

THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS



- 1929 to 1959 -

The South African Institute of Race Relations was born thirty years ago.

Inter-racial organisations in the form of Joint Councils had been started in the early 1920's - the first in 1921 in Johannesburg. Native Welfare Societies had come into being in various centres earlier on, but their membership was confined to Europeans and the approach was almost exclusively philanthropic.

The inauguration of the Joint Council movement marked a definite stage in inter-racial development. For the first time, Europeans and Africans came together with a common objective, namely "to establish better race relations through common discussion and co-operative effort". True enough, most Joint Council work had, inevitably, to concern itself with the disabilities, legal, educational, economic, of the African peoples, but the larger aim was the common South African good.

The Joint Council movement spread. Within a few years some thirty Joint Councils had come into being. One of the causes leading to the establishment of the Institute was the need to co-ordinate their activities and advise them.

So the Institute came into existence. It had little money, but a large purpose. It had no members, but it had Dr. C.T. Loran as its Chairman and Mr. J.D. Rheinallt Jones as its Advisor, and it drew to its service men of the calibre of the late Professor R.F.A. Hoernlé, Dr. the Hon. Edgar Brookes, Mr. Leo Marquard. It had no policy. The Institute was not born with a set doctrine to which it wanted to win adherents.

Its aim was simple - peace, goodwill and practical co-operation between the various groups of South Africa. It did not lay down any dogma or doctrine. It had no preconceived ideas as to what the final solution of South Africa's racial problems might be. At a time of tremendous ignorance, it set itself to find out the facts of any particular situation, to assess them objectively and scientifically, and it made proposals in terms of a humanitarian, liberal philosophy. There was much to do. What did we know about the Non-White blind, deaf, dumb, crippled? Where were the African doctors, nurses and lawyers? What was the state of Non-White education? How many Non-Whites could read and write? Were African wages enough to keep body and soul together? Did all Asiatics really ride around in Cadillacs? Did all Africans have I.Q.'s of 85? Did the Cape Coloured inherit all the worst traits of Black and White? There were slums in towns, on the farms, in the African reservations; there was malnutrition. There were, in fact, a thousand problems, human, hurtful, heart-rending problems. There was a wide practical field for Black and White co-operation. There were a dozen ways in which Non-Whites could be trained to public responsibility and civic knowledge.

Born of their generation and aware of the limits within which they must work, the men and women who headed the Institute in its early days sought racial co-operation through joint consultation and action to raise the level of living of

the/...

the Non-White; to find fact and figure on which to base action; and to educate the ignorant and prejudiced White group. It was a non-party-political, co-operative, educational, and moralist approach.

By means of representation, investigation, publication, deputation, through the establishment of committees and organisations, by reasoned pressure on government and local authority, concessions were won. Primary and secondary education was increasingly provided. African doctors were trained; African nurses accepted into training hospitals. Welfare organisations took Non-Whites within the scope of their work - the Non-White blind, deaf, crippled and the Non-White child. The state was eventually persuaded to accept the principle that Non-Whites should be provided for in state welfare services even if only at differentiated rates, and in these ways and a hundred others, alleviations of national and of local significance were obtained.

This is a large claim to make and there is still much to be done. The Institute of Race Relations could not do all this by itself. It could not have been achieved but for the work of many organisations and many people of goodwill not directly identified with the Institute. Yet the claim is justified to the extent that one must cede influence to the power of ideas, to the enthusiasm and energy of dynamic personalities. Many organisations can claim that they did much of the work, yet so many of the ideas, so much of the drive and persuasion, came from this comparatively small organisation, meeting, in those early pioneering days, in the basement of the University of the Witwatersrand.

So the organisation, essentially an independent fact-finding body, found its function in South Africa and it grew. There was a deficit practically every year but somehow the deficit was met. With a budget of £1,250 in 1929, it grew to an organisation with a budget of £35,000 in 1957: from a Director, his wife and a typist in a dungeon of a room to an organisation with its own building (Auden House), four regional offices, a staff of 30 and a membership of 4,000. And as it grew, of course, circumstances altered. The emphases changed, and new fields of activity were tackled. Legal Aid Bureaux for the Poor, the Penal Reform League of South Africa, the Bureau of Literacy and Literature, were established and became independent. The fact-finding work was expanded as was its publications programme and its library and information service; it continued to deal ad hoc with situations as they arose, always within the terms of its own philosophy and approach - to secure the practical co-operation of all men of differing views sincerely held.