

SEX AND SEDITION

NOTHING arouses such ferocious race passions in Africa as the subject of miscegenation. The idea that Black and White can live in intimacy together brings clawing into the open terrors and revulsions so fierce that all rational discussion on race becomes immediately impossible. Even the more educated and thoughtful of the Whites join in the lusty braying against mixed marriages, and nearly all are satisfied that physical relations between Black and White outside of marriage should be prohibited by law. The whole question of sex would seem to dominate the racial thinking of White Africa. It is a tin tied to the tail of all civilized progress, and any leap forward in political thinking sets up a clatter among the White communities that is stilled only by a bout of further legislative oppression. To be a successful politician one has but to learn off by heart the nauseating patter about blood mixing and the coffee-coloured child and one can persuade a White electorate to purchase anything. All those who peddle the doctrines of White supremacy and the perpetuation of their own privileges are consequently well-schooled in this technique of salesmanship, and in its various vicious forms the question—"Would you like your daughter to marry a Kaffir?"—is produced by them as the ultimate rejoinder to those who deplore the savageries and final insecurities of the colour bar.

Sex in civilized society is the concern of the individual, not of the state. It ceases to be so only when it ceases to be sane and the form it takes involves trespassing upon the liberty of other people. The community has a duty and a right to protect its citizens against rape and the corruption of their children. It has no duty and no right so to handcuff the freedom of its members as to hold them back from entering into voluntary physical relations with one another. Seizure by the state of this, the capital of individual existence, is an assault far worse than any arbitrary imprisonment of the body. For it strikes deeper, at a permanent arrest of the personality, a sort of chaining-up for life of the soul.

In a race-frenzied society however, civilized standards are invariably set squarely on their heads. The marriage of one's daughter to a Kaffir is not at all one's daughter's own concern, it is the business of the whole community. Every individual

White woman's choice becomes the concern of government and law, the traffic of the ballot-box. The whole of society must be organized so as to make such a marriage impossible. And this for a very potent reason. Such a marriage must be made impossible so as to organize society in a particular way. For the essence of sex prejudice is that it is the result of other forms of discrimination and not their cause.

The South African Government is nowhere so just as in its claim to being logical. The morally demented possess a reasoning of their own, and in the irrational context of the racialist state, sex legislation is the inevitable logic of dominion. Though it appears pathological to the sane, to the pathological it constitutes the fundamental sanity, the hinge upon which turns the whole creaking insanity of the state. In the vicious unreason of a colour bar society, control cannot be limited to the kitchen of the personality. And nothing illustrates this with more frightening clarity than the history of the Union of South Africa.

From the first shaft sunk by the Dutch East India Company, the White governors of South Africa have dug their way deep into the lives of their subject peoples. Union of the four provinces only added greater efficiency to their traditional operations. It was not to be expected that rulers who considered it necessary for their own enrichment to herd millions of Black workers into mining compounds and farm prisons would possess some inner reluctance to ordering the most intimate concerns of so many people. They realized early that a state founded upon the pallor of its governors could not afford to allow its foremen to mix too freely with its labourers once the whistle blew. No relationship between human beings so levels its participants as a sexual one, and even in their sleep White South Africans have a duty to their complexions.

Unhappily for the hawkers of the doctrines of White supremacy however, White South Africans showed from the very beginning an astonishing lack of repugnance to race adulteration. Though they insisted with increasing shrillness that the different races should develop along separate lines, they gave little encouragement to their opinions by their activity. The idea of miscegenation has always appeared less inviting than the practice. And so the Government had to re-enforce natural impulse with legislation, and the South African Statute Book has been continually invoked to compel the rulers of the country to a proper

realization of their own responsibilities. In 1927 an Immorality Act was passed making "illicit carnal intercourse" between Africans and Whites punishable by five years imprisonment. This, however, left unblocked the broadest thoroughfare of racial mixing—that between the Whites and the more than one million Coloured people. And so the Nationalist Government, soon after seizing power, amended the Act in 1950 to make its provisions apply to contact between all non-Whites and Whites. Since many South African Whites though, are distressingly dark and many Coloureds bewilderingly light-skinned, Whites were allowed by law a certain discretion and permitted their immorality if possessed at the time of reasonable cause to believe that their partners also were White. Never let it be said that the law in South Africa is unnecessarily harsh.

Some harshness, however, is naturally necessary. And lest men and women escape the purposes of "immorality" legislation by actually marrying, the Mixed Marriages Act was passed in 1949 to prohibit all marriages between non-Whites and Whites. That the South African Government should have made it its prerogative to decide upon who should marry whom, is an interference with the rights of its citizens so grossly impertinent that one is left wondering how even an arrogant and politically debauched White electorate could have permitted it. The Churches, of course, have ceaselessly stated their hostility to the measure, but since the pious governors of the Union are adept at reaching their own singular conclusions about what the Bible really means when it says something quite different, this has had no effect at all, and the Act is still on the Statute Book.

The result of the various sex laws might have been anticipated by their framers had less passion and more intelligence gone into their consideration. There is a booming market in prosecutions for statutory sex offences, and the publicity given to them in Parliament and the Press serves only, it would seem, to increase their number. Every year the number of Whites imprisoned for breaking the Immorality Act bounds upwards, and the proportion of the offenders who are policemen would suggest that the guardians of the law in South Africa are no more sensitive to the ideological importance of its provisions than those whose sensitivities they are employed to enforce. Even the excuse that many think they can get away with breaking the law cannot seriously be offered. The public is becoming increasingly aware of the extent of the energy devoted by the

police force to discovering statutory sex offences. Indeed it would seem that whole areas of urban South Africa go continually unpatrolled while policemen are busy shining torches into motor cars and staring through the windows of private houses. One wonders whether the crime rate in Alexandra Township or Orlando would be nearly so high if there was not the Immorality Act to exhaust the attention of the South African police.

The Government, of course, has only one reply to the mounting statistics—an increase in the maximum penalty for statutory sex offences. Again this year the Immorality Act has been amended, this time providing for prison sentences of up to seven years. It is to be doubted that anyone willing to risk going to gaol for five years will be deterred by the possibility of having to go for seven. But how else is respect for such laws to be generated? One day perhaps, in a last frantic effort to protect the purity of their blood, the governors of South Africa will make intimacy between White and non-White a capital offence. It would be strongly advised, however, not to try. The effects might be disastrous for the perpetuation of White rule.

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In May of this year the Parliament of Southern Rhodesia set about discussing amendments to an old Immorality Act, passed in the muscle-bound Colonial days of 1903. Those who had succumbed to the equivocal caresses of “partnership” might reasonably have expected that the Act would have been repealed. Others more closely acquainted with the racial attitudes of European settlers in Africa anticipated nothing so drastic, but assumed that the governors of Southern Rhodesia would have taken sufficient note of the frenzied failures of their neighbours not to attempt to copy them. Had the major portion of the legislature expressed merely the desire to clean the Statute Book one day of its discriminatory sex law and meanwhile to let it gather dust until the White electorate had grown civilized enough to countenance the cleaning, some little confidence in the future of Federation might have remained.

It is an enormous pity that the Hansard Report of the debate will have so limited a circulation. For it provides a patently authoritative account of how the dominant White community in Southern Rhodesia to-day thinks of itself and of the vast voiceless numbers that it governs. A certain Mr. Buchan introduced the Bill to extend the provisions of the Immorality

and Indecency Suppression Act so as “to prohibit illicit sexual intercourse between a European male and an African female.” In its original form, the Act only applied to extra-marital relations between White females and Black males, and this lop-sidedness had to be remedied at once if, in the mover’s words, “we are not to recommence another phase in the deplorable cycle of miscegenation and injustice which the lack of appropriate legislation permits.” Mr. Buchan’s own attitude to the subject was made significantly clear. “One has only to look back to Roman times, as recently as that, to appreciate the consequences of the inherent dangers of the introduction of new blood strains of slaves from the conquered territory. There is not one single thing of which I am aware that can condone in any shape or form the evils of miscegenation, and while strong, lusty and victorious men are not likely to be subject to what one might term biological inhibitions, it remains to those who follow on to endeavour to stabilize the position as soon as possible.” Miscegenation was becoming a menace, “due to the increased flow of immigration from the four corners of the world, where in many cases a colour bar is unknown, it is non-existent, and where biological inhibitions are of quite a negligible quantity.” Many of the new immigrants would ultimately leave the country, while remaining behind would be “a string of unfortunate and unwanted progeny of mixed race and doubtful background, whom we shall have to support and then, in the natural course of events, reproduce more of their kind.”

The supporters of the motion who rose to speak uncovered various reasons why it was essential to extend the provisions of the Act. Dr. Alexander, the seconder, was disturbed by the “inequity of the present position; that a White woman should be punished so severely for a moral lapse with an African where the European male can indulge in sex relations with a Native woman with impunity is quite unjust.” If the law were changed, “the prestige of the Europeans would be greatly enhanced (and) this would go a very long way to bringing about better race relations.” Mr. Aitken-Cade maintained: “This does not create a new crime. This merely creates a penalty for an existing crime.” And Mr. Reedman quoted approvingly from the *South African Observer*, an eccentric South African monthly of Nordic pretensions, some extraordinary pseudo-medical mumbo-jumbo to the general effect that the children of inter-racial relationships are always ugly and occasionally insane. “. . . When, therefore, these parents are disparate, the confusion and conflict in their offspring’s organism may and too often do cause obscure and sometimes serious symptoms of faulty function-

ing and disease." That this of all speeches should have ended in applause is indication enough of the mood of the Southern Rhodesian Parliament to-day.

It is to the credit of a few members that they should have withstood public pressure and maintained some semblance of civilized discernment, though in the process protecting their reputations with assaults on miscegenation almost as violent as those in support of the motion. In answer to those who maintained that the Act as it stood was unjust because it penalized only European females and not males, Mr. Abrahamson moved that the whole Act be repealed. "*If we want to adopt the policy of the Union of South Africa,*" he declared, "*then we just do not adopt this policy in one respect only. The natural adoption of such a policy is to adopt the whole system eventually.*" Mr. Wightwick, his seconder, then made a point that only so much passionate prejudice could have blunted in the first place. "*We are trying to control the relations between human beings, and I think that is wrong.*"

One man in particular deserves the regard of all those to whom the decision of the Southern Rhodesian legislature is morally and politically repellent. It needed singular courage for the Prime Minister to speak out as vigorously as he did against a proposal which had aroused so much electoral hysteria and which claimed the support of the majority of his party and Cabinet. The arguments he launched against the motion could have been met with such obstinate disapproval only in the race-distracted societies of Southern Africa to-day.

“ . . . Mr. Speaker, this is frankly a racial measure and not a measure which is concerned with morality . . . (Dr. Alexander) almost went as far as to say that there should be a Bill to make all sexual relations outside of marriage illegal. That, at least, is being honest and going the whole way. . . . As far as assault of any kind is concerned, these matters are covered by the common law and covered fully. . . . When you start legislating for moral matters and particularly for racial matters, I am sure you just have to keep on legislating. You will forever be finding holes in the legislation you have and you are committed for all time to patching up the legislation. . . . Much has been said about the offspring of Europeans and Africans, and it is true that many of them are being brought up in surroundings which do us no credit, but if there is any suggestion that these people are a lower breed or less capable, then I would refute that completely. . . . I have spoken about this matter to Africans including a number of leading Africans

in this country. So far I have not met one of them who demanded that we pass the amendment, but they want the law that is on the Statute Book repealed, and I think there are many reasons why it should be repealed. . . ."

The House divided and, by 16 votes to 8, set itself to follow in hot pursuit of the rulers of the Union of South Africa.

There is nothing more certain in Africa to-day than that Southern Rhodesia will find it increasingly difficult to work its new law and increasingly necessary to make it work. Like South Africa, it is committed to the success of its sex legislation, for the legislation must succeed if the state in its present form is to survive. In a society dominated by a racial minority, any racial mixing presents the ultimate sedition. And the state must arm itself against it as against a moral fifth column threatening its whole nature. Yet sex legislation of a completely racial kind can never succeed. And its failure corrupts from within the very structure of the state that it exists to protect. In its career the whole hopeless, helpless insanity of White domination is symbolized, the self-accelerating speed of its decline, the inevitability of its essential collapse.

Principles are never tragic, only people. And it is this aspect of the decision of the Southern Rhodesian Parliament that provides an emotion more powerful than mere political hostility or moral disgust. There is nothing of tragedy in the suicide of White supremacy. But there is much of it in the inevitable agony that the Whites of Southern Africa are planting for themselves in the fury of their prejudice. The road of the Immorality Act ends only over the edge among the rocks at the bottom. It is cause enough surely for the weeping of a world that yet another people should now have chosen to rush so blindly along it.

Mr. Victor Gollancz; Mr. Jo Grimond M.P., Leader of the British Liberal Party; Mr. John Gunther; the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.; Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt; and the Rt. Rev. John Leonard Wilson, Bishop of Birmingham, have joined the Sponsorship Committee of 'Africa South'.