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Denis V. Cowen

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IS THERE A PLACE FOR THE WHITE MAN IN AFRICA?*

By Denis V. Cowen†

In recent years Africa has occupied a large and increasingly troubled part of world news. Insurgence in Algeria, revolution in the Sudan, Mau Mau in Kenya, riots in the Belgian Congo and Nyasaland, a treason trial and the rigours of *apartheid* in the Union of South Africa, bannings and detentions in the Rhodesias, and so on. The catalogue is a long and ominous one.

Those who are content to explain this in terms of communist-inspired agitation are wide of the mark. That communism may be an aggravating factor in some areas, I do not deny; but the real causes of Africa's unrest lie deeper. At the root of much of the existing tension lies the fact that basic human freedoms and rights have been denied to the overwhelming majority of the 220,000,000 peoples of Africa, 98% of whom are non-white. To illustrate this proposition, and indeed to make it easier to understand the political and economic problems of Africa, it is convenient at the outset to distinguish between the white settler areas and those areas where white men have not put down roots in any significant numbers.

The scramble for Africa, which took place in the latter half of the nineteenth century, left virtually the whole of the continent under the control of European powers. Many of the more desirable regions—such as the Union of South Africa, Algeria, the Rhodesias and Kenya—were, or had earlier been, colonized by white settlers who have through the years come to look upon Africa, and not Europe, as their home. In other parts, less attractive climatically, or fever-ridden, the European powers have been content to maintain peaceful administration, promote their economic interests, and allow missionary work to go ahead.

In the non-settler areas, demands for self-government have been increasingly powerful, insistent and successful; for the right of the governed to determine the government under which they live is a right which, in the past, has either been denied to the indigenous inhabitants of Africa, or conceded sparingly in a paternalistic way. But it is a fundamental right which cannot be withheld indefinitely. Political control in these areas is now passing rapidly from Europe to Africa; and as it passes into African hands, the question of vital concern to the whole free world is how will this newly acquired power be used: will the young African states emerge as freedom-loving democracies under a rule of law, or as authoritarian

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† See Contributors' Section, Masthead, p. 558, for biographical data.

regimes—seeking to profit, perhaps, from the experience of the USSR and China?

It is too early yet to give any confident answer. I would, however, put forward a plea for sympathetic understanding and co-operation rather than hasty censure, when their governmental machinery shows signs of strain. The problems of political and economic adjustment which the new African states have to face are enormous. Let us therefore be patient and open-minded; for it may well be that if Africa is prepared to value the human freedoms and rights, basic to free societies generally, the limitations upon power which have been found necessary in other communities will evolve in a different—though not necessarily less effective—form in Africa. *Ex Africa semper aliquid novi.*

However, to discuss this big question is beyond my present purpose. Rather, as a white man, born and bred in the Union of South Africa, as were my parents before me, I would put before you the more immediately urgent and explosive problems of the settler areas, where, in addition to many of the problems of the non-settler areas, such as raising the general standard of living and education, alleviating poverty and eliminating disease, we have the vastly exacerbating factor of colour.

In the settler areas, no less than in the others, demands have been made, with varying success, for release from colonialism. The Union of South Africa, for example, has long enjoyed complete independence, and the Central African Federation is asking for it. However, in these areas, as imperial bonds are dissolved or loosened, power has passed into the hands of the white settlers, who now have to face serious demands from the indigenous non-white peoples to share it. And these demands are becoming increasingly more radical and less amenable to compromise.

Where white men have settled they have used African labour and Western technology and skills to develop industry, commerce and agriculture to a high degree. At the same time, they have kept in their own hands both economic power and political control. Indeed, the colour of a man's skin has in large measure determined the extent to which he may enjoy basic human freedoms, political rights and economic advantages—for the most part to the striking disadvantage of the non-white peoples. But as their educational standards rise, and their understanding of Western democracy increases, the non-whites increasingly resent and challenge this position. And for the whites directing policy, the great question has now become: to what extent, if any, is it right, to what extent is it possible, to discriminate between the inhabitants of Africa in the enjoyment of basic human rights, on the ground of skin colour or ethnic origin?

Several kinds of answers have been put forward by white men in attempts to meet this challenge. The one I shall deal with first is the policy of *apartheid*, now being followed by the Government of the Union of South Africa. The nature and details of this policy, and the impact which it is having on South African society, and in particular on its system of law and government, merit extensive treatment; here I can do no more than summarize my conclusions, and explain why I believe that this policy, as we have seen it operate, is doomed to disastrous failure. Before doing so, however, I should perhaps tell you a little, by way of background, about South Africa and her peoples.

Situated at the southern end of the continent, the Union of South Africa is bounded in the north by the Limpopo River, which separates it from the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. There are four provinces in the Union; the Cape of Good Hope in the south; the Transvaal in the north; the Orange Free State in the middle; and in the east, Natal. The total area of the whole is just under a half million square miles, i.e., roughly one-sixth the size of the United States.

Using the official classification, the races of South Africa may be put into four broad groups. The Bantu (or Africans, or Natives as they are officially called) are the largest group, numbering approximately 10 million. Rather less than half of them live a more or less tribal life in reserves which occupy about 14% of the total land area. The rest live and work outside the reserves on the farms or in the cities. Those who live outside the reserves are in close contact with Western civilization, and many of them have acquired Western values and have adopted a Western way of life. The second largest group are the whites (or Europeans as they are often called). They number approximately 3 million. The third group comprises Asiatics of whom there are approximately half a million. And finally there are the coloured people of whom there are roughly one-and-a-half million, living mostly in the Cape of Good Hope. (The term coloured is confined, in South Africa, to persons of mixed white and non-white blood).

The white population falls into two main groups; a group whose home-language is Afrikaans comprising roughly 60% of the whites, and a group whose home-language is English. Many of the Afrikaans-speaking group are descendants of the Dutch colonists who first brought western civilization to the Cape of Good Hope some 300 years ago. English-speaking immigrants settled more recently; they began to appear in large numbers only in the early part of the last century, and their numbers rose rapidly when later in the century diamonds and gold were discovered in the northern Cape and the Transvaal.

South Africa has a bicameral legislature, or Parliament, comprising an elected House of Assembly of 159 members, and a Senate, or upper house, of 89 members—partly elected and partly nominated by the government. Among the whites, the two major political parties are the National (or Nationalist) Party, which is in power at present, and the United Party, which—numerically—forms the main Parliamentary opposition. These parties share much the same attitude towards colour, the difference being that the Nationalists have a systematic segregation policy which they are prepared to pursue ruthlessly, whereas the United Party has no easily definable plan. There is also a small and articulate Liberal Party which favours integration, but is politically ineffective. And with this very brief sketch behind us, we may now proceed to an equally synoptic account of *apartheid*.

Apartheid is the policy which put the present South African Government in power in 1948 and has kept it there ever since. Whereas before 1948, racially discriminatory policies were empirical, sporadic and, above all, left the way open for eventual integration, we now have to face a far more calculated and systematic plan of separation and separate development, which is widely known by the Afrikaans word *apartheid*.

It is not easy to define *apartheid*, as it means different things to different people. For some whites and the majority of the non-whites, it means a policy of domination (*baasskap*) by white over black. For others, perhaps a majority of the whites, it is a more sophisticated doctrine of separate development and non-integration.

In this latter category the upholders of *apartheid* argue broadly as follows. The non-whites outnumber the whites by roughly 4 to 1; they are, on the whole, at a lower level of civilization, and were they allowed the same rights, they would eventually swamp the whites. This would lead either to black domination of whites, or to the gradual disappearance of the white race—as such—in a society of mixed blood. And in either event, so the argument runs, civilization as the whites know it today would disappear. Therefore, if civilization is to be kept pure, the races should be kept apart, and encouraged to go forward along their own lines of development on the basis of separate cultures and traditions.

It is what I have called the more sophisticated policy of separate development, rather than *baasskap*, that is the official policy of the South African Government. Whether in its practical effects it is equally sophisticated is quite another matter. But whatever differences there may be between these two approaches, i.e. domination and separation, in the eyes of the whites there lies at the heart of every formulation of *apartheid* a belief that if Western civilization is to survive in South Africa, the

separate identity of the white man must be preserved, and he must remain the sole trustee and guardian of that civilization. In short, whiteness and Western civilization are equated. This idea, I am convinced, is fallacious and dangerous.

The implementation of the Union Government's *apartheid* policy has both a positive and a negative aspect; positively, it involves the promotion of the separate development of the races in their own geographical areas; negatively it involves differentiation between the races wherever their paths cross, and wherever they are brought together by economic necessity.

Hitherto we have seen at work mainly the negative aspects of the policy, namely legislation designed to differentiate between the races and keep them apart. Separate transport facilities; separate housing areas; separate schools, down to a separate, more tribal, curriculum designed to fit Africans into their proper place in society; and separate so-called universities. The whites may own as much land as they like; the non-whites, outside the reserves, none. The white workers may strike, the African workers may not. The white workers are protected in their jobs and encouraged to become skilled, the non-white workers are not. And, let me add, in effecting this separation, the doctrine of "separate but equal," which was tried and abandoned here as not good enough, was in South Africa tried and thrown overboard, by Act of Parliament, because it proved too expensive.¹

During the years 1951-56, the National Government, in the implementation of its policy of *apartheid*, decided to initiate legislation to take the coloured voters off the common electoral list in the Cape Province and give them representation of a different kind. (The Cape coloureds were the only remaining non-whites on the common electoral list.) But the Government did not have at its command the necessary two-thirds majority support in Parliament required by the Constitution for the proposed legislation.

I do not propose to narrate in any detail how an attempt was made to take the coloured voters off the list by a simple majority; how the Supreme Court in March 1951 struck this down; how the Government then passed a High Court of Parliament Act, under which the unsuccessful legislators posed as a court of law and set aside the decision of the Supreme Court; how the Supreme Court then set aside the High Court of

¹ See the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, No. 49 of 1953, sec. 3, which provides that separate amenities provided for one race may not be declared invalid merely on the ground that they are not substantially similar to, or of the same standard as, those reserved for another race. This Act was passed as a result of a number of Supreme Court cases striking down separate railway facilities on the ground that they were not substantially equal.

Parliament Act; how the Government thereupon increased the size of the Supreme Court, packed Parliament with its own supporters so as to command the necessary two-thirds majority, and finally removed the non-whites from the common list. It is unnecessary here to review the legal and political arguments for and against the Government's conduct. Suffice it to say that this brazen progression of political maneuvering achieved its immediate object of separating the races. But it also did more; it destroyed the last vestiges of any faith held by non-whites in South Africa in the efficacy of constitutional guarantees devised and operated by white men, and throughout Africa, it did much to weaken still further the already shaken confidence in the white man's integrity.

The impact of *apartheid* on the general body of the common law has been equally disastrous. Apart from two clauses, which protect franchise rights in the Cape Province and the equality of the official languages, by requiring special two-thirds majorities for legislation affecting these matters, there is nothing in South Africa comparable to the Bill of Rights and constitutional guarantees which are familiar in American government. Fundamental human rights and freedoms are left in South Africa, as in England, to the ordinary or common law of the land, and to the Courts. They may therefore be extended or reduced by the decision of Parliament in whose jurisdiction they lie; they are not placed beyond the reach of ordinary Parliamentary majorities.

A system of this kind works well enough in the homogeneous community of Great Britain, where the real protections against legislative and executive abuse of power are ingrained habits of constitutional observance. Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights are such deep-rooted traditions that no British Parliament would have the temerity to abrogate them, for the values which they embody are of the very essence of civilized life in a free world. The fathers of the South African constitution believed that in their country—no less than in Britain—such basic values would be held equally sacred. Experience has proved them wrong.

Chapter and verse are in the Statute Book to prove how each and every one of the freedoms and rights vouchsafed by the common law has been eroded by legislative action. Freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention without Court sanction; the presumption of innocence; freedom of association, of assembly, of movement; freedom to use one's skill according to one's capacity, and to enjoy the benefits of collective bargaining and the strike; even freedom of speech and of religious worship—all these freedoms have been either obliterated or seriously impaired for the non-whites. At the same time, it would be an error to believe or hope that the program of *apartheid* is not levying a toll on the whites as well;

for in a very real sense freedom in a community is indivisible, and measures aimed against one group invariably react on others.

Can these inroads on freedom, these injuries to human dignity, possibly be justified by the positive aspects or aspirations of *apartheid*? I have no doubt that many of the upholders of *apartheid* are men of high integrity, and that honestly believing their policy to be right, they are prepared to make great personal sacrifices to achieve the goal of providing separate territories for the autonomous development of each racial group. They recognize, too, that their self-appointed task is gigantic, indeed an act of faith—even if they could obtain the full co-operation of all sections of the population. However, after five years of intensive work, the experts on the Government-sponsored Tomlinson Commission reported that the only alternative to *apartheid* would be the eventual creation of a completely integrated society if social and economic factors were allowed free play in an evolutionary process. This they rejected, mainly on the grounds that the whites are unshakeably resolved to maintain their existence as a separate entity with all the force at their command, and that if peace is to be kept, there is only one way out for South Africa, namely the way of territorial separation.

Under the Union Government's plan, it is envisaged that the territory which has been set aside for African reserves will in time form several small African communities, called Bantustans, each allocated to the main tribes, and enjoying a measure of autonomy. At the same time—and this in my view is a cardinal objection—a majority of the non-whites will remain as workers in the white areas without any political rights, on the pretext that they will have rights in the Bantustans to come, although they will never live there. Moreover, in the Tomlinson Report, it is envisaged that even by the year 2000 there will still be six million non-whites living and working in the white areas.

Again, the overwhelming majority of the population of South Africa does not desire *apartheid*. In other words, the non-whites, by and large, do not like it. They do not like it as an ideal; the many thousands whose tribal ties have been completely broken, and who have become thoroughly westernized, do not wish to be relegated to the more primitive tribal structures which are being prepared for them, and of which they know little. Neither do the non-whites like the practical effects which the doctrine of separation and differentiation have produced.

And another observation. All the elaborate schemes and theories about separate racial and cultural development seem to ignore the existence of one-seventh of the population—the coloureds and the Asians. The one-and-a-half million coloureds have no separate culture apart from the

whites, nor—let it be faced—have they any separate racial origin; indeed, not a few are as white as many whites and certainly no less civilized. Nor have we been told how fair treatment is to be meted out to the half-million Asians. Are we to have our own miniature Pakistan and India to accommodate the cultural differences of the Muslims and Hindus?

All this makes it difficult to resist the conclusion that a whole way of civilized life is being corrupted in South Africa in the determined pursuit of an impracticable ideal against the wishes of the majority of the people.

To the extent that *apartheid* might one day (under the spur of conscience) come to mean a policy of fair and total territorial partition with full rights for each group, it is, in abstract theory, a solution which could be morally justified. Indeed, sometimes when I see the travail of the United States in making integration a reality, and when I think of the different proportions of the South African population, I am almost tempted to believe that total partition or separation might be the only way of establishing peaceful race-relations in South Africa, despite my own strong preference for the way of integration. But this postulates a *fair* partition, with full rights for both sides. And I think that in South Africa such a partition would present very great obstacles. Who will do the partitioning? Will there be full and free consultation of all groups in its planning? Can South Africa's economy sustain a fair partition? If a non-white labour force is to be used in the so-called white area, what political rights will the non-whites be allowed to enjoy? And how will the gold, diamond and other mines and natural wealth of the country be divided?

What will happen? To the extent that *apartheid* continues to mean a policy of domination by a white minority, under the guise of separate development, it cannot possibly succeed, for a minority cannot indefinitely suppress a majority. One can only pray that we in South Africa will be spared another Algeria or Indonesia. But as long as the whites—who in terms of the existing political structure are the determining force—cleave to the dangerous illusion that they alone are the guardians of a civilization which cannot be shared on equal terms with all human beings irrespective of race, colour or creed, then, in my view, there can in the long run (whether that be five, ten or twenty years) be only one possible fate for South Africa—complete tragedy.

It is certainly not a happy augury to be told by the Tomlinson Commission that where the existence of a people is at stake as a separate racial entity, rational and economic considerations play a relatively unimportant role.

Let me now turn to another proposed solution to which many whites

have pinned their hopes. In the Central African Federation and in Kenya, the white man denies that colour, as such, is an insuperable bar to the advantages of life. He reminds us that he has brought with him, and tried to maintain, a high tradition of civilization. He stresses present differences in the cultural and economic attainments of whites and non-whites, and, pointing to the vastness of African numbers, he claims that a premature recognition of full equality in all relevant fields would lead to the obliteration or severe dilution of the white man's positive contribution. He claims to be prepared to give equal rights to all civilized men; he contends that the existing discriminations are not inflexible, and may lead, in the fullness of time, to complete equality.

People who hold these views are much preoccupied with qualified franchises, with procedures for minority protection, with the dangers of majority rule and the virtues of gradualness. They tend to speak of white leadership, and describe their policy as partnership in a multi-racial democracy. Let us have a closer look at these ideas, for many of them are inherently sound, though in their practical application they have often been debased by human frailty. Some of them may possibly still hold out a little hope for the peaceful development of the settler areas.

Let us begin with the phrase "partnership in a multi-racial democracy", which has been fashionable in the Central African Federation. This federation consists of three territories, Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia. In each of these territories there are upwards of 2,000,000 Africans but the numbers of whites vary from 7,000 in Nyasaland and 70,000 in Northern Rhodesia to just under 200,000 in Southern Rhodesia.

Now a partnership is an agreement; it presupposes consent, and in this regard the Central African Federation started off on the wrong foot, for the majority of the non-whites did not—and still probably do not—want the sort of partnership they were given. Again it is an odd sort of partnership when one of the partners (the whites) wishes to retain power in such a way that it can determine the extent of the other partner's (the blacks) share in the benefits.

But my main objection to the partnership analogy is that a partnership presupposes the separate identity of the partners; and when the idea is transferred to race relations, it involves a broad colour-group distinction which is wide open to abuse.

This raises the question of the validity of group divisions and protections. No one can object to the division of a community into groups for the purposes of government. We find illustrations in every modern society; criminals are treated differently from law-abiding citizens, motor-

car owners are subject to regulations which do not apply to those who do not own motor-cars, and so on. But the classification must be capable of rational justification having regard to the needs of the community as a whole. And I would suggest that a division into groups based on skin-colour is in principle unsound.

Let me say immediately that I am not opposed to the idea of discrimination as such. Indeed, a discriminating man is universally admired, and rightly so, precisely because he discriminates wisely between the intelligent and the stupid, between the beautiful and the ugly, and bases his judgment of people and things on *individual* merit. Indeed, what is needed is not absence of discrimination, but more discriminating discrimination. The fundamental objection which I have to colour differentiation is that it is indiscriminate and blunt-edged. It works injustice to people who are as intelligent, good and worthy as any others, and coarsens the fibre of those who enforce the discrimination.

My second objection is based on what seems to me to be a very practical ground. A division into groups will work (whatever the philosophical merit of the division) provided that not only those within the group, but also those excluded from it, accept the division as sound. It is on this basis that the protections accorded by some constitutions to religious minorities frequently work out well. But, by the same token, a blunt-edged division into white and non-white is not acceptable to the overwhelming majority of the non-whites of Africa.

My third objection is that group divisions—whether one seeks to justify them as minority protections, or in some other way—tend to perpetuate themselves when institutionalized and given legal recognition; and I am deeply convinced that there is no health in any policy which seeks to perpetuate the existence of the white man as a privileged minority group anywhere in Africa.

I now come to the most precarious part of my task. I am not a crystal-gazer, and in any event, African crystals are usually dark; but I would suggest that if the white man wishes to remain in Africa, and to live there in peace, he must bring himself forthwith to accept a policy whose object is a non-racial democracy in which all men irrespective of race, colour or creed, are equally entitled to share in the basic human freedoms and political and economic rights, in what Jefferson described briefly as "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

This path will assuredly be a hard one. Quite apart from the profound psychological adjustments which white men in Africa will be called on to make, they will also have to make sacrifices. For example, in education, if there is to be integration at the school level, the rate of progress

may have to be tempered to allow for the inferior opportunities enjoyed in the past by the non-whites.

Again white men will have to face the risk—if indeed it be a risk—that given power, the blacks will retaliate in kind and do as they have been done by. Such fears were often expressed in Jamaica before the non-whites took over; and there they have proved groundless. But be this as it may, we are here concerned with a risk which eventually cannot be avoided—and the path of wisdom is to minimize it, now.

Then, too, the white man will have to come to terms with his fears that equality of opportunity and of political and economic rights will in time lead to a mixed society. Of course, it need not follow that equal social, political and economic rights for both white and non-white people must inevitably lead to miscegenation. As Lincoln once observed in the course of his debates with Douglas, the number of mulattoes was proportionately greater in the slave than in the free states. But, in any event, if with the passage of time a mixed society should come to be regarded as acceptable by our descendants, we today have neither right nor reason to interfere with their free choice.

I realize very clearly that to put forward the ideal of a non-racial democracy is one thing; to bring it about quite another. And in this regard the crucial question, as I see it, is one of time and timing. How quickly may one wisely and practicably advance towards the ideal? How much time is left to achieve the ideal?

These are the most difficult questions of all. There is, in theory, much to be said in favour of a policy of gradualism, and even more to be said in its favour as a matter of practical politics. Abraham Lincoln, I believe, favoured gradualism as a practical method of advance towards an ideal. But in the light of what has been done in Africa in the name of gradualism, the chances of its acceptance by the blacks are slight. Indeed, I would say that growing distrust between black and white in Africa—for which the whites must bear much responsibility—is one of the great tragedies of the continent.

Having said this, however, I believe that there is just one small hope left for gradualism. If, by the grace of God, white men can bend their stubbornness and commit themselves genuinely and irrevocably to the ideal of non-racial democracy, then I believe that non-whites in Africa might still accept some policy of gradualism, and perhaps be glad of it. But there are three essential conditions. First, there must be an immediate, irrevocable and explicit committal to the ideal. Then, there must be an immediate and dedicated effort towards raising the standards and opportunities of the non-whites to fit more of them as soon as possible

for the responsibilities of non-racial democracy. And this work should be undertaken with the same sense of urgency that we saw in Great Britain in the days of Dunkirk.

And thirdly, and this is the crux, if there are to be minority colour-group protections, as distinct from individual protections—which gradualism implies—then it is essential to realize with clarity that they can only be a temporary means to achieve an ultimate end. They must not be allowed to perpetuate differences. Accordingly, they should be strictly limited in duration; and while they operate, every effort should be made to make them redundant by raising the standard of non-white education, skills and material well-being. I do not propose to go into the technical constitutional details which would be involved in implementing such a policy in various territories. Suffice it to say that the technical difficulties are quite manageable.

I am aware that the ultimate difficulty lies, perhaps, in changing the white man's heart. But I would repeat what I have said before—self-interest, no less than a regard for moral decency, must persuade white men in Africa that they have a place there only in a non-racial democracy under a rule of law which has tamed power and outlawed irrational privilege, arbitrariness and caprice. And I would end by saying that if the white man fails, he will have only himself to blame; and let him not blindly imagine that the implications of his failure will be confined to some parts of Africa alone; his failure will leave a legacy of hatred and turmoil which will harden the hearts of men of colour throughout the whole world.