

# BOOKS & THE ARTS

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M. Wood

## The Onlooker and the Insider

**THE SEPARATED PEOPLE: A Look At Contemporary South Africa.** By E. J. Kahn, Jr. W. W. Norton & Co. 276 pp. \$5.95.

**THE LONG VIEW.** By Alan Paton. Edited by Edward Callan. Frederick A. Praeger. 295 pp. \$6.95.

### NADINE GORDIMER

*Miss Gordimer is a South African novelist. Her most recent book is The Late Bourgeois World (Viking).*

It is the proud boast of most serious investigators of the South African scene—politicians, legal experts, distinguished journalists, visiting us from abroad—that they come “with an open mind.” I often wonder why. They all stand for the principles of Western democracy. They have no doubts about that, at home in their own countries: it is their article of faith in the pursuit of the greatest good for the greatest number. And they do not come in ignorance of the policies of this country and its system of government. They know that South Africa is a democracy for 3.5 million white people who elect their white government in a free ballot, and that this government also governs 15 million black and colored people who have no vote. Why, then, the “open mind”? If you believe in democracy, you can be in no two minds about the situation in South Africa, even before you have ever set foot here. To be honest, at best you can say, “I have come to see whether I have to revise my convictions and accept that, under certain conditions and in certain historical situations, there is an alternative to democracy as the means by which the greatest good for the greatest number may be achieved.”

E. J. Kahn, Jr. evidently did not subscribe to the cant of the “open mind” when he came to South Africa recently. He had done some homework; he knew South Africa was not a democracy; using Western democratic principles as the norm of civilized society, he came to record, as precisely and dispassionately as he could, what sort of society he found. His approach is that of the onlooker who sees most of the game; and here we come up against another assumption whose worth needs examining, in the context of the South African situation, not—this time—because it is cant but because one must ask, “How much of the game can the onlooker see?” The

difference between Mr. Kahn’s book and Alan Paton’s personal testimony of the South African situation seen from within becomes a third statement on that situation: life in South Africa is ordered in such a way, by now, that it is quite impossible for even the most perceptive and inquiring onlooker to claim a full and first-hand account of that life. It can be spoken for only from within that situation; no one from outside is let near enough, any more, for him to be able to claim that he has learned what the people think. It is evident that to bear witness, now, one has to do so from the hazardous center of South African society itself; visitors such as Mr. Kahn are kept out by a *cordon sanitaire* of laws and legislated silences, and kept convinced of the validity of their investigations by having the official blind eye permissively turned just that much when they are gratefully surprised to be able to make contact with such fringe opposition as is left of the great, outlawed liberation movements.

It is a white fringe, of course. Helen Suzman, Progressive Party M.P. and sole vigorous voice of opposition in Parliament; Laurence Gandar, courageous editor of the *Rand Daily Mail*, awaiting trial on a charge of allegedly publishing false information in an exposé of prison conditions; Alan Paton himself, lone leader of the Liberal Party, decimated by bannings of its leaders; a handful of forthright churchmen, academics, intellectuals, all of us white and walking the tightrope of calculated risk. Through contact with such people the diligent inquirer will see, as Kahn did, the rubber-stamp justice meted out in the Bantu Commissioners’ Courts where offenders against the bewildering Pass Laws become statutory criminals overnight; visit the Black Sash organization’s offices where a small band of unintimidated white women give what advice and help they can to Africans entangled in the Pass Laws, Influx Control regulations and Group Areas Act that disrupt their lives; talk to those very, very few Africans with whom whites still have contact as equals, and who, by this definition and the fact that they are still at large and willing to talk, have never played a formative part as activists or thinkers in the African struggle for human rights. But there is no way for the visitor to reach the makers of African or

Indian or Colored opinion, to hear the voices that have the mandate to speak for the 15 million on the dark side of the color bar.

It is understandable, then, for Kahn to dismiss the Africans as a people who never “more reason to be angry” and yet so “placid.” He did not, could not meet Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki, leaders of the African National Congress, Robert Sobukwe leader of the Pan-African Congress, and the other political prisoners on Robben Island (more than 800 in 1967). The only conversation with an African he records having had “at length” is a talk with a Soweto housewife (Soweto is a complex of African segregated township that serves as a dormitory for Johannesburg’s black labor force). It was impossible for him, as for any other visitor to canvass informed or politically aware opinion among Africans.

There is less excuse, however, for his failure to relate the ruthless legislation and secret police surveillance (he describes it and mentions in passing that African leaders are in jail) that has crushed the African and Indian opposition movements, and that outlaws even so much as a private discussion group, let alone any political gathering of any nature, to that “peace of the grave” he found prevailing in place of African resistance to apartheid. What he found here was not the peace of the grave but the silence of a people under the enormous weight of the Suppression of Communism Act, which has stripped them of their leadership down to the last humble organizer of the smallest group and which provides stiff sentences for anyone even *advocating* social change of any nature. Young Africans, Indians and Coloreds who were teen-agers when non-white political organizations were banned have perforce grown up without any political education whatever—except the conditioning to acceptance of apartheid disseminated in their history textbooks and other media controlled by whites. It is difficult to see how new leadership can come from them. This situation is very much part of contemporary South Africa.

Kahn quotes the opinions canvassed from Indian merchants (“keep your nose clean”) as the current attitude of this minority group on the dark side of the color bar, and sums up their reaction to

the Group Areas Act (which declares areas white and removes the Indians—business, household, lock, stock and barrel—from premises they have owned and occupied in some cases since the days of the Kruger Republic) with the laconic “they are not very happy about it.” It is extraordinary that he should present this picture of what the Indian people have been reduced to without mention of the Indians’ legal battle against Group Areas, going on in our courts every day, but even more extraordinary, from the essential point of view of perspective, that he should do so without a single mention of the role the Indian people have played in the struggle against apartheid since the early part of this century. It was under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi himself, then practicing law in South Africa, that South African Indians initiated the passive resistance movement that became the basis of the African Congress movements. In the great Defiance of Unjust Laws campaign of the 1950s, the South African Indian Congress provided leadership along with the African National Congress, and hundreds of Indians went to prison. Indian leaders have been prominent among the accused in political trials from 1959 to 1966. A number of them are political prisoners now; is their enforced silence not to be reckoned with, by visitors, as part of Indian opinion?

As for radical white opposition, Kahn dismisses Abraham Fischer in one sentence, referring to him as “one South African Communist,” and remarks that the \$25,000 Lenin Prize awarded Fischer last year “will probably do him little good since he is over sixty and serving a life sentence (for political offences) in Pretoria jail.” However opposed to communism he might be, no man of liberal opinions (which is the point of departure for Kahn’s inquiry) living within the South African situation could dispose of Abraham Fischer like that. In the context of our separated people, Fischer is not just “one South African Communist” or even just one South African man. Unlike Anton Rupert, the Nationalist cigarette millionaire to whom Kahn gives fascinated space, Abraham Fischer has not been satisfied to get rich and advance the chauvinism of the Afrikaner people to which both Rupert and he belong but, whatever his political ideology, has sacrificed his own personal privilege and freedom as a white man in the attempt to free Africans from the color bar.

Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki, Sobukwe, Fischer—they are in prison but they are still with us. The weight of their presence is hardly to be ignored by anyone who reports on the situation in South Africa today. One realizes that Kahn did

not set out to write a history of South Africa, but some background information from the immediate past is necessary to penetrate the appearance of the contemporary scene.

This is the best and most intelligent book about South Africa to be written by an observer for a very long time, yet just how successfully a man as generally fair-minded and astute as Kahn can be kept gliding over the surface is shown again and again. For example, he falls for the old fallacy of comparing the standard of living of black people in South Africa with that of Africans in the rest of Africa, whereas the real comparison is with the living standard of the white South Africans. South Africa is the richest country in Africa; the true measure of the South African black man’s share is how little he gets of his own country’s wealth, not how well off he is in comparison with the people of immeasurably poorer countries who happen to share his skin color. Kahn discusses “Bantu ability” (“We have been inclined to underestimate Bantu ability simply because we have been accustomed to him doing unskilled work,” the director of the Bantu Wage and Productivity Association recently said”), and explains the system of Job Reservation (whites only for skilled jobs), but does not mention the fact that, in modern labor relations, would be seen to inhibit the black man’s development in industry; under the Industrial Conciliation Act, black men are deprived of the right to strike, or bargain with their employers. Only two years ago—just about the time Kahn was in South Africa—an official of the white Mineworkers’ Union was sworn into office on the oath that he would resist with all his strength “the onslaught of Kaffir, Moor and Indian on the white working community.”

But the real reason for the blur between cause and effect in Kahn’s view of the separated people is that like all on-lookers who come to South Africa now, he was viewing the situation from the confines of the enclave of 3.5 million whites. All he really learned was what we—the whites, Nationalist, United Party, Progressive Party, Liberal with both small and large “L”—think about them, the 15 million on the other side of the color bar. The black people of South Africa remain, silent and in shadow, on the periphery of this book.

Alan Paton’s book is the record of the thought and action of a man of decent liberal opinions in a situation where those opinions have either to be abandoned or put to the test of translation into a daily way of life running counter to that of the society in which he lives. In the first essay he describes a coming to the end of color prejudice:

“I was no longer a white person but a member of the human race”; and that conviction, once arrived at, is for the liberal in South Africa at the same time the beginning of his active role; his goal; and, maybe, the only achievement he can count on at the end of his life.

Alan Paton is a Liberal with a large “L”—he has been chairman or president of the Liberal Party almost since its inception in 1953 until a new piece of legislation, outlawing racially mixed membership in political parties, put an end to the Liberal Party only a few weeks ago. But the account of the fate of liberalism in South Africa that emerges from his essays and public addresses from 1958 to 1967 is the fate of all liberals here, whether or not they were actually members of the Liberal Party. It is at the same time a candid, sober, absolutely honest and exhaustively informed account of the total South African situation, written with the sense of proportion that paradoxically, as I have remarked, can come only from one who lives on embattled ground at the center of it. Alan Paton is not a black man, but as one who lives definitively as a member of the human race, he has seen the black man’s disabilities as his own. There is no *them*, in his viewpoint, only an *us*.

What people who shared this viewpoint wanted for South Africa was a nonracial democracy. There were never very many of them among white South Africans. Among black South Africans a long and hard-earned distrust of white motives, and an equally well-established distrust of white trusteeship for African aspirations, meant that black men felt they ought to free themselves, as black people, from a white supremacist rule, before working with whites for a non-racial democracy. Whites were not accepted as members of the African National Congress; and the Liberal Party, although it stood for one man, one vote, and had no color bar, never attracted more than a token African membership. It was formed at a time—significantly—when the nonwhite peoples of the country were seeing the necessity for a united front. The Defiance Campaigns of the early fifties were a successful combination of the African and Indian Congresses (which had cooperated since 1946) with a token white participation. The Liberal Party made a bid for the wider necessity—a party of people of all colors in opposition to apartheid, which would cooperate with nonwhite organizations. This was still practicable, in the fifties; it looked, for a short time, as if it might be possible to form a united opposition composed of all races. In 1957 it was still possible to hold a Multi-racial Conference, attended by 500 delegates of all races, in Johannesburg. The conference could and did call for a re-

examination of South Africa's policies on social equality and voting rights.

Against this background, Paton wrote of concrete circumstances arising from the apartheid legislation that was piling up during the years before Sharpeville—what happened to actual villages such as Charlestown, where the Africans were evicted under the Group Areas Act, what an increase of basic tax meant to a black man whose income was less than \$504 a year, how the Group Areas Act affected 60,000 Indians in Durban—and the evolution of liberal thought in relation to the white supremacist position at home and the attainment of black independence in the greater part of the continent. This thought was based on the premise of a nonviolent, all-race struggle against apartheid.

After 1960, after Sharpeville, two things happened—clearly reflected in depth by the essays in this section of the book. Whereas in the first section Alan Paton was evolving the ethics of a pressure group, in this second section he is dealing with the liberal's moment of truth in South Africa: the moment when it became clear that from then on he could "fully expect violence to be a feature of the struggle." The exponents of peaceful change found themselves imprisoned, in the months of the State of Emergency, along with black revolutionaries. On the one hand, the state and its all-purpose instrument, the Suppression of Communism Act, saw no distinction between violent and nonviolent opposition to the regime, but outlawed both indiscriminately. On the other hand, Africans had already, with the break-away of the Pan-African Congress from the African National Congress, begun to turn to militant black nationalism. Seeing the state's answer to nonviolence in their people shot in the back at Sharpeville, their organizations banned, they resorted finally to sabotage (*Umkonto weSizwe*—"Spear of the nation") and terrorism (*Poqo*—"Go it alone").

Paton said to the congress of his party, held during the State of Emergency in 1960: "We must not yield ourselves to that pessimistic theory which maintains that the history of the impending future will be that of one violent force against another and that all peaceful people will be crushed between them." But what emerges, in spite of himself, under the bright light of his honest mind in these essays and those of the final section of his book, is certainly the crushing of that "nonviolent third force" that he saw as the only role for just and humane people. What emerges is the jettisoning of the liberal by South Africa; by the whites who want no conscience over the means they are prepared to employ to extend their over-

lordship as long as possible, and by the blacks who see him, ineffectual as an influence on the intransigence of his own racial group, increasingly as—in the words of the African political thinker, Nosipho Majeke—"the conciliator between the oppressor and the oppressed."

Liberalism has failed in South Africa. Just as there has to be a revolutionary situation before a revolution can succeed, so there has to be a certain flexibility in social relations as a precondition for the liberal to fulfill his role as liberator of both the oppressor and the oppressed. He failed to win the whites away from fear, whether he appealed to them on the realistic level of an Alan Paton—"You will never know if the man outside is a friend or an enemy until you open the door. But if you do not open the door, you can be sure what he will be"—or on the wishful level of the Progressive Party's enlightened self-interest in offering the black man a foot in the door—carefully limited franchise. And a white group that could not persuade the whites in power to open the door even that much became yet another indication to the black man outside that if he is to get in, it will be on his own efforts, of whatever nature the resistance of the door calls forth.

So between white nationalism and the black nationalism it created and now holds desperately at bay, with guns and ever more restrictive laws and, above all, at the cost of brutalizing the humanity of the whites, the liberal has been made expendable. Some are embittered, because what has been revealed is the soft spot that perhaps always was there, in the general liberal position in South Africa. A brave white man, who has suffered in his person from government persecution, because of his active opposition to apartheid, said the other day: "What has disillusioned me is not what has happened to me but the fact that multiracialism is failing everywhere." What did he mean by "multiracialism"? Did South African liberalism go no further than envisaging Africans having a share in the government of the country? Did it not face the fact that the liberal standpoint accepted, by definition, a black majority government in which the white and other minorities, as such, might or might not have a share, since there would be no representation of them as separate entities but merely as part of a polyglot population with an identity of interests? Did they envisage a "parity" of power on the lines of the Rhodesia Constitutional Commission's recommendations for that country—"parity" meaning as many white as black members of parliament, with every white man's vote worth twenty black men's votes, no matter what level of civilization the black man might reach?

Alan Paton has never had that soft spot. Liberalism is frequently sneered at from Left and Right as dewy-eyed, but the fact is that a real liberal has fewer illusions than any other political animal (perhaps that is why he has fewer successes, too; popular support is fed on illusions). Paton says in retrospect, of his essays:

I wrote, *inter alia*, of the time that must elapse and the work that must be done before the new nations of the world, and especially those of Africa, could achieve stability. I recognised that the ending of colonialism would be followed by a period of instability. It now seems to me that this period will be longer and more unstable than I thought. This has another consequence. It means that white South Africa will be given a period longer than I thought to abate the hostility of the outside world. If the conservatives inside the ruling Nationalist Party do not succeed in their struggle to gain control, the Government will go ahead with its plans to permit racially mixed teams to go to the Olympics [*the Olympic Association has since stated that they will not be permitted to attend*], and to accept Maori rugby players in the visiting New Zealand teams, and to relax apartheid restrictions for any black diplomats sent to South Africa. But simultaneously there will be made an intense effort to hasten the pace of separate development *within* the country, and to prove to the world that it can actually work, and can bring advantages to non-white South Africans. In other words, the disarray of the African nations and the impotence of United Nations have given the Government time, and the whole aim of Government policy will be to make that time as long as possible. That this time would be so far extended was something I did not foresee. I am still of the opinion that neither separate development nor apartheid can endure, but they are going to endure longer than I thought. In order to use this time without hindrance the Government has given itself totalitarian powers over those who might oppose or delay the implementation of their plans.

Whatever has happened in the Congo or Nigeria or, indeed, in Memphis, cannot alter his belief, along with that of other liberals worthy of the name, that "injustices are intrinsic in any programme of separate development, for the simple reason that separate development is something done by someone with power to someone without power."

How does a white man whose liberal position has failed to meet the historical pressures of his time answer, in the South African situation today, the question, "Is it worth trying to last?" Alan Paton writes: "People answer this question in different ways. Some leave the country.

Some stick to their course, even if they expect certain consequences. And even this last group is diverse, for some would face any consequences and some would not.

"What is my own answer to this question? I must give my own answer, because I would not dare to answer it for anyone else. I think it is worth trying to last. It is worth something to me, even if it apparently achieves little.

"If someone were to ask me, 'What would you and your wife do if you had young children?' I would answer, 'We would have two choices: to stay here and to give our children a father and mother who put some things even above

their own children's safety and happiness, or to leave and to give them a father and mother who put their children's safety and happiness above all else.' Which would I choose? They are both good courses, are they not? I hope I would choose the first."

Here is the only justification for the liberal presence in South Africa at present. That in the midst of the defeat of all he has hoped and worked for, the liberal sees himself still as "no longer a white person but a member of the human race."

Even that, living where we do, is an achievement, not only for himself but for the human race.

## Haunted by Himself

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF BERTRAND RUSSELL: 1914-1944. *Atlantic-Little, Brown.* 418 pp. \$8.95.

### MAX BYRD

Mr. Byrd is a former editor of the Harvard *Crimson* who has written for journals in the United States and Britain.

Bertrand Russell whirled through a life of almost unbelievable achievement, a kind of circus of glamour and variety. In vain one looks through his pages for some one he has not known, some place he has not been, and one marvels at so frenetic a philosopher. And yet in such storms of energy a certain still center of ego is clear. Russell was, quite literally, haunted by himself.

Many times in his text and in the letters at the end of each chapter he returns to the theme of his own ghostliness. He tells how he has

loved a ghost, and in loving a ghost my inmost self has itself become spectral. I have therefore buried it deeper and deeper beneath layers of cheerfulness, affection, and joy of life. But my most profound feelings have remained always solitary and have found in human things no companionship. The sea, the stars, the night wind in waste places, mean more to me than even the human beings I love best, and I am conscious that human affection is to me at bottom an attempt to escape from the vain search for God.

In a footnote he adds, "This and what follows is no longer true (1967)." But few readers will assent. A ghostly chill clings faithfully to him. Those who recall his account of the end of his first marriage in Volume I will not be surprised to find a new chapter beginning abruptly: "When I left Dora, she continued the school until after the beginning of the Second War." Or to learn of the death

of his older brother only through a stray sentence in the letters.

Yet the sheer fascination of the narrative claims our attention far more insistently than the puzzle of his detachment. The longest and best of the chapters, nearly one-third of the book, takes him through the years of the First World War—his opposition to the war, his term in prison, and the subsequent loss of his Cambridge Fellowship, his affair with Lady Constance Malletson ("We talked half the night, and in the middle of talk became lovers"), and his books, especially *Principles of Social Reconstruction*. As before, he writes sharply and frankly about his galaxy of friends, D. H. Lawrence, whom Russell came to despise, is brushed away as a Fascist. Ramsay MacDonald he finds notable for his dull Scotch jokes. And T. S. Eliot appears as the recipient of both Russell's charity and his advice. "After seeing troop trains departing from Waterloo," he recounts, "I used to have strange visions of London as a place of unreality." And goes on in a footnote: "I spoke of this to T. S. Eliot, who put it into *The Waste Land*."

Some of these sketches were published earlier in *Portraits from Memory* (1956). Others, like his marvelous picture of Wittgenstein at tea (as told to him by Whitehead), are new and just as good:

... he appeared scarcely aware of the presence of Mrs. Whitehead, but marched up and down the room for some time in silence, and at last said explosively: "A proposition has two poles. It is *apb*." Whitehead, in telling me, said: "I naturally asked what are *a* and *b*, but I found that I had said quite the wrong thing." "*a* and *b* are indefinable." Wittgenstein answered in a voice of thunder.

After the war ended, Russell traveled to Russia and, with Dora Black, to China

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