

Apartheid at work

easy for the government to argue against mixed schools. The government, of course, has no intention of integrating schools, but can use the pretext of geographical proximity of schools to residential areas to pursue the policy of separateness.

In Kenya, prior to independence, and in Zimbabwe under the Smith regime, a similar policy of separation of schools on racial lines was pursued. Upon attaining independence or majority rule schools in both countries were made multiracial. This greatly contributed to racial harmony. Policies of racial segregation were practised by the English in Kenya and Rhodesia. In Rhodesia's case one could not find a more English-sounding name to lead the country than "Smith." It is, therefore, ironic when one hears English-speaking apologists in South Africa blaming the Dutch settlers or Afrikaners exclusively for the ills of apartheid. After all, the English-speakers make up 40 percent of the white population.

Apartheid everywhere

Now back to arrival at Johannesburg airport. A British Airways jumbo was landing, and departures to Mauritius, Malawi, Botswana, Luxembourg and France were listed for the day. From the plane one gets into the bus driven by a white woman in her forties. The Immigration Officer points out that since I have a visa stamped to visit Kenya during the onward journey he would not stamp it, but affix one of the stick-on visas. This is to avoid any complication in being allowed into Kenya.

The Immigration and Customs Officers are Whites, while the bag-handlers and porters are Blacks. The bank where I cash travellers' cheques is staffed by Whites only. I board the airport bus to Johannesburg driven by a Black with all shades of people on board.

Into Johannesburg — a bustling metropolis. We go past the exhausted gold mines, now packed away into neat rectangular piles. These piles of dust that were once gold seemed to symbolize the exhaustion of the ruling regime.

Once in downtown Johannesburg one begins to notice the double-decker buses (not painted red!) with white passengers and single blue-grey colored buses carrying black passengers and driven by Blacks. The sidewalks are shared by all races — on equal footing for once!

Whites and Blacks mingle freely in downtown stores. Only Whites are allowed to own businesses in the downtown area known as the CBDA, Central Business District Area. This is the case with all major centers. These were the areas effectively boycotted during last Christmas season. White shopkeepers became aware of their reliance on the spending-power of the Blacks as a result of this exercise. You hardly met any storeowner who did not feel the pinch. An extended and a more effective boycott at Christmas this year is being feared by businessmen. One does, however, run across a shop or two being operated by an Asian. How did he manage to secure the store in this restricted area? Well, he bought it in the name of a White and paid him a nominal fee for the use of his name! There is no manifestation of hatred or violence in the streets but there is certainly a sense of nervousness and bitterness. There is tension.

Separate buses, but shared trains

One day I decide to visit an acquaintance in Pretoria, who once was stationed in Ottawa. There are regular bus and train connections between Johannesburg and Pretoria, the seat of the executive branch of the government. (The legislative capital is Cape Town.)

I go down to the Johannesburg train station to inquire about train departures and to obtain a ticket to Pretoria. I buy a newspaper from the vendor and engage in a conversation about changes that are being brought about. The charming newspaper vendor points to the pedestrian mall adjoining the railway station. It was once forbidden territory to non-Whites but they can now walk there. In our brief encounter he nervously tells me that the Townships (areas where Blacks live) are very politicized and there is a lot of political activity there. He points to a restaurant across the street where he was not allowed to enter because of the color of his skin. He hopes that will change — though he does not sound as though it will happen soon. I go past a coffee shop in the railway station complex which has a prominently displayed sign "Whites only." As I enter the train station, I realize that the place is divided on racial lines. There are separate entrances to the station for Whites and non-Whites. Inside the railway station is another coffee shop with a sign hanging in the window (like the closed and open sign) which states "Whites only." Someone, probably a black man, washes that window everyday with that hideous sign hanging as an ugly reminder of the rules of the game. As I proceed towards the information desk I encounter another sign over a door "General Waiting Room — Whites Only!"

On to the information counter staffed by Whites. Asked to proceed to the ticket counter. Staffed by Whites. I buy my ticket to Pretoria and proceed to the turnstiles manned by tough-looking white women. I run down the stairs to the platform. As usual, I think I shall miss the train. It is departure time. As soon as I get to the platform I am confronted by a string of coaches each clearly marked "Whites only." What do I do? I say to myself, "I am not White." I have made it so far because the authorities must have bestowed upon me the dubious honor of being a Mediterranean!

There are only Whites in the coach I am in. Even the ticket examiner is White. Nothing seems to have changed since the days of Gandhi! We are on our way to Pretoria. At very station I notice toilet facilities marked "Men — White only." Later on after one of our stops at a suburban station I see a few Blacks on the platform. I stick my head out of the window and notice that the front section of the train is for Blacks — and they even have a black ticket examiner! The Whites and Blacks enter and leave the train through separate entrances and exits. At one station a black woman runs to board the train. She misses the train not because she is too far from it, but because she is too far from the coaches for the Blacks up front. She dared not have jumped into the coaches for the Whites. Here she is in a country where her people make up 71 percent of the population of 32.5 million, but a mere 17 percent (the Whites) are dictating the lives of the rest of the population and making laws affecting every little detail of their lives. Colored (mixed race) make up 9 percent of the population, while Asians account for 3 percent.