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EDITORIALS

1 THOSE WHO GO AND THOSE WHO STAY

An intense, sometimes bitter debate rages between those liberal and radical white South Africans who have decided to stay in the country and those who have decided to leave. (The debate between the blacks who have left and the blacks who have stayed is in some respects a similar one, but there is less guilt involved in it: all blacks, for obvious reasons, tend to be victims of the situation; most of those who stay are simply unable to go, and most of those who have gone have been forced away.) In the last few years particularly, a mental distance almost equivalent to the geographical distance has separated concerned white South Africans in and out of the country.

The diverging attitudes cannot be summed up adequately: there are too many aspects and complexities, and too many variations in intensity. Still, there may be some

point in attempting to set down a few of the main arguments offered on either side.

A politically-conscious white person who has left South Africa is likely to hold some or all of the following views. The whole South African "system" of economic exploitation and racial injustice is inherently violent (as the Carletonville shootings so clearly suggest), and is intolerable. The most sensible and indeed the most moral response to this system, since one cannot seriously hope either to change it or to subvert it, is to go away, and maybe to make some contribution to the pressures which are being brought to bear upon South Africa from overseas. In the end change will come mainly as a result of black exertion; probably there will be a revolution. Those

whites who decide to stay and to "carry on the struggle valiantly" are perhaps in many respects deluding themselves. Whether they like it or not and whether they know it or not, they are in fact in various ways both beneficiaries and even supporters of the whole system; they often possess status, wealth and ease which they would not have if they lived elsewhere; and besides, their "liberal or radical" efforts achieve little or nothing. But then this last fact seems often not to worry them as much as one would expect: they cry "Never say die" and continue optimistically. Could a reason for their "steadfastness" be that they are less deeply distressed by failure than they claim? . . . And beyond all this, there is often a further criticism of the whites who stay: their very opposition to the status quo is less radical than it should be. In the words of a recent letter to a South African newspaper: "All they want to do is to tinker with the machine as it exists and tune it up a bit. When one considers what the machine really is, this seems futile."

A liberal or radical white person who has decided (so far) to stay in South Africa is likely to hold some or all of the following views. The whole South African system of economic exploitation and racial injustice is inherently violent, and is appalling. But a person who feels that he belongs in South Africa, that his human responsibility is located here, must attempt to work for change—and obviously this can normally be done more effectively within the country than outside it. Any white person who decides to stay is bound to be caught up in various ways within the apartheid system; but it is his duty to try to make sure that the evil consequent upon his existence within the structure is outweighed, and if possible heavily outweighed, by the things that he can say and do. And can he say or do anything that is really valuable? Liberals have a few achievements to their credit already; but it has to be admitted that an ominous question-mark hangs over all their activities. If a violent revolution were to sweep over South Africa, the doings of white liberals would indeed appear almost completely pathetic and futile. But if change is not accomplished in a wholly violent manner (and revolution would not on the whole be a satisfactory solution, nor perhaps is it a very likely one), then the presence of white liberals may well prove crucial, particularly at certain key moments in the process of change. The most powerful movement towards change must of course come, is in fact already coming, from blacks. How far should change go? That the people and the future must decide . . . Those who stay in South Africa usually respect

the distaste or the despair of those who have left, but they do not believe, as they are sometimes urged to, that the act of leaving is in itself a large contribution towards a resolution of the problem, nor incidentally are they always willing to accept the clear moral superiority of people who so obviously relish the cultural stimulation of Britain or America.

There—roughly, inadequately, over-simply—are the two sides of the argument. What can one say about them?

An overseas reader might immediately object that *Reality* has no right to adjudicate: published in South Africa, it is bound to side with those who are still in the country. To which one would have to reply. "Who can adjudicate?" The answer is clearly, "Nobody". Everyone is apt to be prejudiced; yet everyone must try to work things out for himself.

One of the most important features of the debate, in our view, is that each side is more responsive to the attitudes of the other side than it is usually prepared to admit. After all, there are strong arguments from both directions, arguments that every sensitive person is bound to acknowledge; and yet every individual is forced to choose one way or another. Both points of view are powerful, and unsatisfactory. The situation is in fact a tragic one. And tragedy generates confusion, guilt, despair . . .

But is it not possible to say which view is the better one? No. In such a situation there is no right view, no "better" view. Morality is largely what an individual—responding with his whole being to what he believes and to all that he sees and knows—creates for himself. Every white South African (unless perhaps he is one of those few who has really suffered for his belief in justice) is tarnished, guilty; but everyone must decide, as honestly as he can, what is most creative in his own case. And when he has made his decision, let him be humble about it and recognise the power of the opposite point of view.

Some of our overseas readers will think that we are under an illusion in supposing that those who decide to stay have a strong case. Some of our South African readers will think that we are being too generous in supposing that those who have decided to go have a strong case.

We ourselves, those who edit and publish *Reality*, have clearly decided—so far—that there is some point in staying. □

2 EVIL AND MAD

As *Reality* goes to press, there is further news of the Government's ruthless campaign against the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) and the Black Peoples' Convention (B.P.C.)

The inhumanity and the short-sightedness of these actions is appalling. □