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THE LONG VIEW

Nigeria, in spite of its hot climate, is a stimulating country because of its vigour and optimism. The people themselves are friendly and well-mannered. They are tackling with enthusiasm the task of running their own education, their own broadcasting, their own health services, their own transportation; not to mention, of course, their own government.

During my two weeks here at the All-Africa Church Conference, I met very few people, including no Africans, who were pessimistic about the future. They were not against change, they said, only against the rate of change. They expected corruption, maladministration, epidemics, and accidents. Even Lord Hailey, in his revised survey, expressed the opinion that Britain had not bequeathed to Nigeria the kind of Civil Service she bequeathed to India.

Whatever validity there may be in these opinions, they are in one way totally irrelevant to the Nigerian situation. Difficulties can no longer be used to put off change, they must be reckoned as part of change, they must be encountered, and where possible overcome. When one sees the bearing of the people, and experiences the courtesy of the officials and the eagerness of the teachers, one realises that efficiency is not everything.

On the whole I did not find myself investigating the efficiency of the services. All I knew was, they were rendered freely and politely. The words "sir" and "madam" are used universally by servants, officials

and juniors when speaking to other persons. I could not help reflecting that some of my fellow South Africans had probably never before been addressed in such a manner.

Our own African representatives from the Union did the country honour, not least the women. One of our senior white delegates, the Rev. William Illsley, said to them "you girls did us credit"; and turning to me, he asked "Don't you think our girls did us credit?" In South Africa both these speeches could very well be offensive, the first to black, the second to white South Africans. Up here in Nigeria they took on their true and natural meaning. When we parted at Kano Airport to go our several ways, more than one of us remarked that it was a sad thing that we had to leave South Africa to be able to meet together so unconstrainedly in a public place.

During our stay here, the interest in us and in South Africa continued unabated. We were of more interest to the people of West Africa than the colourful visitors from Burma, Fiji and the Phillipines. My lecture to the students of the University went far beyond the allotted time because the questions - which were informed and intelligent - would not end.

One thing was clear. Apartheid is offensive to the people of West Africa. I hear that Mr. Louw has again been discussing the possibility of exchanging diplomatic representatives with Ghana. I must say I find the idea more and more fantastic. It raises questions to which Mr. Louw has no answers.

The Premier of Western Nigeria, a tremendous man in Nigerian dress, gave us a reception. We stood up as he approached our tables, were introduced to him, shook hands with him, sat down when he had moved on. No one met him with greater friendliness and goodwill than our Dutch Reformed colleagues.

Will our own Prime Minister hold receptions for Nigerian visitors? And will they be as free to move about in his territory as we were free to move in Nigeria? Would they ever be free to come to an All-Africa Church Conference in the Union, which feels its way towards a unity transcending race and denomination? Could such an All-Africa Church Conference be held in South Africa? Could any All-Africa Conference be held in the Union? These are the questions for Mr. Louw.

To put it bluntly, you cannot treat Nigerians as equals and our own Africans as inferiors. Whether we like it or not we are up against a continental as well as a national problem.

Will the white people of South Africa see it? Will they see it in time? Will they merely dislike you if you face them with these questions? Will you then lose all the "influence" you might have had if you hadn't tried to "influence" them?

I don't know the answer to these questions. I shall just go on with the job.