



A MAN OF HOPE

A few weeks before Alan Paton's 85th birthday he was interviewed by Humphrey Tyler for America's Monitor Radio, the radio service of the Christian Science Monitor. Alan Paton died in April 1988. Here is a previously unpublished transcript of what he said during his last radio interview, what he thought about some prominent politicians (and Archbishop Desmond Tutu) and what he predicted for South Africa.



The interview took place on Alan Paton's verandah. When Tyler identified some birds in the garden as "wild canaries", Paton quickly corrected him. They were weavers, he said.

TYLER: May we go back to that extraordinary, that astonishing book, *Cry, The Beloved Country*. Why do you think it has been such an enormous success and why, not only commercially, but it had enormous human impact round the world.

PATON: Well, I think that the conscience of the white world on black problems is very tender, and this book spoke to them and it's not a kind of a book that antagonises, although there were some people in South Africa who were antagonised by it. I remember one Zululand farmer wrote to me, said the book's full of lies and gross exaggeration and I should be ashamed of myself. Not a true lover of my country and all that sort of thing.

TYLER: That's a point I'd like to raise with you. As a South African, I can't conceive of you as being or belonging anywhere else. Could you see yourself preferring to have lived or to be living anywhere else?

PATON: Well, now my father came out from Scotland — 1900 — and I've often thought, well why didn't he go to Canada, and then realised if he'd gone to Canada I wouldn't even exist (chuckle). So I'm quite glad that he came here. But when you develop a love of country, and so many South Africans have a tremendous love of their country, then, for example, the fact that we are the polecat of the world, well, when I was in politics I would have said, well, we ought to be, we deserve it, and I used to blame it all on the Nats, but now I find myself, uh, resisting these attacks, especially by the sanctioners. Because I just don't think they know what they're doing.

TYLER: They're trying to provide a kind of quick fix for South Africa. Is there a possible quick fix?

PATON: No. If you read the history (of South Africa), if you don't understand that, then you just don't realise how complicated the problems are.

TYLER: The convenient thing for many English-speaking South Africans is to blame the Afrikaner for our predicament.

PATON: That's true. Let's not blind ourselves to the fact that he must carry the great part of the blame; Afrikaner Nationalist. Because I do think that when he came to power in 1948 then he really messed us up. Largely under the influence of Verwoerd, whose influence on the Afrikaner was incredible.

TYLER: In our terribly mixed up political scene, and with your extraordinarily long experience of it as an observer, as a teacher, as a politician yourself, you've met some striking and interesting people. Who comes to mind?

PATON: You mean, in South Africa?

TYLER: South Africans. Prominent South Africans, and what would distinguish them as being forceful and, what . . . creative?

PATON: Well, those white South Africans who attracted me most are the ones who knew there was something wrong with our

society and who more or less devoted their lives to improving it and I'm thinking of people like Edgar Brookes, JH Hofmeyr, Alfred Hoernle, Mrs Hoernle, the Rheynold Jones, all those people who founded the Institute of Race Relations in 1930. 1929, '30. And, then, in 1953, when we founded the Liberal Party, then many of my old friends looked very askance. But I made a whole lot of new ones. And the ones today again for whom I have the greatest respect were members of the Liberal Party. I would include one who wasn't and that would be Helen Suzman.

TYLER: What about Black South Africans?

PATON: Well, when the party was finally disbanded in 1968, we were about two-thirds black, and these, many of these people were just ordinary black people. They were usually people who had smallholdings, the what you call the black spots, and the Liberal Party came to their defence. And, er, we had very strong branches in Ladysmith, Bergville, all up the northern part of Natal.

TYLER: What about leaders like Chief Albert Lutuli?

PATON: Yes well I knew him very well, and he was the leader of the ANC when I was the president of the Liberal Party and we got on very well. But I mean we also had (pause) differences. For one thing, he was very closely allied to the Congress of Democrats, and the Liberal Party had a sort of a (sniff) natural aversion (chuckle) to the Congress of Democrats.

TYLER: What about leading South Africans today? Who would come to mind as people who are playing a creative role in our society?

PATON: (Pause). The people who are best placed to play the creative role are all members of the National Party. You can't get away from that. Helen Suzman has acknowledged this more than once. The real power in the country still lies there. But I can think of lots of people outside the National Party, like Beyers Naude, for example, um, Helen Suzman.

TYLER: What about people like Bishop Tutu?

PATON: (Pause; slight sniff). You're asking me a very difficult question. I'm not a whole-hearted admirer of Bishop Tutu because . . . I was, you know I wrote the life of Archbishop Clayton and he was a great archbishop, and I can't help comparing the others with him. And Tutu certainly isn't in the same class. He's very . . . He's charismatic. He's, I think he said once that white people thought he was the devil incarnate. Well, he's much more like an imp than he is like a devil, I think. He's got very impish qualities, and . . . But that's his, that's his temperament, that's his nature, that's the way he's made. And I wish him luck. He's my archbishop, anyhow.

TYLER: Christianity has always played a very important role in your life and it has many manifestations in this country, some of them not very Christian, apparently, in the result. But, how important is Christianity, is the fact that this country at least says it is a Christian country, how important is that to its finding an honourable solution?

PATON: I think it's very important and I think the awakening of the Afrikaner Christianity has been very much delayed, but at least in the past year or two the big NGK

(Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk) has come out saying it had made a mistake in supporting apartheid and thinking that apartheid was the will of God for this country and all that sort of thing. And another thing you must remember, white South Africans can be . . . (can) go down on their knees and give thanks for the fact that there are so many black Christians. Jolly good ones, too, because I know many of them.

TYLER: What, on a different tack, writers you admire yourself? Is that an invidious question? If so, then don't answer it if you don't wish to.

PATON: Well the only thing is that you have to . . . If you give the names of those whom you admire, then obviously the names you don't give are the ones you don't admire. And as a rule, I avoid that question.

TYLER: The excitement of your writing career, um, you say that, you're, if not abandoning it, you're slowing up on your writing now. What is, what does the future hold for you? You're off to China on a trip next year . . .

PATON: This year.

TYLER: This year, of course.

PATON: I don't think I'll write another book. At the moment I can't see any chance of it.

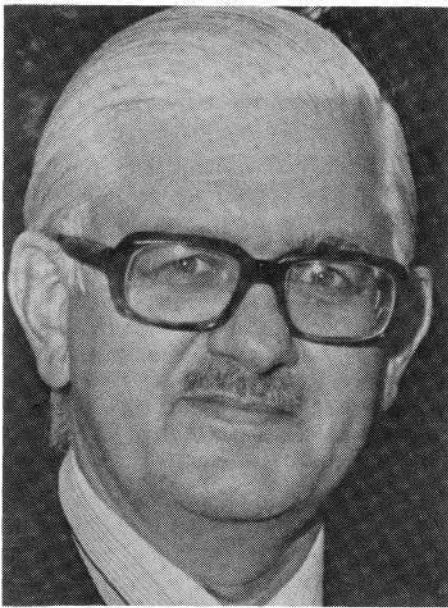
TYLER: You were in fact set on a trilogy?

PATON: Oh, I gave that up because I realised I couldn't complete the autobiography and complete the trilogy because they covered the same ground. And I thought much better to cover it, um, factually than fictionally.

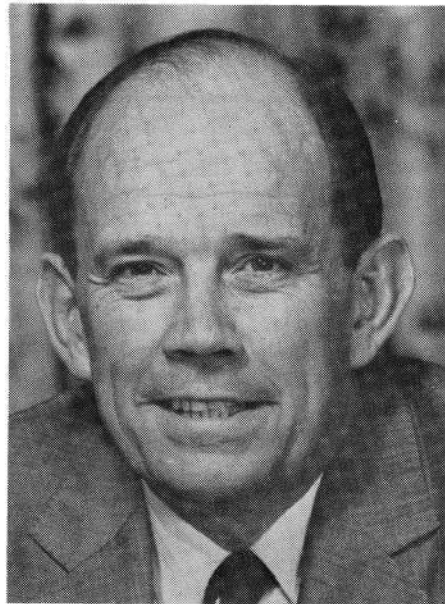
TYLER: You have close ties and friendship with Chief Buthelezi. The culture of our black people, how significant is this in our future? So many blacks seem to be hurrying



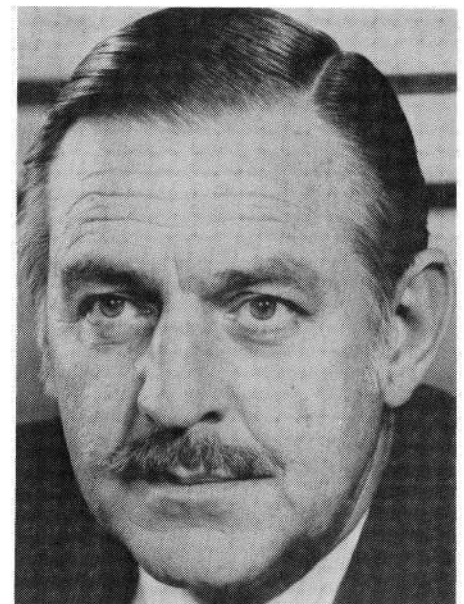
Fame came early for the Paton family: Alan, with



“Gerrit Viljoen? Too brainy! Too clever! The Afrikaners don’t choose learned men to rule them. It’s very interesting.”



“Magnus Malan is a soldier. And I’m sure he believes you can do things with a gun that you can’t do with politics . . .”



“I think Pik Botha’s quite a decent chap. But I don’t think he’s very high in the Nationalist hierarchy, myself . . .”

to abandon much of their cultural heritage and leaping on to some sort of Coca-Cola culture, or something convenient that passes by at the moment that lets them drive trucks, and abandoning something that is very valuable. How do you see, how important, how valuable is black culture in this country?
PATON: Oh I think it’s very important. But you must remember that the pressures to adapt yourself to an industrial society are enormous, and this must affect black culture. Well, in any case it’s affected Afrikaner culture. The Afrikaner never thought that he’d become a part of the industrial empire,

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Book I
I There is a lovely road that runs from Lxopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered & rolling, & they are lovely beyond any saying of it. The road climbs seven miles into them, to Cambrooke; and from there, if there is no mist, you look down on one of the fairest valleys of Africa. About you there is grass & bracken, & you may hear the freedom crying of the kikhoya, one of the kinds of the wild, before & beyond you. Below you is the valley of the Muzinkulu, on its journey from the Drakensberg to the sea; & beyond & behind the river, great hill after great hill; & beyond & behind them, the mountains of the Inqoti & East Griqualand. The grass is rich & matted, you cannot see the soil. It holds the rain & the mist, & they seep into the ground, feeding the streams in every kloof. It is well leaved, & not too many cattle feed upon it; and not too many fires burn it, laying bare the soil. Stand unshod upon it, for the ground is holy, being even as it came from the Creator. Keep it, guard it, care for it, for it keeps men, guards men, cares for men. Destroy it & man is destroyed. When you stand the grass is rich and matted, you cannot see the soil. But the hills are not so high, they break down, they fall to the valley below, & suddenly, change their nature. The soil is not leaved, & too many cattle feed upon it, and the streams are dry in the kloof. The soil is not leaved, & too many cattle feed upon it, and



t wife, Dorrie, and sons, Jonathan and David.

The original, handwritten first page of Alan Paton’s “Cry, The Beloved Country”. The original manuscript will be sold at an auction in New York next month.