

# QUISLINGS OR REALISTS

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by M. G. Whisson

Pierre Hugo has compiled, rather than written or edited, a vast collection of documents pertaining to the political position and future of the people classified "coloured" in South Africa. His brief introduction sets the scene. There he suggests that there are three main streams of thought and action detectable among those who are "discriminated against in a particular way" (as Dick v.d. Ross defined them). The Federal Party, now the Freedom Party, represents those who are prepared to use the government's means to achieve the Party's goal of full citizenship for "coloured" people. The Labour Party represents those who seek full citizenship for all "non-white" people and who are prepared to use the government's machinery only tactically and on their own terms. A substantial but largely unorganised group rejects the use of all "puppet" institutions and boycotts, as far as possible, all segregated organizations.

Andre Müller, in a discussion of "minority goals, problems and theories" first presents an apparently rational explanation for the relative deprivation of the "coloured minority group" in terms of demographic and self-perpetuating bio-cultural factors. This, he concedes, has been exacerbated by the systematic policies and prejudices of the parties and ethnic groups in power and can only be eliminated by a reversal of those policies. He argues that the costs of granting full citizenship to the "coloured" people, including equal facilities and financial allocations for services, would be minimal in the long run as they would be offset by economic expansion, a reduction in the defence budget and increased productivity.

He cuts the "coloured" political cake differently from the more empirical Hugo, dividing the responses to minority status into four – pluralistic, assimilationist, secessionist and militant. The **pluralists** want full citizenship rights, but also some encouragement or tolerance of cultural differences. The **assimilationists** want full citizenship and are sanguine about the homogenising process in a cultural "melting pot". The **secessionists** want their own territory and political autonomy. The **militants** seek to control the society as a whole on their own terms, but their approach may also be seen as a tactic to achieve other goals. Müller argues that the majority of "coloured" people are assimilationist, a few sub-groups pluralist, a negligible minority secessionist and a growing number militant as they experience the failure of gradualist politics.

After a brief descriptive chapter on the history of the franchise, four substantial "chapters" of documents form the main part of the book. The first (Chap. 3) presents the

government's view, mainly as expounded by the minister opening the annual session of a coloured council. It culminates in the "new political dispensation" whereby the National Party proposes to entrench its rule by eliminating all possibility of an effective poly-ethnic alliance in opposition to the majority white party.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the Labour Party and is, as befits the body which has demonstrated the greatest amount of popular "coloured" support, the longest in the book. Addresses given at Labour Party conferences, by leaders of the party and by sympathetic non-members such as Chief Buthelezi and Edgar Brookes, take up most of the space. In many ways this is the most interesting material since the Labour Party is made up of a curious alliance of idealistic liberals and pragmatists, some of whom take a politically expedient view in the short term (so seek to conform to the feelings of their electorate) while others take a longer view and seek a common platform with assimilationists from the "black" and "white" groups. As has been demonstrated by the divisions and reunions within the ranks of the party in the C.P.R.C. the alliance is fragile and the leader by no means assured of the loyalty of the rank and file. In this it resembles the British party of the same name, which is likewise an alliance of ideologues, pragmatists and special interest groups, whose leader, like the priest of Neni, is a king by day but must prowl his domain with drawn sword against the threat of assassins by night. It is easy to deride the Labour Party for lack of principle, lack of sound political theory, "selling out", ineffectiveness and confusion, and this is done through the words of the **Educational Journal** in Chap. 6. But when all that is said and done, the Labour Party has provided a means for the people to demonstrate convincingly their attitude to the policies of the government, it has given opportunity for unfranchised people to learn the practical arts of politics and it has done much to politicise the mass of "coloured" people.

If the Labour Party has tacked to catch each new breath of political wind, then the Federal (now Freedom) Party has shown a more constant drift towards populist politics. Initially a creature of the government – what the **Educational Journal** might have called a withered brown figleaf to cover naked political exploitation – the Party laid great emphasis on "coloured identity" and the opportunities created by apartheid for "coloured" people to run their own affairs. With the death of its leader and founder, Tom Swartz, and the withdrawal of much of the support which it gained through government nominees

to the C.P.R.C., the party has changed its name and attempted to change its image. It remains committed to working within the framework provided by the government but is much more aggressive in its criticism of economic injustice, inequality of facilities and petty apartheid. In his appeals for "coloured unity" and in his addresses to the annual conference of his party, Dr. Bergins seems to sense a new vulnerability in the government, a growing realisation that if it does not negotiate with him and his party and make concessions to strengthen his appeal to his electorate, then all hope of "coloured" support for the "new political dispensation" is lost. Thus strengthened, paradoxically, by the success of his opponents in the C.P.R.C., he feels able to demand concessions rather than accept them gratefully.

For the non-brown reader, Chapter 6, made up wholly of extracts from the **Educational Journal**, will come as a revelation. The journal, of the Teachers' League of South Africa, has a small circulation and is rarely cited in the national or regional press. Its philosophy however has penetrated deep into the English-speaking people in the "coloured" community in Cape Town through the medium of the school teachers. Evidence for its strength is suggested by the fact that in C.P.R.C. elections, the lowest percentage polls were recorded in the areas where the T.L.S.A. is most strongly supported — the constituencies of the Cape Peninsula. The philosophy is simple, and the actions which follow from it predictable. South Africa is engaged in a class struggle between the manipulators of capital and the providers of labour. The liberal free-traders and national socialists, the promoters of apartheid and black consciousness are all witting or unwitting tools of the exploiting class and the victims of false consciousness. Only through educating the masses in the true nature of the struggle will a transformation take place and South Africa become a free and just society. The vision is millenarian, the method appropriately optimistic. The doctrine is to be taught wherever possible and the faithful bound to boycott any activity which is tainted by institutionalised racism. If at times the people are compelled to conform, as in attendance at schools or residence in Group Areas, then they must be taught what is being done to them. If at times the leaders demand that the people boycott entertainment for which "open permits" exist, this is seen as a stand on principle, education through suffering,

and probably a protection from "herren volk" propaganda disguised as art or culture. The **Educational Journal**, as the extracts show, indulges in vigorous *ad hominem* argument against the "brown leaders" whose names appear in the national and regional press, and provides its dedicated readers with a clear philosophy, an unambiguous guide for action (or boycott) and a constant stream of **bon mots**.

The balance of the book is made up of 122 pages of articles and leaders from the "white press", and about the same amount of space devoted to ten other annexures on aspects of "coloured" politics outside the strict framework of the four main chapters of documents.

Very little in the way of analysis is offered in either Hugo's chapters or in Müller's. No indication is given that the writers have done any first-hand research, and beyond the voting figures in the elections no suggestion as to the relative strengths of the various viewpoints. We are not told why there are such fundamental divisions of political opinion, nor whether the voters are interested in the nuances indicated in the documents. The evidence is allowed to speak for itself, but the evidence is of but one kind — the word written or spoken in public political debate — and that, as readers of Richard Crossman's diaries or any other political biography will know, represents a very specific form of communication. Given these limitations however, the book is a most valuable compendium of information on a topic which has captured much recent public interest and which is an important test of National Party intentions for our future.

One is tempted to cry "so what" at the end of it all for, as Hugo so rightly puts it "Although this book concentrates on the period after 1960, a study of the preceding period in Coloured politics leaves one with an acute sense of *déjà vu*" (p. 6). The political rituals repeat themselves in each generation as the political structure reproduces itself. There are changes, a little give here, a little take there, but the real issue is missing from the debate.

Like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the non-blacks are battling over the use of their rattle — but the crow is coming closer, and is going to need an enormous amount of convincing that either hero is a crow in disguise, or that his crow-like qualities are a manifestation of false consciousness. □

