

*Issued by the General Meeting of the Society of Friends  
(Quakers) held at Cape Town, January, 1931.*

## Memorandum on the Inter-Racial Problems of South Africa.

Believing, as we do, that the Christian teaching provides a way of life and a guide to conduct, both personal and national we feel that the race problems of South Africa should be considered in the light of that belief.

The Society of Friends does not claim any monopoly of truth nor does it suggest that it alone can interpret the Christian teaching, but it has made especially its own that aspect of the Christian faith, known to Quakers as the doctrine of the Inner Light, which claims that there is in every human being some part of the divine life, which makes sacred every human life, and gives to every human being and personality infinite possibilities of development and service. Upon this belief, the policy of the Society of Friends has been founded; through it, the Society has made its particular contribution to the world. It is with the application of this doctrine to South African affairs that we are concerned.

The race problems of South Africa are many and complex. We cannot but appreciate the great difficulty of the task of those upon whom has fallen the responsibilities of Government. We must regret the sense of strain that still too often characterises the relations between the two main elements in the European population of South Africa. In spite of the statesmanship which attempted to build a harmonious community out of the elements recently at war, much bitterness and misunderstanding remain. There is a great need here for sympathy, forbearance and goodwill. A greater willingness is needed on the part of both Dutch and British to respect the other's language, custom and tradition. The problem of race relation, which is really the problem of how peoples of different belief, custom, tradition and economic standards can so adjust their differences as to make possible a homogeneous and harmonious community, is not, in South Africa, confined to those races that are differentiated by colour.

In approaching the race problems of South Africa we must at once dissent from the use of the term "native problem." The South African native is not in himself a problem; or is not any more a problem than any one human being is a problem to his fellows. What is presented to us in South Africa in an acute form but in comprehensible degree, is the problem of race adjustment prevalent in many parts of the world.

The Quaker doctrine of the Inner Light, our belief in the sacredness of every human personality, makes us dissent at once and entirely from any general belief and policy which is based on the assumption that any one race is necessarily and permanently superior to another. We are fully aware of great differences of development and culture ; we know that these differences constitute the problem that we have to face ; but, we believe that superiority must rest in character, in knowledge and in service to one's fellows ; it cannot rest in the colour of the skin.

We believe that civilization with all its defects is a good thing and therefore to be shared with those who have not yet come within its sphere. We believe that all the wealth and tradition of western civilization that we have inherited should be held by us in trust for those who desire to participate in its benefits. We cannot feel that civilization may be withheld from those who wish to share it, and we believe that western civilization, still very imperfect, may be enriched by the contribution of those who come to participate in it. Therefore, while recognising that it may be, in some cases, desirable for different races to develop each in its own community, we could not assent to a permanent and enforced system of racial segregation.

We regard the franchise as being at once the right and responsibility of every member of a civilized community, and therefore the franchise should be shared by all civilised persons without distinction of race. We should regard with apprehension the stimulus to dissent and conflict that would be involved in any system of permanently separated representation.

We regard with thankfulness and appreciation the policy of encouraging the development of agriculture among the native peoples of South Africa as shown in the successful experiments in the Transkei, and the present policy of establishing native agricultural colleges in the provinces, and look with hopefulness to the time when large numbers of native people may become independent agriculturists, a most valuable element of the South African community. To the native, Indian and coloured persons engaged in industry and civilised pursuits we trust that greater knowledge and ability will bring greater reward. We believe that the economic development of South Africa depends on the development as producers and consumers of all the members of our population.

The meeting of civilization with barbarism, the meeting of western civilization with eastern civilization, gives rise to many difficulties and necessitates many adjustments. The situation is fraught with dangers and perplexities. It must not be expected that such wide differences can be adjusted without trouble. Disappointments and apparent failures are to be expected. There is great need for patience and steadfast goodwill. There will be those who, impatient of the time which necessarily adjustment takes, or sensing injustice, will show bitterness and distrust. Such

bitterness must be met by understanding. Contempt and repression are signs of weakness and lead to greater troubles.

Particularly we must deprecate the setting aside of long-cherished civil rights by the Riotous Assemblies Act. To invest a Minister with power over a subject, that belongs to a Court of Law, is to set aside rights which our civilization has struggled long and arduously to achieve and which cannot be abandoned without the risk of grave consequences.

The introduction of large numbers of people accustomed to simple tribal life in the country to the complexities and difficulties of civilised town life gives rise to many problems. It is important that individuals and public bodies should be conscious of the many needs that arise and be quick to meet them, particularly by supplying the necessary housing accommodation both for families and for individuals and the means of recreation, of education, and the helpful use of leisure.

In framing any regulation that may seem to be necessary for the proper ordering of life in towns it is important that the wide gulf that separates the civilised from the uncivilised native should be remembered. Regulations perhaps wisely applicable to the uncivilised, if applied to the civilised may give rise to grave injustice and cause grievous hurt to people already rendered acutely sensitive.

A wide field of service is open to all people of goodwill. On Joint Councils and in Welfare Societies; in medical and health services; in educational and recreational work, there is unlimited opportunity for service and we are glad to think of the many men and women giving themselves to these tasks with selfless devotion.

In the light of prevailing prejudice, social intercourse between members of different races presents great difficulties. We must not, however, forget that, particularly in the case of cultured Indians and educated and civilised natives, the refusal of social contact involves cruel hurt. The civilised native, cut off from the tribal life of his own people by his own advancement suffers cruel isolation unless he can find a place in the society of those whose way of life he has been led to adopt. While wilful flaunting of general opinion is to be deprecated we cannot admit that difference of race can set limits upon our friendships.

We have upon all of us a great responsibility in our attitude and conduct towards the members of other races. Whether we wish it or not we have to be, in ourselves, examples of our civilization and our Christian faith. People who, for generations, have lived in barbarism and heathen fear, people who come from the civilizations of the east, meet western civilization and Christianity for the first time in us, and, by our conduct, our civilization and our faith are judged.

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