

# LIBERAL OPINION



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75 cents (7/6) for 6 issues.

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## THE LESSON OF THE TRANSKEI

A VINDICATION OF THE POLICY OF  
UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE

By a Special Correspondent

What lessons can believers in universal adult suffrage derive from last year's Transkeian election? I believe their case is immeasurably strengthened.

An overwhelmingly poor and illiterate electorate managed to surmount the obstacle of a complicated and confusing electoral system, and give an unequivocal rejection of apartheid. They rejected Chief Matanzima's state-aided black racialism and plumped almost solidly for the non-racial democratic policies of Chiefs Poto and Sabata.

We are often told that a qualified franchise will "keep the extremists out of power" and enable the "moderates" to hold sway. There are several difficulties about this argument, not the least of which is that of giving any precise meaning to the term "extremist". Your use of the term depends on your position in the political spectrum. U.P. supporters call the Progressive "extremists", whereas Liberals regard the Progressives as being too conservative. **One man's meat is another man's poison.**

Did universal franchise let the "extremists" in in the Transkei? Whatever one's view of

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Chiefs Poto and Sabata, it is impossible to label them "extremists". Both are tolerant and humane men, genuinely non-racial in outlook. Their moderation is in marked contrast to the racial fanaticism of those who presume to be their rulers. And, be it carefully noted, those white electors who support racialists like Verwoerd and Graaff would nearly all qualify for the vote under the franchise system proposed by the Progressive Party. One should never forget that the arch-extremist of this century, Hitler, came to power through the democratic processes of the Weimar Republic's constitution. No one can deny the popularity of Hitler among the mass of the German people, and yet those same people had one of the highest literacy rates in the world. And, on the other hand, one of the greatest statesmen of this century, Nehru, came to power on the votes of millions of illiterate peasants.

Can you expect any electorate anywhere in the world to do more than vote on the very broadest of issues? What percentage of the British electorate would have the faintest idea of the real questions if British entry into the Common Market was the burning election issue? I put forward several propositions about voting behaviour which recent studies bear out; first, that class is the most important determinant of voting behaviour; secondly, that voting is largely a matter of habit; thirdly, that even in the most sophisticated electorates, a high percentage of the voters do not even know what the election issues are or what policies the respective parties stand for; and, fourthly, that the floating voters, i.e., the voters who really determine the outcome of an election, are the least politically conscious of all voters.

Many of the arguments for the limited franchise assume a belief in the rationality of the electorate, and that this quality is the prerogative of those with certain property and/or educational qualifications. This belief in voters' rationality is a hangover from the classical theorists' writings on democracy and has little relevance in the modern mass democracy. To the extent that the average voter thinks, he thinks in terms of ill-digested election slogans.

It seems to me a mistake to argue that political consciousness is a function of social class. Most white South Africans would be amazed at the political consciousness

shown by illiterate peasants and ragged town-dwellers. These Africans grasp the one essential truth about South African politics: that until Africans gain a good share of political power, their social and economic position is not likely to change fundamentally. It stands to reason that people who are bullied by the police, pushed around by bureaucrats and subject to one-thousand-and-one humiliations because of their blackness, will be roused to political consciousness and relate their experience to the present distribution of political power in South Africa. "The system" obtrudes in so many painful ways that they cannot help but develop some attitudes towards it.

In what sense do voters elect their leaders? The leader of a party is normally elected in one way or another, with greater or lesser measure of democracy, by party members, or more accurately, oligarchies within parties. Voters passively react to an image of the leader presented to them. It is highly misleading to talk of the people throwing up leaders. "The People" don't create leaders; men endowed with qualities of leadership thrust themselves forward and "the people" follow. Is it possible to argue that the quality of the leadership is determined by the property and educational qualifications of the electors, i.e., will the leaders elected by qualified voters generally be men of better calibre than those whom the unqualified would elect?

The many distinguished Africans who headed the A.N.C. between 1912 and 1960 make it difficult to accept such a conclusion, particularly when those men are compared with their white counterparts. **Compare, for instance, the calm vision, tolerance and humanity of Lutuli, Matthews or Dr. D. T. Jabavu with the narrow-minded racialism of Malan, Strydom or Verwoerd.**

What mystic and elevating quality does possession of property and educational qualifications bestow on a citizen? Is he a superior being to his penniless and illiterate brother? One's possession or otherwise of those qualifications is determined largely by one's place in the social hierarchy. Because I am white and come of middle-class stock, I can receive full education, find lucrative employment, accumulate property and generally be the object of special state solicitude. If I am black the whole system presses down on me, my opportunities for attaining those qualifications are

1/20th as great as those of my white brother. Why should the Africans now be penalized for generations of deliberate neglect and subjection?

I put forward another proposition: any group of the population which is excluded from the franchise is unlikely to find that large sums of money will be appropriated for its education, social welfare, etc. The unrepresented group tends to become the Cinderella of the society as a whole. Political history is rich with examples which confirm the tendency for neglect of unrepresented groups. Nowhere is the tendency more strikingly confirmed than in S.A. The conclusion one draws is that the vote is an essential instrument for the upliftment of the underprivileged.

An old argument is that an educational qualification will act as an incentive for illiterate people to obtain education for themselves and their children. This seems to be an insult to our presently unrepresented citizens. Have they shown any need of an outside stimulus like this where education is concerned? Do not the African peoples thirst for education? Look at the resentment aroused by Bantu education. Does the magnificent effort by the Indians to secure education for themselves suggest any apathy on their part? If the educational facilities are there, the unfranchised will not need any prodding to avail themselves of the opportunities. But with a qualified franchise will those educational (or other) opportunities ever be equal to those available for the represented?

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## TWELVE MILLION OUTLAWS

(A COMMENT ON SOUTH AFRICA'S BANTU  
LAWS AMENDMENT BILL OF 1964)

by a Lawyer

Do you remember learning at school about the outlaw? He was a person whose crime put him outside the protection of the law. He could not sue in any court, nor had he any legal rights which could be enforced, but he was personally liable upon all causes of action. If he showed himself in the market or temple

he could be arrested by anyone and cast into prison without means of defence.

**Certain provisions of the Bantu Laws Amendment Bill show you how close to the outlaw the settled urban African will be brought when the Bill is passed by Parliament.**

It is proposed, in section 8, to establish a local labour bureau in every prescribed area, and to have it managed by a municipal labour officer. Section 46 says that every urban area is deemed to be a prescribed area.

This officer can refuse to sanction the employment of any African in his area and can cancel any contract of employment if he is satisfied that it is **not in the public interest** that the contract should be entered into or be continued.

In other words, whether or not a person should work for another is made to depend upon the discretion of an official whose opinion as to **the public interest** is the fact that will decide whether a man or woman may earn a living in a town with a particular employer; and to challenge that opinion in a court of law is well nigh impossible.

If an official decides to cancel an African's contract of employment, the African may be referred to a so-called **aid centre**. There he may be offered suitable work, but he may also be required to leave the area together with his dependents. He can appeal to the Chief Bantu Commissioner, whose decision is final, but this does not suspend the removal order unless a Bantu Affairs Commissioner, in his discretion, allows him to remain until the appeal is decided. Here again, it is the choice of an official whether the person stays in the area to arrange for his appeal or leaves without being able to safeguard his interests in this vital matter.

At the moment certain Africans may lawfully resided in urban areas. Section 10 (1) (a) (b) and (c) of the Native Urban Areas Act gives this privilege to Africans who have since birth resided continuously in a town, or who have worked there continuously for one employer for not less than ten years, or have lawfully lived there for not less than fifteen years. The wife, unmarried daughter and young son who does not yet pay tax are also protected if they ordinarily reside with the husband and father.