

metaphysical speculations that he attributes to his narrator, the trekboer and hunter, Jacobus Coetzee. Certainly he goes beyond what would traditionally be regarded as the limitations of the character he has created, but then Mr Coetzee is not a traditional novelist. He is a highly conscious artist, interested in the relation between the author and the creatures of his own creation. Many novelists have tried to eliminate the presence of the omniscient author in their works. Mr Coetzee openly acknowledges and deliberately exploits that presence. In *The Vietnam Project* he presents himself as one of the characters, the shadowy director of operations. In *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee* he is not ostensibly present, but I cannot help feeling that there is a degree of identification between Coetzee the explorer and Coetzee the writer. This could be a way of saying that the writer has failed to create an autonomous character, but I think the 'failure' is deliberate and that it forms part of the overall concern in the novel

with the nature of reality and consciousness. Jacobus Coetzee himself suggests something of this in his final words:

you will find that whether I am alive or dead, whether I ever lived or never was born, has never been of real concern to me. I have other things to think about.

Although Mr Coetzee has shown that he has the power to describe events with minute realism, the narrow limits of 'realistic' characterization are not his concern. He endows Jacobus Coetzee with a richer and more modern consciousness than historical realism would allow. But by doing so he gives more universality to his story, makes him our contemporary and makes it more difficult for us to escape the similarities between his situation and ours.□

SOUTH AFRICA IN CANADIAN EYES

by ARTHUR KEPPEL—JONES

In trying to describe Canadian attitudes to South Africa I am compelled to make observations at three levels. There are the attitudes of the government, of what may be called "interest groups", and of the general public.

The government's attitudes — those of previous governments as well as of the present one — are explicit and easy to describe. They do not occupy a large part of the Ministers' attention. The 1970 white paper on foreign policy devoted a little more than two pages, out of a total of 185, to this subject. The statement amounted to this: on one hand the government deplored the South African system of racial supremacy and oppression; on the other, Canadian business has many dealings with the country, and it was not Canada's policy to stop trading with countries of whose regimes she disapproved. The list of such countries was too long.

This fence-setting did not appeal to the other Commonwealth governments which met in Ottawa in August, 1973. They proclaimed the legitimacy of the liberation movements in white-ruled Africa, and Canada joined them in re-

cognizing that legitimacy. The recognition was followed, early in 1974, by an undertaking to give financial support to the liberation movements. The support was to be for humanitarian activities only — educational, medical and the like—and to be channeled through international agencies such as Oxfam and the World Council of Churches. Thus Canada would have no direct dealings with the "freedom fighters".

To some people the policy appears unheroic and even shameful, but it is easily explained. Canada has acquired, both in the Commonwealth and in the United Nations, the reputation of a white nation that can be trusted by the black nations. The role cast for her is that of "a bridge across the chasm of colour" (Julius Nyerere's words). To play this part she has to be trusted by white nations also. Hence the fence-sitting. There is also something more positive: aid to underdeveloped countries. In the ratio of this aid to gross national product Canada stands seventh among the donor countries — a typical Canadian position, neither high nor low.

The white paper of 1970 produced a sharp reaction from certain citizens who wanted a strong line against "white racism"; they advocated this in a "Black Paper" of their own. They represent a body of opinion (I have called it an "interest group" but do not mean "interest" in a material sense) which is dedicated and vocal and therefore may have some influence. The group includes people who have lived and worked in black Africa, political exiles from South Africa, and perhaps some idealists with no African connections. Their number is infinitesimal, but they are articulate, express themselves in articles, pamphlets, speeches and letters to the press, and they lobby in Ottawa.

On the opposite side another group can be seen, still smaller less organized and rather less articulate. These are the defenders of South Africa and Rhodesia in the press. Some have lived in those countries or visited them. Others are in the same camp for more general reasons that might be called "right-wing principles": their primary concern is likely to be the defence of capitalism and free enterprise, but they go on to support anything that is attacked by the enemy on the left. This is more or less the position of the journal **Canada Month**.

Neither of these little committed groups is peculiarly Canadian. Similar groups can probably be found in any country where there are a few people with African backgrounds and experience. What matters is their influence on the government and on public opinion. Whatever this influence may be, they share it with, and to some extent exert it through, the press.

To get a cross-section of public opinion, I asked my students to do some sample questioning in their home towns during the Christmas holidays. From their reports, eked out by my own observations, I conclude that 99 percent of Canadians know nothing about South Africa and have no opinion on its policies. (How would South African knowledge of Canada compare with this?) Most of the remaining one percent have a vague knowledge and express uncertain opinions: the blacks are oppressed down there, **apartheid** is a bad system, it is good that some black athletes are now allowed to compete with whites — or, from a different angle, that the blacks are now becoming quite hostile towards the whites, and that this is a real problem. Those with accurate and specific information, and opinions based upon it, were very few indeed.

I have never heard of a professional poll to measure this elusive slice of Canadian public opinion. If governments want to assess it, they have only the press to go by. There is usually very little South African news in Canadian papers. Occasionally some prominence is given to an item that gives South Africa a good image — Dr. Barnard, for instance. Almost always, however, the South African news that gets the headlines is bad news. Sharpeville and its aftermath covered the front pages of most Canadian papers for several weeks. In February 1974 a front page head-

line covered a report that "South African bill seeks to suppress lawful opposition". The suppression of civil and political liberties comes next after killing as diet for the newspaper readers, and South Africa can usually supply the sub-editors with this kind of material. In the wake of the news comes editorial comment, generally hostile, and sometimes some controversy in the correspondence columns.

The same paper that reported the bill to suppress lawful opposition carried a news item from Ottawa. The government had previously announced its intention to support the liberation movements through the international agencies. Now, however, 'External Affairs Minister Mitchell Sharp, reacting to some criticism in newspaper editorials and letters to the editor, has ordered that the grants be delayed until the policy has been publicly debated'.

Not all the editorial opinion had been critical. At least one paper treated the proposed policy as "shameful and degrading", mainly because the real culprit was South Africa, which was hardly affected by "liberation movements". Mr. Sharp, however, as a member of a minority government with a precarious hold on office, could not afford to make a mistake about public opinion. Why should a government be stopped in its tracks by sporadic expressions of opinion on a subject which most Canadians know nothing about?

I believe that the answer lies in events — or one specific event - beyond South Africa's borders. It was the shooting of two Canadian girls at the Victoria Falls by Zambian soldiers on May 15, 1973. Though the various Zambian explanations were not accepted by the Canadian government, though a special envoy was sent to Lusaka to impress on the Zambian government the serious view taken of the matter in Canada, Mr Sharp was made to understand that his reaction had not been strong enough for the Canadian public. Some months afterwards I questioned an External Affairs official about it. His testy, even bristling, response showed that the government was sensitive to the public reaction. It refused to stop aid to Zambia on the very just ground that the innocent must not be made to suffer for the guilty. But those shots across the Zambezi have continued to reverberate. Black Africa's image, which had been enough to attract financial and military aid over the years, plummeted in the eyes of many ordinary Canadians. The way had been prepared, too, by General Amin. His government has been as newsworthy as the South African, and his reputation was not improved by the arrival of thousands of Ugandan Asians in Canada, each with his or her tale of harm and loss.

It was, however, the killing of the two girls that had the biggest impact on the Canadian man-in-the-street; more importantly, on the editors of newspapers. It is not that they look any more favourably on South Africa, but that they look somewhat less favourably on people who might conceivably have something in common with those power-station guards on the Zambezi.□