

AFRIKANERS AND OTHERS

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It is 250 years since a White man at the Cape first called himself an Afrikaner. Significantly, he was saying to a magistrate that "you can't do this to me—I am an Afrikaner". And he and his friends tried to get their own back on the magistrate at Stellenbosch who had dared to punish a White man for mere drunken disorderliness.

In the two and a half centuries that have passed since that incident occurred, the character of the Afrikaner people has remained something of a mystery not only to the outside world but even to their fellow-countrymen in South Africa. The very name of "Afrikaner" was hardly ever applied to them in the world Press until their first political victory in the general election of 1948. Before that they had simply been "the Boers" who had fought gallantly in that old, unhappy war with Britain, and who remained somehow doggedly un-English in spite of all temptations to accept quietly the process of being anglicized.

The ignorance of the English-speaking world about the Afrikaners is easy to understand. There is not a single book in the English language devoted to a description, let alone an analysis, of this unknown nationality. Nor could such a book be well done except by someone who knew Afrikaans and had achieved that degree of sympathy with Afrikaners so much harder to attain in these days than the degree of criticism that should accompany it.

Books about Afrikaners will assuredly be written in the coming years for English readers. The important position held by Afrikaners in the continent of Africa makes it certain that the world will want to know much more about them. Apart from a million Frenchmen in Algeria, the Afrikaners are the only White-skinned community in the continent to-day who are likely to be still recognizable as a distinctive White community in the year 2000.

The political victory of the Afrikaner Nationalists in 1948 was followed by an even fuller triumph in 1953; and no realist doubts that it will be further entrenched by the general election due in 1958. Political success has, however, tended to obscure the economic and social progress of this people, a fact less visible but no less significant. But before I pass to this aspect of their life, let me dwell for a short space on the extent of their political success.

It was not won quickly. The story goes back to the middle of the South African War. Even at that time the British themselves recognized (although the recognition was not openly announced) the necessity to come to terms with the Boers when victory was won. This recognition began when Britain abandoned the belief that a less repressive Native policy could be imposed on the Boers after the war. In the peace treaty of 1902 the British promised to postpone a decision on the vital matter of the franchise until after self-government had been conceded to the Transvaal. But before that happened the British went even farther to meet the Boers' known attitude on the subject by themselves proposing in 1905 that the franchise be restricted to white men. Then in spite of warnings from W. P. Schreiner and others, the British allowed Union to come without any attempt to ensure the extension of the Native franchise beyond the Cape Province. It is commonly believed that such an attempt would have wrecked the prospect of Union. But as Keir Hardie, the Labour leader at Westminster, said at the time, "it is ridiculous to say that the great (British) trading and commercial interests whom the Act of Union will benefit—the customs and railway interests and the whole of the property interests—are going to throw away the benefits they anticipate because the House of Commons insists that the Union Parliament shall remain open to Africans, as the Cape Parliament was open".

The British surrendered one other position that was to hasten the ultimate political triumph of their enemy, the Boers. By an intrigue (the full details of which are still buried in unpublished papers), the British Government in 1910 deprived John X. Merri-man, the most experienced and accomplished of the available political leaders, of the office to which he was entitled, namely, that of the Union's first Prime Minister. Instead, their influence hoisted the pliable Louis Botha to that office. Botha was a modest man and (to apply Churchill's memorable phrase about Attlee) he had a great deal to be modest about. But he did have the incomparable merit of being an Afrikaner. So the political convention was at once established that the Prime Minister of the Union must be an Afrikaner. From that day to this no one has seriously challenged this convention and now it is observed by the United Party as solemnly as by the Nationalists, to whom of course it presents no problem of leadership.

Before 1948 every Cabinet consisted of English speaking members as well as Afrikaners. Since that date the Cabinet has consisted entirely of Afrikaners. To-day over 80 per cent of the members

of Parliament are Afrikaners. So is the Governor-General and, almost without exception, so are the permanent heads of all the departments of State. Indeed, not only are all the key positions in the civil service held by Afrikaners but most of the minor positions are staffed by them too. The Army and the Police Force are also very largely manned by Afrikaners, who certainly predominate in all ranks. Since no informed person believes that the Nationalists will be ousted from political power in the foreseeable future, this whole situation is what I mean by the political triumph of the Afrikaners.

It is a victory that took just about half a century to win. It was, as I have suggested, actually facilitated by the British in spite of their apparent opposition to every step in its steady accomplishment. The reason why the British can be said to have facilitated it is not hard to understand. The British interest in South Africa has always centred mainly in economic life. After all, that is where the inner substance of empire lies when all the external trimmings have fallen away. As long as the British are assured that their economic interests are in no danger they will be extremely reluctant to quarrel, to the point of open conflict, with any country. That is why they could so generously forgive the Boers for the war that wronged the Republics so grievously.

By the irony of history it was the South African War that led, step by step, to the domination of the Union's politics by the aggrieved Afrikaners. Ten years after the end of the war, Hertzog formed the Nationalist Party; but another forty years were to pass before it came to exercise unchallenged political power. For the party's growth was retarded by the two world wars, an embarrassing intrusion of external events on a domestic scene otherwise isolated from an unsympathetic world.

If anyone wants to inquire in more detail how the Afrikaners accomplished their political success, he will not have far to look. Dr. D. F. Malan left the pulpit in 1915 to become the first editor of the new daily newspaper in Cape Town, *Die Burger*. Dr. H. F. Verwoerd left a chair at Stellenbosch University in 1937 to become the first editor of the new daily newspaper in Johannesburg, *Die Transvaler*. A chain of other newspapers and magazines was forged around the country. With their aid several publishing firms grew up. To-day few books or even articles can ever reach a sizeable number of Afrikaner readers without the approval of the Nationalist leaders, who control the production of the printed word in their language.

To make assurance doubly sure, the Nationalists and their powerful ally, the Dutch Reformed Church, captured the minds of Afrikaner youth. They did this by winning, some twenty years ago, official recognition for a policy that insists on the single-medium Afrikaans school as the normal type of institution for all children whose home language is not English. In these schools few teachers survive, and none are promoted, who dare to challenge the orthodox outlook bred in combination by the Dutch Reformed Church and the Nationalist Party. In these schools children are, in effect, taught a version of South African life, and especially of history, that makes the non-Europeans their first enemy and the British their second enemy. No wonder that by the age of eighteen (if not earlier) the younger generation is wedded to a life-long loyalty to only such Afrikaner ideals as the Church and the State choose to honour. The surprising thing is not that this happens to the vast majority of Afrikaner children; the surprising thing is that even a small proportion ever escape this fate.

I mention the fact that some few have escaped because I shall inevitably be reminded that Afrikaner and Nationalist are not synonymous terms. That is true. There are still, especially among the older generation, Afrikaners who worship the names of Botha and Smuts; who recognize that all Englishmen are not (and never were, even in 1899) imperialists; and who may, at least in their hearts and consciences, question the authority of their Church on various subjects. Yet it would be an illusion to suppose that this type of Afrikaner counts for anything in politics to-day. Their number is dwindling steadily and they are destined virtually to disappear. However hard the United Party pretends to be an alternative political home for Afrikaners, the electoral figures—coupled with the birth rate, the death rate, and the lack of immigrants—tell their own inexorable tale. In any case, it is well to remember that even if the Nationalist Party split down the centre to-morrow—an improbable event—no mere realignment of existing political forces, dividing the unity of the Afrikaners, is likely to produce new national policies fundamentally different from those prevailing now.

Unhappily for the Afrikaners, however, politics only constitutes a half (or less than a half) of public affairs. The other half goes by the name of economics.

A glance at the economic aspects of South African life helps to explain why the Afrikaners cannot relax their exertions and celebrate their political victory. They know perfectly well that

political success normally rests on economic foundations. They knew this from the beginning of their Nationalist movement. They were not content to run newspapers and rely on the force of political argument, important as this undoubtedly was. From its early days the Nationalist Party was not simply an alternative political party; it was a broader nationalist movement of a kind whose pattern of growth is familiar to students of nationalism from a score of examples provided by the recent history of other countries in America, in Asia and in Africa, as well as in Europe in the nineteenth century. Any nationalist movement, if it is to succeed in its aims, must find expression in economic institutions complementary to its political forms. The Afrikaner Nationalists have built up such institutions. There are insurance companies, banks, building societies, nursing homes, undertakers, and a host of other large financial and commercial enterprises that have prospered greatly in the last twenty years. Their growth has been deliberately supported by special organizations with one eye on the main chance of commercial profit and the other eye on the indirect political value of such enterprises. This economic progress has, of course, been accelerated more recently by the fact that Afrikaners can now confidently turn to the State for practical sympathy and encouragement. Afrikaners had indeed to secure such support, in a variety of ways, before they could effectively cease being only "boers", as they were a century ago.

The Afrikaner middle class took a long time to emerge because it was slow to accumulate the capital necessary for further growth. And even now its economic growth is retarded by the fact that it must compete with British capital (whether from abroad or at home) holding the lion's share in several major fields of operation.

On this subject figures are difficult to come by and they come mainly (and significantly) from unofficial Afrikaner sources. According to J. L. Sadie, professor of economics at Stellenbosch University (quoted by the State Information Office in *South African Affairs*, January 1955), the Afrikaner share of the national income is one-quarter of the total (which was about £1,500 million in 1954). Apparently, farming is still the main source of wealth for Afrikaners. In the field of manufacturing, they own 3,000 of the smaller factories; but in mining their share is only about $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. Professor Sadie estimates their share of "control" of wholesale trade to be "only 6 per cent of the total annual turnover of £32,000,000". These few figures confirm what is known from general observation. Afrikaners predominate in agriculture, in all

the public services, and no doubt in the lower White ranks of clerical and administrative employment generally. But in all the most profitable fields (except farming) they play a relatively minor (though increasing) part. These include mining, insurance, banking and finance; and the professions such as law, medicine and the rest. Until a proper economic survey can be undertaken, a more precise analysis can hardly be made in a reliable fashion.

Here, then, is the clue to an understanding of South African life at the present time: political power rests entirely in Afrikaner hands while economic power remains largely in English hands. The English in the Union, influenced by British capital and its outlook, are not deeply dissatisfied with this division. Indeed, the present English adjustment to a division on these lines continues a process that, as I have indicated, began in the minds of the mine-owners, and was soon legible in their policies, just after the conclusion of the South African War. Even at that early date it was realized that if British interests were to continue to enjoy the fruits of their economic enterprise and investment, they would be wise to avoid further conflict with Afrikaners in the political sphere. Formal opposition, in the parliamentary sense, has of course continued down to the present day. But it has grown more formal and less vigorous and purposeful as the sheer weight of Afrikaner numbers in the White population has put the outcome of political contests beyond all doubt. This division between economic and political power is a strange one, probably without parallel in another country. It is largely responsible for the continued tension between the two White races; and this tension is one factor that prevents the ruling White race from enjoying the fulfilment of its avowed political aims.

Finally, another factor, looming ever larger in the background, should be mentioned. It is the part necessarily played by the ubiquitous non-Europeans in the economic life of the divided country. In their attitude to non-European the Afrikaners can, broadly speaking, count on the support of their English fellow-countrymen on all fundamental issues. Nonetheless, the dependence of South African society on the labour of the non-White keeps the ruling Afrikaners uneasily aware of the weakness of their own position. They have begun to realize that they now have everything under control—except the aims and aspirations of 10,000,000 people who, while looking on Afrikaner nationalism as the root of all evil, are developing a rival nationalism of their own.