

The Ka-Ngwana/Ingwavuma plan highlights in dramatic form the Nationalist Party illusion that by turning South Africans into aliens, and reducing their numbers on paper, you build security for yourself. At a more humdrum level, every day, in a hundred pass-offices, the same thing is happening. People are having stamps put in their pass-books which effectively say "You are no longer a South African". And if Dr Koornhof's new "Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill" becomes law in its present form we will be well along the road to the point where, as Dr. Connie Mulder promised ten years ago, there will be

no more Black South Africans. And will Nationalist Afrikanerdom even feel secure then? Of course not. Instead of having to worry about how to accommodate the aspirations of 20-and-more million black South African citizens, it will have to worry about something more serious. That will be the determination of those same people, as the poverty of their homelands is accelerated by growing populations and diminishing resources, while next-door the South Africa which has rejected them thrives on their contract labour, to get that citizenship back. □

2. The New Constitution

The single most important element in Mr. Botha's constitutional proposals is that all Africans must still expect to exercise their political rights in the homelands.

Beside that, all else is insignificant.

THE MAN WHO DIDN'T MAKE IT

A Review of Phyllis Lewsen's JOHN X MERRIMAN

by Alan Paton.

Phyllis Lewsen's life of John X. Merriman is a superb book. It tells the story of South Africa from say 1860, the early days of self-government of the Cape, to Merriman's death in 1926, just after General J.M.B. Hertzog and his National Party, with the aid of Labour, won the general election, and inaugurated, although it was not apparent at the time, a new era in our history.

Great figures pass through these pages, Cecil John Rhodes, and Alfred Milner, Onze Jan Hofmeyr and W.P. Schreiner, President Paul Kruger, Louis Botha, Jan Christian Smuts, J.M.B. Hertzog. Great events happened too, the Jameson Raid of 1895, the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the First World War of 1914, leading to the Rebellion and the founding of the Afrikaner National Party. Louis Botha died in 1919, and Smuts succeeded him, only to be defeated by Hertzog in 1924. Let us face the fact that it is a white history. We meet Tengo Jabavu, J.L. Dube, and Sol Plaatjie, but only as they react to white history. The

history of our country being what it has been, a biography of Merriman cannot be other than a white history.

Merriman had considerable intellectual gifts, but he did not have the brilliance of Smuts, nor his massive self-confidence that was near to arrogance. Nor did he have the charismatic gifts of Cecil John Rhodes, nor indeed his arrogance. There were people who thought that Merriman was arrogant too. The CAPE TIMES thought, on one occasion at least, that he was animated by "personal spite" against Milner, and the CAPE ARGUS called him, on one occasion at least, a "bitter dialectician". One could not come to such conclusions after reading Phyllis Lewsen. In fact this reader's affection and esteem for Merriman went on increasing as the book progressed.

Many people, including ex-President Marthinus Steyn of the defeated Orange Free State, wanted Merriman as the first Prime Minister of the new Union of South Africa, which after the end of the Anglo-Boer War in 1902 was seen to be the inevitable outcome of this tragic period. It was also a

miraculous outcome, and was seen at that time to be the triumph of big-heartedness, forgivingness, and sanity. In fact there were reasons of quite a different order for the coming together in Union of the four provinces, two of which had been fighting for their survival against the others, led of course by Britain herself. The new Union of South Africa, which came into being in 1910, entrenched the colour bar against which some people, not excluding Merriman, hoped the war was being fought. It was only three years after Union that Parliament passed the Natives Land Act, which condemned the African people to be landless, and led in part to the black flight to the cities, which today is seen as a social problem of the first magnitude.

Merriman never became the first or any other Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa. Before the Anglo-Boer War he had to contend with the hostility of both Rhodes and Milner, and earned for himself the reputation of being the worst renegade Englishman in all South Africa. After the War he had to contend with the overpowering influence of Botha and Smuts. It was becoming abundantly clear that the British Government wanted Botha as the first Prime Minister, largely because they wanted to make reparation to the Boers for their defeat in a war of which the British people were growing more and more ashamed. In 1908 Merriman became Prime Minister of the Cape Colony and the next two years produced ample evidence of his outstanding ability. But it was the Transvaal, not the Cape Colony, that was becoming the dominant power in the country.

Merriman could well be called South Africa's leading liberal of the time. He reached this state of emancipation as so many other liberal white South Africans have done, by a process of painful evolution. Sixty years later a man like Beyers Naude was to reach it, but the consequences of emancipation in the sixties had become much heavier to bear. J.H. Hofmeyr never really reached the state of emancipation, but he also went through a period of painful evolution. In 1982 it is clear that unless a great many white South Africans experience these changes, the future will be tragic and violent. The times call, not only for a change of machinery, but also for a change of heart. Do human beings, except as individuals, ever experience a change of heart? By the end of this century, we ought to know the answer to that question.

Was there any other reason why Merriman never became our first Prime Minister? Did he have some character defect? If such a question seems too extreme, let us ask whether he had some defect of temperament. He was what one might call a noble man, upright, and devoted to the cause of justice, yet he could hardly be described as a warm man. His deepest affection he kept for his wife and his mother. Mrs Lewsen is a very scrupulous biographer, and has not gone in for speculation. But I would like to have had her speculations on this particular subject. I agree that excessive speculation is not proper in a biography, but I don't favour total abstinence either.

May I as reviewer point out an error. On P. 362 Mrs Lewsen quotes Merriman as giving certain figures to show the enormous gulf between the wages of white and black mine workers: 24,000 white miners earned £ 800,000 and 200,000 black miners earned £ 5,962,000, but in fact this means that all earned more or less the same. I think a zero has gone missing somewhere.

I have really only one criticism to make of this splendid book. Merriman died on August 1st 1926 at the age of eighty-five. General Hertzog and his National Party, aided by Labour, came to power in June 1924. Mrs Lewsen makes almost no mention of this historic event. Was Merriman past caring, or was he past making penetrating observations of the times? In any event we are not told of his own reaction to Hertzog's accession. I found this omission, if it was an omission, somewhat strange.

Mrs Lewsen has made me question the stature of one of my heroes. When I think of Louis Botha, I recall always the tribute paid by Smuts at Botha's graveside - "the greatest, cleanest, sweetest soul of all the land, of all my days". But Mrs Lewsen portrays him otherwise. According to her he was capable of being sulky, stubborn, bad-tempered, and he was very ambitious. She does not show him as the bluff and charming personality seen by Engelenburg. The truth is that no good biography of Botha has ever been written. I shall have to suspend judgement.

Students of South African history, if they have not already read this book, have a treat in store for them. □