THE QUESTION OF YOUR REMOVAL

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Young English poet and journalist who was ordered to leave South Africa while teaching at the Central Indian High School in Johannesburg

I HAVE had plenty of time to think over the Under-Secretary's words since the day I walked up through the beautiful deserted terraces of the Union Buildings in Pretoria.

I had reached Pretoria early so as to have plenty of time to gain access to the Minister, but it was already hot by ten and the lonely gardeners working isolated among the flowers high above the trees reminded me a little of Italy.

I had two days left in which to "make representations" to the Minister of the Interior showing good cause why I should not be expelled from the Union.

A week before, I had been called out of a class of sixty lively Indian children—who were doing their effective best to sabotage my attempts at conveying the values of the English language—to sign for a registered letter. O.H.M.S. and a Pretoria postmark led me to believe it was a tax demand. I had been teaching three weeks at the school. Had they caught up so soon with the first £26 I had earned for months? I put it in my pocket until break.

But it was not money '*they*' had caught up with. It was me.

"Madam,

1. I am directed to inform you that the Honourable the Minister of the Interior is considering the question of your removal from the Union in terms of section 22(3) of the Immigrants' Regulation Act No. 22 of 1913, as amended, and to enquire whether you desire to make any written representations in this connection for submission to, and consideration by, the Honourable the Minister.

2. Any representations you may wish to make must reach this Department within fourteen days of the date of this letter.

3. Section 22(3) of Act No. 22 of 1913 reads as follows:-

'Notwithstanding anything contained in this Act or the Aliens Act, 1937 (Act No. 1 of 1937) or any other law, the Minister may if he considers it to be in the public interest, by warrant under his hand, order the removal from the Union of any person who is not a South African citizen, and thereupon such person may, pending his removal, be detained in such custody

as may be prescribed by regulation.' ''

The letter was dated 30th January and had taken five days to arrive, so that I had ten days left, until Friday, 13th.

I will not now go into the discussions, visits to lawyers, counting of money; the advice, the packings, unpackings; the anxiety, protection and support of friends; the celebration of decisions made, the secrecy, the rashness, the fiery words, the gloom, the excitement, the terrible tiredness; the cancellation of visits that might incriminate friends, the care taken in back yards; the thickening fog and enormous use of shoe leather and horrible hot telephone boxes that the days following this communication brought on.

Suffice it to say that—swinging between a sort of Scarlet Pimpernel world where plans to creep back over the Limpopo, great, grey, green, greasy as it was, and live underground in Johannesburg with a different name, were my furniture; and the other world where the conviction I had done nothing wrong, even under South African law, supported my incapacity to believe that anyone could possibly bother with me—I had had by February 11th no reply to my pleas for some information on which to base representations.

On Friday '*they*', in the form of their police, might come in the middle of the night, for after the 14 days the Minister had power to imprison me. I grasped eagerly at the suggestion that I should go and see the Minister myself. So I arrived in Pretoria, where all the statues seemed to have top hats and bodies much too big for their legs, once again in high hope that *now* I should find out, *now* I should know enough to decide what to do.

The vast phoney palazzo of the Union Buildings was empty. I walked down big red stone corridors and came across a charming doorman. Could I possibly see the Minister of the Interior, I asked. He, of course, was in Cape Town. Now I realized why the place seemed so like a winter sports resort in summer. Parliament was sitting, and in the Cape. Obviously the Honourable the Minister would be far too involved in protecting the future of civilization to be thinking about me. What was it about, the doorman asked kindly. Could I perhaps see the Secretary? The letter was from him. He was in Cape Town with the Minister. Could he know what it was about, perhaps some one else could help? I showed him my ''document''—by now well-worn with much showing and re-reading. He

became even kindlier and directed me to an Under-Secretary. On his door there was a notice telling callers to go to the Interview Officer. Determined to do everything right I asked a big red-faced man in a grey suit, who was the only soul in sight, where to find that officer. This man was the Under-Secretary, and I followed him into his office.

Foolish I had been to think he would understand the human need to know something about my position, or that he would dare to reassure me even by a smile that I was still among people where a charitable human response can be looked for. All he could say was that he couldn't say. He at least admitted the letters had been received. "What is the usual procedure?" I pursued, my winsomeness evaporated, but determined to keep my temper. "Does the Minister usually answer such requests for information? Will he, do you think, at least write and say he won't give me any?" "I can't say." "Have there ever been cases where he has given information?" "I can't say." I tried another tack.

"I'm sure you will agree with me that it is not unreasonable to suggest that one needs to base a representation *on* something?" "It's not for me to say." "I know it's not for you to tell me what the Minister has decided, but what ought I to do? Is it likely, for instance, that the day after to-morrow a big lorry will come in the middle of the night and fetch me?" I had not said this completely seriously, but he answered solemnly, "That can happen too."

Reason, politeness, abasement, firmness, an attempt at charm, all had failed. When he suggested I should write to the Minister saying what I had already twice written, I felt I had really got into some book by Kafka. My helplessness was quite genuine and tears of impotent self-pity very near the surface when I finally asked him, "What shall I do?"

His offer of comfort was: "Perhaps if you search your conscience you will find some reason for it."

Exploding inside I thanked him profusely, courteously and ironically. I went outside to one of the thick stone balustrades and collapsed onto it in a flood of defeated rage. The Voortrekker Monument shimmered in the heat of the horizon. Nothing in the scene reminded me of Italy now. After some time I walked slowly down through the trees. At the bottom I looked up. I spat twice at the great pile above the cannon, a thing I have never managed to do before in my life. And as

I waited for the bus I gradually recovered from the empty despair that had overcome me in the gardens. Suddenly there, bright like a steady bunsen burner which has a regular supply of the right fuel, was a fierce and clear determination, based neither on self-pity nor anything personal, that I would not give in. I might well be beaten; I know the strength of outside powers and that I am not particularly well-equipped to fight; and I was beginning to know much more about this particular enemy, the great fogging power of a tyranny. I might well be beaten, but I would not now give in . . . .

I accepted the offer of hospitality and a lift to Rhodesia from a friend whom I met at a wedding three weeks later; and I did so because I hoped I would be able to do some work there, both to get some money and to go on with a book that had to be with publishers in London in May. My life in Johannesburg was becoming farcical. I had said I would not give in to blackmail—and I felt I had to cut myself off from many friends for their sake, or at least give them the option of doing so. I had said I would not let myself be affected by the fearful suspicion that cloaks so much of all that one does in South Africa, that I would not base my thoughts and judgements on rumour and aspersion—and there I was listening to hints that perhaps so and so, who had suddenly got a permit after long denials, had said something; that an acquaintance had always suspected that one of my acquaintance was a police informer: had I considered the possibility of . . . and perhaps I better look into . . .

No, no, no, I said. A hundred betrayals rather than suspect everyone. I had never made any secret of my opinions, my friends, my way of life. I had done nothing wrong, and I was not going to become part of that great sponge on which a corrupt police state depends—the network of suspicious and fearful minds, blackmailed and blackmailing, that is much more sickening really than the laws and methods that bring it into being. This aspect of the situation in South Africa had always interested me—the great damage people do to themselves because of what is done to them, the second rung of the ladder, the depressing and inevitable result of bad laws, that they make bad men. What the Honourable the Ministers—and the diabolically clever system they are based on—were doing was bad enough. I did not want to co-operate with them in their attack on morality, as so many less fortunate people than I have had to do.

A State of Emergency was declared in Southern Rhodesia the day after I arrived in Salisbury, but that is another story. (I hastened at the time to reassure those of my friends who might be beginning to believe with the Minister that I was of any use in revolutionary circumstances, that it really had nothing to do with me.) And it was in Salisbury that I heard that if ever I tried to re-enter the Union I should be refused admission.

"The Honourable the Minister of the Interior has after due consideration of all the circumstances, deemed Miss Joseph to be unsuited to the requirements of the Union on economic grounds or on account of standard or habits of life, in terms of the powers vested in him by Section 4(1) (a) of Act No. 22 of 1913 as amended", the Secretary for the Interior wrote.

There has been a certain amount of Sunday newspaper publicity stressing my personal predicament and saying nothing of what I really think. The line we took was "bolt from the blue on innocent unsuspecting young woman." It is extremely difficult to answer when people, especially those who do not know the Union, ask "But what did you *do*?"; since it is perfectly true that I never have taken part in any political activity, and hardly attended meetings, even in Hyde Park, except as a reporter.

Although I agree less with Nkrumah's "Gain ye first the political kingdom and all will be added unto you" than with the original version, after six months or so in South Africa I became convinced that the country has reached a point where the only practical answer is political organization. This is the fault not of those struggling to win freedom through this means, but those who have held the power up till now.

Since I both thought this and wished to do something, the obvious action was to join some political group. I returned to South Africa in November last after a holiday, fully determined to do this; but once again, to my grief, I found myself again irresolute. So I continued, as all through my life, with interests and associates in many places, but membership cards in none.

However I do see the point of a friend of mine who said: "Of course you're guilty. You're the most guilty person I know in South Africa." I was guilty of taking no notice of '*them*,' and all their supporters, open and tacit.

Searching my conscience, as the Under-Secretary suggested, in the long hours of comfortable exile in Salisbury, I found lack of courage, lack of aim, dissipation of energies—omission

rather than commission. I should have done something more positive than merely judging people according to standards other than colour, having to do with them or not for reasons other than respectability; treating people as one might anywhere else; pretending to live in Africa as if it might be somewhere else—not because I was ignorant of the differences and took no account, but because I *was* aware of what was happening and considered this something one should try to do. Eliza Doolittle in "Pygmalion" was a lady when she was treated as one by Higgins' friend, not when she was "made" into one by Higgins' bullying. I had bumbled along doing what I could for those I came in contact with, not aimlessly but with no stated programme, trying to steer an honest path between the Scylla of despair and the Charybdis of over-simplification. The price of journeying with ready-made principles but no ready-made conclusions is that you take the slow stopping train and get out at every station.

The problem here is not unique, though it is possible that here it is expressed, in this present age, in a unique form. Underlying all the difficulties is man's attitude towards other human beings. You can say, and I would fully agree, that this is so anywhere, and where are you when you find out that truism? But it is *not*, for instance, acknowledged that the reason for refusing someone a vote (that is, a potential say in his and others' affairs) is because you do not value him or her as you do yourself. Few people would claim that men are in fact equal now, but until one treats everyone of equal *value* as himself there will be bitterness and confusion, envy and despair.

Since it is very rare that human beings can consider other people and their needs to be as important as their own, there must be safeguards in the form of laws so that no one is in a position to abuse a weaker. One of these safeguards is the vote—if a man depends on you in part for his power, then he treats you as of no account at his peril.

"It's more complicated than that." I can hear all the people thinking of their jobs not so easy to keep, the noisiness and mess of the invasion of lower standards, people who don't know what a nice garden is swarming up the road breaking the young trees, living in squalor next door with their twelve children, leaving litter, getting drunk. It sounds maybe too simple, but who said it wasn't immensely complicated to carry out such a simple thing? The Ten Commandments are simple enough, and

difficult enough. To prize a Persian carpet more than a person is wrong, and we ought to admit it.

And if white civilization will go under because all people are created with the respect we give ourselves, then good riddance, then it's a dying duck anyway. I don't think it will. In spite of what the Minister thinks of my standards and habits I have enjoyed a most civilized life, and the barbarism of white South Africa apalled me even more than the degradation and despair of black South Africa.

Whether we like it or not freedom is indivisible, as was said some years ago about peace. The whites in South Africa are among the most imprisoned people I have ever come across. The agony one sometimes feels about a country which arouses so much passion is often on their account—not because of what may happen to them, but because of what they have let themselves become, what they have done to themselves. The agony is agony at waste.

It is quite inexcusable to treat the "native problem" (it's really a "white" problem) as "politics" and dismiss it. Nor can people outside the country any longer ignore the part that international opportunism plays in supporting the *status quo*.

We may say: "But is it my business? Is it my fault?"

Whatever country I'm kicked out of, I shall continue to say that the answer is yes to both questions.