

THE CITIZEN AS ELECTOR

BY PROF. E. F. W. GUY VAN PITTIUS

[Professor E. F. W. Gey van Pittius, of the University of Pretoria, is the author of "Aktuele Politieke Vraagstukke," from which this passage is taken by courtesy of himself and the publisher, J. L. van Schaik, Limited, Pretoria.]

AS the Afrikaner must reject any arrangements which control the citizen from the cradle to the grave, it is obvious that the ordinary citizen must play an important rôle in public life. It has already been shown that, according to our beliefs, the individual has not only duties, but rights too.

The citizen enjoys these rights not for self-glorification but in order to realize the best in him and so make the greatest possible contribution to the enrichment of the community.

From the nature of the case, the life of every man has two aspects. The one has to do with him as individual, as a man, as a thinking being. It concerns his private life. It is in this that one man is different from another: in this exists his value as an individual. The kind of house that he wants to build, the food he chooses, the furniture of his home, his church, his games—all these things centre round his personality. Whereas, in his office, in the factory, at an agricultural congress, he is but "one of many," in his home life or in his circle of friends he acquires more individuality. And this is one of our greatest blessings, in spite of our machine age that tends to make a man more and more a cog in the machine or a number. This soul-killing uniformity which is such a characteristic of the twentieth century is to a great extent responsible for the emergence of such tendencies as Fascism and National Socialism. Where the man in the street performs the same monotonous work day after day under strict supervision, where he returns home each night to a suburb in which the houses are so alike that he must look at the number to make certain he is not going into the wrong one, where he must furnish his home with the monotonous furniture that comes from mass-production, where his wages are low, it can well be realized that he seeks an escape from his soul-destroying existence by putting on some uniform or other after work, attending parades in the open air, and even holding some rank or other in the activity. All these things are a kind of compensation. It is precisely one of the most important tasks of the democracies to ensure the enjoyment of the highest degrees of personal freedom and individuality, which make life so rich and colourful.

In such personal matters there ought to be the least possible control from the side of authority. In such matters the conventions should be limited to the absolute minimum required for the general good. For example, as far as the materials of a dwelling house are concerned, and its lighting, and so on,

certain standards must be complied with, for the experience of years has shown that they are absolutely necessary for reasons of health. For the same reasons, a person could, for example, be forbidden to keep a cow in his back yard in a large town. However, when someone begins to lay down rules for other members of his family, everything cannot be left to his arbitrary will. Thus a father, who does not realize the value of education for his child and would rather see him go to work young, can expect that the state will force him to send his child to school. Similarly, if I like to make so much noise at night that my neighbours cannot sleep, I have no complaint if I am forced into silence.

This concept can be expressed thus in general terms: In my private life I have a right to the maximum of freedom, provided that I do not harm anyone thereby and that I do not invade the same freedom enjoyed by others.

When we come to the second aspect—the political rights of the citizen—matters become more involved.

The basis of a democracy—in which the people rule—is that the citizen shall have adequate information available so that he may be able to judge how to rule. From this it follows obviously that the citizen must attain a certain level of education. Experience shows that education avails most if a person is educated in childhood. Therefore every child of a certain age must go to school and reach a certain standard or age before leaving.

That is the general principle—teachers, as professional men, must work out the petty detail. Such education must be there for all citizens, whether they can afford it or not.

If this policy is properly carried out, it is idle later to decide that a person must have certain educational qualifications for the franchise—it is the state's duty to see that all citizens have those qualifications otherwise it is not carrying out its own educational policy.

As far as the political rights of citizens are concerned, the aim must be so to make provision that the citizen can take a full part in the country's politics and make his greatest contribution.

THREADS (Continued)

MEMBERS of Durban and Pietermaritzburg had a happy and informative morning during July when they had the privilege of meeting Mrs. Ballinger, M.P. We all envied those who had had this opportunity of talking to one of South Africa's most famous daughters.

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AT last Natal feels it will have an opportunity to demonstrate. The Nationalist party is holding its congress in Durban this month: Good haunting!