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PBM - 18
Native Opposition

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Dear Mr. Rogers:

In my last letter I tried to give you some idea of the combative methods of anti-Nationalist Europeans--methods consisting mostly of rousing public opinion and maintaining a liberal outlook. Since I wrote that letter I have had an opportunity to compare these methods with those taken (or, more properly, to be taken) by the Africans themselves. There is a marked difference.

During one of my visits to the Western Native Areas with Father Huddleston (PBM - 17) I met Stephen Segale, a member of the African National Congress according to Father Huddleston, and an African leader in the fight against the Western Areas Removal Scheme. We were standing on the side of a small hill looking down one of the main streets of Moroka--"we" being Father Huddleston, a group of visitors who called themselves the Sons of England, and myself. Father Huddleston pointed out the mud brick walls, the absence of any electricity supply wires and the complete lack of any bathroom facilities.

The Sons of England (including a few female "Sons") made shocked sounds and screwed up their faces in a combination of pity and a struggling attempt to understand what they were seeing. I'm sure they felt, as I could not help but feel, that a whole world was spread out before them of which they knew nothing and in which they had no place. For those middle-aged, decently dressed Sons of England Moroka might as well have been on Jupiter or Saturn. There was a gulf between them and the low, dark ramshackle huts of Moroka which was almost impossible to cross.

There was a silence, broken only by the gasp of one of the women who looked down to find she was standing in a small stream of waste water which trickled down from a few of the shacks higher on the hill. A few of us smiled at a half-dozen piccanins lined up in front of us and they grinned back, delighted to see our cameras and keenly watching for pennies. Then a small, grey-furred animal ran up the dirt street toward us. It was a dog, of untraceable parentage and in uncertain health. It was apparent that the little fellow, whatever he had been, was now no more than an animated appetite.

This was something the Sons of England could understand. "Oh, look at the poor little puppy," one of the women said. "It looks half-starved." She looked angry, as if she had found a piece of poisoned meat in her cat's feeding dish. The dog gave the Englishmen something familiar to talk about and they gathered closer to Father Huddleston.

"Whose responsibility is it to plant trees in these townships?" asked a red-faced man, packed snugly into an almost aggressive tweed coat. Father Huddleston tried tactfully to suggest that any money available for trees would almost certainly, and rightly, be used to build houses, but the man had seized the bit in his teeth and was plunging ahead.

"Surely," he said, "some of these men could use some of this leisure time to go out and transplant a few trees." He pointed to four or five men sitting against the back wall of one of the houses. "Why, I've never seen such a bare-looking place. Look at that! You can see all these houses from that road over there. Put in a few trees and the place would look a hundred per cent better." He wheeled around and looked behind him. "Look there." He waved his hand at a broad, open field. "No trees in sight. The place is barren." A sudden thought struck him. "Why don't they get together on one of these weekends and make that field into a sports ground? Just like we did when we were children, not asking for money, but just pitching in and doing a job of work." He turned to address his words to Father Huddleston, but Father Huddleston was about 20 yards away, talking to a heavy-set African wearing a tweed coat startlingly similar to that of the Son of England.

I saw the big African smile and nod and then I was drawn aside by one of our group, a slight, wispy Englishwoman with grey hair and an owlish look about her, largely due to a pair of perfectly round spectacles. "You're an American, aren't you?" she asked. I nodded. "Well, tell me," she said, "how bad is the Native problem in America? I've heard that it's just as bad as it is here in South Africa." I was just beginning to try to explain some of the differences between the American Negro and the African Native when Father Huddleston came back to the little group and touched my arm.

"Excuse me, Peter," he said. "I have a man here I think you should meet." I made apologies to the Englishwoman and walked with Father Huddleston to where he had left the African. "Stephen," he said, "this is Mr. Martin. Peter, this is Stephen Segale, one of the Sophiatown people who are fighting the Western Areas Scheme. We shook hands.

"Are you one of the people who owns his own house in Sophiatown?" I asked.

Segale smiled. "I'm afraid I am not one of the fortunate ones. But I and my organization are the ones who are leading to save Sophiatown. I don't know what Father Huddleston has told you, but there are many reasons that we do this."

"What do you mean?" I said. "Give me a for-instance." This Americanism confused Segale for a minute--then he seemed to understand I was asking for some of the reasons.

"There is one of the big reasons," he said, pointing generally at Moroka. "Why do they want to move those who live in Sophiatown when these people live like this? I don't know if you have seen Sophiatown, but there is nothing there like this. This is slum conditions and in Sophiatown at least there are"--he groped a minute for the word--"substantial houses. Sophiatown is not so good but it is better than this."

The argument was one that Father Huddleston had used when we first talked of the Western Areas Removal Scheme and I gathered, as Segale went on, that the rest of his arguments would be very much like those of Father Huddleston. Indeed, some of them almost sounded like direct quotations. While Segale was talking I saw the Sons of England follow Father Huddleston to another vantage point.

"The loss of our freehold title is the important thing, though," Segale was

saying. "If they said they would move us from Sophiatown to Meadowlands and give us the freehold title in the new township, then I would not be against them. But we have had the freehold title for more than 50 years and it means very much to my people. It is the reason we can arouse the people to fight the Scheme. We can say that the Government has lied to the people and has deprived them of their land. Land is very important to us and I think the Government will have a hard time taking it from us."

"Why?" I asked, very interested. "What can you do about it?"

Segale looked about him as though he were afraid of being overheard. Then he lowered his voice to a conspiratorial whisper and a very stern look came over his face. "We are now doing something about it. Every Wednesday and Sunday we hold meetings. We try to get all the property owners--the landlords--to come to the meetings. We tell them what the Government will do. We tell them that they will lose their land and they will be forced to move from Sophiatown but the people at Pimville and here at Moroka will be left behind.

"The people at the meetings sometimes get angry and they ask what they can do. And we tell them, when the time comes that the Government tells you you must move, do not do it. They will come to your house, we tell them, and they will say that it is the law that you must move and that the area is for Europeans. The only answer, we say, is to tell the Government we will not move and if they want us to go they must move us by force.

"It is important that you and other overseas people understand what it is we do and why we do it. The Government will say that we are ungrateful and uncivilized. They will say that we are only agitators who make trouble and who do not understand the value of slum-clearance. They will say that we will benefit and that we are stupid to refuse to move to the new houses. But we will resist them and we will not move.

"It is important that the people in America know that we refuse to move because they will take away our freehold title and destroy good houses when so many houses are needed for these people"--he waved again at Moroka--"and the people at Orlando. Then no matter how much the Government talks about slum-clearance the people in America and in the United Nations will know the truth.

"You say you are already holding meetings," I said. "Are they well-attended?"

"Oh, yes," came the answer. "We hold these meetings on Sunday and Wednesday. The Wednesday meetings are not as good as the Sunday meetings because everyone works on Wednesday. We sometimes get more than a hundred people at the Wednesday meetings and maybe 500 or 600 at the Sunday meetings. So far we have not been bothered. The meetings run very smoothly and I believe the people are with us. But we must continue to hold very many meetings very fast. You see, we think that if the Government hears of our meetings they will come and forbid us to have any more under the Suppression of Communism Act.¹ That is why we are holding the meetings now before the Removal Scheme can begin to work. When the Scheme begins to work there will not be time to hold meetings and if there is no meetings and no organization then the people will have no choice but to move from their homes. We hope to contact all the landlords and tenants in Sophiatown before we are forced to stop the meetings. It is important that we do, you see, because it is the only way we have

1. See Postscript.

to fight against the Scheme."

From the corner of my eye I saw Father Huddleston returning with his flock. It was time to move on. "I am glad to have had this chance to talk with you," I said to Segale. "I think that perhaps we should talk some more. And I'd like to attend one of your meetings. Do you think it will be all right?"

"We are holding a meeting tomorrow," Segale said, "but I must first find out if it would be all right for you to come. So perhaps you will be able to come to a later meeting. If you will give me your telephone number I will call you and tell you how the meeting went and perhaps make an appointment for another talk." I wrote my address and phone number on a piece of paper and gave it to him.

"I have friends who will also want to talk to you," Segale said. "They are very anxious to meet Americans."

Just then Father Huddleston came up. "We're moving on," he said. "I'm glad that we ran across Stephen. He's representative of the men who are fighting the Scheme in Sophiatown. Did you get all the information you wanted?"

"Not quite," I said, "but we'll be meeting again. Thanks very much, both of you." We made our adieux and I rejoined the Sons of England.

A few days later the telephone rang and I went to answer it. It was Segale. "I called to tell you that the meeting was very good. There were 700 people there and at the end of the meeting we took a vote. It was almost unanimous that we should refuse to move when we are ordered to. And there is still no trouble about holding the meetings. I do not know when the next one will be because we cannot have the hall we usually use. I must call you again when you can come."

When the time comes for the Government to move residents of Sophiatown to the new townships, it is evident that a good many of them will refuse to move. And it seems evident that this resistance will be futile. An American friend of mine told me of some African resistance he witnessed a few years ago during a labor dispute. "They resisted, all right, but it didn't bother the South African Police any. They just waded into them with their clubs flying and broke the whole thing up."

No doubt when the first reports of African families refusing to move from Sophiatown reach police headquarters the same police squads will again swing into action and the Removal Scheme will come off according to schedule. But the significant fact is that there is organized resistance to the Scheme by Africans (under, I have a feeling, the indirect supervision of Father Huddleston). If properly handled, the organized resistance will arouse public opinion in favor of the Africans. If improperly handled, it cannot help but backfire, proving to Afrikaner Nationalists that apartheid is the only answer.

The Nationalist Government, sublime in the self-confidence of its power, is certain that it can handle any resistance thrown up by the Native African population. But the fact remains that the Government, in spite of its apartheid, has only been able to handle resistance, not eliminate it.

The Ghandi-type resistance planned by the opponents of the Western Areas Scheme

may prove very effective--passive resistance is in many ways more convincing than active resistance, especially in regard to sympathetic local and overseas opinion. But active resistance will only serve as proof that Africans are still irresponsible children of nature playing with fire and threatening to burn the whole South African house down.

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Upon re-reading PBM-17 and the section of PBM-18 above I have the feeling that I may have conveyed the impression that Father Huddleston is generally considered the final authority on resistance to apartheid in general and the Western Areas Removal Scheme in particular. This is far from the case. There are intelligent South Africans opposed to Afrikaner Nationalism who are quick to tell you that Father Huddleston is off on the wrong track.

The other evening we repaid the hospitality shown us by the niece of an important South African who has helped me in arranging interviews, etc., since my arrival. In order to provide a fourth, both for dinner and for bridge afterwards, we asked her to bring a friend. The friend she brought was Tony Tungman, a young (24 or 25) Government employee who is the son of a Church of England minister here. His background is British but he was born in South Africa--which makes him an almost natural member of the United Party and an opponent of the policy of apartheid.

Being the son of a minister, he knows Father Huddleston well, both through his father and personally. We were sitting in the back yard of 128 First Avenue in the cool of early evening working our way through various tall, frosted drinks, mostly based on gin. We could hear the noise of a herd of cows being driven down the dirt road on the other side of the high brick wall which encloses the yard (Kew is still semi-bucolic in spite of being only six miles from downtown Johannesburg) and it was beginning to get dark enough for Julie to begin thinking about lighting the candles we had put on the small tables under the peach trees.

Tony was interested in what I was doing, and when I mentioned that I had had several conversations with Father Huddleston, he leaned forward in his chair and waved his drink in my direction, in the manner of a blackboard pointer. "What do you think of him?" he wanted to know.

I could see that it was the sort of question that could turn a pleasant cocktail session into an endless debate--but I answered as honestly as I could. "I haven't been in South Africa long enough to judge whether a man like that is right or wrong," I said. "I know he is sincere. And having spent two years as a journalist on a staunchly liberal newspaper I can't help but sympathize with his aims even though I don't know this country well enough to say whether his method is helping or hindering."

"The man's a fool," Tony said. "I agree with you, a right-thinking person can't help but sympathize. But all the same, he's a fool--I might even go so far as to say a monomaniac. He's set on just one thing--helping Natives--no matter what the cost.

"Just for instance, here's a true story about Father Huddleston. There was a Native squatting on municipal property at Orlando. This fellow had built himself

a shack and was living on this particular piece of ground illegally. All right, the Municipality, after much delay and doubt, finally decides that it is going to install running water and waterborne sewerage in that part of Orlando. They plan the project, find the money, buy the pipes and get to work.

"When the engineers get to Orlando, what do they find? They find this illegally squatting Native living in an unauthorized shack in the exact spot they want to dig to put in their pipes. So they do the natural thing, they apply to have the Native evicted.

"And the Native, who is not so stupid after all, runs to Father Huddleston right away. 'Father,' he says, 'they're going to evict me from my home in Orlando. Please do something about it.'

"The day of the hearing comes, the Native appears in court, and along comes Father Huddleston to defend him and save his home. The facts of the case are presented, which, of course, Father Huddleston hasn't heard before, and the court decides that there is no question about it, the Native must move. And Father Huddleston, who hasn't taken the time or trouble to look into the case, looks an awful fool, all because he wanted to help a poor, oppressed African.

"I'm not saying that Father Huddleston hasn't looked into the Western Areas Scheme. I just say that he and people like him are only stirring up trouble and doing nothing to help the situation. Just suppose what will happen if he does manage to stir up enough feeling to make the Africans resist the move from Sophiatown. It doesn't take a clairvoyant to see that the only result will be a good, stiff fight. And if there's a fight, someone's going to get hurt. And, when someone gets hurt, it means a lot of bad publicity and a step backwards instead of a step forward. You can't force progress."

"What do you suggest instead?" I asked.

"Just letting things take their natural course. For instance, take a look at industry. Native labor has become so vital that it is foolish for anyone to suggest that Africans can be kept out of semi-skilled and even skilled positions in factories. There just isn't enough labor to go around and the day must come when everyone, businessmen and government officials alike, realize the inevitability of economic integration.

"Why, take the head of Hercules Bicycles. You and I both know what sort of man he is.¹ Well, he's the kind of man I'm talking about. He does more good just keeping in touch with the workers in his plant than Father Huddleston can do in 10 resistance movements. Here's another story to prove my point. Say that there's an Afrikaner Nationalist named Piet who's a welder at the bicycle factory. Piet wants to be a foreman and he has all the qualifications for promotion. One day Sir Francis happens to be sitting at the same lunch table as Piet. 'Piet,' he says, 'you'd make a good foreman and there's nothing I'd like better than to make you a foreman. And, since I need more good men in the front office I was thinking of promoting Kurt (the present foreman) to front office and making you foreman in his place. The only trouble is, I don't have anyone to take your place as welder. I've got lots of Natives who would make good welders if they were trained--you know that as well

1. This refers to Major General Sir Francis de Guingand, a mutual friend.

as I do. But your government won't let me make skilled workers out of Natives so I guess there's nothing I can do about it.'

"Just let Piet think that over for a while. And when he tells Kurt about it, Kurt will have something to think about too. And if that happens in five or six plants, as I know it is, you're going to begin to get Afrikaner Nationalists thinking that perhaps all this apartheid isn't as good as it's made out to be. That's the sort of pressure that gets things done--not all this passive resistance and squabbling over 'moral rights' and 'inhuman treatment.'

"Economic integration is the sort of thing anti-Nationalists should concentrate on. The plain fact is that there just aren't enough trained Europeans to go around and sooner or later the Government is going to wake up to the fact that they're going to have to begin giving Africans more freedom or go under. And trouble-makers aren't doing anything to help that process--in fact, they're hindering it because the more you prove to an Afrikaner Nationalist that Native Africans are just naturally uncivilized savages, the longer the natural economic process is going to take."

That's Tony's argument, and no one could deny that it makes sense. But I can't quite make myself agree that what Father Huddleston is doing is completely wrong. An opposition--a noisy opposition--to apartheid is, it seems to me, a necessity if the policy is to be kept within in bounds during the time it takes for Tony's natural economic process to make itself felt. And if Tony's natural process is not quite so inevitable as he thinks it is, a strong opposition is the only thing left that can be used as a weapon against the more flagrant excesses of apartheid. It is better to fight an oppressive measure while it is still being legislated than to wait until the only recourse is agitation against a well-established status quo.

Sincerely,

Peter Bird Martin

Peter Bird Martin

P.S. Under terms of the Suppression of Communism Act, Communism "includes any doctrine or scheme which aims at bringing about any political, industrial or social change within the Union by the promotion of disturbance or disorder, by unlawful acts or omissions or by the threat of such acts or omissions or by means which include the promotion of disturbance or disorder, or such acts or omissions or threat of such acts or omissions which aims at the encouragement of feelings of hostility between the European and non-European races. . ."

The Act further goes on to say that "Whenever in the opinion of the Minister (of Justice) there is reason to believe that the achievement of any of the objects of communism would be furthered (a) by the assembly of a particular gathering in any place; or (b) if a particular person were to attend any gathering in any place, the Minister may. . .prohibit the assembly of that gathering in any place within the Union, or he may by notice under his hand addressed and delivered or tendered to that particular person, prohibit him from attending any gathering in any place within an area and during a period specified in such notice."

--PBM

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