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### 3. MYRNA BLUMBERG

'Apartheid is Wrong'

## The British Decide

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TO ASK WHETHER the average person in Britain is actively 'engaged' with the problems of South Africa is like asking whether the average penal reformer could be engaged to a whore: the whole point is that he's interested because he's detached, his moral probity is high because, for some reason, he regards himself as being, thank Heaven, not a sinner like other men.

This often seems remarkable to visitors from other African territories who would like to see the British apply some of the passion of her moral criticism of South Africa to other territories where Britain is directly involved at present, such as Central Africa. For I think it is undoubtedly true that the ordinary men and women in Britain are much clearer in their attitude to South Africa than in their attitude to Central Africa. This is partly because the issues, from here in England, seem so much clearer—apartheid is known to be extremely hateful but the truth of 'partnership' is only beginning to dawn—and partly because of the sort of view expressed by one member of the House of Lords that the white settlers in Rhodesia are British 'kith and kin' while the mixture of white South Africans are not in quite the same way.

But reading the national newspapers and talking to people I meet (which is my unscientific way of trying to gauge what the 'average person' thinks) I have been greatly struck by the general hardening of feeling against apartheid and theories of white domination.

I returned to live here last year after two year's absence, and the fact that now there is not one national newspaper, as far as I can see, which does not take it for granted that apartheid is a dirty word is very far from the position three years ago—or perhaps one could almost say in pre-Sharpeville days.

Earlier it was just papers such as *The Observer* (Liberal: circulation about 700,000), *Reynolds News* (Labour: circulation about 300,000), the *Daily Herald* (Labour: circulation 1,400,000) and the late *News Chronicle* (Liberal: circulation 1,200,000) which consistently reported on the daily tragedies and absurdities of apartheid.

But today *The Times* (Independent Conservative: circulation 250,000), with echoes of its old thundering days, can scarcely be beaten, in its reporting and com-

ment, for regular, informed and certain opposition to apartheid; *The Guardian* (Liberal: circulation 260,000) has regular news from more than one correspondent in South Africa; and the *Daily Mail* which used to be orthodox conservative until it swallowed the dead *News Chronicle* and became schizophrenic Liberal-Conservative (circulation over 2,600,000) has one of the liveliest and most sympathetic coverages of African affairs in general, and South Africa in particular.

Those, I think, could be regarded as the most influential daily papers. What's left? The *Daily Mirror* (Independent Labour: circulation 4,500,000) does not often give space to Africa, but when it does, it's bang-on. (With Basil Davidson on their staff now, the *Mirror* is bound to talk sense in most of its comments on Africa.)

And even the *Daily Telegraph* (Right-wing Conservative: circulation over 1,000,000) does not mince its disapproving words on South African apartheid, although it is stonily reactionary on the Congo, Angola and so on.

BUT IT IS THAT square-eyed monster, the Telly, which I would back as the most intimately educational anti-apartheid agent. Few people who saw it could forget the impact of the film on South Africa on the eve of the 1961 May strike which was made by the B.B.C. magazine programme, 'Panorama'. (Average viewers: over 8,000,000). It began with a powerful close-up shot of the hindquarters of a couple of white women bowlers in Durban, and the sight of those indolent figures bulging at eye-level in the corner of your living-room is certainly a haunting image. When the women bowlers eventually straightened up, the B.B.C. interviewer, James Mossman, asked them what they thought about the impending strike. Strike? One hadn't heard about it, and the other said that although she did not always agree with Dr. Verwoerd one thing she liked was his firmness with 'agitators.'

What did they think of the present state of African opinion?

"Yer mean natives? Oh, I've got nothing against them myself. I mean, they make awfully good servants."

And then back their posteriors rolled in front of our noses while Mossman explained pithily about white privileges, leisure and ignorance and growing African bitterness.

In the past year or so these are some of the South Africans who have also appeared on both television channels, the B.B.C. and Independent Television: Chief Luthuli, Nana Mahomo, Tennyson Makiwane, Bloke Modisane, Oliver Tambo, Todd Matshikiza, Bishop Reeves, Colin Legum, Alfred Hutchinson. Mostly they have been interviewed on the B.B.C.'s peak-hour daily magazine programme called 'Tonight', which is said to be watched by over 9,000,000 people and has much of the radical flavour of the old *Picture Post*.

By seeing these men, probingly interviewed, so closely in your home, you feel you know them personally, and when Dr. Verwoerd or the South African Foundation talks about 'agitators' you can scoff from personal knowledge. I believe, in fact, that British television had made the British public the most knowledgeable people

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MYRNA BLUMBERG, *journalist and author of White Madam, describing her life in South Africa and 1960 detention, has settled in London.*

in the world on South African affairs: there is no form of mass communication comparable in South Africa that informs people so vividly and impartially (it does not push one group of Africans against another), and which could have made these men's faces and their views so generally known.

I BELIEVE that South Africa House steadfastly refuses to put in one of their representatives to oppose any of these men on television. The last time I saw some South Africa House talent on telly was about six years ago, when a Government representative pitted his incoherent bigotry and lack of grammar against the urbane, cogent, aristocratic wit of Miss Noni Jabavu. It was a walk-over for Miss Jabavu, who remained coolly informative in her case against apartheid, while the poor South Africa House man mumbled savagely about 'primitive natives'. Since then, I gather, South Africa House has remained speechless both on British television and radio.

IT IS BECAUSE of this regular, informed newspaper and broadcasting coverage of South Africa that the ordinary person in Britain no longer needs to be convinced that apartheid is wrong. He's heard enough details—and it's the details rather than the rhetorical generalities that count—over a long enough period for the whining of the South African Foundation to make almost no impression at all. I am certain of this.

To take a small instance: only last month the Foundation had a letter published in *The Times* boasting about education for Africans in South Africa; the next day someone called Lord Lucas had an excellent letter published rebutting it with one or two famous quotations from Dr. Verwoerd, and this was followed by another detailed letter tearing Bantu Education to threads. There has been little interest in official propaganda on the Transkei simply because many papers do not even think South Africa House propaganda worth bothering about. And few people regard the wandering reports of Lord Montgomery with anything but bored amusement.

SO BRITONS, indisputably, have made up their minds about South Africa: they're against it. This is not only because they're well-informed and, in a muddled way, feel no responsibility for its problems, but because—and this is probably the most unpalatable of the

reasons—they far too often foist all wrong-doing on the Afrikaners, still frequently referred to as the 'Boahs.'

I should qualify all this by stressing that in talking about the majority of ordinary Britons I have not included the Big Business investors. I can't say how clear their minds are, but it is encouraging that *The Economist* that extremely influential weekly, frequently sounds more militantly opposed to the South African racial set-up than *The New Statesman* (and indeed this radicalism covers their attitude on Central Africa too, having recently run a campaign headlined, 'Welensky Must Go!'). In addition, the *Financial Times*, during the strike last year, suddenly broke out with one of the most sympathetic interviews with Nelson Mandela.

IF SO MANY PEOPLE have made up their minds, then, what are they doing about it? Could they be actively 'engaged' as well as morally?

That, at present, is probably asking for a lot. It is true that the idea of a boycott has lost momentum. But it must have been good for anti-apartheid morale to see M.P.s of all British parties recently spring to ask questions in Parliament about why Sir John Maud had a colour-bar party to celebrate the Queen's birthday—just to mention a small example. In practical terms, Canon Collins has shown that many people were prepared to give generously to his Defence and Aid Fund; he raised hundreds of thousands of pounds for South Africa, but it is proving hard to raise anything like that for defence and aid to Northern Rhodesian Africans. At the national annual delegates' meeting of the British National Union of Journalists a few weeks ago an emergency resolution was unanimously passed (a rare feat for journalists) condemning the new censorship law in South Africa and what they described as interference with the free flow of news in and out of South Africa.

All this adds up to the fact that South Africa receives unique attention, if not always action in Britain. There are no other countries with comparable tragedies—Algeria, Angola, Central Africa—which have received anything like the microscopic analysis and concern as this lonely corner of Africa. One regrets it for the sake of Central Africans; but one cannot help applauding it for the sake of South Africa. ●



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