

SHORT STORY

CIRCUS STYLE

by Getrud Strauss

A black man in a red overall called Boswell Circus over his back. Animals too of course and clowns and glittering costumes, tricks and stunts and trapeze. But he looks on sullen, too familiar with the show. And too familiar with his coke bottle carrying which continues as relentlessly as the persistent hammering cheerfulness of the music. His body balances the weight of the bottles in their red plastic carrying tray. He leans far back with his shoulders, arms straightened and supported by the bulk of his torso, bottles and tray resting against his stomach but jolting away glassily with each step. He releases the hold not bending forward an inch and allows the bulk to crash down on the planks of the steep aisle. White arms stretch out from the rows of spectators, mothers and fathers tell their thirsty kids to wait, the boy will open their bottles. Some impatient ones come out onto the aisles and grab the drinks; one woman takes six bottles out of the tray and waits for the black man to open them. But he gestures with a nod to the side she should put the bottles back again. She refuses, putting back would be to relinquish her right. He battles with her stubbornness but finally returns all six bottles to the tray himself in one neat row. The bottle opener is gripped

expertly in the palm of his hand and with the roll of the drums and the crescendo supporting the juggler's act he glides over the bottles with a single strong movement, extracting all tops in one row with incredible speed. His face remains grim, he is fiercely intent on being allowed the display of such skill. He hates the white woman a row further down who keeps on waving one unopened bottle in his face. Again from him the sideways nod for her to put the bottle down in the tray. She does not, he will not open it in mid-air—or only eventually. It makes him sick to open it thus, his muscular arms despise the little task. He needs the support of the tray for the execution of his skill. Only bottles lined up like soldiers are worthy his attack; then he wipes the heads off with one concentrated stroke.

Rows of white kiddies and Moms and Dads clap eager and excited, taken in by the lion's show of ferocity. They don't take in the black man's art and anger.□

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FEDERALISM-OPPORTUNITY OR EVASION

by Edgar Brookes

The minds of many thinkers in South Africa during recent years have turned to federation as a solution of our country's difficulties. Even the Report of the Sprocas Political Commission went rather far in that direction (the present writer signed, for that reason, a minority report). Leo Marquard has stood unwaveringly for a federation. Many more superficial thinkers have been equally sure, without his background of study and experience.

There are two ways of approaching the subject. One is the belief that federation is worthwhile for its own sake. The other is that the federal system holds a possible solution of the issue of race and colour in our national franchise.

Those who hold the former view have not hesitated to blame the fathers of the National Convention for rushing our country into a legislative union. Two outstanding South Africans who did not sit in the Convention—W.P. Schreiner and "Onze Jan"—were strongly in favour of federation. So was the somewhat undistinguished delegation of Natal in the Convention. Some of us have been loath to accept that giants like Steyn, Smuts and Merriman were wrong on this vital point.

Be that as it may, there is nothing to prevent a Liberal from supporting federalism on its own merits and arguing that the

experiment should form part of the necessary overhauling of our Constitution at this stage in our history.

We come to the second view, namely, that federation should solve the problems of the franchise in the context of South Africa's racial composition.

There is a preliminary point to be considered here. Has the development of the Homelands gone so far that they must be given the autonomy of States within a Federation? Chief Matanzima is working not for this but for complete independence. Chief Gatcha Buthelezi gives one the impression that if a Liberal solution of the franchise question is reached he would not make the maintenance of an autonomous Kwa Zulu a major point in his policy. This is the impression which one gathers from some of his speeches, but it is no more than an impression: he may have been misunderstood.

Some of the very honest and careful thinkers who have supported federalism have no doubt considered these and other points, but of a large number of ardent federalists it may be said that their views are lacking in precision, and especially under two heads.

The first of these is the composition and powers of the federal legislature. On some points, however few they may be, the federal legislature must be given sovereign authority. Will there be some mysterious process whereby the majority of the people of South Africa will be in a minority in the federal legislature? If not, the federalists find themselves committed to a black majority in the highest legislative authority in South Africa. They usually do not say this openly, but if this is their real opinion what reason have they to suppose that the whites of South Africa would support under a federal system what they would oppose in a legislative union?

The other point on which clarity is advisable is the racial composition of the constituent states of the future Federation. If the white man is assured of autonomy in a large number of points in his own States, may he not be brought to agree to a black majority in the federal legislature? The point is: What are "his own" States? One assumes that we are not repudiating the Liberal doctrine of universal franchise, and that therefore in the Western Cape there will be more Coloured than white voters, and that in Natal the number of Indian voters will be so large that they will dominate many constituencies. Would even the Orange Free State be a "white" area unless Liberals accept the unacceptable doctrine that the Free State farm labourers must be con-

tented with a franchise in "homelands" which they have never seen and will never see.

The fact of the matter is that few of the vocal federalists have really thought it all out, never even illustrated it by maps—those pitiless critics of ill-digested policies. In fact for many decades, ever since white supremacy was first challenged, many South Africans have tried to dodge the real issue by producing imaginary solutions which do not solve. This is South Africa's "lie in the soul". Many federalists leave one with a muddled feeling that somehow their nostrums will overcome all difficulties. But they will not. When "segregation" or "apartheid" were first put forward, there were no maps that could be advanced as proofs of the justice and practicability of their policy but they tried to give us the impression—false as we all agree nowadays that it was—that all would be well and fair if we left the details in their hands. Even the policies of the "homelands" ignored the facts that security and police control were to remain in the hands of the national government. It has been said of Dr Verwoerd that he brought morality into apartheid. He did; but the morality was so inadequate as to be almost specious.

The fact is that South African opinion has twisted and turned and dodged and blindfolded its eyes in the effort to avoid facing the real issues of South African politics. No answer is given to the question: "Can you justify the political colour bar on any honest ethical grounds?" Until South Africans cease to dodge and learn to give an honest straightforward answer to an honest straightforward question, the lie in the national soul will remain. By the year 1975 we must, if we are honest, have come to the conclusion that there must be a black majority in any South African legislature. It would not be wrong to try to devise methods to make this transition more bearable to the whites, or to give legal sanctions to their rights of property, but it would be most definitely wrong to try to evade the main question by putting forward remedies—be they federation or any other nostrum—which do not in fact cure our national disease.

When Steyn, Smuts and Merriman decided in 1908–9 that it was impossible to unscramble the South African egg they had more reason on their side than many present day historians are prepared to admit. Reasons which are no reasons, solutions which do not solve, "practical" proposals which maps and statistics do not support, will not really do for the more mature and more deeply honest South African of 1975. Let us do the best that a man can do with any situation—face the worst honestly and see with equal honesty the best that can be done with it. □



Africans buying books

The Natal Witness

A new school-year has begun, and with it comes the annual spending of hard-earned cash on schoolbooks. The photograph shows the scene outside a Pietermaritzburg bookshop.

The Secretary for Bantu Education, Mr G. J. Rousseau announced in Cape Town last week that his department was at present completing the second year of a four-year programme to provide textbooks for African schoolchildren.

Although the programme will lighten the parents' load considerably, the Government does not plan to provide prescribed setworks or stationery, so it will still be no easy task to send a child to school.□