

THE LAND OF THE OSTRICH

BY TREVOR LYTTLETON

(Mr. Lyttleton, a 36-year old Cambridge graduate, is a composer, music publisher, lawyer and playwright. He wrote "THE DEAL" – produced at this year's Edinburgh Festival – a tragic drama centred upon the moral issues confronting three expatriate white South African liberals who become involved in what appears to be a plot to supply arms to South Africa.

Mr. Lyttleton wrote the following article upon his return from a private visit to South Africa. The significance of his findings lies in the fact that he visited South Africa as an impartial and uncommitted outsider with no axe to grind. He has asked us to state that he is neither a member of any political party nor associated with the Anti-Apartheid or any other similar movements).



"Eighty per cent of the world's ostriches are bred here in South Africa" – says the guide at the Oudtshoorn ostrich farm. No claim to fame more aptly describes the attitudes of most White South Africans both for and against Apartheid.

"AGAINST" APARTHEID

The self-professing 'liberals' are also self-deluding:–

"I moved my bed into a position so that I could see Robben Island across the bay – says a Capetown heiress – "Unlike most Whites I like to be reminded that over 900 political prisoners are detained there. I'm well aware of what's going on and I've no wish to turn my back on uncomfortable facts. It's like Haiti here – 'La Dolce Vita' built on rotten foundation!"

A few minutes later she is protesting vehemently: "But I'm damned if I'm going to leave South Africa! No fear! It wouldn't do any good and, besides, why should I leave all my money behind?"

Mr. S., a wealthy professional man, has convinced himself that "This is a good life. The Afrikaner's gradually becoming enlightened as he moves out

of the insularity of rural life into international business and finance".

But the evidence of increasing Government repressions runs counter to this belief, shared by so many White South Africans who like to persuade themselves that South Africa is a land of 'milk and honey' – without taking too much account of who is milking whom. "We are 'punch drunk'!" exclaims a lawyer describing the mounting volume of restrictive legislation which in the last three years has, amongst other things, made it illegal for:– anyone to belong to a racially-mixed political party; Coloured people to continue to have any representation whatsoever in Parliament; the partners to a mixed marriage, contracted outside South Africa to live together as man and wife within the Republic.

In addition the Government has acquired increased powers: – to detain people under the Terrorism Act for unlimited periods, without access to anyone, including relatives and lawyers; to override local authorities in deciding which areas, beaches and other amenities shall be declared "White" or "Non-White";

to restrict where Africans may live, to transfer them to the Reserves and to prevent them from being employed in particular kinds of jobs; to interfere in the rights of Universities to decide who shall teach, who shall be taught and even, in certain cases, what shall be taught.

SIX SHILLINGS A DAY

But still Mr. S. is optimistic. And why not? Has he not made tens of thousands of tax-free pounds on the Stock Exchange whilst paying lip-service to a concern for the plight of the African who has contributed so handsomely to his profits? And yet – for one of his education and ability – he is not lacking in awareness? Why, for example, is he amazed to learn that African miners earn only six shillings a day? Perhaps he prefers not to know where his dividends are coming from.

"We would be deported if we protested. We talk a lot and do nothing" – explains a Johannesburg lawyer who recently called in at the local police station to visit a client only to find him being subjected to electric shock treatment.

The few who protest do so at their peril. Out of 65 solicitors' firms in

Capetown only 2 are prepared to act for Africans in political cases and they have both been 'searched' by the Security Police.

A Jewish businessman makes comparisons with Nazi Germany:

"What did you do during the holocaust! - I feel like asking every German I meet! But if in 20 years' time I'm asked "What did you do?". I'll have to admit that I did nothing".

A young couple showing me the Wynberg and Newlands suburbs of Capetown point proudly at the neat, white terraced houses:-

"Look how beautifully they've been done up to look like Chelsea-style cottages!"

Not a murmur of sympathy for the Coloureds who were ejected from their homes to make way for the White developers who came in and exploited the situation.

PLENTY TROUBLE

"There's going to be plenty trouble" - complains a Coloured taxi-driver in Capetown who no longer thinks twice about driving a cab labelled "WHITES ONLY". "You save for years to buy a house and then they declare your area "White" and you move out to the suburbs!"

This Market area is to be declared White. The Indian traders are to be moved out to their own township 20 miles out of Durban"

and

"That beach is now Coloured but it will be declared White within two years!"

Such bald statements of fact from residents or guides show little concern for the Indian tailor who will lose all his customers or for the Coloured children who will have to travel three miles to an inferior beach.

The warmer-hearted who are genuinely disturbed by some of the Government's policies, too often reveal an awareness blunted by a reluctance to probe too deeply and to discuss real issues. But even the few who make a real stand at considerable risk all too frequently admit that they were more indignant 10 or 15 years ago when the situation was considerably less repressive.

"When I met my old friends from University" - says a South African actress

recently returned after several years in London - "I said: 'What's happened to you? You've changed! We used to fight against these things. But now you just accept and say nothing'. They replied: 'Yes, but we're older now with kids to support. Besides, let's face it, it's a marvellous life here if you keep quiet!"

NEUTRAL

"I used to get upset about the way they treat the Blacks" - reveals an Italian barber in Capetown - "But now I'm neutral. There's no point in discussing any more. The Afrikaner's like a brick wall. Nothing will change him! He's been brought up to believe that the Black man is a servant, an object! I believe in civilisation and progress and that, in the long run - say in 20 or 30 years - things will change. Meanwhile, I'll mind my own business!"

"I must admit I'm not as enthusiastic as I used to be" - confesses a former candidate for a Progressive seat in Parliament. "Three factors have changed me: independence in other parts of Africa (which lost us more votes than anything else); the prosperous boom conditions which have induced many Whites to support the Government; and the increasing futility of opposing a more and more autocratic regime."

The Guide at dinner shows us how: "the Coloureds use beer-can openers as slash rings!"

"Heaven knows what they'll do next!" - sighs a charming English-speaking gentleman.

Such fears run very deep and undoubtedly do much to perpetuate a system under which the Government tightens the screw whilst, for the most part, White South Africans stand idly by with their faces in the sun refusing to look at the pain inflicted in the process.

More than anything else they want to hear how much you love their land, climate, food and way of life. The highest compliment you can pay is to say that you would like to live there, for just as every outside 'convert' somehow appeases their conscience, so conversely, every White emigrant stimulates their feelings of guilt.

Your views on the real issues are unwelcome unless they happen to en-

dorse their sense of security and, if by chance you say too much, you are met with the rebuke: "You really have to live here to understand our problems". However, the rosetinted cocoon of unreality by which most White South Africans surround themselves prompts one to suppose that the length of one's stay in South Africa will be in inverse proportion to the amount one is likely to learn.

* * *

STATUS QUO

White women are keen to point out to visitors from abroad how well they treat their servants. "How I wept at my servant's funeral!" or "gave the maid a bedroom suite" - the maid in question was earning £10 a month!

"My servant cried when she read a statement by an African agitator that servants were going to be abolished. I reassured her".

This lady was obviously more reassured than her maid, for nothing comforts the Whites more than to learn of an African who wishes to maintain the 'status quo'!

"Coloured servants are becoming more difficult these days. They don't appreciate what you do for them" - a Capetown housewife complains. It scarcely seems to have occurred to her that perhaps they do not want to be servants at all! Official propaganda would appear to be remarkably effective - to judge from those who profess to oppose the Nationalists whilst deriving comfort from some of their more specious arguments. For instance, time and again people - other than official guides - refer to the low rents (often as little as £1.50 a month) paid by Africans whilst completely ignoring the low pay they receive in return for their contribution to the White-controlled economy.

For those without eyes to see the easy cocktail life on the sunburnt beaches and their own good opinion of the way they treat their servants are sufficient reassurance that everything in the garden is and will continue to be rosy. Although aspiring to vague 'liberal' principles and a belief that the Government should do a little bit more for the Africans - preferably not at their expense - most non-Nationalist

Whites do not wish to know about Sabotage Trials, detentions, and mass deportations; nor do they like to be reminded that they are responsible for the decline of the United Party into a mere cypher of what an Opposition should be to the extent that, whilst South Africa accounted for 47 per cent of the world's known executions (U.N. figures), the so-called Opposition stood committed only to Television and a State Lottery! They prefer to watch the share prices confident in the belief that their slice of the cake will grow in size whilst 50 per cent of the African children born in the Transkei (which few of them have visited) die of malnutrition before the age of two!¹

To do otherwise would be to disturb a happy dreamworld.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORTERS

Afrikaners

There is little love lost between Afrikaners and English-speaking Whites – as evidenced by Mr. Hertzog's controversial outburst to the effect that "only Afrikaners true to the spirit of Calvinism were fit to run the country". The Afrikaner's fear of English domination partly explains the delay in allowing television into the richest country in Africa and accounts for the insistence at all times upon the official use of Afrikaans as well as English (even on a 7-day guided tour in a bus whose passengers all spoke English!).

Nevertheless, the Nationalists insist that the Whites are "one nation with a heritage and way of life all their own" – whilst in the same breath proclaiming that the Africans comprise several distinct peoples each with its own language, customs, etc.

Upon these two statements the policy of Separate Development is based.

* * *

"What we're doing is English constitutional history" – a Nationalist M. P. explains to me in the Cape Parliament:—

"We're governing the Bantu from Pretoria just as the British governed us Afrikaners from Whitehall! The Bantu

are essentially tribal and the difference between the tribes are very great. Our system of keeping the tribes apart protects them from slitting each other's throats!"

It is interesting to hear a lawyer-member of Parliament who has travelled abroad supporting the government's past policy with regard to television with the words: "We don't want that tinned filth!"

When confronted with Professor Reid's figures – quoted above – concerning malnutrition in the Transkei his only comment is:

"Some Africans in the Transkei have four or five Cadillacs!"

He justifies the restrictions on free access for White visitors to the Transkei with: "Even I am forbidden to enter the Transkei without a permit" – as though this was a great hardship for him and a privilege for all the Africans! "Besides" – he goes on – as though this somehow knocked the final nail in his argument – "Asians aren't allowed into the U.K. and, anyway, the African must be protected from Communist agitators".

Moments later the ubiquitous shield of Apartheid is being shown to protect the African from predatory capitalists:—

"White capital is not allowed into the Transkei because we want to protect the Africans from exploitation by Jewish businessmen from Johannesburg! By enforcing Apartheid we're protecting the Africans from discrimination!"

"We limit student protest" – says another Nationalist M. P. – "because there are a lot of communists in the Universities. We don't want unrest. This is a peaceful country!"

"What about Sharpeville?" I interject "Oh! that was a mere pinprick blown up out of all proportion by the world press".

There is an uncanny resemblance between his parting shot – "You see we don't kill Africans" – and the self-conscious joke of another M. P. as I leave – "How many Africans have you killed?" – he asks the policemen at the gate of the Parliament precinct.

* * *

"They think we're the police!" – says a White taxi driver as six African youths – aged 18 to 25 – get up and run off as fast as they can as we drive slowly past the terrible shacks of East London's Duncan Village. Meanwhile, an infant, wearing only a dirty vest, jumps up and down for joy. He has yet to learn to fear White men in cars!

"Did you get the smell of them?" – asks an Afrikaans woman after watching Africans in the Transkei putting on a well-rehearsed tribal performance for our benefit. "Why are you always taking pictures of them?" – she exclaims – "We see too much of them!"

The tribal dances are performed in Umtata by bare-breasted women wearing multiple bangles, bracelets and coloured beads under the direction of a White guide who insists that he is not from the Government. With thinly disguised contempt he describes how:—

"They make their huts with cow manure. The women mix it with their hands. Now – you wouldn't like to do that, would you now, Mrs. Jones? – but this is the way they like to live!"

On another "showpiece" tour at the colourful Ndebele village near Johannesburg, I manage to walk behind the gaily-painted huts, with rush-matting on the floor, outside which beaded and bangled "topless" African women posed for photographs at extortionate prices.

Inside one of the houses (concealed from the visitors' view) sits a dignified African mother with her uniformed schoolgirl daughter in a simply furnished modern room. Here is the African's natural desire for self-improvement, outside – the Nationalists' vain attempt to 'put back the clock' on that development; here lies the reality – there the facade of fear and self-delusion.

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ENGLISH-SPEAKING SUPPORTERS

A Cabinet Minister recently accused the Opposition of stirring up trouble when a question was asked in the House concerning three Africans found dead from suffocation in an overcrowded prison van. A Judge considered that it was no offence to keep

¹ According to Professor John Reid of the University of Natal.

one's houseboy in the boot of the car provided that there was no danger from exhaust fumes.

Because of their narrow Calvinistic rural background Afrikaner attitudes such as these, however deplorable and unfathomable to the outsider, are in many ways less reprehensible than those of the English-speaking White supporters of the regime.

"Although I didn't mind being in the same ward as Coloured patients I found it repulsive to use the same eating utensils and insisted on being transferred!" - declares a former prisoner-of-war reminiscing about his experiences.

Another explains at table that: "The waiters wear white gloves for hygienic reasons!"

"How can you expect these 'Nigs' to rule a country when they live like that!" - exclaims an English-speaking lady (who might well have been the wife of a Home Counties vicar) as a group of poor, ragged children suddenly emerge - dancing and waving - from the empty scrublands of the parched Transkei.

The sight of a pathetic cripple in Soweto instantly puts the English-speaking guide on the defensive with:

"Oh, they get disability payments, you know!"

"Bantus prefer to live in squalor" - she comments as we pass a particularly depressing housing section. Moments later as she points to the houses of the handful of Soweto's better-off 'Bantus':-

"See how well-kept their gardens are!" - she now says.

A similar inconsistency is revealed when in one breath she describes Africans as "incapable of abstract calculation" and in another how a hospital has just acquired an African medical specialist who studied overseas before coming back to a top job!

We are shown a charming Nursery School for the children of better-off Africans. That it is a "show piece" is clear from the length of the Visitors Book and the fact that pictures of the same school appear in several propaganda brochures on Bantu education.

I am not allowed into an African house at random but am told that if I go to the Tourist Centre there is a house nearby which can be visited!

The guide - who takes State Guests on conducted tours at the Government's expense - describes how Robert Kennedy, during his visit to South Africa in 1967, took two photographs, the first of 'Bantu' lying in the sun in a park, and the second of a miner stripped to the waist. She insists that Kennedy published these in a German magazine and maliciously wrote under the first the caption: - "BANTU SHOT DEAD IN PARK" and under the second: "AFRIKANER MINER STRIPPED TO THE WAIST AWAITING PUNISHMENT!"

"Don't you believe all the distorted things you read about us in the Press" - says a chatty Nationalist of English origin.

"I am a Nationalist and my father was a Nat". There is no trace of apology in his voice as he continues - "Nationalist policy is based on fear and inbred hatred going back to the Kaffir wars. I believe that you should treat the Black like a younger brother who needs protection. Now you wouldn't give your younger brother a gun, would you?" - he asks.

"Perhaps not" - I reply - "but I'd give him the same food and shelter". The metaphor is quickly dropped.

One of his wife's most vivid memories of her European trip was seeing a woman in Italy pulling a plough: "What a dreadful job for a White woman!" - she keeps on saying.

* * *

"I think the students protesting at the Universities are immature! They need to be guided by their elders and betters". These words - not from a middle-aged, die-hard Afrikaner, but - sad to relate - from a 28-year old English-speaking Public School type working in the Government Tourist Bureau.

"Although I have voted United Party" - he explains - "I now support the Government. You've got to support them in this job, as tourists to South Africa always discuss politics".

"The main thing is they're happy" - says an English-speaking White woman in the Transkei after watching the native tribal dances.

The ostriches of South Africa are not confined to Oudtshoorn

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FACT AND FICTION

As the sun sets over Table Bay and cocktails transform fact into fiction and fear into fantasy, whilst harsh realities disappear as conveniently as Robben Island into the darkness; as White South Africans remain as falsely reassured by the fact that Africans come to South Africa to work - when the alternative in their own countries is no work - as they are lulled by comparing African wages in the richest country in Africa with those in the poorest; as the White supremacists feel secure in their armed strength - conveniently forgetting that without weapons, Africans could by a single national strike bring the entire economy to a grinding halt; as mounting oppression adds fuel to discontent; as the ostriches at Oudtshoorn and elsewhere bury their heads in the sand - let it not be forgotten that just as there is only one real issue - a rich cake and how to share it - there is also only one question to be answered:

"For how long can it remain divided as at present!"

* * *

RUN WITH BLOOD

"This country will run with blood if they don't stop treating the Africans like this" - says a Congregational Minister living and working with Blacks in a small town near the Transkei.

"The laws are wicked" - he continues - "There's vicious hatred here. They're sent to the Transkei at random to starve. There's nothing there for them - no work and little cultivation. They'll only take so much of this treatment.

One day they'll say "We'd rather die than stand any more of this".

But what of the silent majority?

"There is no work here" - says a middle-aged African in a small, shanty town in the Transkei. "I'm here to recruit Africans for the mines. I have no difficulty in persuading them to leave their families. First they're moved here from the towns, then they have to move on because there's no work. We're all very frustrated. We never see the foreign press but we hear the radio. We know what's going on elsewhere. One day there'll be a great war!"

CAMERON

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Dear Mr. Lytton,

I am so sorry to have been so long replying to your letter, but as usual I've been away and managed to get at it only this week.

Of course I've read your conclusions about South Africa with immense interest, and approval -- not, alas, surprise; I know the bloody place only too well and am bitterly familiar with the imhumanities of apartheid. I first tried to make people aware of what baaskaap meant years and years ago when Malan first got the Nats into Government through the inadequacies of Smuts. It took a long time to persuade some people of what is now accepted as one of the wretched commonplaces of the world, and in the process I got my own African book proscribed and myself excluded.

I am rather at a loss to know how to advise you in getting your views ventilated. The facts are not new enough to be a revelation -- that is to say, while not nearly enough people here are aware of just how bad things are, the theme itself is usually considered by publishers to be worked out. If I had my way I would have these facts brandished in front of every European nose continually, but it might be professionally argued that apartheid doesn't shock anyone any more, and that enough journalistic protests have been made about South Africa to fill a house. This is a rather difficult thing to deny.

There is also the problem, technically (which I'm sure you've been told over and over !) of the unorthodox length of the manuscript: too much

for an article, too little for a book. I know this is a preposterous objection, but it is the sort of one publishers make. It is, of course, 'pamphlet-length', but who puts out pamphlets now ?

I'm not making difficulties, and I'd sincerely like to help. What about us having a chat about the whole thing some day soon ? If you cared to give me a ring some time I'm sure we could fix something up, and worry out something constructive.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James Cameron". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "Yours sincerely".

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