

Supporters of adult suffrage also reject the view that if "uncivilized" people are given the vote, the government will tend to be "uncivilized". They say it is impossible to define "civilized" and that a sophisticated, educated body of voters is just as likely to adopt obnoxious policies as a mass of illiterate peasants: Hitler's Germany is cited as an example.

It is not possible to dispose of these arguments lightly. Let us assume, however, that the principle of a qualified franchise is accepted. The problem then arises, where should the line be drawn? A very low qualification—say a Standard III education—coupled with an intensive educational programme, would mean a rapid extension of the franchise to a very large proportion of the population. On the other hand, a high qualification—say a Standard VIII education—would confine the vote to a relatively small number of non-white people.

Here two conflicting considerations emerge. On the one hand, if one accepts the premise that an educated electorate makes for better government, then presumably, the stiffer the qualifications, the better the results. On the other hand, if the white community genuinely desires to share political power with non-white people, a system that excludes all but a handful

of non-white people from participating in elections is likely to be an unsatisfactory basis for future co-operation. Recommendations for reform should not attract the imputation of hypocrisy, and that is one of the dangers that white South Africa faces.

In whatever way the franchise is extended in South Africa, there is no escape from the ultimate end result: a majority of non-white voters. Stiff qualifications for the franchise would merely delay that result for a time; but there may be a good case for delay in order to provide a transitional period and to ease the change-over.

Finally, one should note the existence of two divergent attitudes to the whole franchise question among liberally-minded Whites. One group approaches the matter with the idea of giving something to the non-Whites—this is the "concession" school. The other, smaller group does not think in terms of concessions: it identifies itself more closely with the unfranchised and visualises a situation developing in which the franchise will take the form desired by the broad mass of the people themselves. The former group tends to support qualified franchise, the latter group adult suffrage. But there are exceptions in both camps.

— W. B. W.

The Franchise — Voices from the Past

From "Nineteenth Century Opinion"—
An anthology by Michael Goodwin

WHEN the county franchise was talked of in 1873, there were many who thought the subject ill-timed—that the rural workman was an unfit subject to be invested with political power. The idea in many minds was that those hard-working men in the rural villages of this England of ours had no aspirations or desires above working, eating, drinking and sleeping—that they were content to let their more favoured and better educated superiors think for them, make laws for them, administer those laws; and no matter how unjustly those laws, which he, as a poor man, had no voice in making, might be administered, he, the working man, was expected to sit quietly down and tamely submit to the decision of his rich superiors. . . .

For years the unenfranchised state of farm labourers has been felt to be a grievous wrong inflicted upon them. Their position in life during the past has been such as has to a very great extent prevented them from making their grievances known beyond themselves. A public meeting in a rural village ten years ago, composed of

and got up by the working men to petition for household suffrage, would have caused considerable alarm among the well-to-do people of the village. The village clergyman and the well-to-do maiden ladies would have wondered at the audacity of the village rustics; but, although ten years ago their voice was not heard from the public platform, yet none the less did they feel they were wronged and injured by being denied the vote.

— George Potter — January, 1878.

ONE thing we need to learn is the necessity of limiting individual freedom for the general good; and another, that although decision by a majority of votes may be as good a rough-and-ready way as can be devised to get political questions settled, yet that, theoretically, the despotism of a majority is as little justifiable and as dangerous as that of one man; and yet another, that voting power, as a means of giving effect to opinion, is more likely to prove a curse than a blessing to the voters, unless that opinion is the result of a sound judgment operating upon sound knowledge.

— T. H. Huxley — January, 1890.