

CONTACT

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THE ATTACK ON THE SENATE

NO sane anti-Nationalist could do anything but approve of the wave of protest against the plan to pack the Senate which has swept the country lately. But, while approving whole-heartedly of the protest, it can do no harm to ask why it is necessary. How have we arrived at a state of affairs which allows the members of a government to contemplate such legislation as the Senate Bill even in the darkest corners of their minds—let alone bring it out openly into public view and submit it to Parliament with the certainty that, within a week or two, it will be law? What has brought us to this pass? Is the attack on the Senate really a unique event? Or is it just another sordid step in a process which has been going on for a long, long time?

The Nationalists are using their political power without scruple to improve their own position in the political field, jockeying, they hope, to the complete confusion of their opponents. But is this anything new? Has it not happened in South Africa before? The answer is, of course, that it has happened—often. The answer is that in South Africa governments dominated by Europeans, before and since Union, Colonial, United Party or Nationalist, have used their political power consistently to deprive Non-Whites of advantages and to add to their own advantage. Let us recall a few facts.

In the last century Indians in Natal enjoyed the Parliamentary franchise on the same basis as Europeans. In 1896, when there were 9,309 white voters and 251 Indian, and the Indian vote was reckoned to be becoming a threat, this right was removed from them. In passing the necessary legislation, however, the Government gave the most definite assurances that the Indian municipal vote in Natal would never be interfered with. And so it was not—for 28 years. But in 1924 the Indians lost their municipal franchise also.

In 1913 Europeans used their political power to deprive Africans of their right to buy land over a large part of the country. They took this step almost without warning and almost without discussion. They justified it on the grounds that the Native Land Act was a temporary measure aimed only at freezing the existing position until investigations could be carried out and legislation introduced. Investigations were carried out soon enough but Africans had to wait 23 years—until 1936—for the promised legislation. When it did come it removed their remaining right to buy land in the Cape and promised them 13 per cent. of the total area of the Union in final settlement of their land claims.

In 1923 Europeans used their political power to control the movement of Africans into towns. They justified these restrictions and those placed on Africans already in towns on the grounds that the African was “not a permanent town-dweller”—an argument so specious as to be almost incredible. In 1926 they barred Africans from attaining certificates of competency in a wide range of skilled occupations—and denied them the right to develop the talents God had given them. In 1930 and '31 they took the step—no more moral than that being taken against the Senate today—of more than doubling the strength of their own voting power compared with that of Africans and Coloureds, by extending the vote to all European women over 21 and removing the qualifications applying to European males in Natal and the Cape. Still not satisfied, Africans were placed on a separate roll in 1936. Seven years later the “Pegging” Act imposed severe restrictions on the right of Indians to purchase and occupy property and in 1946 whole areas of Natal were prohibited to them for the purchase or occupation of land. The process of restricting Africans and Indians to specified areas was brought to its “logical” conclusion in the Group Areas Act. To suit their own ends—and it is extremely doubtful that any single Group Areas plan has yet been produced which will bring greater advantage to Non-Whites than it will to Whites—Europeans will push unwilling Non-Europeans into unwanted Group Areas all over the country.

There have been the attempts, so far unsuccessful, to remove the Coloured voters from the common roll. Europeans have decided that a special kind of “Bantu Education” is best for Africans. That the vast majority of Africans don't want this “special” education is beside the point.

The list could be extended almost without limit, but what emerges from this brief recapitulation is that the European in South Africa has, over the years, seldom failed to make use of his dominant political position for his own purposes. He has used it to entrench his political power by restricting the political power of others. He has used it to entrench his economic status by restricting the rights of others to acquire land or to invest money or to attain skill. With the passage of time he has become used to legislating to get what he wants and to stay where he is. We should not, therefore, be unduly surprised when a Nationalist government introduces a Senate Bill which will enable it to get what *it* wants and to stay where *it* is. After all it is only doing to white voters what they have been doing to Non-Whites—voters and otherwise—for many years.

The wheel has come full circle for non-Nationalist white South Africans. They find themselves where they do to-day because, in the past, when questions of race have been involved, they have based their stand on self-interest and not on principle. If the restrictive laws mentioned above had been opposed at the time and if the rights and responsibilities of citizenship had been extended when they should have been there would be no tampering with the Senate to-day—because there would be no Nationalist Government to-day. Democracy only becomes reasonably safe from abuse when the majority of people have a say in how it works and an interest in seeing that it continues to work properly. If white South Africans can only learn this from the Senate Bill then some benefit may still come from it.

COURTESY

COURTESY Week is over. Courtesy is a fine thing, we are all for it. What is more, thanks to Rotary, Courtesy Week is growing in South Africa. More and more people are speaking about Courtesy. More and more people are listening to others speaking about it.

It is not enough to talk about Courtesy. A sharp rap must be delivered to those who have been discourteous. We rap Dr. Ben Marais and his fellow-professors at Pretoria for being discourteous to the Government. We rap Mr. Adlai Stevenson for criticising his host-country. We rap Margaret Ballinger for insinuating that the Senate Bill has an unpleasant scent. We rap the Bishop of Johannesburg for biting the hand that feeds him.

In certain cases we hesitate. We hesitate to rap the Badplaats Town Council for fencing off an Indian storekeeper from his clients; this case clearly cannot be as bad as it looks. Surely it was all a matter of roads, and in any case the storekeeper may have been cheeky. We hesitate to rap the Rotary Clubs in South Africa for having a colour-bar, because we have good reason to believe that they wouldn't have a colour-bar if the majority of their members didn't want it. We hesitate to rap Toc H, the Y.M.C.A., the Red Cross, the Round Table, for the same reason.

It is time someone told Rotary that Courtesy Week is a lot of nonsense. Why don't they have a Justice Week instead? Courtesy without Justice is a lot of nonsense.

It is time someone told all the notable speakers of Courtesy Week to leave race relations alone when they speak about courtesy. Let them confine themselves to . . . well, one doesn't quite know. But why tell us to be polite to an Indian storekeeper whose very living we are going to take away? Why be polite to a Coloured man when we are going to take away his vote?

Why be polite to any human being to whose child you would deny opportunities that you would give your own? Why be polite to any human being if you would withhold from him anything that you would grant yourself?

We think that talking about Courtesy is a lot of nonsense in a colour-bar country unless you are going to talk about the colour-bar too. We think that it is an impertinence for any upholder of any kind of racial supremacy to talk about Courtesy. We think that it is an insult to God for any person to talk about Courtesy if he agrees with the Group Areas Act.

Talk about Courtesy is bound to be superficial in a colour-bar country. And no wonder either, for Courtesy is only a flower. The plant itself is the Tree of the Golden Rule, of the Second Commandment. If I say to my brother please and thank you, and take away his house and his living and his vote, then may I be damned forever.

We urge all our notable speakers who disapprove of the colour-bar to refuse to speak about courtesy, unless they are prepared and allowed to speak about that Tree of which it is the flower; for Courtesy is the flower of justice and love, not an empty smile on a cruel ace.

The Liberal Party of South Africa believes in Courtesy, and it believes that any kind of race discrimination is discourtesy. Pay attention to race discrimination and the please's and thank you's will look after themselves.