

Blueprint for South Africa

JOYCE HARRIS

What a refreshing exercise it would be to draw up a blueprint for South Africa based on the yardstick of values which has always been the guideline for the Black Sash when deciding on policy and action. How good to have to think in terms only of what is right or just or decent without also having to consider what is expedient, what is in the interests of this or that political party, this or that ethnic group. Let us be presumptuous! Let us try!

The overriding problem in this country, that which influences all policy, all action, all decision-making, is race relations. From the inherent racism of the ruling party stems all the legislation, all the restrictions, all the bitterness which in turn blight the lives and influence the attitudes of ALL citizens and hamper progress and prosperity.

Yet in Black Sash terms it becomes so simple.

- * It is just that all men should enjoy equal opportunity in the land of their birth.
- * It is decent to treat all people simply as people and to behave towards others in the manner in which one would wish to be treated oneself.

These premises are unarguable in any society which considers itself to be civilised. Let us deal with each of them in turn and see where they lead us.

First of all — human dignity. Probably it is the master-servant relationship between White and Black — the historically inevitable outcome of the conquering of a relatively backward people by a more advanced people — which has influenced the attitudes of the majority of people in this country.

The Whites have come to regard themselves as superior while the Blacks have until very recently adopted an attitude of subservience and humility.

Yet conquest is nothing new. The difference is that in other lands the culture of the conquerors has seeped down to the conquered while the physical attributes of the conquered have penetrated the ranks of the conquerors creating eventually a homogeneous new society.

In South Africa this osmosis has been impeded, though certainly not entirely prevented, by the difference in skin colour between conquerors and conquered. This has perpetuated

the topdog and underdog syndrome and created a society which is neither just nor decent.

It is wrong to adopt an attitude of superiority, or even of paternalism towards another human being. It is wrong to confine him forever to the menial tasks of life. It is wrong to feel that the tasks he performs are inferior and not worthy of respect.

This lack of respect for the man and for the contribution he makes towards the welfare of society as a whole, are inextricably bound up. They are part and parcel of the whole lack of respect for the dignity of labour from which the White population of South Africa suffers.

So many jobs are considered to be beneath a White man's dignity, and if a job is beneath one's dignity, so is the man who performs it.

Yet every job performed is a worthwhile and necessary adjunct of the total social organism. Someone has to do it, and the better it is done the more advantageous it is to every member of society.

Let a man, therefore, take pride in what he does, and let him be granted the respect of his fellow-men for performing a necessary task well, no matter how menial.

This leads directly to the second premise that all men should enjoy equal opportunity in the land of their birth.

It is wrong that there should be job reservation, so that a man is prevented by law from realising his full potential. It is wrong that education should be separate and unequal, designed to keep the "underdog" forever under, and that the poorest sections of the community should have to pay for what is free and compulsory for the White section.

If education were free and compulsory for all the peoples of this land so that all could benefit to their full capacity; if all had the opportunity of acquiring the skills and know-

ledge which a modern economy demands, then the door to progress would be wide open and there would be a tremendous surge of productivity and prosperity.

If competition for jobs was free and unrestricted, if every man could move around at will and sell his labour in the best market; if there were respect for the dignity of all tasks so that there was no shame in the performance of menial ones, then every man would find his own level. He would do the job for which he is best suited and therefore make the maximum contribution to the general welfare while finding contentment for himself.

Such a seemingly Utopian state of affairs can obviously not be created overnight, if ever. There will always be social misfits and difficulties of organisation, distribution, the siting of industries, the availability of labour; shortage of housing and the thousand-and-one problems that beset the proper ordering of the social and economic complexities of a bustling state..

But an all-out effort could be made to solve them with justice, so the conflicting interests of the various groups into which our society has so purposely been split cease to conflict and begin to interact and co-operate in the interests of all.

The money that is presently expended on administering the whole policy of "divide and rule" with all the expensive bureaucracy that it involves could be diverted into the positive channels of education, of housing, of adequate transport.

Once men are treated with justice in the economic and educational spheres, it is not such a big step to treat them in all other spheres as one would wish to be treated oneself.

It is wrong to shunt people around like so many pawns on a chessboard. It is wrong to consign "superfluous appendages" to so-called Homelands where there are few employment opportunities, minimal facilities and stark poverty.

It is wrong to separate husbands from their wives throughout their working lives, denying them the right to live together as family units in the place where they are working. It is wrong that children should have to be able to prove their right to live with their parents, being sent away from them if they are unable to do so.

It is wrong to restrict the mobility of people in the land of their birth. It is wrong to treat people without respect and without justice, with scant regard for their feelings and scant sympathy for their suffering.

It is this kind of treatment that builds up resentment and nurtures bitterness, sowing the seeds for the inevitable disruption of the whole of South African society.

How pleasant it would be if the White man could face the Black man without guilt and without fear — fear of what the cause of his guilt will engender. How pleasant if men could simply be men to other men — and how good and right and just.

But this is not the end of it. No man will be satisfied without political rights which give him the opportunity to make his voice heard in the echelons of society where the laws are made that control his existence.

And it is right and just that he should enjoy this opportunity. Of course if all the above factors have been complied with then "one-man-one-vote" would hold no fears for anyone.

Majority rule would no longer mean Black majority rule of which the Whites are so frightened. It would mean majority rule of a political party which is a political party in the true sense of the term — a group of people sharing a common view about the science and art of government having regard to the state as a whole.

Skin colour would no longer matter. Only community of interest would count.

But until such a colour-blind state can be reached, here is a suggestion. Rather than have a qualified franchise, with all its complications and inequities, have a qualification for candidates, so that they would all be of such a high calibre that it would not matter in the least who had the vote.

Law-making is a highly complex and responsible job. The people who make the laws exercise far-reaching power. It would not be unreasonable to expect them to be qualified for their important position.

A South Africa ruled by Black Sash standards would be a just and decent society, without racial prejudice, without intolerance, without guilt, without fear. In it every man would be treated with respect, all would enjoy equal opportunities and the atmosphere would be one of mutual co-operation in the interests of the whole community. I can dream, can't I?