

A Plea: Decentralize The Government

G. E. LEE—Sunday Times, July 20, 1958.

SOUTH AFRICA is almost unique among modernly-constructed states in that it has placed well-nigh despotic powers in the hands of a central government, and we are being rightly chastised for our folly.

This excessive concentration of power at the centre is one of the main reasons why our land seems to be heading for ruin, in spite of a majority of decent people who would like it otherwise.

Why?

Why did we do it? Why was Natal's plea at the National Convention for a federal system overruled?

A few concessions were made in the shape of the provincial system and some entrenchments in the constitution—which could be easily circumvented by a group of office-holders prepared to lay aside democratic principles and political conventions to get technical legal sanction for their acts.

I believe the answer is three-fold.

First, no one believed that South African politicians would sink so low.

Second, the Afrikaner architects of union felt that under such a flexible constitution the Afrikaner would more speedily assert his rights, if not indeed become the dominant partner.

Third, the British section saw the trade advantages of a completely centralised form of government.

Decisions are imposed

A centralised form of government is suitable only where there is a homogeneous community, preferably in a small area, with a long tradition of working together and where certain democratic principles have come to be accepted by all parties.

Britain is an example. But even there centralised government has not always been successful, as the case of Ireland clearly shows.

Where everything is centralised, the governmental machine becomes choked. There is no time to deal properly with the interests of the various sections. More and more bureaucracy takes over, because of the sheer inability of a central parliament to exercise adequate supervision.

More and more decisions are imposed without consultation or agreement. This happens even under a democratic government. How much greater is the evil when the central government seeks to impose its ideologies at every level, provincial, municipal and even over local bodies such as school boards, hospital boards and transportation boards.

The only way

It is noteworthy that nearly all modernly-constructed states are federal in form, and for a good

reason—it is the only form that works. It is the only way in which the trade and defence advantages of larger-scale working can be harmonised with liberty.

The United States, Canada and Australia are a few examples.

The instance of Canada is particularly significant for South Africa. Like South Africa, Canada started off with a centralised constitution, with two races differing in language, religion, traditions and temperament. One race, the French, was smarting under defeat in war; and, as in the case of South Africa, relations, instead of getting better with the passing of time, grew steadily worse.

Then Lord Durham, perceiving the root of the trouble, recommended in the Durham Report that *the centralised constitution should be scrapped and a federal constitution substituted.*

That was done. Canada has since gone ahead and is now the leading Dominion of the Commonwealth.

South Africa can do the same. There is this difference. Canada was under British control at the time and she was given a federal constitution by the British Parliament. We, in South Africa, have to achieve one for ourselves.

Our present flexible constitution, with practically all power placed in the hands of a central government which can overrule the provinces and municipalities, if it desires, is an open invitation to dictators.

The electoral system which puts such a government in power can be manipulated to any desired extent.

Dangerous

Since the passage of the South Africa Act Amendment Act through the joint sitting technique, with the aid of the packed Senate, South Africa has been living practically without a constitution—a most dangerous state of affairs.

Even the limited entrenchments of the Act of Union have been swept away and can never be re-entrenched (save for the equal language rights entrenchment, which can be removed at will). Before we can expect any health in the body politic, it is essential that we have a new and better constitution, following a new National Convention.

We must have a far more rigid constitution, with all individual rights entrenched. And as a safeguard of these individual rights, we must entrench the powers of local bodies to uphold them.

In a multi-racial society such as South Africa, we must also entrench the rights of the various races, particularly minority races.

As Mr. Donald Molteno, Q.C., president of the Institute of Race Relations, said in Port Elizabeth on June 25, "A solution inherently possible in South Africa, without the use of force, is one based on

partnership, division of power on federal lines, entrenchment of human rights, regardless of race, and protection of minority groups."

This will make for harmony. Where domination is forever impossible, ambitious men will turn their interests in more useful directions than in stirring up racial strife.

The position is somewhat analagous to that in international politics, where, in a state of insecurity, each nation seeks to ensure its own defence by weakening the defence of its neighbour.

The Whites are oppressing the Blacks to-day because they fear that otherwise the Blacks will oppress them to-morrow. This is the road to perpetual conflict and ultimate ruin.

The only cure is to set up an impartial authority, to which all must bow. Inside the State, this authority is the constitution. When all groups feel secure, then at last will a true South Africanism be born.

Inhumanity is the inevitable logic of an outlook that treats an individual not as a unique personality but merely as an item, a unit, in a "group identity."

—Prof. Keet.

Candid Comments

Sober Realism

We must not follow a policy that we could not justify before God and our Christian conscience. The end must never sanctify the means. The White man's struggle to survive should certainly not be coupled with injustice towards others.

—Ds. W. A. Landman (retiring chairman of Sabra), reported in Die Burger, 1st May 1958.

Taxing the Voteless

Is there any other country but ours that taxes the poorest section of the community most heavily? Already countries abroad say of us that our thinking is a century behind the rest of the world, and that we don't read the New Testament.

(Letter to the Daily Despatch, signed Mary Bell).

No Permanent Guardianship.

The great question facing the Whites in South Africa is, what is to be done with the Non-Whites who have reached maturity? Guardianship is tyranny unless it is applied in accordance with the principles of Holy Writ. This requires, first, that the minor shall be taught to become an adult. Secondly the minor must be given his adult status as soon as he is ripe for it. There can never be such a thing as a permanently minor status.

—Professor J. C. G. Kotze, Theological Seminary, Stellenbosch, reported in Die Burger, 1st May 1958.

The Black Sash, September, '58

HALLOWED BE THY NAME

THE other evening I was visited by a member of one of the lesser known sects of the Protestant Church. The gentleman's main argument was that one cannot worship a god without first knowing his name. In this case, my informant insisted that the name was Jehovah, and that when we had acknowledged that Name we should all—I must ask his pardon if I have misunderstood him—be "saved."

Now this struck me at the time as being the oddest of beliefs; for I can "know" an individual very thoroughly without necessarily being acquainted with his correct name, and I do worship, humbly, That which I do not know.

So odd a contention continued to interest me, and I began to work out permutations and combinations with a name as the central idea. It then began to be apparent that while "Jehovah" was as unrelated to any living idea (for me) as granite, if the name was—say—gentleness, loving kindness, power, security, vengeance, hate, the response was immediate and vital.

I wonder what would happen to this sick world—and in particular our own sick land, if **every** congregation in **every** church, Christian or Asian, should ask its minister to define in clear and unequivocal terms the Name, or Names of that god he urges them to worship?

If that God's attributes, or Names, are "gentleness" and "loving kindness," can His ministers even preach, or believe in, hate and bitterness, separation and self superiority?

Or is it true, as it was true at the time of Christ, that our spiritual leaders have made God in their own image, and have endowed Him with their own beliefs?

How shocked an orthodox Christian would be if you were to say casually to him one day: "What are **your** God's Names? **Mine's** "gentleness" and "compassion."

But then what **does** he mean when he says: "Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name—" every time he prays—or hasn't he thought that far?

DOREEN RANKIN.

Washington Post Broadcast

MISS MURIEL BOWEN, of the Washington Post Broadcast Station, is touring the Commonwealth in order to interview the political leaders in each important centre. From Johannesburg and Pretoria, she chose for her interviews Mr. Eric Louw and Mrs. Ruth Foley.

Because of the time limit of four minutes, it was a most difficult interview to prepare; yet Mrs. Foley managed it perfectly, and Miss Bowen told a member of the Central Executive that our President had given one of the best interviews of the tour.