

WHAT IS

APARTHEID?

by H. J. SIMONS

In this penetrating analysis — delivered recently as an address to the Studies Committee of the University of Cape Town — Dr. Simons has examined the various concepts of apartheid advanced by the exponents of that theory themselves.

THE word serves many purposes. It is used as a political slogan, a catch-word for voters. It purports to describe existing institutions and policies. It serves as a justification of policy. In addition, it describes an imaginary future society. A speaker who uses the term may reasonably be asked to explain his particular concept, and its relation to the other usages or meanings.

Ambiguity is also a quality of others words or phrases by which people have tried to express the nature of the relations between Africans and non-Africans, the actual content of the State's policy towards them, and the ultimate aims of that policy. The most familiar expressions are:

White supremacy (heerskappy), white domination (baasskap), the preservation of white civilisation, trusteeship, segregation, discrimination, differentiation, separate development, parallel development.

Much of the political history of the past half-century is wrapped up in these words. Each has undertones, acquired in the endless debate on our colour and class divisions. The shades of meaning that distinguish one from the other can be defined only by relating each to its appropriate historical setting.

They have, however, one element in common, and that is the denial, either as reality or ideal, of equality between the colour groups within a single social framework. Some expressions, such as trusteeship, differentiation, and parallel development, leave open the question whether inequality is to be a permanent condition, or whether it is to apply also to the relations between separated ethnic communities; but all assert or assume the supremacy of the white group within a common society.

Does Apartheid also assert inequality, as an ideal, in the existing society? Fortunately, the word begins with the letter A, and so finds a place in the published volumes of the great Afrikaanse Woordeboek. It is a long definition — probably the longest in the dictionary — and I shall quote only a part:

'n Staatkundige beleidsrigting in S.A., gegrond op die breë beginsels van

(a) differensiasie, ooreenkomstig verskille van ras en/of kleur en/of beskawingspeil, in teenstelling met ASSIMILASIE;

(b) die handhawing en bestendiging van die eiesoortigheid (identiteit) van die verskillende kleurgroepe wat die bevolking uitmaak en die aparte ontwikkeling van hierdie groepe volgens eie aard, tradisie en aanleg; in teenstelling met INTEGRASIE.

GEDEELTELIKE APARTHEID, apartheid slegs ten opsigte van sekere terreine, bv. op politieke, maatskaplike en kerklike gebied. ALGEHELE APARTHEID, die volledige, aparte ontwikkeling op al die verskillende terreine, bv. van die verskillende Bantogroepe.

Die regering pas 'n beleid van apartheid toe ten opsigte van blankes, Kleurlinge, Asiate en naturelle. Die oorweldigende meerderheid van die blanke bevolking begeer apartheid (Eiselen). Apartheid beteken eenvoudig dat elke mens sy eie plek moet hê (H. F. Verwoerd).

The definition is conspicuously silent as to the nature of the relations between the colour groups. They are to be separated; that is made clear. But are they to be separate and equal? The issue is raised, by implication, in Dr. Verwoerd's statement. For 'place' may mean a point in space, such as that occupied by a social unit in an autonomous region. Or, it may mean a status within a hierarchical order. Reserving this aspect for later consideration, I shall concentrate on the notion of separation in terms of geographical, as distinct from social, space.

The origin of the idea of physical separation must be looked for in contributions made by English-speaking South Africans, most of whom would be called 'Liberals' today. It was foreshadowed, though only crudely and partially, in the report of the S.A. Native Commission of 1903-5, which was given the task of working out the principles of a uniform policy in preparation for unification. The Commission urged a system of land reservation for Africans, for if they were scattered throughout the White population, and owned 'the land of the country equally with them', many administrative and social difficulties would be created, 'feelings of race prejudice and animosity' would be accentuated, and it would be 'far more difficult to preserve the absolutely necessary political and social distinctions' (para. 192).

These recommendations were put into effect by the Botha-Smuts ministry in the Native Land Act of 1913.

A theory of separate development was more systematically elaborated by Maurice Evans, a prominent Natalian, in his book **Black and White in South East Africa**, published in 1910. He rejected the idea of the 'absolute segregation of every black man on one side of a given line, and every white man on the other' (p. 275). Instead, he proposed three 'fundamental principles':

1. The white man must govern.
2. Parliament should delegate the 'administration of native affairs to a permanent council of experts, combining the functions of the Native Affairs Commission, which was set up under the Native Affairs Act of 1920, and the African Advisory Board of the Rhodesia-Nyasaland Federation.
3. The 'separation of the races as far as possible' so as 'to prevent race deterioration, to preserve race integrity, and to give to both opportunity to build up and develop their race life' (p. 310).

Segregation was put into operation in the towns by the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923. This was introduced by the Smuts government, and embodies a principle formulated by a Commission on Local Government in the Transvaal. Its Chairman was Stallard, later leader of the pro-British Dominion party. The Stallard Commission said that, "The Native should only be allowed to enter urban areas, which are essentially the white man's creation, when he is willing to enter and to minister to the needs of the white man, and should depart therefrom when he ceases so to minister."

General Hertzog, when he took office in 1924, raised the edifice of segregation, which had been laid by his predecessors to a higher level. In this work he was influenced by the views of Evans and another English-speaking liberal, Edgar Brookes, then a young professor in public administration in Pretoria and the author of **The History of Native Policy in South Africa**. Brookes, like Evans, renounced 'complete, immediate and compulsory segregation'. A 'certain type of politician' who advocated it was either a fool or a knave, and a great hindrance to progress, for he drew attention away from detailed and urgent problems to the contemplation of a Fool's Paradise. Differentiation, he said, was the way out between the Scylla of identity and the Charybdis of subordination (p. 344-497).

Segregation had become, by this time, the official designation of the State's policy. As Brookes's caustic reference to 'a certain type of politician' shows, the concept was being used by party speakers to describe 'total' separation, as well as 'differentiation' or outright discrimination. A still-born 'Republican Party' issued a draft constitution in 1932, which urged 'segregation of the Native, socially, political, industrially, and as far as possible, territorially'. It also asserted that the incorporation of the

High Commission Territories into the Union was essential for a 'final solution' (The Star, Sept. 2, 1932).

A more emphatic assertion of 'total' segregation appeared in the Labour Party's election manifesto of 1938. It proposed the 'complete segregation' of Africans from Europeans, territorially, socially and economically, by setting aside and providing a portion of the country in which the African population could 'develop along its own lines' with all necessary advice and assistance. (*Forward*, April 14, 1938).

The other parties of 'white supremacy' were more restrained. The Hertzog-Smuts formula, adopted by the United Party at its inaugural conference on Dec. 5, 1934, proclaimed 'as paramount the essentials of European civilisation', and the 'recognition of the Natives as a permanent portion of the population of S.A. under the Christian trusteeship of the European race', 'together with the definite avoidance of race intermixture'. (Native and Coloured People's Policy of the U.P.) This formula closely resembled the principle adopted by the National Party when it was founded in 1914: 'the supremacy (oorheersing) of European civilisation in a spirit of Christian trusteeship, with strict disapproval (wraeking) of every attempt at race intermixture'. The Party's election manifesto of 1938 elaborated its policy for 'the application of the principle of segregation' by undertaking to introduce legislation for:

1. separate (aparte) residential areas, trade unions and, where practicable, separate places of work;
1. reservation of jobs in defined spheres for white labour and/or a specified and equitable quota for whites and non-whites;
3. separate (aparte) representation in legislative bodies for the Cape Coloured voters;
4. extension of the Immorality Act of 1917 to all non-whites, the prohibition of mixed marriages, and a ban on the employment of whites by non-whites.

This is the programme that the present Government has been implementing since it took office in 1948, under the name of Apartheid. It did not envisage total separation, nor was this aim asserted by the Party's Union-wide congress in 1938, which it regards as one of the most important in its history. In his address to the Congress, Dr. Malan spoke of the determination to keep S.A. a 'white man's country', and outlined the threats to this ideal coming from population growth, the spread of education, communism, liberalism, foreign churches, imperialism, the idea of equality, and, behind that, the mighty and ever-growing power of international Jewry. The resolution adopted by Congress merely reiterated, however, the principle of White supremacy in the spirit of trusteeship, preservation of race purity, and the creation of a healthy relationship between white and non-white races. (*Die Groot Beslissing*, 1938, p. 5).

A direct outcome of the Congress was the presenting to Parliament of a petition signed by 230,619 White adults, and affirming the principle of white supremacy in the spirit of trusteeship, by means of legislation to, inter alia, prohibit mixed marriages, the 'mixing of blood' (bloedvermenging), and mixed residential areas (deurmekaarwonerij), and bring about economic as well as political segregation. (J. J. van Rooyen, *Die Nasionale Party*, p. 265).

What the petitioners demanded was, in effect, an extension of laws already on the statute book, such as the Native Land Act, Native (Urban Areas) Act, Immorality Act, Mines and Works Act, and Representation of Natives Act, to all colour groups.

The growth of racial intolerance was reviewed by a liberal philosopher, Alfred Hoernlé, in the Phelps-Stokes lectures, delivered before this University in 1939. The 'fundamental fact' in S.A., he said, was the domination of Whites over Blacks; the 'deepest aim' of the State's policy was to maintain this domination (p. 1). Trusteeship might be permanent, as an aspect of permanent domination. Or it might aim at common citizenship and total assimilation. This was compatible with 19th century liberalism, but 'must be ruled out as impracticable in the present state of racial feeling.' Thirdly, trusteeship might prepare the wards for independence in their own self-governing communities (p. 99). Considering all the possibilities, he felt that 'Total Separation should be the liberal's choice', because it was the choice most acceptable to 'those sections of White South Africa which are anxious to justify White domination by genuine concern for the welfare of the dominated non-White groups' (p. 181). As for the Africans, 'it should be clear that there is no escape from White domination by way of Parallelism or Assimilation, but only by way of Total Separation' (p. 183, *S.A. Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit*.)

This was not a new thought, but if anyone has a claim to the invention of Apartheid, it is Hoernlé, and this for two reasons. Firstly, he deliberately chose 'separation' (which in Afrikaans is apartheid) as a substitute for 'segregation',

'because "Segregation" stands for a policy offensive to all non-Europeans in S.A., viz., for a policy of exclusion, forced upon them by the White group, from the status and privileges which the White group insists upon reserving for itself. This is segregation as an instrument of domination; segregation which retains the segregated in the same social and political structure with the dominant White group, but subjects them to the denial of important rights and keeps them at a social distance implying inferiority.

'By "Separation", on the other hand, is meant literally a sundering or dissociation so complete as to destroy the very possibility of effective domination' (p. 168).

Secondly, Hoernlé pointed out the way to be followed by those who, while adhering to the doctrine of White supremacy, recognised the injustice and impermanence of White domination.

'And that section of White public opinion which is thinking along the lines of "territorial segregation", is, as we have seen, moving in the same direction and would, if it pursued its line of thought to its logical end, arrive at a policy of Total Separation as the one way of freeing Whites and Blacks from an entanglement with each other which is bad for both, but worse for the non-Whites. Separate areas of liberty for separate racial groups seem the only alternative to domination in a racial-caste society' (p. 183).

This conclusion was vitiated, however, and, therefore, also the whole chain of reasoning that led to it, by the further assertion that Total Separation was a chimera.

'As hard-headed realists, we must confess to ourselves that Total Separation is as unrealisable in practice as are its alternatives'. 'No new order of race relations is possible in S.A., except on the initiative and with the consent of the White group; and the White group as a whole cannot be conceived as agreeing of its own motion to the sacrifices of power, prestige, and, not least, of economic advantage and convenience, which would be involved in Total Separation' (p. 183).

The assertion that significant changes cannot be made 'except on the initiative and with the consent of the White group' will be more widely disputed today than it was 20 years ago. If the premise is accepted, however, what do we have? The reality of white domination, which is unacceptable; and two alternatives, which are impracticable: Equality within a single socio-political order, or Total Separation.

The situation is worse than a dilemma; it is a nightmare. On this plane of reasoning, the claim to Equality is not less valid than the demand for Total Apartheid. Indeed, if the common society is to be permanent, *Equality, however unrealisable, is the only goal for the liberal and socialist*, the two champions of equality in the modern state. Hoernlé's conclusion should have led him to retrace the argument, and end with a plea for a crusade for equality. Men do not campaign for the unattainable, however, and the adoption of equality as the only satisfactory solution would have ended in an assertion that it was practicable as well as desirable.

The upholder of white supremacy could not and would not accept this conclusion. The only alternative for him was to embrace the other, equally impracticable, objective of Total Separation. This is what actually happened. The racist took over the concept of Separation from the liberal, translated it into Afrikaans as Apartheid, and turned it into a slogan of action.

(The second part of this article will appear in our next issue.)