

# A 'SOLOUTION'

## WHICH DOES NOT SOLVE

by Edgar Brookes

Federation is much in the air at the present time. It is a strangely elusive conception. When one comes to examine its political implications one finds that no Party is wholly committed to it. The Nationalists are more or less in favour of complete autonomy for the "homelands" at some unspecified time and on some not clearly defined terms. The "homelands" thus freed are to form a sort of economic confederation or "commonwealth" with the Republic, but never a political federation. The Nationalists are not federalists.

The United Party claims to favour federation, but it is a federation of a kind unknown in the rest of the world—a federation not of states but of races. So far as state boundaries go the United Party is anti-federalist. If it accepts the "homelands" it will be because it has to: it never tires of pointing out their dangers. There will apparently be an all-white sovereign Parliament and a Federal Assembly representative of all races. When the Federal Assembly will become supreme, if it will ever become supreme, in what proportion the races will be represented, are points left in that cloudy ambiguity in which the United Party excels.

The Progressive Party is the only political party which **could be** federalist in the true sense of the term, but it is not committed to federation, and its chances of office are too remote to make any federation which it might favour a practical proposition.

There are two other groups which may perhaps be counted as favourable to federation. One is the "homeland" leaders of whom the most vocal is that very able politician Chief Gatsha Buthelezi. Probably the Chief's activities in this field mean no more than his conviction that this is a way in which he can induce white voters who are not committed liberals to agree to an extension of powers for the "homelands". Any really federal "solution" would involve the consolidation of "homeland" boundaries, and then what of the black millions—all the Indians, all the Coloured people and millions of Africans—not living within those boundaries?

The remaining group is that of the liberals. In the Political Report of Spro-cas federation is seen as a step in the solution of our racial difficulties. But is it?

If federation is in any way to "solve" the problems of race there is need for State boundaries which will to some extent coincide with racial boundaries. The "homelands" meet this need. But outside the "homelands" how can boundaries be drawn? One at least of the reasons which made Smuts and Merriman work for legislative union in 1908 was the difficulty of drawing such boundaries. How could the Cape and the Transvaal be divided geographically between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking whites? The exclusion of the Witwatersrand from the rest of the Transvaal and the division of the Cape into an Eastern Province, a Western Province and a Free City of Cape Town might go some way to meet the difficulty. Certainly English-speaking South Africans, a submerged group despite their possession of the franchise, would benefit by

such a division if we still lived in the atmosphere of the 1910's when only the whites counted. But in the atmosphere of the 1970's could so radical a reconstruction of South Africa ignore the Coloured and Indian South Africans, and if it could not what of the Coloured vote in Cape Town and the Indian vote in Durban? Will English-speaking South Africans in Natal rejoice at their emancipation from Afrikaner rule if it means that they are subjected to Indian rule?

There are arguments in favour of federalism for its own sake, but federalism as a means of dodging the issues of race and colour cannot for a moment be acceptable to liberals who are consistent in their creed of non-racial freedom. It may be that, as Olive Schreiner taught, small states are more free and less inclined to nurture tyranny than large ones. It may be that in a federal (but still race-conscious) South Africa, some of the States may rise a little above the level of the present central authorities. On the whole one would be ready to support federation as such, but with no quickening of the blood.

But how can federation as such "solve" our problems of race and colour? For most South Africans the process of political thought has been one of twisting and turning in order to avoid facing the real issue of the colour bar. If as liberals we believe (and we do so believe) that the colour bar is immoral and in the long run impracticable, we should avoid being mixed up in one more twist in this evasive action.

The challenge of the black South Africans will be no less insistent in what is left of the Republic after the homelands have been excised from it. It may be more insistent. The side-stepping of the Coloured people's legitimate claims by Mr Vorster and his Government has been one of the greatest weaknesses of the regime. Many thoughtful young Nationalists are deeply distressed by it. The Coloured people's claims must still be faced even under federation.

Unless we accept this fact, the propaganda for federation will be at best irrelevant and at worst self-deceiving. The

same applies to the case of the Indians in Natal.

In any federation the composition of the Federal Legislature is very important. What would it be in a federated South Africa?

The main fact for us Liberals is that **THE COLOUR BAR IS WRONG**. To combat this is our first and most urgent duty. It is doubtful whether propaganda for federation will do much to assist us in this uphill fight. □

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#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS:

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Reality wishes to record its pleasure that at last some signs of change are visible within the thinking of the White Electorate of South Africa.

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