people than between British and Dutch."¹ In 1920 Smuts was forced to co-operate with the British Unionists, and in 1924 Hertzog with the Labour Party; thus there was an alignment of parties along other than racial lines. Hertzog showed himself on the whole conciliatory in office. Finally optimists point to the present national government.

Many difficulties prevent us finding the truth between these two opinions. Because of the language difficulty the inner recesses of the Boer mind are sealed to us. "England is probably worse informed about the hearts of the majority of white South Africa than she is about the people of any other country in the world."² We who live far from the scene of action cannot reconstruct from books that delicate sense of atmosphere which would enable us to feel our way to some conviction about South Africa.

But a judicious balancing suggests that the Boer-British question is essentially a question of the past; for what is remarkable about the history of the Union is not that there should have been bitterness, but that there should have been any friendship at all after

1. Borna. Buxton. P. 80.

2. Freeman. "South Africa and the Commonwealth." Fort. Rev. 1930.

such a War. The history of South Africa has indeed been anything but a steady progress towards union, but the troubles have been, essentially, growing pains. There are two more reasons for taking this view. The two peoples are so similar in traditions and ideals; there is no fundamental division between them as there is between white and black; they are divided only by their own mistakes. The supreme problem of South Africa - the Native Problem - calls so loudly for union for its solution that it is inconceivable that union should not come. Sometimes a raucous and deforming echo sweeps through African life; sometimes the fifty years old dream of a republican South Africa, united from the Cape to the Zambezi, stirs in the Boer; sometimes the Britisher dreams of a British South Africa. But the future lies neither with Kruger's Republicanism nor with Milner's Imperialism, but with the South Africanism of Smuts and Botha. The dream of Union - the dream of George Grey, and Carnarvon and his emissary Frere, of President Burger, of Hofmeyr and his Bondsmen - is too strong to be denied.

This conflict between Boer and British has been fought out against a background of imperial relations. By the Act of Union South Africa became a dominion, and in the years following secession became a focus of Dutch ^{less} discom^{fort}, which culminated in the deputation to Versailles. But the Imperial Conference of 1926 gave a new turn to South African thought. It defined the relations of the Dominions as they had arisen out of the war, - it defined them on a

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basis of a synthesis of freedom and equality, and co-operation. The dominions are equal in status and free from all subordination, but united by a common allegiance to the crown. It was difficult to express the result of historic evolution in terms of legal formula, and there was some confusion as to what this new status implied, especially as to the right of secession. The Union understood it to imply such a right; but Mr Benedict Keitz seems to have proved that the Union has no such legal right. Here again opinions differ as to the real magnitude of the secession controversy. Mr Jan Hofmeyr says that most South Africans consider it "a barren disputation" ¹ But Professor Freemanthle considers "the right of secession and its acknowledgement are essential to the growth of the mind for union" ².

Engl A reading of statesmen's recent speeches seems to sanction the more optimistic view. It is hard to judge. We can only point to the glorious future which it lies in its power to fulfil. ^{It} has the opportunity of sharing in one of the greatest political experiments in history; for the equality of the parts has been obtained, and it remains now to achieve in practice the unity of the whole. The Union has the opportunity of playing a great part in the application of this new conception of Empire. "A century of building up freedom has been accomplished - a century of effective co-operation lies before" ³.

1. Jan Hofmeyr. South Africa. P. 282.

2. Freemanthle. South Africa and the Commonwealth. Fort. Rev. 1930.

3. L. S. Amery. Speeches. P. 300.

II

"The history of the Native Question in South Africa has been one of failure; failure to recognise the impossibility of maintaining as subject a race which outnumbered the ruling race by 4:1; failure to recognise that the interests of the two races are one and not two; failure to recognise that the industrial problem and the native problem are the same thing, that the native is in fact the proletariat; in a word, failure to recognise that the economic exploitation of labour, whatever the ~~class~~ colour is un-economic"

[L. Marquard. "The Native Question in South Africa"]

There is a very close connection between the imperial and the continental problems. In its dealings with the natives the Union has the choice of two methods - British or Boer. More than any man can tell depends upon her choice. In her dealings with Africa, the Union will be able to guide Africa along the path of civilisation because it is part of and can draw upon the great civilising tradition of the British and Empire.

The native problem has three aspects, agrarian, industrial and political.

South Africa has so far tried to find a solution for her agrarian problem along the lines of territorial segregation. This idea was explicit in the report of the Natives Affairs Commission of 1903-5. It was made implicit in the Natives Land Act of 1913. There was nothing intrinsically wrong with this act. It failed because the areas proposed were never set aside, and the displaced natives were forced to

the towns. "The degradation which followed is a tragedy which has no parallel in the social history of any nation."¹ "Of all the grievances harboured by the natives against European rule the greatest is the Land Act"². In 1926 Hertzog published his Land Bill which throws open certain 'released' areas to European and Bantu competition. There are very fundamental objections to this Bill which render it quite impossible for the natives to acquire land.

With this gloomy retrospect it seems academic to consider any prospect ^{except} disaster. The future is full of every alarming possibility. But there are two main lines along which hope may run. A very good case can be made for the necessity of segregation - "a policy which will not force her institutions into an alien mould, but will preserve her unity with the past, preserve what is precious in her ^{past}, and build her future progress and civilisation on specifically African foundations"³. The dream of a society founded on an indigenous culture must always be inspiring; but two great facts make it impossible. We have the absolute refusal of the whites to increase the native reserves. Secondly, at least two and a half million natives are outside the reserves, working for the whites and already detribalised. Have we not gone too far to retrace our steps? The other prospect is some measure of compromise along the lines suggested by a recent article in the Times:- improved methods of agriculture in the reserves, and for the urban natives better conditions, and perhaps for example an education franchise.

1. "An African Natives point of view" Round Table 1929.

2. Prof. Tjaburu. quoted by Olivier "Anatomy of African Misery"

3. Smuts Rhodes lecture on Native Policy.

The second aspect of the problem is industrial: What is to be the position of the natives who work for the whites? Is race or civilization to be the criterion of economic rights?

The industrial and agrarian aspects are very closely connected. The poverty and overcrowding of the reserves prompts a considerable efflux of natives for the greater part of the year to the towns. The absence of the natives is reflected in the yield of the reserves reserves. This forces the migrant to stay longer in the towns. This keeps down the level of native wages. Thus a vicious circle is set up connecting the two main aspects of the economic problem - poverty in the territories and inadequate wages in the towns. Lack of land is one cause of native urban poverty. But the native is also subject to industrial and economic restrictions eg the Masters and Servants Act, and the Pass laws. There are legal restraints on his right to strike, and right of organisation. His right of entry into organisations is severely restricted. Though it is not quite a sound generalisation we may say that the line of skilled and unskilled is the line of the white and black.

The problem obtrudes especially upon the white community because of the Poor Whites. The causes which produce Poor Whites in South Africa are no different from those which produce them in England. But in England the skilled worker, when forced out of employment, can fall back on unskilled employment. In South Africa he cannot for the natives do all the unskilled work; it therefore involves a stigma, and in

any case the wages are below the white subsistence level.

For the future there seem to be two alternatives.

Firstly, the present policy best seen in the Masters and Servants Act and The Native's Contract Bill in regard to the native, and the Colours Bar Bill in regard to the Poor White.

This has many disadvantages. The Carnegie Report makes it obvious that the Colours Bar Bill is no cure for the Poor White problem. The ^{Natives} Economic Commission Report witnesses to the poverty of the native under the present regime. "You will see malnutrition stamped on the race." Secondly there is the policy recommended by the Economic and Wage Commission of 1925 which advocates a lessening of the difference between the economic conditions of native and white, and the creation at the same time of increased productivity and an increased demand for goods by a rise in the standard of living among the native populations forming the vast majority of the people.

The third aspect of the problem is political. The four states which composed the Union differed in the political rights they gave natives. The Union made no change in this. Today natives are claiming "no taxation without representation" This aspect is probably the most real to the popular mind, but the essential problem is one of economic adjustment. On the one hand it is unjust to deny the vote to civilised Africans, but if the native is given the vote sooner or later there will be a black Parliament. On this question the issue is plain - Is ^{race} ~~rights~~ or civilisation to be the criterion of rights? But here again the only ^{prospect} ~~retrospect~~ seems

meaning?

to be a retrospect, and future progress will almost certainly be along the lines of the government's three bills - the Native Councils Bill, the coloured Persons Franchise Bill, the Natives Representation Bill.

Space forbids a discussion of the Asiatic problem, but in the 1927 agreement the Union embarked upon a policy of raising the Asiatic's standard rather than repression.

When we look back on the last twenty-one years we see how spasmodic and ineffective have been the Union's attempts to face its Native Problem. It has refused the land which would make segregation possible; it has depressed the native economically and politically. Of the four bills which enshrine the Government's policy the Councils Bill has fallen into the background, and the Land Bill is following it. The real battle is over the two Franchise bills, i.e. the attempt to take away the colour blind Cape Franchise of 1853 and to give as little as possible in return. Yet we must be careful in our censure of the Afrikaner. The dread of the rising tide of colour is the main factor in the history of the Union; if it does not excuse many things, it explains all. It seems now too late to hope for a clear solution. But what solution is still possible will probably be found by compromise - distinctive development within the reserves as far as may be possible, and for those for whom there is no room in the reserves unrestricted encouragement as co-workers in the white man's industry. Beyond this, the Whites will have to trust that if they are true to the spirit

of their civilisation mere numerical strength will never overwhelm them.

The second controversial problem is "What will be the Union's relations with the Trans Zambesian lands?" South Africa in the past has played a considerable part in the develop^{ment} of the North. "A growing interest in the North is ~~even~~ evidencing markedly throughout South Africa today"¹

But Rhodesia has shown an emphatic dislike of Union.

There are two schools of thought on the future develop^{ment} of central Africa. There are those whose slogan is "Africa for the Africans" there are those who hold the policy of European settlement as the "steel framework of African civilisation"² which of these ideals triumphs will depend upon ^{??} natural and economic forces but it seems highly probable that any extensive white settlement would be a failure.

Organic union does not seem a practical possibility and the Union's relations with the North will probably continue along the lines of indirect help. Smuts has suggested an annual African conference. The Union is the laboratory of Africa, perhaps even of the world. The Union can help the Trans Zambesian lands from its own experience, and can give Africa the gifts of science. "It is science which more than any other single factor can determine the future of Africa."³

1. Janz H Hofmeyer. South Africa. P. 70.

2. Smuts: Rhodes lecture on Native Policy.

3. Janz H Hofmeyer. South Africa.

The whole problem of the relations with the North has been profoundly modified since the War by Article 22 of the Covenant; and the Union has herself entered the hierarchy of colonial powers in Africa.

There are two other considerations. South Africa, as a primary producer, has been badly hit by the world crisis, and this cannot fail to leave the position of the white races, already very very unstable, less stable. The Union has been unable to evolve genuine organs of self government. This is a very disquieting sign since it links up with too many other indications that it is just in this weakening of the fibres of self help that the peculiar social and economic conditions of a parti-coloured country will reveal themselves.

The problems we have discussed are magnificent and essential; they are the "ultimate political problems of the world" - the reconciliation of races and cultures, the working out of a new form of co-operative government, the building up of a new civilisation. These great problems of the coming centuries are being faced now in South Africa. The future is a dark and perhaps terrible secret; but if South Africa has great problems, it has also great resources. "Of the future the historian can see no more than others. He can only point like a showman to the things of the past with their mysterious and manifold message".²

1. Oldham. Christianity and the Colour Problem.
2. G. M. Trevelyan. History of England.

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