

spurious Christian National education which will be different for each race, the reduction of the trade union movement to a mere appendage of the state, all go to prove the direction of events in this country. To be sure, Calvinism is not the cause of this unfortunate state of affairs. Calvinism is rather the ideology which, modified by the rulers to suit South African conditions, gives them that spiritual vigour and tranquility of conscience which disguises the basest of motives under the name of morality.

NATIVE, BANTU & AFRICAN

By R. K. COPE

DISCUSSION with African friends and a study of opinion among them long ago convinced me of the great importance attached to correct forms of politeness, the use of names and terms of address and of respect. This, of course, goes direct to the cultural background of the Africans where such customs as *hlonipha* in tribal life are elaborately developed and govern an intricate system of respect and reverence between related people. Strong traces of the old order are carried into urbanised life and an outsider will always be struck by the dignity or poise of our fellow African citizens, without perhaps being able to explain it.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that with people who have so acute a sense of correctness in speech an insult or a slight, even if it is not deliberately intended, is deeply and bitterly resented. There are many fine shades of conveying a rebuke or a snub in the African languages, but these are verbal weapons for use among equals and a man can give as good as he takes if he has the wit. When it comes to the use of insults, curses and terms of abuse between ruler and oppressed we have an altogether different situation. Here one finds an evil reflection of the swarming passions that beset our country, the anger and hatred and fear and uncertainty all round.

It is an old saying that politeness costs nothing. In fact a polite and correct bearing is the only way by which a man can truly express his civilisation and culture in his relations with others. With this thought in mind, I recently wrote to one of our national daily papers with a plea for ordinary courtesy towards the African people. The result was quite surprising and proved that I had touched on a point that is exercising people's minds.

The letter was prominently displayed and, from the response, was obviously widely read and studied. People wrote to me from distant places. Others whom I chanced to meet in the ordinary way of life made a point of mentioning the letter, thanking me and

urging me to carry on the good work. One of the African weekly papers reproduced the letter while the chief Nationalist organ, *Die Burger*, devoted its first leading article to a whining and snapping attempt at refuting the contentions made in it.

The main gist of the letter was to show how terms of insult or patronage come into being and especially to draw attention to the recent evolution of the word "Bantu." It has been noticeable that in only a few years "Bantu" has come to acquire a bad smell, an evil reputation. To Africans it recalls more and more the far-reaching plans of the Nationalists to push them back into an ignorant and perpetual serfdom. On the other hand the people themselves prefer to be called Africans, a term of dignity and pride and also of strength and promise in the future.

The paper to which I wrote is not given to hurting people's feelings wilfully. If it still uses the term "native" that is because it is behind the times or out of contact with current opinion. Maybe that accounts for the prominence given to my letter. It came as a new idea! Here are the main points I made:

"Words have their own life cycle, acquiring character, reputation, or odium. The abusive term is, like a baby, usually born in innocence; it may have a hectic youth, degenerates until it becomes foul, almost unmentionable. Then it dies.

"In English, such terms as Kafir, nigger and coolie are in their decrepitude, and their odour is unpleasant. We have no equivalent of "Hotnot," but one can think of other abusive terms applied to the Coloured peoples which are also on the way out. The word Native, once respectable, is also on the downgrade and has acquired the features of patronage and insult; to the ears of millions it has become objectionable.

"Next on the line of retreat (or progress?) is the term Bantu, which has a peculiar and significant complexion since it was sanctified by Dr. Verwoerd. In only a few years it has sprung to life as the badge of bondage, much like the yellow-star badge forced upon the Jews by the Nazis.

"The word itself is worth examining. Its justification in official eyes is the purist argument that it describes a people in their own term and therefore cannot possibly be objectionable. But there is actually no such word as Bantu. It is a Europeanized derivation from the root -Ntu: Singular, *umuNtu*; Plural, *abaNtu*. It does not mean dark people, or Africans, or aborigines, or any other such ethnic distinction, but simply: Sing., a person. Plu., people.

"If a Zulu or a Xhosa wishes to make a distinction he may say *abantu abantsundu*—dark people. To use Bantu as an adjective as in "Bantu Education Act" is unthinkable to African ears. Another blow to the purist argument is that Bantu does not even resemble, phonetically the term for "people" in the Sotho languages.

"Bantu" is thus an etymological bastard. But, more than that, it implies a back-to-the-wall stand by officials who refuse the common

courtesy of addressing others as they wish to be addressed. The Government departments cannot bring themselves to open a letter to a non-European with the otherwise meaninglessly courtesy phrase "Dear Sir" or "Waarde Heer" but start with "Greetings", which is both ridiculous and offensive.

"In Southern Rhodesia, I believe, officialdom has descended to the absurdity of "Bantu Kumalo" to avoid writing "Mr. Kumalo"

The walls of Jericho will not fall if the Africans are called Africans, and no battle will be lost by a word of courtesy and a gesture of goodwill."

Die Burger scented all kinds of dangers in this appeal and immediately turned it into a political question. Most political questions when once touched by the Nationalists become a mass of prejudices, contradictions and mere nonsense. This was no exception. The paper rightly pointed out that the word Bantu was first utilised for ethnical purposes and was intended to convey a general category of peoples linked by certain linguistic characteristics.

Every student knows of the heavy tomes by German, British, French and other authorities in which the word Bantu is employed as a convenient term with varying definitions. Bantu has also been accepted under European influence and of course there was no objection to it as long as it was free from unwanted associations.

But what Die Burger does not recognise or refuses to accept is that the Nationalists themselves have struck the death-blow at the term by the very act of adopting it. There is all the difference in the world between "Bantu" when used by the language expert Meinhof and "Bantoe" in the mouth of Dr. Verwoerd. The paper suggests that "certain whites" are responsible for killing terms like "Kafir" and "Native" and that the Africans are today "being taken by the nose" by liberalistic influences and taught to suspect that Bantu contains the mark of bondage.

In a series of childish arguments the contradictions tumble over one another, proving that the Nationalists are severely rattled to find that the Africans will not be branded like a lot of sheep as "Bantoe." It is completely nonsensical, says Die Burger, for the name of a whole continent to be applied to only one of its many peoples. But of course it is even more nonsensical, on this argument, for the words Afrikaner and Afrikaans to be applied to the smallest, newest and least secure group on the Continent. Yet nobody has ever objected to these words, least of all the Africans. The Afrikaners can call themselves what they like and it is no more than everyday sense to recognise their right.

It turns out that the Nationalists are like the manufacturers of some brand of kidney and bladder pills who feel their trade mark has been sneaked. How can one distinguish between "Afrikane and Afrikaners," wails Die Burger.

Another argument is that people who find a mark of inferiority in each new name applied to them are merely stamping themselves

as inferior. One might ask why Afrikaners object to being called Dutchmen. The reason is that Dutchmen was a term of patronage, inferiority and even contempt when used by the colonial English. In the same way Asians object to being called Asiatics because the latter word has picked up a derogatory meaning. The point is that all the names applied to the Africans in the past — Kafir, Native etc. — came from the outside. Now the people have adopted their own term and it is a sign of their rapidly growing political maturity. Afrika, amaAfrika — yes, it has a rather pleasant sound, there's no denying.

Finally, the Nationalist organ has the amazing perverseness to say that the Beggars of Holland turned a term of opprobrium into one of the most honoured names in history. In a way this is true. The Spanish oppressors, dismayed at the stubborn resistance of the Dutch liberation forces, slandered them as a ragged band of beggars. The Dutch wrote the name on their banners and, by driving out the oppressor, the Beggars of Holland returned the insult with interest. In the same way the Kaiser described the British army in Flanders as "contemptible," and for the rest of the war to the day of final victory the British delighted in the name, the Old Contemptibles.

Is it possible Die Burger has a suspicion that the Africans will emulate both the Beggars of Holland and the Old Contemptibles? One has no doubt they will and it is amusing to find a secret friend of African liberation writing leaders for Die Burger. There are some historical differences between the Duke of Alva and Dr. Verwoerd. The Spanish Duke did not introduce a "Beggars Education Act" to turn the Dutch into hewers of wood and drawers of water in perpetuity for Spain. He wanted the Dutch to become good Catholics rendering loyalty and tribute to Philip of Spain. The Dutch thought it better to fight for their own kind of freedom than to die in bondage to Spain. They wrote the word Beggars on their flag. Here the word is different but it is the choice of the people themselves. And what was right for the Beggars of Holland is surely right for the Africans of Afrika.
