

THE ATTITUDE OF THE COLOURED PEOPLE TODAY

Before examining the attitude of Coloured People today it is useful to remind ourselves what has happened to them since 1909. At that date, in the Cape where the majority of Coloured people lived then and do today, there was a non-racial qualified franchise according to which coloured men were entitled to vote under qualifications which applied to all races, e.g. if they were literate and earned £50 a year or owned fixed property to the value of £75. They were also entitled to stand for parliament and the Provincial and Municipal Councils.

In 1909 the National Convention agreed to maintain this position except that non-Whites were no longer entitled to sit in Parliament, and in Natal no more Africans or Asians were to be registered as voters. In the Transvaal and O.F.S. the franchise had always been limited to white men only.

The next blow came in 1930 when White Women were enfranchised but not women of other races and again in 1931 when income and property qualifications were removed for White Men in the Cape and Natal but not for Coloured Men.

The Representation of Natives Act of 1936 provided that African voters in the Cape should be placed on a separate roll to elect 3 white members to the House of Assembly and 2 to the Cape Provincial Council. So now the voters in the Cape consisted of White Men and Women over the age of 21 and Coloured Men over 21 who satisfied the income and property qualifications. As you all know after battling for several years to remove even those coloured voters from the Common Roll, the Nationalist Government, unable to obtain the necessary majority of Assembly and Senate (2/3rds) sitting together, increased the size of the Senate from 48 to 89 with 16 instead of 8 nominated members and 65 instead of 32 elected members and those elected by the majority vote or "ticket" system, instead of by the system of proportional representation. Having done its dirty deed and removed the Coloured voters the Senate Act of 1960 restored the system of proportional representation and the size of the Senate returned to normal.

In 1965 the Separate Representation of Voters Amendment Act stipulated that existing and future coloured representatives would hold office for a fixed period of 5 years from the time of their election. The same year Coloured teachers were prohibited from being members of the Nationalist, United, Progressive and Liberal Parties. The Coloured Persons Representative Council Act 49 of 1964, had provided for a council of 46 Coloured members, 30 to be elected (18 Cape, 6 Transvaal, 3 each of Natal and O.F.S.) and 16 to be nominated by the State President. The Act also provided for the general registration of voters - coloured men and women over the age of 21 years. (The age of white voters had been lowered to 18 in 1958 - this is now to be done for Coloured voters too).

You will recall that at the first Coloured elections in 1969 the Labour Party won a majority of the 40 elected seats, but the government then nominated Federal Party members - the defeated candidates - to be the 20 nominated members so that the Federal Party had a majority in the Council. Early in 1974 the strength of the parties represented in the C.R.C. was Federal Party 30, Labour Party 26, and others and independents 4. In March 1975 the Labour Party gained 31 seats to the Federal Party's 8 and now had a clear majority irrespective of the political affiliations of the persons to be nominated. It was interesting to note that in 1969 out of 800,000 odd people qualified to vote only 600,000 odd registered and of them only 300,000 odd cast their votes, whereas in 1975 out of 900,000 entitled to register, 500,000 did so and only 250,000 actually voted. This was not due to lethargy; it was a refusal to take part in a system of which they disapproved.

I tried to persuade coloured people I knew to vote for the Labour Party but they utterly refused to take any part in the election whatever. These were simple, worthy people - a-political, but deeply hurt and unwilling to co-operate in any way. Even the refusal of Mr. Sonny Leon, who was appointed Chairman of the C.R.C. executive, to live in his official house didn't impress the ordinary coloured people. They disapproved of his accepting office and submitting a list of persons suitable for co-option to the Council. But when the Chairman of the Executive Council refused to sign the Budget they began to be interested.

In November 1975 the Minister of Coloured Affairs dismissed Mr. Sonny Leon as Chairman of the C.R.C. executive and appointed Mrs. Alatheia Jansen in his place. The other members of the executive promptly resigned. Now the coloured people were really interested and literally thousands flocked to the report back meetings all over the country. Up till then people said that the Labour Party didn't represent the Coloured people as only 25% of the people entitled to vote had done so - the percentage vote in Cape Town was only 12% but in the country areas it was much higher. Now those who had refused to vote at all, let alone for the Labour Party, turned out to show their appreciation of the C.R.C. Executive's action and it became possible to get some idea of what coloured people were thinking. Right from the beginning the Labour Party has stood for a non-racial franchise and full citizenship rights for all South Africans, not only the coloured people. There is now no doubt that a very large percentage of coloured people insist on full political and civil rights - nothing less than universal suffrage will satisfy them. They also insist on equal pay for equal work, the removal of all discriminatory legislation such as Group Areas, Job Reservation etc. etc.

In a letter to the Cape Times 2 weeks ago Mr. David Curry, deputy leader of the Labour Party, said "Last year I prophesied that the C.R.C. will go from crisis to crisis. This year will prove to be the same because the policy of separate development has a bitter frustration complex. Crisis after crisis will come because the C.R.C. is so badly constructed. The Government even now has to appoint an ex-civil servant in the person of Mrs. A. Jansen to run the show. It cannot even depend on the Federal Party any more". He then goes on to the questions the C.R.C. Executive asked the Prime Minister regarding basic government policy and the answers received in a memorandum released by Mr. J.H.T. Mills, Secretary for Coloured Relations. He goes on "From the above it is quite clear that the Government has no clear policy as far as the Coloured people are concerned. They expect us to travel with them on the separate development train while nobody knows what the destination will be. Notice we will walk on this road step by step and that there is no intention to present a cut-and-dried plan. The Government cannot present a plan because it has none. On this road to nowhere we are very nicely asked for our dedication and goodwill. We will certainly not give the Nationalist Party a blank cheque. They have to spell out quite clearly how they will separate power and how the Coloured people will "Share power" in the framework of separate development."

"We as a political party have stated clearly what we want: First-class citizenship for all South Africans regardless of race or colour".

"It is the Government that must be questioned on the application of its policy. Its own policy has been responsible for the re-awakening of a political consciousness among Coloured people. It will have to satisfy that consciousness. It has given us a form of representation without responsibilities. It is not our job to advise the Government as to how it should implement its policy. It has had 27 years of ruling our country and by now it should know what to do with its own policy. In the meantime we in the Labour

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will continue to oppose, expose and embarrass the Government regarding its own actions. We have no illusion about the situation we find ourselves in. We will continue to strive for full citizenship because change is being written on the walls of South Africa. Change will come and White South Africa will conform to change not because they want to but because they have to".

I used to think that educated politically aware Coloured people wanted this but that the majority would be grateful for any crumbs from the White table! But now I realise that most Coloured people, especially the younger ones, have lost all faith in White men's promises and now demand the whole cake - not half the cake or 90% of the cake but the WHOLE CAKE. The bitterness and anti-white feeling among the younger coloured people is tragic and terrifying. There is only one way in which we can recapture their respect and trust and maybe eventually their affection, and that is to remove all discriminatory legislation and grant them full political and civil rights. The more political coloured people will only accept this if it is extended to all South Africans, not only to coloured and white ones. Their firm stand on principle has been quite wonderful. It is impossible to gauge whether the man in the street shares their views. Coloured people have the same fears of being swamped as whites have, but on the other hand they know what it is like to have no representation at all.

You may have read in the Sunday Times of February 22nd under the heading "Coloured T.V. viewers hiss White soldiers" when South African soldiers appear on the screen the Coloured customers hiss. When scenes are shown of M.P.L.A. or Cuban soldiers, there are shouts of exultation. Howard Lawrence, the author of the article, says "In the context of the Angolan war and the threat to South Africa's borders, it is my impression that Coloured South Africans are not 'patriotic' because they do not believe they would be fighting for 'our' country."

"It is the failure of the Government to 'move away from racial discrimination' as promised that has created this hostile attitude - the attitude that the war in Angola is a war against Whites in the interest of Blacks, and not a communist threat". How can White South Africa contemplate defending itself against the World with a 5th column of 18 million Black people?

In the Sunday Express of February 22nd Allister Sparks quotes Macaulay as saying "We know of no great revolution which might not have been prevented by compromise early and graciously given". Sparks comments that "Britain at the time was teetering on the brink of revolution. The lower social orders - or 'the mob', as the aristocracy called them - were seething with discontent and clamouring for reforms in a socio-political system which discriminated against them and kept them powerless. But Britain took Macaulay's advice and offered compromise in sufficient time and with a good enough grace. They didn't wait until the revolution was upon them and the lower orders were no longer in a mood to compromise.

And because of it the British aristocracy survived more effectively than any other in the world. To this day."

He says "This is why I believe Macaulay's advice is so singularly appropriate for the Whites of Southern Africa today. For we are in the same position as those British aristocrats, and our interest is in survival.

"The Portuguese territories are to us what France was to Macaulay and his fellow British aristocrats - the terrible example on your very doorstep of what happens when you wait too long before offering the compromise and introducing the reforms."

Is there anything the Black Sash can do to help the Whites in South Africa to heed Macaulay's advice? As Sparks says "Only the British listened. All the others have hung on grimly, stubbornly and with increasing blindness until the revolution burst upon them and eliminated them". Is that what is in store for us?

As Macaulay said "Already we seem to ourselves to perceive the signs of unquiet times, the vague presentiment of something strange which pervades the community. The restless and turbid hopes of those who have everything to gain, the dimly hinted forebodings of those who have everything to lose".

We can blame the government for not facing the facts but they would have to have the support of the majority of whites in order to make the drastic changes necessary and to make them in time to avert revolution. Could we not campaign among our own kind of whites - English among English, Afrikaners among Afrikaners, to try to get Macaulay's message across so that South Africa could follow Britain's example and give early and graciously and so avoid losing all a little later?

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