

Views of Youth - 2

Bridging South Africa's
youth gap

DAVID LE ROUX

WHILE CAPE TOWN'S NOON signal cannon is not yet fired off twice, firstly for whites and then for nonwhites, time is about the only thing shared on an equalitarian basis by all people in South Africa. Nonracialists wishing to organise integrated activities are confronted with a Berlin wall, creating severe difficulties, which must be hard for people living in Britain and other sane states to even visualise.

Those attempting to organise nonracial youth encounter the same problems as all integrated groups, though youth usually has less financial resources available.

The myriad ramifications of apartheid do not only affect anti-racist political movements, but every conceivable aspect, from bird-watchers' societies (the government grants to all scientific and cultural societies being recently suspended unless they are segregated) to blood banks labelled racially; from schools to U.S. Space Tracking stations (Dr. Verwoerd announced that U.S. Negro scientists would not be allowed to enter the Republic to work at these sites); from dry-cleaners to cemeteries, all are racially segregated.

Any integrated activity is frowned upon and legislated against, be it by chess-players in the open-air park cafe, or library book-borrowers.

The first obstacle a youth organiser must overcome for any nonracial meeting is the venue. All parks, beaches, cinemas, halls (any form of 'public entertainment' which is integrated must be sanctioned by a Ministerial permit, even if held in a privately-owned or Church hall) theatres, cafes, restaurants, trains, taxis, buses and pubs are by law segregated, apart from the prejudice of the white owners, not to mention landlords' fear of "getting mixed up in politics."

In even the handful of as-yet non-segregated parks, it is not exactly advisable, in South Africa 1965, (with the Secret Service's R312,000 for purely internal use being separate from the R500,000 budgeted for external spying) for white and non-white to sit together informally speaking or demonstrating effusive friendship in public, a sight so rare as to attract the stares of passers-by, if not police curiosity.

Young white people living with parents, who are rarely sympathetic (it is a widely observed ritual for white students to be warned by their parents not to "get involved with communists like NUSAS" — as the author can state from his and most of his friends' experiences), find flats or houses few and far between whose owners are willing to permit nonracial meetings. This leaves semi-accessible picnic sites as the only suitable places — after fares and scrambling up a mountain-side have been considered.

PERHAPS A BRIEF SURVEY of the few surviving non-racial organisations will illustrate the problems faced:

In the political field the Liberal Party, the South African Congress of Trade Unions, National Union of South African Students, several student societies at the formerly "open" universities, the S.A. Institute of Race Relations, and the propertied Progressive Party, all, to varying degrees, eke out an existence on the twilight fringe of legality.

The Liberal Party, especially in the Cape, has been disembowelled by the banning and house-arrest of its members and office-bearers to the point where it survives in little more than name; the atrophy since January 1965, certainly since June 1964, have left it, in the Cape, without even a paid official of its own.

The time when mass meetings, street demonstrations and poster protests could be successfully organised and held, is largely over. Any organiser hoping to stall Special Branch discovery must conduct activities predominantly, if indeed not exclusively, through house-meetings or small study groups of ten or so people; the disadvantage of this type of organisation being the need for strong central control to prevent individuals from being taken in by agents provocateur and Special Branch plants. Many white youths, coming fresh from school, and never having had an opportunity before to meet nonwhites on an equal basis, have a naive trust in any nonwhite they meet, and are especially susceptible to being trapped, the Special Branch employing many Africans and non-Africans for this purpose.

The South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) has been the hardest-hit by banning orders and house-arrests, its pitiless, methodical destruction being evidenced by the obscure five-line articles appearing at about monthly intervals with monotonous regularity in the status-quo press, stating that another three or five trade unionists have had banning or house-arrest orders served upon them. The crippling high personnel turnover rate resulted in well over 100 office-bearers being eliminated to date.

The "Open" universities are by now, to all practical intents and purposes, for whites only (since 1959 nonwhites attending them have had to have a permit from the appropriate minister, granted only if no alternate facilities at a tribal college are available). Here too, the transformation over a period of only three or four years is startling.

Views such as "if we let the kaffirs take over South Africa, they will drive the white man into the sea, and we will have the same chaos as in the Congo and Zambia" are not only commonly held by students, they are frequently written in essays in those faculties formerly attacked for being "teeming with leftists." The university authorities, whose attitude will play such an important role in deciding how much longer the universities will be the academic and intellectual centres of opposition to Afrikaner Nationalist policies, are discreetly playing down all issues as they arise.

NUSAS, under two-pronged attack both

Direct Action

the monthly libertarian paper that consistently advocates unity of all workers against oppression and racialism. Published by the Syndicalist Workers' Federation, British section of the International Working Men's Association. Yearly subscription 6s. Specimen copy free on request from 34 Cumberland Road, London, E.17.

from the outside (the massed might of the SABC, the Afrikaans press, and Ministers Vorster and Hertzog) and from within (a student electorate now nearly all-white, the rapidly escalating political polarization of the population, with the whites moving right ever-faster), faced with the alternatives of confrontation or conformation, is already showing alarmingly discernible signs of choosing the latter — the 1965 NUSAS Congress will show to what extent this development can be retarded. This trend, while accelerated by the events of 1964 — large-scale detentions and political trials — is a permanent one, and will continue to grow. Mr. Maeder Osler, 1964-5 President of NUSAS, called NUSAS a “living example of non-racialism”; that hopeful embryo of the late 1950s is likely to be aborted.

THE STUDENTS REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL, at Wits and UCT in the fight to preserve Academic Freedom but four or five years ago, are steadily becoming more conservative. The liberal “line,” which they have followed fairly consistently since the mid to the late nineteen-fifties, is being soft pedalled for a “respectable responsible” vaguely Prog. line. The lower ranks of the NUSAS hierarchy are noticeably percolated with racists, including many white Rhodesians, the “keep NUSAS out of politics” and “we should only bother about politics which concern students as such” arguments being hints of what is to come.

The Defence and Aid Fund and the S.A. Institute of Race Relations are alarmed at new legislation requiring the segregation of all welfare organisations. Defence and Aid has been the recipient of two banning orders and one deportation order, and has been attacked for defending “communists and saboteurs.”

A few youth clubs attached to the “leftish English Churches” and cultural societies sponsored by foreign embassies are the only integrated social groups left where whites and nonwhites can mix on an equal basis. Even the Progressive Party has been raided and a Parliamentary smear campaign on postal vote irregularities has tarnished its Hillbrow “respectability.”

PERHAPS THE BIGGEST PROBLEM for Youth organisers of nonracial activities, even for those whites who survive twelve years of school conditioning (not only history but prescribed geography text-books, for example, state that while the African is “unfit for mental exertion” he “cheerfully delights in even the heaviest manual labours”) is simply the dearth of occasions on which one can meet people of different races and get to know individuals as individuals — it is precisely this state of affairs that the Government has striven to bring about. Politics, universities and religion are about the only partial exceptions.

The second factor is fear. While Asians, Coloured people, and especially Africans have always had intimidation or endorsing out to threaten them into silence, the widely-publicised emergence of secret service agents Q-018 and Q-043 and the efficiency of solitary confinement and torture at making lifelong friends betray each other, have sown the seeds of doubt and suspicion. No one knows whether “colleague Jones is a spy,” as a letter to the editor of a newspaper stated.

The demoralising effects of this can perhaps only be fully realised by politically conscious people who lived in Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia. It is a tremendous factor in creating wariness, rendering mutual trust impossible and establishing a country-wide web of informers.

To the placing of African locations miles out in the bundu, costing ill-affordable

fares, is added the deportation of Coloureds and Asians to similarly placed “locations.”

It would, of course be possible for another Group Area Amendment bill to be passed in future, prohibiting people of different races from meeting together, except in their capacities as employees and employer, without a permit from the appropriate minister. This would rule out the small discussion groups of four or five meeting in private rooms which have succeeded the giant rallies of yesterday.

In short: the present is bleak, the future is grim. The most that “liberalists” living in South Africa can look forward to is to suffer under one of the shifting grades of restrictions, such as listed as unquotable, listed as communistic, banned, banished or house-arrested, which remove a person from politics as efficiently as if he were interned in a barbed-wire concentration camp, though with nothing for the “leftist overseas press” to see. Of course the last-named may materialise when “trouble” comes — a word so beloved by the white populace.

But even if we have little more than two and threes listening to Radio Ghana or Tanzania behind locked doors (and overseas news snippets are like seeing sunshine through a keyhole from a dark dungeon) or people organising secret literacy classes in locations, the determination of all nonracialists, including that of a tiny handful of whites, and the incentive of youth, will in the end be greater than any obstacles Dr. Verwoerd can place in their path. ●

NEW AFRICA

The Progressive International Monthly Magazine
on African Political and Economic Affairs

Subscriptions: £1 (S.A. R2, U.S.A. \$3)
per annum post paid.

Published at
58 PADDINGTON STREET, LONDON W 1