A Tswana Growing Up With Afrikaners

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Cover illustration: Sam Motsueyana
PREFACE

It is a long row to hoe from working as a laborer on a farm in the western Transvaal, to scratching for an education, to being a soil conservationist, to being a businessman, and, for a decade, the President of the National African Chamber of Commerce, and finally, to being the founding President of the first African Bank in South Africa.

Sam Motsueyane is an indefatigable worker, a man of great integrity, a man of patience and a man of anger. I have known him as a fellow trustee of the United States-South Africa Leader Exchange Program (USSALEP) and we have often met in both countries. His judicious judgments on whom should be given travel grants and on the most constructive types of symposia to arrange impressed both the American and South African trustees.

Sam Motsueyane has been a pivotal figure in the great success of the Careers Development Project under the aegis of the USSALEP. This project is devoted to the training of African, Asian, and Coloured South Africans for leadership positions in South African society. He has devoted long hours to screening candidates and works closely with Mr. Windsor Shuenyane, the Executive Director.

As he relates in this essay, the path to his present position of importance has been strewn with more thorns than roses. Bitter experiences often create bitter people. But Sam Motsueyane has a heart filled with love for all people of goodwill. And he is, above all, a South African who cares for, even though he cries over, his native land. Although he concentrates here on his relations with Afrikaners, he has had some harrowing problems with fellow Sechuana-speakers.

E.S.M.
A TSWANA GROWING UP WITH AFRIKANERS

Sam Motsueyane

When the fierce Ndebele leader Msilikazi-ka-mashobane drove through the Transvaal between 1828 and 1835, pillaging and plundering villages along his path, the survivors of my people the Tswana split into many small fragments. These groups later settled in various parts of the Transvaal, the Orange Free State, and the Northern Cape. A small group of my ancestors, the Bakwena, who had broken away from their original home Molokwane near Rustenburg, took refuge in a cave called Lepalo, not far from Potchefstroom.

When the Afrikaners had finally driven Msilikazi’s regiments across the Limpopo River into what is now Rhodesia, they returned south and occupied Tswana territory in the area stretching from Rustenburg into the Orange Free State. My ancestors were ultimately forced out of the cave, primarily by hunger, to join the Afrikaners in their southward migration into the Orange Free State.

The years that preceded and followed Msilikazi’s violent exploits were years of starvation, turbulence, and insecurity in the Tswana area in the Transvaal and Northern Cape. Under the leadership of a Methodist missionary, the Reverend Archbell, a certain group of Tswanas, the Baralong, moved into the Orange Free State and established Thaba-Nchu, a Tswana island in the midst of what was then Sotho country. They were joined later by other Tswana groups, fleeing from the wrath and devastating ravages of Msilikazi.

The Tswanas are historically a peace-loving people. When they had their first encounter with the Voortrekkers at Thaba-Nchu, Chief Moroka gave them not only food and shelter but also cattle.

Warlikeness among black tribes in South Africa is often associated with conditions of land shortage and hunger. The wars fought with the Afrikaners by the Zulus and the Bapedis were essentially fought over pastures; the Zulu and Fedi tribesmen were pastoralists and so were the Afrikaners. We Tswanas never fought
the Afrikaners. The fact that the Tswana area is extensive and sparsely settled may account largely for our peaceful nature. Furthermore, our enthusiastic espousal of the Christian faith could have exercised some significant influence on our social life and attitudes. It should also be remembered that the Tswanas never at any time had military leaders like Chaka, Moshesh, and Msilikazi.

My father was born in 1872 near Vredefort in the northern part of the Orange Free State. His parents had migrated there between 1826 and 1845 and had worked for several white farmers in that province. My grandparents had migrated with other Bakwena tribesmen from Rustenburg who together constituted a closely knit group that never allowed itself to be torn apart.

My father grew up under the Afrikaners. At the age of twelve, he started work on the farms. The usual method of remuneration in those days was one heifer per year. There were no schools for blacks, and even for the Afrikaner children education was difficult to obtain. On the farms there were no churches, but the farmers made it their duty to pray with their servants in their homes, usually in the kitchen.

At the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War, my family crossed the Vaal River into the Transvaal Republic. The old people still cherished the desire to return to their old habitat, Molokoane. Over the years they had kept some communication going with their chief and with their relatives in Rustenburg. They had continued to pay tribal levies and in other ways had contributed to the tribe. The Afrikaners allowed the chiefs to visit their subjects on the farms, and the workers were permitted to follow their customary ways of living.

Afrikaans was the only official language spoken. At religious ceremonies, however, High Dutch was used, since the Afrikaans Bible had yet to be published. The Tswanas were greatly influenced by the Afrikaans language and culture. Many words in our language are borrowed from Afrikaans -- for example, tafel (table); setuloe (stoel) (chair); soal (saddle); and perde (horse). Thus my father could not complete a single sentence in Tswana without including an Afrikaans word or phrase. Many of my older relatives were similarly influenced. English was a strange tongue. My father tells of a time when his parents contributed cattle to bring an English-speaking teacher from Maseru. At school "concerts" this man would be asked to speak in English and the event excited tremendous interest.

My father had been working for several farmers when the Anglo-Boer War erupted. Because of his remarkable industriousness, dependability and obedience, he had earned for himself considerable respect and admiration among the farmers he worked under. There was only one farmer for whom he had no good word. This was a certain Gawie Rosseau, of the farm Rietfontein, who had developed an incurable and pernicious habit of whipping his servants for the slightest error committed.
According to my father's account, Afrikaner farmers could punish any black person with impunity. In fact in certain instances punishment was meted by a Veldkornet, whose position entitled him to inflict severe punishment. Like people everywhere, Afrikaners did not all come from the same pod, even though they all expected unquestionable obedience from blacks. Some were very friendly, and blacks who showed obedience to their masters were often treated with leniency and compassion. Any black passerby who needed food could walk into an Afrikaner farmhouse and be sure to be fed, so long as he demonstrated obedience to the master.

At the age of twenty-eight my father fought in the Anglo-Boer War on the side of the Afrikaners. Some Africans changed sides from time to time, but he stuck with the Boers as a Voortrekker, one of the advance scouts who would give warning of the presence of the British forces. He was not armed, not because he was mistrusted, but so that he would be less easily detected by the British.

During the war the Afrikaner on whose farm my father lived, Aardt Cronje, was captured with other Boers and sent to the prisoner-of-war camp on St. Helena Island. In his absence my father worked the farm and helped to take care of Mrs. Cronje and the children. After the war when the farmer returned home everyone was very poor. I can remember my father telling me how African and Afrikaner helped each other out with whatever money and goods they had.

My father and Aardt Cronje had become close friends in the paternalistic pattern of the day. Although genuine mutual respect existed between them, it was respect based on the master-servant relationship, an attitude of unquestionable loyalty to their authority.

I was born on February 11, 1927, at Eighaansfontein, a farm owned by an Afrikaner named Henklaas Malan. At this period, just before the great depression of the early thirties, there was an acute shortage of farm managers. My father and some of his colleagues operated the farm for Malan, who lived on another farm, Vlakplaas, about forty miles away. In the manner of the white byworners (sharecroppers), they planted and harvested the crops and gave two-thirds of the harvest to the farmer. I grew up on that farm and began to herd my father's cattle when I was six. My schooling began at the age of eight, in a school that the black parents built themselves on land which Malan donated for the purpose.

The following year my family moved to Rietfontein, some seven or eight miles away, and after that my schooling was highly irregular. The African teachers who would come to this farm school were barely literate and had no formal qualifications. Our parents struggled under difficult circumstances to scrape together some money to pay their salaries, but the teachers would just leave for
another place and we would have not school for months. Even when we had a teacher, I can remember times when I would go to school one day but the next day I would work in the fields and my brother would go to school. Going to school entailed a long and tedious walk of roughly fourteen to sixteen miles each day. This meant waking up very early in the morning and returning home sometimes after sunset.

When I think about it today, I am profoundly amazed by the Afrikaners' apparent lack of interest and insensitivity to the educational needs of the Africans at that time. Whereas they made every endeavor to build schools and churches and to provide transportation for their own children growing up on the farms, they saw little need to provide these amenities for their black servants. The Afrikaners were indeed a devout people, and my father had the experience of praying with them in their homes. I have no doubt that they recognized all people to be the children of God. However, I have the strong belief that the Afrikaners always saw blacks as underlings who would have to be led and guided by them. This deeply ingrained sense of paternalism remains to this day. It is a tremendous psychological barrier that Afrikaners must overcome if they are to deal successfully with their existing political problems.

Growing up on the farms, I was taught very early to know the Afrikaner as my Baas (Boss). Every white male had to be called by that title, regardless of age or social status. If you want any favors done for you by an Afrikaner, even to this day, you get much farther by making use of Baas as frequently as possible. True, to many enlightened and sophisticated Afrikaners today this crude title is becoming a source of embarrassment, representing an unwanted relic of past Afrikaner domination to which they no longer subscribe. But to the simple and ordinary Afrikaner in the street the word Baas is still a title of honor to which he feels entitled. From his own point of view, not to be called Baas by any black person constitutes gross impertinence.

As a young boy, and even as an adult, I saw both the smooth and the rough sides of the Afrikaner personality. Blacks were for the most part called Kaffirs, (which had about the same meaning as an American calling someone a "nigger"). Africans working on the farm were often sjambokked (whipped) by the owner. Working hours on the farm were long, usually from sunrise to sunset, and payment was for the most part in kind.

I cannot forget an incident in my early boyhood when we were picking apples with an Afrikaner farmer. The farmer was perched on an apple tree above me when he released a gust of foul air, boom! He laughed. I also laughed, but he was quick to question me. Who had done it? You want to say the Baas has done it? My answer was no, it was not the Baas, it was myself! To state the truth was inconceivable lest I be penalized. The Afrikaners tried by all means to foster a false image of infallibility about themselves among the blacks. What the Baas thought or did was always to be regarded as faultless and beyond reproach.
I was twelve when my family quit the farms forever. It was then that I found the opportunity of attending school regularly. My father bought a small plot in the district of Pretoria. We were among the first families to settle on these plots, and thus my father and many other parents played an active role in establishing a school for us, with black teachers. But not far away was another school run by the Lutherans, and I received most of my primary school education there. Later I went to Vereeniging district for my secondary schooling.

My father was at this stage unable to support my education any further, owing to age and ill health. During the three years of my secondary-school studies both my parents worked for Afrikaners in the Pretoria district, my father as a builder earning some $5 to $6 per week, and my mother as a washerwoman earning about $.70 to $.80 per day. With that meager income they managed to keep me in school and to meet all my simple requirements until I completed the Junior Certificate. My parents sacrificed a great deal to give me an education, and they expected that this would make life much easier for me than their own lives had been.

In the mid-forties, I came to seek work in Johannesburg. During the first two weeks in the city I had my first encounter with Afrikaners there. It was the police from Hospital Hill Police Station who picked me up one morning on an alleged violation of the vagrancy laws. Under these laws thousands of young blacks were arrested and locked up in South African jails while their criminal records were being scrutinized.

I was transferred from Hospital Hill Police Station to Newlands, where I spent some fourteen days awaiting trial. In that interval I saw some of the excessive cruelty that makes our black kids today so resentful of Afrikaners. Every Afrikaner is seen always against the background of these unfortunate, brutal experiences that young blacks have had at the hands of Afrikaner policemen. When I and quite a large number of fellows accused appeared before the magistrate, we were all discharged and cautioned not to remain in Johannesburg if we did not find work within two weeks. I was indeed fortunate in that I did find work well within fourteen days. For two years I worked at various jobs in Johannesburg while continuing studies for my Senior Certificate.

Toward the end of my second year in Johannesburg something happened to me which completely shattered my trust in white people. I was working in a sewing-machine firm as a messenger and invoice clerk. The owner of the firm was a German who was accustomed to beating the blacks who worked for him. One morning he discovered that some pinking shears had been stolen. Suspicion immediately fell upon me, even though I was new to the firm and knew little about what was going on there. Again the police collected me and took me home to search for the missing shears. They found my room literally strewn with books and lecture notes and were satisfied that the allegation was entirely false. The police returned with me to the firm and reported their impressions to the owner. He was still not
satisfied, and devised a flimsy trick to get me jailed. An anonymous note said to be found in my jacket during a coffee-break was suddenly produced and shown to the police. The letter was an acknowledgement by an unnamed person that he had received the shears that were sent to him by me. The police were not convinced of the authenticity of this story. They said to me as they picked me up, "We are arresting you on sheer suspicion, but if you were a white person we would not be locking you up." This was one month before final matriculation examinations. I took with me one of my English textbooks to read in jail. In all my life I have never felt more bitter and more offended. I knew nothing about those missing shears. In fact, I did not even know what pinking shears looked like.

I vowed then that I would never again work for a white person. After spending fourteen days at Number Four, one of South Africa's most notorious jails, awaiting trial, I made an appearance before the magistrate. No accusation was brought up and I was accordingly discharged. When I returned to the firm to request a formal discharge and the wages owed to me, the owner not only refused to discharge me, he also smacked me a hot clap.

This is how I bade farewell to white employers. I was fortunate at that time to complete my Senior Certificate (matriculation) and to be admitted on a work scholarship to the Jan Hofmeyer School of Social Work in Johannesburg.

As a social work student I took a course on the Social Christian Teaching of the Bible, which required me to have a Bible. One afternoon I entered an Afrikaans bookstore on Breede Street in Johannesburg. There I made a grievous mistake by addressing a white lady as "Mevrou," which means Madam, instead of as "Nooi," or Miss, as they expect to be called by blacks. A white Afrikaner in the store made a furious rush at me, chasing me out into the street. Fortunately, I was too fast for him. But I have often wondered what he could have done to me if he had caught up with me. What would his accusation have been? Our class later discussed this incident during an Afrikaans lecture period. Our instructor was an Afrikaner lady married to an Englishman. She literally wept when she heard the story. The question was how we should appropriately address Afrikaner ladies if we cannot say "Mevrou" or "Mejuffrou" (Miss) to them. What hurt her the most was to hear that eventually all the good that she and other Afrikaners were doing for the black people would count for naught if violence were to erupt between black and white in South Africa. The dividing line between good and bad would be color or race. Many good Afrikaners would die because they happen to be white by the accident of creation. On the other hand, many good blacks would be killed because they happen to be black.

While at the Hofmeyer School of Social Work, I and my colleagues saw many incidents of brutality involving Afrikaner policemen. One such case was that of a student with whom I was coming home from a Sunday evening party at the school when the
police stopped us at Denver Station. The student just dared to speak in English, and for this he got severe punishment which ended up in a court case. The policeman in question was finally convicted of common assault and was sentenced to thirty days or thirty Rand fine.

In the 1950s, after graduation from the Hofmeyr School of Social Work, I became involved in rural community development work. While in the employ of the National Veld Trust, a soil conservation organization serving principally the white community in South Africa, I pioneered the establishment of the African National Soil Conservation Association, a black counterpart of the Trust.

During the years that preceded and followed the establishment of the African National Soil Conservation Association I spent nine years altogether working in various parts of the Republic of South Africa. I traveled the country districts and frequently spent a night at Afrikaner farm houses or hotels. In those days the farm families were almost always warm and hospitable according to their code of hospitality. Quite often, I was invited into the kitchen and given good food. But I was never invited into the main rooms of their homes. Some of them may have wanted to carry on our often thoughtful conversations in the comfort of their woonkamer (living room), but those few seemed afraid of being criticized by their peers for being too soft on Africans.

I can vividly recall a time when I showed an agricultural film to a predominantly Afrikaner audience near the fringes of the Kruger National Park. The farmers were so well impressed by the whole program, especially by my Afrikaans commentary, that they served me tea with the finest crockery available and indicated their enthusiastic response by asking one of their number to thank me formally. That evening, instead of sleeping in my car as usual, the farmer at whose home the film was shown took out his car and installed a bed for me in the garage as a favor.

On another occasion I traveled with an English-speaking white friend of mine into the dustbowl area of the northwestern Orange Free State to examine soil conservation projects there. Enroute we stopped over for a night at Potchefstroom, where my friend, whom I will call T.C., made arrangements for me to be lodged at the Kings Hotel for the night. When I was ready to go to my room, I was taken to the back of the hotel and given a dirty room with broken window panes; there was no bed, not even a blanket. No way could I have been willing to sleep in such a place. The best alternative was to look up my relatives in the nearby townships, since my friend was nowhere to be found at the time. The following morning I delayed somewhat in returning to the hotel. T.C. was already awaiting my return with some impatience. He had apparently seen the room where I was to have slept the previous night. When he saw me arriving from the township he was quick to apologize. "Please pardon me, I did not realize that you would be given such an unsuitable place. It is certainly worse than a pigsty and not fit for human habitation. I will make sure that you do not suffer again in this way."
That day we drove through Bothaville to Wesselsbron in the Orange Free State. We had supper at T.C.'s friends' home, where I was served alone in the kitchen, while the rest of the family were in the living room. From this house, T.C. telephoned the nearest hotel at Wesselsbron to reserve two rooms for us. These were indeed available, but trouble arose when we got to the hotel. The proprietor met us on arrival and was quick to ask T.C., "You reserved rooms for two; where is the second person?" It was as though I were invisible. He continued, "We have hardly enough room for whites, let alone Kaffirs." T.C. then asked him how he could help to accommodate me, to which the man replied, "We have a place for him at the back of the hotel."

T.C. accompanied the proprietor to the back of the hotel and came back saying, "It is better for you to sleep in the car. The place is no better than last night's. If I were a black man in this country I would surely have been a revolutionist." That night was bitterly cold in the Free State, and I feared that I would freeze to death without a blanket or overcoat in the car. But as soon as the lights went off, T.C. removed all the blankets that were on the bed next to his, opened the window and threw them out to me. I slept warmly though cramped in the small Opel we were driving. The following morning, I tiptoed through the passage of the hotel into T.C.'s room to have a wash and change clothes. There was no real reason for the hotel proprietor to refuse me accommodation except prejudice.

The Afrikaners I knew in the rural areas had a strong sense of family and were courteous and compassionate toward one another. In the last fifty years I have not seen much change in the general civility of rural Afrikaners toward blacks. But among the sophisticated and enlightened urban Afrikaners, who now constitute a large fraction of the Afrikaner population in South Africa, I have seen some marked changes. Although I have many Afrikaner friends with whom I associate freely and whom I trust and admire for their frankness, my impression is that the majority of Afrikaners are still strongly paternalistic in their attitude toward blacks. They still think you are best off if they can make decisions for you. But there are exceptions.

The Afrikaners are generally afraid to allow the black people to use their innovative powers as freely as they know how. When I was secretary of the African National Soil Conservation Association, a nonpolitical body which enjoyed support from a wide spectrum of black leadership in South Africa, I was constantly cautioned by Afrikaner agricultural officials in Pretoria not to drift into politics. Finally a directive came from Pretoria in the late fifties suggesting that the organization be restructured along ethnic lines in conformity with the government policy. It was all black but they wanted separate Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tswana organizations. This the Executive Board of ANSCA refused, and the Association was consequently allowed to die a natural death.
In the early sixties I came to the United States as the first black grantee under the United States-South Africa Leader Exchange Program. Although my visit was originally planned to last three to six months, I was fortunate to secure a scholarship from the Institute of International Education which enabled me to study for three years at the North Carolina State College at Raleigh, where I obtained a B.S. degree in Agriculture.

Returning home in the sixties I had made up my mind not to work for the government because I knew how strongly government agricultural schemes were being opposed by blacks in the rural areas. I thought that my training would have greater impact if I worked through the communities rather than through government agencies. I succeeded in winning the confidence of a certain community in the Brits area who gave me a site of approximately 200 acres to establish an agricultural training and research center. A committee formed to administer the project under my chairmanship began to organize financial and technical support from the private sector. This initiative, however, was completely discouraged by Afrikaner officialdom and was consequently abandoned when the security police began to quiz everyone about it.

When the National African Chamber of Commerce came into being in the mid-sixties, I was co-opted onto the Executive Board as an agricultural consultant. Before long I was appointed editor of the Chamber's quarterly magazine, The African Trader. In 1968 I was elected President of the National African Chamber of Commerce, a position I have now held for more than ten years.

In this capacity I have had to keep a close watch on the Afrikaner government policies with respect to black participation in the economic life of South Africa. What astonished me most was that the Afrikaners were unhappy over having been excluded from the mainstream of South Africa's economic life by the "English" and the "Jews" while those groups had power in their hands. But the Afrikaners were themselves excluding blacks by legislation from full participation in the country's free-enterprise economy. During the sixties a spate of severe and restrictive regulations were imposed on black urban traders and workers, denying them any opportunity for achieving equality with other races. The grand design, of course, was to create an atmosphere of insecurity among urban blacks and in this way to convince them of the wisdom of moving out to the Homelands, where it was promised that "the sky would be the limit." What the Afrikaners did not realize initially was the fact that the urbanization of any community anywhere is an irreversible process. Blacks in the cities will never gravitate back to the Homelands in any appreciable numbers, given the circumstances now prevailing in these areas. It has taken a very long time to convince Afrikaners, believing as they do in the policy of separate development, of this crucial fact of life.

One thing complimentary about the Afrikaners: they are hard to convince, but once convinced they are sincere and therefore can be relied upon.
I have found it interesting to listen to Afrikaner leaders making speeches on any of their stryddae (days of festivity). They all emphasize the need for unity in South Africa, but their vision of unity is so narrow that it begins and ends with the white ethnic groups in the country.

The Afrikaners have done everything possible to separate blacks, Coloureds, Asians, and whites in South Africa. They have to a large extent capitalized on the tribal and cultural differences that exist among the peoples of South Africa to set up a seemingly ethical basis for their policy of separate development. But a multiracial community such as those in South Africa, Rhodesia, and Namibia could be held together in the future only if some common goals or commitments existed among and between them. Where social or ethnic gaps are allowed to persist, or even to widen, conflict is bound to take the upper hand. The unity of all the peoples of South Africa, regardless of race or ethnic identity, is therefore a serious future objective. Popular black leadership in South Africa is indeed opposed to the Afrikaner concept of black ethnic states. In 1969, three months after I became President of the National Chamber of Commerce, our organization was directed by the then Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration, Dr. Piet Koornhof, to break up into ethnic components. Our reaction was totally negative and because of this the Department of Bantu Administration had no direct dealings with our Chamber of Commerce for seven years. Only after the Soweto riots in 1976 did the Minister see his way clear to having negotiations with us.

When I pioneered the establishment of the African Bank, together with a number of my colleagues in the Chamber movement, I decided after an exhaustive feasibility study to involve Barclays Bank in the creation of the proposed bank. I went to London and there proposed to the Board of Directors of Barclays International that they assume a 30 percent equity position. To this proposal Barclays was quite agreeable, provided the government in South Africa gave final approval. The Afrikaner Nationalist Government, though approving in principle the establishment of the African Bank, was definitely opposed to allowing Barclays to acquire more than 10 percent of the African Bank's equity. It was the government's suggestion that four other major banks -- including those controlled by Afrikaners, such as Volkskas, Trust Bank, and Nedbank -- should take up shares.

The establishment of the African Bank necessitated a great deal of bargaining with the Nationalist Government, out of which came some major policy concessions. The government does not ordinarily permit black business in the white urban areas; the bank became the first black-controlled company in South Africa to have its headquarters in metropolitan Johannesburg.

The bank is free to collect deposits from both blacks and whites. Black business is exclusively supported by blacks. The law prohibits blacks in urban areas from supplying goods to white customers. The African Bank employs whites in senior management
positions with a view to getting them to train their black counterparts. Ordinarily black businessmen are not supposed to employ whites in the townships. The creation of the bank enabled blacks from all over the Republic to participate in the equity. The African bank is a truly national company, cutting across all ethnic and racial barriers. By loaning their trained white officers to the African Bank, white Afrikaner banks were enabled to participate in a positive program of training future bankers in the black community.

About 1974 I noticed a drastic change in the attitude of white businessmen in South Africa, including the Afrikaner businessmen. At that time I took the initiative of inviting the heads of various business organizations to a meeting. They all attended and our deliberations were very fruitful. In addition to undertaking a study on the problems of black businessmen in South Africa, a joint approach was made to the government to amend existing restrictions on urban black businessmen.

In the following year, 1975, the government introduced comprehensive regulations governing black urban trading. I invited more than one hundred white companies to join our National African Chamber of Commerce as Associate Members. The response was amazing. Our organization now has eighty Afrikaans and English companies enrolled as Associate Members, and many of them are doing excellent work in supporting black business projects. Before 1974 there had been little contact between our organization and its Afrikaner counterpart, the Afrikaanse Handels-Instituut.

About two years ago I was invited by the Afrikaanse Handels-Instituut to be a guest speaker at their Annual Congress in Cape Town. This was indeed a history-making event, since it was the first time that the Instituut was addressed by a black person. What I said to them contained plenty of what Americans call "home truths," but my remarks were greeted by thunderous applause. Much of what is reactionary and bigoted in Afrikaner thought and actions stems purely from ignorance resulting from isolation and lack of contact with thinking blacks. It is this lack of knowledge that they must overcome before we can have truly meaningful dialogue.

Some time ago I had an experience that illustrates the above contention. I was returning to Johannesburg from Sekukuniland, where I had attended a soil conservation conference with some chiefs and farmers, when my car got two flat tires, one after the other. The nearest garage was about a hundred miles away, in Middelburg. Just after sunset I saw a light in the distance and made my way there to ask for assistance. It turned out to be the home of a Dutch Reformed Afrikaner missionary. He took great interest in helping me out of my predicament. Searching through his garage, he found two inner tubes to fit my wheels, one used and the other new. When he gave them to me he said he did not want any payment but asked me to listen to a brief story. This is what he said. "As an Afrikaner I was raised in an environment where we had little contact with Indians. We saw them remotely as people with whom we had nothing in
common. Not long ago I was stranded on the road from Lourenco Marques. My engine came to a dead stop and the car would not start again. After many white folks had passed by without stopping, an Indian who came along that road stopped and said, 'How can I help you, sir?' Half embarrassed, I said I needed to be towed to the nearest garage, which was in a town twenty miles away. With a smile the Indian offered to tow me to the town. When we reached the garage, I wanted to recompense him for his trouble. But he would take nothing. He said, 'It was my pleasure to assist you, but I would like to ask you a favor. Please keep some space open in your heart for another person. He could be anybody, black or white.' I then asked him to tell me his name. He replied, 'My name is not important, but my message is.' Then he left. This was undoubtedly the most profound Christian experience in my life. I would like to share it with you. Take these tubes and keep some space open in your heart for another person!' I left that house feeling immensely enriched by the missionary's experience, but I thanked the anonymous Indian for it.

Contact between the Afrikaner and black people at the right levels could yield an enormous amount of good for South Africa, particularly at this time of increasing polarization. The development of mutual trust, the elimination of fear and suspicion of each other's motives, the generation of hope and confidence in the future -- these are the goals which proper contact could advance in the South African society. It is time for the Afrikaner-African dialogue. The white English liberals, who have often said that they spoke on our behalf, are disillusioned. Some are frightened by what has happened in Angola and Rhodesia and now lean toward the government. They still have economic power, but the issue between black and white is essentially political.

In Namibia the Afrikaners, to their credit, recognized the need for change, but under pressure. Their position is seen from other quarters on an illegal one, and they have been wise to yield to the principle of majority rule.

We have seen some positive changes in South Africa that have resulted from internal and external pressures. But one area of life that imperils peaceful change is the growth of security legislation as applied by the Afrikaners. When our children are arrested by the security police, the parents cannot even see them and cannot apply to a court of law for their release. In this respect the Afrikaners have moved away from Western concepts of law and toward the kind of legal oppression said to prevail in the Soviet Union. The Afrikaner Prime Ministers of the last forty years have all been of a kind in opposing the aspirations of the black people. But the swart gevaar (black danger) and the Kaffir op sy plek (Kaffir in his place) rhetoric has been toned down somewhat and is no longer used in public by leading Afrikaners. Strijdom was the most reactionary and harsh in his views. Verwoerd promised autonomy for some rural areas, but he opposed rights for urban blacks. Mr. Vorster as Prime Minister did realize the need for discussion with black leaders and was compelled to recognize the permanence of the urban black population. It is to be hoped that the new
Prime Minister, Mr. P. W. Botha, and Afrikaners in general will recognize the limitations of their policy of separate development.

There must be an honest and realistic reassessment of the future of black and white relations in South Africa. I agree with those who see the need for a National Convention from which can emerge common goals for our society, objectives toward which we can all strive as South Africans. If the Afrikaner understands that his ethnicity can still survive in a new South Africa of mixed citizens, the lot of the average Afrikaner will be improved. As a businessman I know the great economic potential of South Africa, and the foreign capital that would be available to a South Africa set on the course of peaceful change. In the years to come the lower-class Afrikaner can be eating a better meal, in a better restaurant, but there may be a well-dressed black person at the next table.

Already the leading hotels in Johannesburg have prospered from black business under their present status as international hotels. The changes in this and other areas of petty apartheid have been peaceful. The great challenge of the future is for all South Africans, irrespective of race, to see themselves as one people in one country entitled to the same rights and committed to the same national goals. In that kind of atmosphere of unity and brotherhood the Afrikaners would have no reason whatsoever to entertain fears or doubts about the future security of their survival for generations to come.
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