

## THE COLOUR BAR IN SOUTH AFRICA — By F. A. W. Lucas, K.C.

FEW THINGS have created more inter-racial bitterness in South Africa or done more to besmirch its name abroad than the colour bar. Those who hold that it is unjust as well as those who claim that it impoverishes the Union constantly appeal for its removal. Yet it holds its ground with apparently increasing strength. There are no signs that its opponents are making any headway against it.

It is hardly possible to exaggerate the effects of the colour bar on the relations between whites and blacks in the Union and we cannot afford to ignore its effects on our prestige abroad or, to come closer home, on the chances of our ever being able to incorporate in the Union, otherwise than by force, the neighbouring native Protectorates of Swaziland, Basutoland and Bechuanaland.

It seems to me that if we are to improve the present position, we must look more closely than is generally done into the reason for the colour bar. Until we understand that and can meet the difficulty against which the bar is intended to protect the whites, we cannot hope to find an acceptable way by which it can be modified or removed.

### TWO ASPECTS

There are two aspects of the colour bar, one social and the other economic. They are quite different in their origin and effects, and I believe that if we are careful to distinguish between them we can hope to remove in the main, if not altogether, that part of the colour bar, the economic, which is to-day so injurious to our welfare and reputation.

It is, I think, quite useless for anyone to expect to remove the social colour bar for generations to come. It is so strongly entrenched in the emotions of the white people of the Union that they would at any cost resist any attempt to end it. It is based on a fear and dislike of miscegenation so strong that no reasoning could prevail against it. We must, therefore, accept it as part of our social organisation.

Fortunately, however, there is no serious moral issue involved in the social colour bar. We are all of us entitled to choose the company we keep and our white people are entitled, if they wish it, to hold aloof from social contact with the coloured races.

### THE ECONOMIC BAR

We come then to the economic colour bar. This restricts employment in the highly paid, skilled occupations to the whites and confines the natives, coloureds and Indians, in the main to unskilled jobs paid for at a wage on which a white worker cannot keep up the recognised white standard of living.

Two consequences of this aspect of the colour bar should be noted. It prevents

a coloured person, no matter how great is his innate ability, from being allowed to develop it either for his own benefit or that of the community. He must confine his skill and energy to doing the lowliest of manual jobs. It, therefore, restricts his earnings to the low level which prevails for such jobs. The result is a wide gap between the customary level of wages of a white worker and that of a native, the former being about six to one of the latter.

The first of those consequences is obviously unjust to the coloured races; the second is equally obviously a serious danger to the economic position of the whites.

### EFFECT ON THE WHITES

Because the native is prevented from using his intellectual and physical powers to produce goods or render services to the extent of which he is capable, he cannot, as he would like to do, purchase the products or call for the services of the whites for which they want an outlet. This causes unemployment among the whites. But a still greater danger to them lies in the wide gap in the wage levels of the two races. Employers are constantly subject to the keenest competition in their trades and, as a rule, the only factor in their costs which they can cut down is wages. An obvious way in which they can do this is by employing in as many jobs as possible the low-paid native. Any part of a highly-paid operation which can be lopped off from a skilled worker's task and handed over to an unskilled worker will reduce the employer's costs. The incentive to do this is ever present and, consequently, the position of the white worker grows always more precarious and the possibility of a successful development of industry in the Union more remote.

### GROUNDING IN FEAR OF WANT

If we are willing to deal with the economic colour bar as separate from the social, we can avoid much of the emotionalism which gives the latter its strength. Then it will be possible to find a way in which the whites and their civilisation can be preserved and at the same time the coloured races can be relieved from the limitations which the colour bar places on their right to develop and use their abilities in any natural and legal way.

The economic colour bar is insisted on by the whites because of a fear that there are not enough jobs to go round. *Die Transvaler* put the case in this way: In order to compete with the non-European, the European worker will be obliged to sink to the standard of living of the former; if he did so, white civilisation would be doomed.

When the white worker looks at the matter in that light, it is natural that he feels he must resist at all costs any attempt to destroy the protection which

he believes the colour bar gives him. As he has the political power he will use it to maintain that protection and unless he can get a satisfactory form of protection in some other way the colour bar will have to remain.

If, however, we can remove the cause of that fear, there is reasonable ground to hope that the economic colour bar will fall away with it.

### MORE JOBS THAN WORKERS

That can be done, but only by our destroying land monopoly and the power to hold land out of use. All jobs depend upon access to the natural resources of the earth. We must make them accessible to all our people. We all live out of farming, fishing, mining or building, OR out of processing, handling or distributing their products, OR out of catering for the needs of the workers in those industries.

When we remove the obstacles which land monopoly places by high prices for land in the way of industry, urban, mining or rural, the only limit to our production will be the richness of our natural resources and our natural and developed ability and skill. As we have rich natural resources, our interest will lie in the training, to the best of which they are capable, of all our workers, white and black. There will be an unlimited number of jobs, that is, more jobs than workers. Then not only will the whites be able, without any economic colour bar, to maintain their standard of living and even improve it, but our coloured peoples also will be enabled to raise their standard to the limit of which they may be capable. The whites will gain financially and, at the same time, cleanse themselves from the stigma which the injustice of the present economic colour bar places on their reputation. Our country could then be really free and we, its inhabitants, a Free People.

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