N.Y. Times Book Review May 12, 1968

An Apology, a Defense, a Report

THE LONG VIEW. By Alan Paton. Edited by Edward Callan. 295 pp. New York: Frederick A. Praeger. $6.95.

THE SEPARATED PEOPLE. A Look at Contemporary South Africa. By E. J. Kahn Jr. 276 pp. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. $5.95.

AGAINST THE WORLD. Attitudes of White South Africa. By Douglas Brown. 264 pp. New York: Doubleday & Co. $4.95.

By JOSEPH LELYVELD

"IF you win in life, you are a successful man," Alan Paton said in the eulogy he delivered last year at the side of Chief Albert Luthuli's grave. "If you lose, you are an unsuccessful man. But if you go on whether you win or lose, then you have something more than success or failure. You keep your own soul."

Luthuli was a loser who went on. Paton has been another, continuing to speak for a nonracial ideal and what he calls "the cause of the individual person" in a society that has frightened itself into regarding these values as subversive. Ten years ago, when he wrote the first of the articles in "The Long View," a collection of his political writings, he allowed himself the luxury of hope. His audience was small, but it would surely grow, he felt, for the liberal ideal of full racial equality was part of the spirit of the times; the prevailing doctrine of apartheid would be a rejected, a doomed anachronism. The task of liberals, white and black, was not to convert South Africa but simply to stand ready to guide her when the expected forces of history converged and the old order crumbled.

But somehow in those terrible 10 years—with the Sharpeville shooting, the Congo disasters and the Western abdication on Rhodesia—the spirit of the times went limp in South Africa. The doomed anachronism ruthlessly saw to its own survival. The liberals' task was also reduced to plain survival. Confronted by a police state ready, as Paton writes, "to destroy or maim or change the human personality," this wasn't easy.

In the beginning Paton was driven by zeal and anger, by the wish that he "could write such words as would make the very water catch fire, to burn them [the white South Africans] awake to cruelty being done in their names." In the end he is driven by something more profound. "Is it worth trying to last?" he asks. Speaking only for himself, because he doesn't "dare to answer for anyone else," he concludes in the simplest terms, "It is worth something to me."

A surprising number of South Africans go on making that same choice over and over again after being forced to acknowledge that their efforts are irrelevant and hopeless. There are moments in this volume when Paton seems almost suffocated by his own indignation, but he manages to overcome it and speak. Taken together, these essays stand as a moral history of the vanishing South African liberal. "Cry the Beloved Country" made Paton the best known South African author outside South Africa, but inside his audience dwindled as his multiracial Liberal party was suppressed nearly out of existence. The last of these articles was circulated in mimeographed form to a readership numbering no more than a few hundred.

Paton's greatest trial has not been loneliness but the discovery that a number of the young men who learned their liberalism from him had discarded the nonviolent principles that came with it in favor of romantically conceived sabotage attempts that could have been copied out of the annals of 19th-century Russian anarchism. His reactions can be traced in this book. When the charges are leveled, he is incredulous, morally convinced that they have been trumped up. Later he is angry with the young men for having played into the hands of the authorities, making it easy for them to identify liberalism with subversion.

Finally he is forgiving, for the retribution of white South Africa is merciless. He condemns violence but asks, "What would I have done if I had been 30 years younger?" It is apartheid and not the young saboteurs that should be blamed, he concludes, for apartheid made them desperate. Stoically he advises those who would follow the course he set for himself: "Beware of melancholy and resist it actively if it assails you; and give thanks for the courage of others in this fear-ridden land."

Douglas Brown would find Paton's stand noble but quixotic. An editor of The London Daily Telegraph with a long, deep and painfully ambivalent acquaintance with South Africa, he has written this book, he explains, with the idea of giving white South Africans the sympathetic portrayal they deserve. They have probably never been so well understood by a foreigner. And the results are devastating, for Brown is as unsparing as he is sympathetic. Not surprisingly, his book was banned on receipt in South Africa.

"Against the World" is remarkable for evocations of the land and people that capture the haunting quality of this "strange, half-enjoyed world, sunlit, yet full of menacing shadows." The white South African who emerges is a large man, rarely petty, a strange mixture of earnestness, hardness of heart, cruelty and idealism. Whatever the world thinks, he is not a crude racist but a man who has been corrupted to a frightening extent by privilege. Out of fear he

---

MR. LELYVELD was The Times correspondent in South Africa before his present tour in India.

Johannesburg, South Africa.

has chosen to know as little as possible of the life of the black majority around him. Brown's South Africa is in a state of suspended civil war. The authorities must deal on a daily basis with an "endemic, if unorganized, rebellion" by four-fifths of its population who can be coerced into anything but a recognition of the legitimacy of its laws. Considering what apartheid has done to the African family, Brown decides that slavery was in some respects a superior institution. These are harsh but not excessive judgments. It is a surprise, therefore, to discover their author concluding with a homily that maintains that no one should judge the white South African who hasn't been faced with his moral choices. Of course, many people who condemn white South Africans are smug, ignorant and unfeeling. But "Against the World" is itself proof that sensitive, delicately balanced criticism of white South Africa is bound to be as stark as the situation it reflects. It is one thing to say white South Africans are deserving of compassion, another to argue that they shouldn't be judged. We can be glad Brown wasn't guided by his own precept.

E. J. Kahn Jr., author of "The Separated People," spent three months in South Africa in 1966 for The New Yorker. Unlike Brown, he isn't exploring the white man's soul. His narrative trips lightly over the surface of South African life, stopping here and there for a perceptive insight, never dwelling tiresomely on any of the many South African quandaries. Kahn has a good reporter's eye for the bizarre. A blind man who is white, he discovers, gets $72 as opposed to $37 for a blind African. Owners of "white" drive-in movie theaters allow motorized integration on slow nights. There are only 38 hotel rooms for Africans in Johannesburg, one of the largest African cities on the continent. An African servant costs only $200 a year. And so on. Kahn is making no argument. He is simply covering the scene.

That is fine, except that he never really gets down to examining the dynamics of apartheid. He describes the repression but almost makes it sound gratuitous, which it is not. It is almost as if there had never been any black opposition to crush or any politically motivated violence. The imprisoned black leaders aren't named, nor the reason for their imprisonment defined. Kahn finds the African, on what must have been a relatively slight acquaintance, apathetic, subservient and cheerful. That is not wrong, but the African is also bitter and sardonic and inexpressibly sad.