

An address by Mr. H.V. Roberts, General Secretary of the South African Institute of International Affairs, to members of the Branches of the Institute, August, 1958.

For the last five months of last year I was visiting institutes of international affairs and university centres of international and African studies in the United States and Canada, in Britain, Holland, France, Belgium and Western Germany. In all these places I talked on South Africa's racial relations as a problem in the international field and I should now like to tell you something of what I said about our position in world affairs and what reactions I encountered and, in conclusion, to look at our position now that I have studied it from the outside as well as from within.

I outlined to my audiences overseas factual conditions in South Africa today, conditions with which you are all familiar and which I need not repeat here. I told them that, irrespective of internal policies and conditions, there are external factors against the background of which South Africa's problems must be seen.

It is in the post-war years - a mere twelve years - that these problems have attracted considerable international attention and criticism. In this short period changes have taken place in human affairs which are greater than those which have occurred over thousands of years. Never before has such a brief period witnessed such astounding/scientific progress, such rapid material advances or such a marked increase in world population, and I should like to say a little more about these later.

In the same period some hundreds of millions of non-European peoples have shaken themselves free of Western political control. In this massive liberation of coloured peoples from Western influence, there have been, and still are, three factors all tending in the same favourable direction:

Firstly, the coloured peoples have become aware of the power of

* The text of this address is sent to members of the Institute at the request of their Branch Committees.

their great and rapidly increasing numbers as well as of political ideas of self-government.

Secondly, Europe has displayed an unwillingness to retain political control of these peoples, whether it be from moral reasons or simply from lassitude and inability as a result of two suicidal wars in thirty years.

Thirdly, and this is the most important factor, the pole of world power has for the first time in centuries shifted from Europe and it has not yet been determined whether it has gone West to North America or East to Russia and China. There are today two poles of world power and they are engaged in a war - call it a cold war, if you will, but it is still a war - to establish one pole as the dominant one. In this struggle each is seeking to attract to its side - America by means of financial aid and propoganda, Russia by any and every means which fit the case of the moment - the other nations of the world who have not aligned themselves either with the one or with the other.

Now these nations who have not so aligned themselves - the so-called "uncommitted nations" - are almost entirely made up of the newly-independent nations of Asia and Africa. Over twenty new nations have come into being since the war and these nations see world affairs not as we Europeans see them - as a struggle between communism and capitalism, or between the freedom of a democratic way of life and the slavery of a dictatorship - but rather as a widespread struggle by coloured peoples to win independence from European powers. The two major powers who are now competing for the favours of these uncommitted nations have to take into account these feelings. For Russia there is no difficulty. She exploits these feelings to the full since it is in her interest to have Western control removed from those parts of the world in which it is established. Should that control be withdrawn abruptly so that only a weak new state is left behind so much the better for in such conditions the local Communist party stands a better chance. For the United States the problem is a delicate one. She is

torn between the fear of driving the coloured peoples into the Communist camp by aligning herself, or even appearing to align herself with the European powers who control these people, and the fear that a weak newly-independent state might run into economic and other difficulties which would open the way to Communist control.

The impressive numbers of non-European peoples, and the even more impressive annual increase in these numbers, are compelling reasons for the United States to seek influence among them. A prominent American, a former Ambassador and a forceful writer on what American policy should be, Mr. Chester Bowles, has this to say, for example, about Africa:

"Implicit in our whole discussion of an African policy is the point that American diplomacy must now recognise that the sources of potential power in Africa lie with the Africans, not with their European rulers. In the long run, the strategic peoples of this great continent will determine who shall have access to their strategic metals".

May I underline the importance he attaches to what he calls "strategic peoples" as opposed to the usual concept of strategic position or strategic resources. He suggests a line of action too:

"Within practical limits", he writes, "we should support the United Nations as an instrument for organizing, correlating and encouraging the growth in African progress towards ultimate freedom". American official policy is, of course, more cautious than this, and considerably more obscure, but I think that Mr. Chester Bowles' views are representative of what a large and influential body of Americans feel and their feelings are reflected to an important degree in ^{the shaping of} American policy towards Africa.

Thus we have a trend in world affairs where a score or more of new Asian and African nations are, particularly through the United Nations, campaigning for the transfer of power from Europe to indigenous governments in Asia and Africa and where the two major powers in the world today are favouring, if not actively stimulating,

this process.

Whether you or I, or anyone else in this country or elsewhere either likes or dislikes this trend, does not matter. To a student of contemporary history, which is what the study of international affairs is, the trend is there and must be noted, irrespective of likes or dislikes. One must not assume, of course, that this trend will continue always in the same direction or at the same speed. The course of human affairs cannot be calculated mathematically as can physical phenomena. It could be that a recognition of Russian imperialism might sweep through the uncommitted nations of Asia and Africa, as it already has done through the Western world, or that some other factor might divert or weaken this trend. But such considerations are mere conjecture and we had better keep our eyes on what is actual, so that, as the future unfolds, we shall be better understand the relative importance of its events.

It is against such an external background that I wish to consider South Africa's position, and we must frankly recognise that the white minority of this country is pitiably small in numbers and finds itself in the path of the independence struggle I have mentioned. We may point out that we are an exceptional case, the one country from which European control cannot be removed to London, or Paris or Brussels, the country in which Europe and Africa are indissolubly joined by the presence of three million Europeans who wish to remain in Africa. We may point this out but so far we have not been well heeded in the world.

The racial situation in South Africa has created an international problem which is revealed in the deterioration of our relations as a country with the rest of the world. Firstly, in the Commonwealth, that so-called "family of nations", there is no political or commercial co-operation between India and this country, and with the other Asian members, Pakistan and Ceylon, political relations are strained. To a lesser extent, a divergence in attitudes towards the native peoples of Africa has led to a strain in our relations

with the United Kingdom and this strain is revealed sporadically over the question of the transfer of the High Commission Territories, Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland. As you know, provision was made in the South Africa Act of 1909 for the eventual transfer of these territories to the Union and representations have been made by General Hertzog and Dr. Malan for this transfer to be carried out. I think the essential features of this problem are that, irrespective of moral considerations, no Government in the United Kingdom would risk its political future by arousing a certainly hostile public opinion about a transfer in present circumstances; and secondly that native opinion in the territories, if it were consulted, would certainly reject incorporation in present circumstances. It therefore seems likely that this problem will remain unresolved for a long time and that relations between this country and the United Kingdom are likely to become frayed from time to time as new developments arise here or in the territories. It would seem to me that the only meeting ground for the various factors at work in this situation is the creation under the joint sponsorship of the United Kingdom and South African Governments of separate South African native states of which Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland might be component parts. In that way the British Government could say that "these territories have become independent, which is our policy"; white South Africans could point to a positive form of "apartheid", and the new territories would provide an outlet for growing native ambitions. I do not wish to advocate here that such a course should be adopted; it would clearly require the careful consideration of a joint commission. I merely want to make the point that such a course seems to offer the only grounds for agreement among the various parties.

There is a strain in our relations with the Commonwealth as a whole, even with nations like Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and with the Western world too, because embarrassment is felt in these centres about the policies which are followed here. It is

the same sort of embarrassment that I met in the United States over the Little Rock episode: a feeling that "here is something which is showing us up as a whole rather badly".

In the United Nations the feeling is not one of embarrassment but of open hostility voiced by the majority of its nation-members. A technical legal question concerning South-West Africa provided the "casus belli", but it is clear that the real causes for the clash arise not so much from the specific matter of South-West Africa but from opposition to the racial policies which are pursued in South Africa itself. After all, British Togoland was recently incorporated in Ghana; the reasons given were that this small territory was not economically viable. The same happened in the case of Eritrea, which was federated with Ethiopia a few years ago. In both cases incorporation took place despite the opposition of a substantial number of the inhabitants of Togoland and Eritrea. There are good economic grounds for the incorporation of South-West Africa in the Union; but ^{international} political opposition to the racial set-up in South Africa does not take them into account.

The international problem which is created by South Africa's racial relations is not a classical international problem: it does not involve the invasion by one country of another country's territory, or the infringement of another country's rights. It is, on the contrary, an invasion by world opinion of the territory of one country in an endeavour to rectify the conditions of life of some of its inhabitants.

It is often the case that people seek parallels and comparisons, either to condemn what is going on in South Africa or to justify it. Some violent comparisons are made; for example, when I was overseas, a comparison was made by a trade union leader between conditions in South Africa and in Russian-dominated Hungary. Now the South African Government has not murdered thousands of Africans in the streets of Johannesburg; it is possible, of course, to foresee a popular rising in South Africa being suppressed with considerable loss of life, but

even in this hypothetical case, the analogy is basically wrong. Hungary is not the homeland of Soviet Russian troops, while South Africa is the homeland of the white people there. Other, more informed, criticism compares the situation with that of the Negro in the South of the United States. But there are tremendous cultural differences between the Negro of the United States and the Africans in South Africa. There is also a question of numbers; in the United States there is one Negro for every eleven white people; in South Africa there is one white person for every four coloured people. Comparisons are also made with Algeria, but this is a country still controlled by a metropolitan Power. The nearest parallel that I have seen myself is in Liberia, which is a country ruled by an immigrant minority which speaks a European language - if you count the English of the Deep South as a European language; the main difference between that country and South Africa is that the ruling minority is of the same colour as the ruled majority, and I think the fact that that country is overlooked, for example by the United Nations, illustrates how criticism in these matters can be not only colour-conscious but also colour-blind.

In considering South Africa's problem in the international field, I do not wish, however, to draw parallels with this or that country, since I believe that each of these countries has a problem which is very different from the others. But in the broad field of world affairs, I pointed out to my audiences overseas, there is a lesson to be learned from the South African situation which may give pause to those who would solve the problem by a stroke of the pen by granting full democratic rights to every adult in South Africa regardless of race. At present there exists no world government on such a basis, there exists not a world administration but only a debating society - the United Nations, which shows an occasional tooth; and in this world group each society, each nation is allowed to pursue its own policies, relatively unhindered. But we do seem to be moving towards the idea of a central world administration; and

we must ask ourselves, on what basis would power be allocated to the various nations making up this world administration? Would we equate, for example, as we do at present in the United Nations, the voices of (let us say) the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. on the one hand, with those of (let us say) El Salvador and Liberia on the other? Or would it not be suggested that the more democratic way of doing this would be to give the vote to every adult and administer power according to the size of the population? Would the citizens of the United States contemplate being out-voted by five to one, by a thousand million Communists in Asia and Eastern Europe? Such an idea is clearly not practical politics, but I submitted that this white minority in South Africa is faced with such a dilemma here and now and in a more acute form. There are no national boundaries, let alone oceans, separating us from a majority whose way of life and whose standards are not ours, and it is no more unreasonable for white South Africans to refuse to merge their destinies with the majority - still largely backward - than it is for the citizens of the United States to refuse to submit the voting powers of their 170 million people to the decisions of a world body dominated by 600 million Chinese and over 200 million Russians.

What the distant future of the world holds as a political unit it is not, of course, possible at this stage to predict. I feel that many people in the Western world are not expecting South Africans to keep abreast of their ideas on democracy, but rather to take the bold plunge ahead of all the rest.

The evolution of the British Empire affords an interesting contrast: the emergence of independent States has been going on now for some years and the Commonwealth is not what the Empire was - a unitary force - but it is a very loose association of sovereign States; a suggestion that in evolving from an Empire into a Commonwealth - in evolving towards a more democratic form - the Commonwealth should retain its unitary strength by having an overall Commonwealth Parliament has never been seriously considered. Would the citizens

of Great Britain, for example, care to join such a parliament on a democratic basis, in which the 50 million people there would be out-voted by seven to one, by 350 million Indians? What about the smaller countries with their tiny populations - Canada with 15 million, Australia with 10 million, and New Zealand with 2 million? Such a democratic solution has never been seriously considered.

On the contrary, the British Empire has split itself into a number of self-governing States on racial and national lines, and it has done what the proponents of total apartheid in South Africa would have South Africa do: split into a number of self-governing units on racial lines. I indicated that such a policy did not seem to have attracted widespread support in South Africa where all races are economically and geographically interwoven, but it was, I felt, unreasonable to expect white South Africans to merge their fate with the majority of different race, colour and standards when others are clearly unwilling to do the same in the Commonwealth as a whole.

While the attempts being made here to deal with racial problems have met with an unenthusiastic response overseas, world opinion has itself played as yet no constructive role in the problem; criticism has been negative, often violent and generally ill-informed. It expresses itself in language which is often violent as in the Hungarian comparison which I mentioned, or in generalities like those contained in a document circulated in December in the United States - "The Declaration of Conscience and Protest" - which called upon all people in the world to persuade the South African Government that only in the paths of "democratic equality will a solution be found". As I pointed out a demand for democratic equality in a mature and homogeneous community is understandable, but applied to the South African situation it would lead not to democratic equality at all, but to African domination and the creation of three oppressed minorities - White, Asiatic and Coloured - for the world conscience to worry about. There is after all no evidence that the black man

will be a more noble political creature than the white man is.

However, while violent criticism and generalisations about democracy are to be deplored in that they hinder the cause of reasoned, peaceful solutions, we have to take note of another fact in assessing our position in world affairs and that/ there is no body of opinion anywhere in the world which views with sympathy the racial set-up in this country.

Criticism in the countries I visited is of two types. There is the type of sensational material used by the popular press which in these days seems to be interested in serving up to its readers a daily dish of sex and blood, and which I believe, is hopefully anticipating that this country will provide a sumptuous repast of these items. I know that in influential circles overseas there is a grave concern about this type of newspaper and its ultimate effect on the national character. I do not feel, in any case, that we need dignify many of their outbursts by a reply. A reply usually adds to the publicity of the items and that may be just what is wanted. A reply may also stimulate controversy at a low level and this is equally unsatisfactory.

The more intelligent type of criticism has to be reckoned with intelligently and persistently. Here we need to bring home to the thinking members of our friends in the Western world the very real difficulties of our problems. I found that the average intelligent man-in-the-street in America knew about our country only through one novel - "Cry, the Beloved Country" - and I feel that American libraries could use many more books on this country than are to be found on their shelves at present. In this field the recent appointment of a cultural attaché in Washington has brought some success and I feel that this is in large part due to the enthusiasm and energy of the cultural attaché herself, Miss Elizabeth Meyer.

Before leaving this question of criticism overseas of South Africa, there is one danger which I think we have particularly to avoid, that is, to imagine that we alone are misunderstood in this

world. There is no more unpopular character than the fellow with chips on his shoulder. Most other countries have also to suffer from foreign distortions of their national character and motives. Are there not here in South Africa some pretty grotesque conceptions of many other countries, even of Britain who has consistently stood by us in the attacks made in the United Nations, and of the United States, that greatest of democracies and our leader in the Western world? There is a very real danger that we could become isolated and it is therefore all the more important that we try to appreciate their difficulties and their points of view while inviting them to appreciate ours.

And, whilst we are understandably concerned about our problem in the international field, we should not, I feel, allow this pre-occupation to make us overlook the general international situation and other significant trends unconnected with colour. Time does not allow me to deal adequately with these, but I would say of the general situation that, paradoxical as it may seem, the world is buying freedom from a general war by the continuous invention, modification and production of destructive weapons of such potential devastation that no great Power will dare to use them. But while we have and shall have that kind of peace, or rather freedom from total war, we are, as I said earlier, at war - a war fought with the weapons of propaganda and sabotage, subversion and incitement. Especially in view of the rapid successes of Communist intrigue in the Middle East, a careful and continuous study of these methods, which are now being applied to Africa, is called for.

Perhaps the most disturbing trend in the world situation /is apart from this "cold" war the rapid increase in population which is now taking place, and the fact that increases are most spectacular in the poorer countries. Thus an official Chinese estimate puts the annual increase in China's population at 13 millions - equivalent to the total population of all races of this country. Similar rises in the rate of population growth are noted in many Asian and to a lesser extent, African countries.

The important aspect, however, is that these countries are consuming less and less of the raw materials they produce. A French demographer has calculated that between 1929 and 1950 the underdeveloped areas increased their relative production but lost in relative consumption of seven out of ten important primary materials. "In the aggregate," he says, "two-thirds of humanity consumes less than 5 per cent of the primary materials". The gap in the living standard of the industrial and the non-industrial nations is widening because of the accelerated technological advances of the former and what has been called the "unimpeded human multiplication" of the latter. Inequality has always been an important factor in international relations and this increasing inequality between the industrial and non-industrial nations is likely to lead to further incidents like the nationalization of Persian oil and of the Suez Canal.

A political shift in world population is also noteworthy. At the end of the war, some 850 million people were still living under Western control and less than 200 million under Communist control. Ten years later the position had been reversed and 850 million people are now living under Communist control and less than 200 millions under Western control.

On the other hand, it is encouraging for those who believe that the tradition and civilization of Europe still have a worthwhile role to see that, now that the United States has built up its population by immigration from Europe, Europe is populating by a similar process two other large areas of the world, Canada and Australasia.

Of other trends in the international field I shall single out two. The first is the increasing tendency of countries, large and small, to form themselves into larger units for economic, political or military purposes. There are military groupings like NATO, SEATO, the ANZUS Pact; economic groupings like Benelux and the ambitious efforts now being made to build a United States of Europe, in which it is impressive to see the degree of co-operation between

two long-standing and very recent enemies, France and Germany; and political unions such as that made recently in the Middle East between Egypt and Syria. Of all these groupings of nations, Col. Nasser's United Arab Republic, since it is topical, calls for some elaboration. Nasser has written a booklet on his plan of campaign, rather like another dictator before him. In this work, called "The Philosophy of the Revolution", Nasser considers the role of Egypt in world affairs and, since I think that much of what he has written on this, throws a light on the recent union with Syria, I should like to quote a little from his text.

"There is no doubt", he writes, "that the Arab circle is the most important and the most closely connected with us. Its history merges with ours. We have suffered the same hardships, lived the same crises and, when we fell prostrate under the spikes of the horses of conquerors, they lay prostrate with us I do not hesitate for one moment to mention that our united struggle could achieve for us and our peoples everything we wish and aspire to be; I shall always go on saying that we are strong but the great catastrophe is that we do not know the extent of our strength When I attempt to analyse the components of our power I cannot help pointing out three principal sources which should be the first to be taken into account". The first source of power, according to Col. Nasser, is the common civilization of the Arab world, the second is the strategic position, which he describes as "the crossroads of the world" and "the third source is petroleum, which is the vital nerve of civilization, etc. etc." He points out that half the world's reserve of petroleum is still underground in the Arab regions and, quoting figures of the daily output of oil in the world, concludes by saying: "I hope I have succeeded in explaining clearly the degree of importance of this element of power".

I think it is clear from this book that Nasser dreams one day of ruling a united Arab world, and of controlling Europe's oil supplies. The union with Syria is the first step in this direction and, although there is still distrust in other parts of the Arab world, the real danger is that Russia might consider it in her interest to further Nasser's cause. Israel, of course, is faced with the gravest of threats to her security both by the union of Egypt and Syria and by the awakening of pan-Arabism.

To return to the significance of all these groupings not only in the Middle East but elsewhere in the world, we may yet be a long way from one world, but the formation of these larger groups of nations and the sacrifices which many of these nations have had to make in their national sovereignty in favour of the group, marks the beginning of the end of nationalism, even though nationalism still remains the most powerful force in the world of today.

The other trend is the position which science is attaining in international affairs. I was in New York when Sputnik went up and the dismay there was very great indeed. It was not just that another country had gone one better and one bigger. It was the awful realisation that here was a symbol of the great advance made in science by the Russians, an advance that most Americans had not believed possible in their lifetime. There has been a healthy response, however, in America; an inward look which has revealed that many of the nation's best brains are being used to design and market refinements, many of them dubious, in luxury goods. The demand for increased numbers of scientists will now be strengthened throughout the Western world.

The demand was there before but went unheeded. A year before Sputnik went up a prominent British Scientist, Dr. R.K. Blount, had predicted "that the Soviet Union, the first nation fully to appreciate the importance of science and to order its affairs accordingly, will move into first place; that the future of India, hesitating as she must between science and Hinduism, which may not be compatible, is

uncertain; and that, sometime after the year 2000 China will be a leading, if not the leading, nation of the world".

The tides of world affairs are running strongly and ever more swiftly; some are at present running against this small white minority. It is not for me to plot courses. All I would urge is that we try to keep abreast of the profound changes in the international field, changes following each other ever more rapidly, so that tomorrow will not take us by surprise while we are still considering yesterday.

Mr. Chairman, I should like to conclude a rather sombre general survey on a particular local note. Faced with such great international difficulties as we are, it is always cheering to feel that we may be able to make some contribution, however small, to a better international understanding. The development which our Institute will before long make in establishing, in conjunction of the Witwatersrand with the University, a centre of international studies and the light we shall be able to throw on the growing and important international relations of the African states will, I feel sure, be of assistance not only to the informed public of this country but also to others in the African continent and in the Western world.