

## Racialism <sup>1,2</sup>

A.N. Prior

When I was last speaking to you, three weeks ago, I remarked that before you open your paper in the morning, there's one thing you can be quite sure is going to be mentioned in it: From one day to another, you can always be sure that your next day's paper will have something in it about Communism. Another subject that you read about pretty often these days, though not quite every day, is race prejudice and the colour bar. Just think of the number of times it has come up recently. There's this matter of the Maoris being kept out of the football team that's going to South Africa. Then a few months ago there was the Maori whom the Government of Australia was not going to allow to settle in that country. There were other non-European people too, from South East Asia, whom the Australians deported, although they had married Australian wives. And this whole "White Australia" policy has been much under discussion lately – the Churches there have attacked it, for example. Returning to South Africa, the recent elections [p.2] there, in which General Smuts went out of power, seem to have been fought largely on the question of native policy. General Smuts and his party were very far from abolishing the colour bar, but they were not enforcing it rigidly enough for the party which now rules the country. South Africa, moreover, has shown itself very sensitive to outside criticisms on this point, and objects to the United Nations having anything to say on the subject. Then there's America. President Truman has lost the support of some of the Southern States, though these are the traditional stronghold of his party because on his insistence of equal rights for whites and negroes. In America there was also the incident of the<sup>3</sup> man from the Ethiopian embassy being turned away from his seat in a theatre.

All this seems rather strange and foreign to us. New Zealand is rather a [p. 3] young country, and it may seem a little early to be talking about a New Zealand way of life, as the Americans, for example, talk about the American way of life. We have a New Zealand way of life, all the same, whether we are aware of it or not. We have the beginnings of one, anyway; and we are aware of it when visitors from overseas criticise us. I don't think our New Zealand way of life is by any means perfect, and we should perhaps listen to these criticisms more patiently than we do. There is in this country, I think, a certain excessive conventionality, a certain lack of variety and imagination, a tendency to deal rather harshly with minority opinions. But it is not my purpose this morning to repeat or add to all the usual criticisms of New Zealanders. I have given myself the more easy and pleasant task of referring to one feature of our New Zealand way of life which seems to me thoroughly good and commendable, something we can be a little bit proud of, if we stick to it and don't allow it to be taken from us. I am, of course, referring to the fact that in our New Zealand way of life there is no place for [p. 4] a colour bar. I know it is said sometimes that there is a bit of a

---

<sup>1</sup> Editors' note: National Broadcasting Service, station 3YA, Christchurch, 10 a.m. 1/10/48. Added in pencil above the title: "In this Week's Overseas News" (probably a section of the programme called 'Women's Hour').

<sup>2</sup> Edited by Martin Prior and Simon Graf.

<sup>3</sup> Editors' note (Prior crossed out): [... the incident of the] "family from the Ethiopian embassy being turned away from their seats in a theatre. And colour bar being enforced in the theatre against a party..."

colour bar in New Zealand. And perhaps that is true. We do not always live up to the principles we profess. I heard some years ago, for instance, of a landlady in one of our cities who contributed generously to such causes as missions to the Chinese, but who would not have a Chinese student in her house, even as a visitor. But there is one thing about us that's worth observing. If anybody says there is a colour bar in New Zealand, we're always up in arms about it, and try to prove that there isn't. You wouldn't get a South African or a Southern American reacting like that. Imagine a South African trying to prove that there's no colour bar in his country. Of course there is, and what is more, the majority of Europeans in S. Africa think it's quite right that there should be. They showed that by the way they voted.

Of course in a way it's easy for our country to do without a colour bar. Non-Europeans are in a very small minority here, so that we are not afraid of them, as South Africans and Southern Americans are. [p.5] And we deliberately keep it that way – we do have a kind of colour bar at our borders, so to speak – nothing quite so rigorous as the White Australia policy across the Tasman, but we do make it easier for white people to immigrate here than for coloured people. We have no cause to be very proud of ourselves in this matter. Nevertheless, we have this idea of racial equality; and it seems to me good that we do have it, and that we should maintain it. And the more that we look at the way the colour bar operates in other countries, the more sure we can be of our justification in opposing it.

Let us take a brief glance, for example, at the Southern States of America. In arguments about the rights of negroes there, those who want to retain the colour bar, and those who want to abolish it, tend to move on different planes. Political and economic equality is what the negroes seem to want most; but on the other side, the argument always seems to come around sooner or later, and usually sooner, to the topic of intermarriage. I do not [p. 6] know how widely realised this is; but in most of the Southern States of America, marriage between whites and negroes is not just socially frowned upon, but not legally recognised. And however far Southerners may be prepared to go in granting political or economic equality to the negroes, the one thing which most of them will not have is what they call social equality. In fact, their commonest excuse for opposing political and economic equality is that it would bring social equality in its train. What this “social equality” means, superficially, is anything like going to the same schools and colleges, sitting together in buses and trains and theatres and so on. But the phrase “social equality” is just a polite way of talking about something else. The whole point of all these pettifogging regulations – and the Southerner is quite aware of this – is that negroes and whites must not have the sort of social life together which might lead some of them to contemplate mixed marriages. [p. 7]

Now intermarriage is a subject on which there are many different opinions, but there are also a few plain facts about it. In the first place, anyone with ordinary horse sense can see that it's unwise for people to marry when they have totally different cultural backgrounds and domestic habits, whether their skins are of different colours or not. But the obvious unsuitability of some mixed marriages is no reason for organizing a society's whole life to prevent mixed marriages ever becoming suitable. As an excuse for such a policy, it is sometimes said that the children [p. 7a]<sup>4</sup> of

---

<sup>4</sup> Editors' note (Prior crossed out): Now intermarriage is a subject on which there are [sic] a great variety of opinions, but there are also a few plain facts about it. To begin with, it is just common sense that marriage between people of widely differing backgrounds, whether [the] ... colour of their skins is different or not, is seldom wise or happy. And as

mixed marriages are a poor type, that some sort of degeneration always follows upon racial mixture. And this is pure superstition. Some quite interesting investigations have been made into this subject in our own country, and at one school it was found that the scholar who outshone all the others in studies and sport and general popularity had grandparents of four different races – I think they were Chinese, Maori and two different European races; they were, at all events, as different as that. And there's a third point to which I want to draw your attention, as this is a session mainly for women. The [p. 8] systematic degradation of one race by another seems to be invariably bound up with the systematic degradation of one sex by another. Where racial intermixture is socially or legally forbidden, it always nevertheless takes place; but almost always, so to speak, in one direction. The coloured woman has no protection against the white man; while the white woman is protected against the black man whether she desires such protection or not; so that women of neither the one race nor the other have much choice about their behaviour.<sup>5,6</sup> And my own candid view is that the desire to keep the relations between men and women at this primitive level is one of the main emotional forces behind racial domination. We need to realise once and for all that racial domination is not only an unjust but an unsavoury thing. [p. 9]<sup>7</sup>

I have chosen this subject this morning not only because it is one on which New Zealanders have a better conscience than many other peoples, and it is always pleasant to be able to pat ourselves on the back, and thank God that we are not as others are, but also because [p. 10] it's bound up with the other subject that's always in the news. Racial discrimination is one of the things that makes people Communists. Let me mention one rather striking example. I am sure you all enjoy the singing of Paul Robeson. I once had the privilege of meeting him – it was when he sang for an international students' club in London. He has a very charming, simple and impressive personality; and he is, I think, not only a great singer but a great man. And you may have read in the papers a few months ago that he had to appear before an American committee to be questioned as to whether he was a Communist. Now I have no inside information as to whether Paul Robeson is a Communist; but I do know that he's so near to it that it makes no difference, and he has had his children educated in Soviet Russia. And it seems to me rather tragic that a man of Paul Robeson's stature should be driven into the camp of the enemies of freedom by discrimination against negroes; because [p. 11] that is unquestionably what drove him there.

One point of interest about this case is that relative freedom from racial prejudice was not introduced into Russia by the Communists, but to some extent has always been there. A Jewish anthropologist in London once told me that there is one fact, and one fact only, which seems to support the theory that some races are intrinsically inferior to others. And this one fact was this: that there has only been one race that has ever been so silly as to imagine that there are inferior races – when we ask, Who are the racialists? we find that most of these themselves belong to one race,

---

things are now, the backgrounds of white and coloured people usually are very different, however friendly they may be. But if they are not – what then? It is often said that the children ...

<sup>5</sup> Editors' note (Prior crossed out): This is a very unsavory aspect of the racial domination of one race by another and I shall not dwell upon it any further.

<sup>6</sup> Editors' note (Prior crossed out): And if my more candid view is that the desire to keep the relations bet. men and women on this factitious level is true of the main focus behind the domination of one race by another.

<sup>7</sup> Editors' note (Prior crossed out): This is a very unsavory feature of societies based on what is called white supremacy. And I do not intend to dwell upon it; but we do need to realise once and for all that this white supremacy is not merely an unfair thing, but a filthy thing; and that, again, is a mild way of putting it.

namely the Teutonic. The Teutonic race includes the Germans and the Dutch and the English and the Americans, and those are the people among whom the idea of a colour bar is most prevalent. You don't find it even among other European races – among the Slavonic peoples, such as the Russians, or the Latin peoples, such as the French. Of course my friend's generalization was too sweeping, but you can see [p. 12] that there is something in it. Why the Teutonic race has this rather unpleasant distinction, at all events among European races, I do not know, though I have one or two theories about it; but I will leave that problem with you – perhaps some of you can puzzle it out for yourselves.