Politics and change in South Africa

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In this paper I will present data on the political situation in the Republic of South Africa and show how both the situation and the policies have changed. Due to the complexity of this subject and the limited space allowed by the editor, it will be impossible to offer in any detail material which will form the basis of this discussion. An important aspect which needs to be mentioned here is that the political situation in South Africa regards the relations between White and non-White, as well as the historically based antipathy within the White sector of the population. All of these groups, therefore, have to be contrasted with their fellows living within the political boundaries of the Republic.

At this stage I would like to explain the terminology to be used in this paper. By South African I refer to the Whites living within the boundaries of the Republic of South Africa, in other words those persons who enjoy full political rights in this country. The Afrikaner, defined primarily in terms of language and culture, will be described in greater detail below. On the whole the Afrikaners can be contrasted with the English-, Italian- or Portuguese speaking peoples in South Africa. Any study of the Afrikaner and of South African politics must take into consideration the role of the Afrikaner-Broederbond. I have used African to refer in general to all persons of Negroid ancestry and to denote the detribalized persons in South Africa. This group is composed of a number of Bantu-speaking tribal groups and Bantu is used when we speak of the man in the reserve or the man in his tribal context. Primarily it refers to the Bantu-speaking peoples who reside over most of South-eastern Africa. Natives, when used, is a general term referring to both of these groups or the natives of Southern Africa. Coloured refers to all persons who are of mixed origin and would agree with the mestizo, Amerind etc. of other countries. Throughout the paper I prefer to contrast the Whites with the non-Whites as this seems to be the basis on which this country classifies (vide du Toit 1965 (b)).

1. The Early Years of Settlement

The Whites who first settled at the southern tip of the African continent
were employees of the Dutch East India Company. From the beginning they were in contact with non-Whites and this is where the basis for present attitudes and policy have to be sought. These non-Whites included both slaves and the indigenous population groups, initially represented by nomadic peoples of Bush-Hottentot stock and later by the Bantu-speakers pressing southward in search of better grazing for their herds and space to live. These facts should form the starting point of any discussion or analysis of the present racial situation and attitudes. They must ultimately lead us to the governmental policies which attempt to cope with this situation. It should, however, only be the point of departure, for the situation – and therefore the policies – are dynamic.

A few years after the 1652 arrival, Dutch settlers started moving across the Cape Flats and away from the Company station at the foot of Table Mountain. Soon homesteads were established beyond the borders of the original Hottentots-Holland and the settlers’ cattle grazed as far as the Orange River in the north and the Fish River in the east. At this stage these early pioneers were already in contact with Bantu-speakers. Wilson (1959) has shown that early Xhosa groups already occupied this region by the beginning of the sixteenth century. The contact situation which was taking form was one of settlers with a European cultural background meeting and interacting with persons of a different racial group with a relatively simple culture. The same, however, did not apply to the slaves who came from Malaya, Bengal and related areas, and who had been in contact with the Whites for some time. Soon the latter also applied to some of the Hottentots who associated with the Whites in a master-servant relationship.

During these early years of the colony there existed an imbalance regarding the male-female ratio of the settlers. Forty eight years after van Riebeeck arrived to establish a halfway station for the Dutch East India Company, there were 1370 Europeans and 838 slaves. By 1750 the number of Europeans had risen to 4860 while the slaves counted 5327 (Scholtz 1964:23). This does not include the indigenous population groups with whom an increasing degree of contact was taking place. It is clear then that even at this early stage of the South African history the Whites were in a minority and they were dependent on a labor force consisting of non-Whites. These slaves, however, were a part of most households and were contrasted with the indigenous population groups. In these early years there existed a great contrast between the settlers and the natives of South Africa and this contrast was most clearly noticeable in terms of religion. For this reason we soon found that church attendance and holy communion were open to all Christians irrespective of color or origin (Moorrees 1937: 39). The significance of this situation is clearly that color did not form the dividing line within the society which was emerging, but cultural and religious attainment. Even mixed marriages were permitted and a number of miscegenous unions, both extra-marital and through legal unions, took place. Children born from such unions were, upon reaching a certain age, free men. In this respect Mason remarks: “It is not surprising that by 1671 only one quarter of the children born to slaves were reputed to be the children of slave fathers” (1954: 83). By the end of the seventeenth century marriages with “full-