

# IMPRESSIONS AND THOUGHTS

by Peter Royle

Big thoughts are in the offing. All but the most ostrich-like South Africans are beginning to feel this in their bones. The Blacks feel hope, and erstwhile reactionaries are talking of history and concessions. Liberals look on with amusement as government supporters see cherished illusions shattered and unchallengeable principles revised. Some English speakers express resentment at the abandonment of Smith. The 'Natal Mercury' writes of the government's mania for inter-racial sport. There is less obvious agitation than there has been at various times during the twenty-seven years of Nationalist rule—or so it seems, at least, to the returning visitor; but this is surely one of the results of the becalmed amusement with which most South Africans have awakened to the recognition that their country is part of the world. Mr Vorster may choose to call his new outward-looking policy detente; but that implies, after all, that there has been tension, which suggests there has been a relationship; whereas the truth is rather that, as far as South Africa has been concerned, the political agents in the world of which the Nationalists and their allies have disapproved have, until recently, been regarded purely as gadflies by those in authority, and as powerless courts of appeal by those who opposed them. What the new policy and the new attitudes reflect is that they are so regarded no longer. Eureka, the world exists!

What accounts for this surprising change of perspective? Partly, no doubt, very little things. It must be impossible these days to watch or play sport, whether intergraded or not, without reflecting on the existence of the outside world; and the speed limits and regulations governing the supply of petrol were a constant reminder to me, as they must be to resident South Africans, that there are external powers which have to be placated. This explanation holds chiefly, of course, for the man in the street; but insofar as he is applauding the government's hesitant steps in the direction of better relations with Blacks at home and abroad, it can only be, in many cases, because he too has come to recognise that, irrespective of the way Whites may feel and vote, there are certain imperatives which it is no longer safe to ignore. South Africans, like everybody else, live in an interdependent world; and many of them have just realised it for the first time.

Why has it taken so long for this realization to dawn? It should, after all, have been obvious for a very long time. There are, I think, specific historical reasons for this blindness which I shall try, at the risk of over simplification, to sketch.

Imperialism helped to unify the world economically on the White man's terms. Once this had been achieved, however,

it didn't take long for the colonial powers to recognise that their interests would best be served by steering their colonies to independence. Of course, it wouldn't be real independence, because in a world of gargantuan appetites and economic scarcity there can be no such thing; but it suited both colonizers and colonized, the former because, while the basic economic order remained intact, the granting of independence would give them a good conscience, and would obviate the necessity of disbursing large sums of money for defence and administration, the latter because it meant 'recognition' and an opportunity to fight for a more equitable world order. The major exception to this rule was South Africa's ally, Portugal; and as long as she went on holding back the tide, it was possible for South Africans to bury their heads in their sand castles. What has happened is that the life-guard's whistle has gone.

Of course, it would be possible to argue—and by those who are so engrossed in their castle-building that they haven't heard the whistle or have chosen to ignore it, it is being argued—that, as an already independent country of undoubted military and economic strength, governed by people who don't consider themselves imperialists and have no intention of pulling out, South Africa is immune from developments such as these. After all, the great Black-White battles of Afrikaner lore were fought 'sub specie aeternitatis' between two breakaway groups; and Nationalist attitudes ever since could be seen as a ritual re-enactment of a timeless victory. Therein, I think, lies the explanation for many South Africans' belief that their country could go it alone, impervious to the tides of history. But just as the South African war proved that economic imperialism would inevitably catch up with and reclaim its lost tribes, so the victory of the forces of liberation in Portuguese Africa, bringing militant Black Africa to within a pebble's throw of the Republic, has awakened the suspicion that, failing a withdrawal to loftier places, the lost Black tribes of Southern Africa are also about to be brought back into the mainstream of world events.

Why can't this just be resisted? The answer is simple: White South Africans would prefer not to have to fight; for one thing that the Arab-Israeli conflict has shown is that, where a rebellious group can command the gut allegiance of neighbouring states, the fight is not just with that group but with a whole sea of sympathizers; and it would be foolish to pretend any more, as Mr Vorster used to do, that they could all be gobbled up before breakfast. The prospect of an endless unwinnable war against an enemy with sanctuaries in neighbouring countries which it would be madness

to attack is, as the Americans discovered in Vietnam and the French in Algeria, a daunting one. What makes the situation even more acute is the fact, rubbed in by the speed limits and petrol regulations, that the Third World is now, for the first time, showing its economic muscle. One of the things that the malaise of Western economics demonstrates is the beginning of a major shift in the world balance of power. Decolonization, like the abolition of slavery, threw its beneficiaries to the economic wolves at a time of rapidly rising populations and increasing scarcity; but it also enabled them to organize and fight; and this is what many of the world's underdeveloped countries, following the examples of the Arabs, are starting to do. Economic sanctions can no longer be laughed off or dismissed with the argument that they would be hurting those whom they were designed to help (try using the same argument with a strike leader).

Mr Vorster's response to this new situation is clear to see: he wants to surround South Africa with satellite Bantustans.

By making minor concessions at home, he hopes to keep on the right side of as many as possible of the leaders of Black Africa to the north; and by helping the leaders of Black

Southern Africa (excluding, of course, South Africa), he hopes to establish good neighbourly relations with client regimes in the south. Although I think that in the long run the Nationalists' game is lost, the 'pragmatic' Mr Vorster is not being utterly naive in thinking that these policies may work to the advantage of South African Whites; and in any event it is important at the present juncture that he should be allowed to go on thinking it. Of course, if he could bring himself to switch sides openly in the Rhodesian conflict, his hand would be greatly strengthened, but even failing that he still has many trumps. It is a situation fraught with creative possibilities, in which each side can reasonably believe that the new policy is favouring it. Naturally, if the Nationalists think that concessions made now will be money in **their** moral bank, they are being quite unrealistic: they made their choice in the early 1960's, and concessions now like those made under the pressure of events, to the Catholic population of Ulster, will be seen for what they are.

Am I suggesting, therefore, that South Africa's future will be settled by outside forces? And if so, does this mean that liberal resistance to the less pleasant policies of the government can be seen only as symbolic, rather in the way that the actions of the French Resistance in the second world



There is a tide in the affairs of men

war, according to Sartre and Camus, who were in it, were transformed, even for themselves, into mere gestures by the knowledge that the destiny of France was being settled elsewhere? Certainly I think that South Africa's future, like that of every other nation, will be **largely** determined by outside forces; but at the same time by entering into a dialogue with representatives of some of those forces, she will in turn be able, to some extent, to influence them. What liberals could profitably do is, as they are doing, themselves establish contact with these representatives. At the same time the future of the country will also largely be determined by itself. The only changes which the outside world is virtually unanimous about is that there should be some form of majority rule and that apartheid should be scrapped. On the exact political complexion of any future government there is still room for manoeuvre. Acts can become gestures, but the opposite is also true: acts which seem like gestures to-day can, given the right circumstances, bear positive fruit in the shape of popular support at crucial moments. Far be it from me, who have left the country, to tell those who oppose the government from within what they ought to do; but it seems to me that a good line would be the one

that most of them have adopted already: to go on strenuously opposing apartheid, while welcoming any liberal change, and urging the government to accept the implications for South Africa of its own Bantustan policy. Some of these would be the scrapping of the colour bar for 'foreign' citizens (whoever heard of migrant workers in other countries being denied legal access to hotels and cinemas? ), the scrapping of the colour bar for South Africans (if it has to be scrapped for 'foreigners', how can it be justified for one's own citizens? ), and the granting of full citizen rights to all those such as the Coloureds and Indians who have no theoretical homeland in which to exercise such rights. For liberals this would, of course, be merely the thin end of the wedge. Nationalists would naturally view the matter differently. From debates of this nature, in any case, debates in which all sections of the population should be encouraged to participate, the lineaments of the Southern Africa of the future may well emerge. As realism grows in those for whom, until recently, liberalism has been equated with utopianism, the day is perhaps not far off when 'REALITY' will be publishing articles written by Nationalists. □

## EDENDALE

By: SELBY MSIMANG



The Settlement of Edendale, adjoining Pietermaritzburg, was established in 1851 on the farm Vervordient by the Rev. James Allison and several African members of the Methodist Church. It was subsequently sub-divided and these sub-divisions were transferred in freehold to individual owners. There were sub-divisions which were not allotted and, it is understood, were reserved for future expansion. Mr. Allison also had his sub-division which is where the Edendale Technical School stands today. Owing to certain disputes in the community over the un-allotted sub-divisions the Supreme Court ordered that all un-allotted sub-divisions should be sold to descendants of original buyers. Unfortunately this order coincided with the time

the Pietermaritzburg Corporation had decided to clear out all settlements of unauthorised urbanisation round the perimeter of the city. As usual, no other accommodation had been arranged for the people concerned, who were workers of Pietermaritzburg.

In some underhand way a number of the sub-divisions sold fell into the hands of land speculators. Practically all the people from the slum areas around Pietermaritzburg were accommodated on these plots and, by 1937, Edendale had become the worst slum of all. Property owners formed a Vigilance Committee with the purpose of fighting to bring about order. They soon discovered they would require a