

Notes on the Coloured Franchise.

1. The idea of the communal franchise was first suggested, as far as I am aware, by the Native Affairs Commission of 1903-1905. *Formally recommended*
 The suggestion was made, however, only in respect of the native vote, and the idea was that by changing the basis of representation from the common roll to a separate communal roll, it would be possible to give some form of representation to the natives in the other colonies, as well as the Cape.

It is significant, however, that the idea did not catch on politically. The other colonies were averse to a native franchise of any description, and the Cape representatives, though a few may have wanted the standard of civilisation more precisely defined so as to prevent abuses, were so firmly in favour of their own common-roll system that the question of a communal franchise was not raised at all at the National Convention.

Merriman's evidence on this point before the Commission is illuminating. He was asked whether he would not favour a communal franchise of the New Zealand kind for the Cape. His reply was that he did not. If the idea was that a communal franchise would "keep the natives out of politics" this was quite unrealistic. So far from doing this, the tendency would be either to make more acute the party struggle for the ~~the native~~ native votes, as these votes might constitute the balance of power in the House; or else the effect might be to create an "Irish party" in the House. (in other words, an extreme group forming a solid bloc, outside the ordinary party alignments, but capable, in certain conditions of holding the balance of power.)
 He insisted that the native franchise had on the whole worked well in the Cape, and that the Cape natives had both made progress under it, and shown themselves more happy and contented than natives in other parts of South Africa.

What Merriman said is borne out by studying the Hansards of the period. At no stage in South Africa's history, has native policy been more out of politics than during the last decade of the old Cape Parliament. The reason was that both parties ~~accepted and approved the existence of the native vote, that both had held seats where there were native voters, and were therefore in touch with native requirements and opinions.~~ Whether by a coincidence or not, the men representing constituencies where the native vote was of importance were in the main persons of exceptional calibre - e.g. Merriman and Sauer - who took the trouble to pay frequent visits to their constituents, and to raise in Parliament any ~~native~~ matters affecting them. The approach was, however, *an increasingly non-political approach*. *resultant debates were to a striking extent bi-party*
 Thus in the last two years of the Cape Parliament, a permanent committee on native affairs was established, with ~~members from both parties appointed by Parliament to it,~~ to which all legislation affecting the natives had to be referred. *Summary up*
 The common-roll native franchise therefore meant that the natives had the same kind of voice as any other electors in the House, that they could bring matters concerning them to the attention of their representatives whenever the need arose, that these representatives belonged to both parties, and that the effect in the main was thus to largely remove native policy as an active political question from politics.

Under those circumstances, a member of parliament who raised a question of native administration in Parliament was far more likely to be listened to, and to get something done than under the present system, where the native representatives form a separate group unable to influence either party. Moreover, the fact that other members of Parliament are never brought into direct contact with native opinion or requirements emphasises the separation of the native representatives and increases their powerlessness. *isolation & powerlessness*
 They become the mouthpiece of grievance.

• It is apparent too, that -

Moreover what Merriman said about an Irish Party is increasingly coming about. The native voters, knowing that their representatives have no influence upon Parliament's counsels, prefer today, if they have to choose people who are ^{no more than} ~~only~~ mouthpieces of their grievances but cannot effect policy, to choose the more extreme rather than the more moderate. The selection of communist candidates is of great significance, for it shows the political influences to which the native voters ~~can become~~ have become subject under the ~~separate~~ system of a separate communal roll.

By contrast the coloured voters have shown no such tendencies. Should they be isolated politically by being placed onto a separate roll, there is considerable danger that this tendency will arise, ~~because it is inherent in the system itself~~. The danger is inherent in ~~itself~~ the system itself; and the circumstances under which this system is now liable to be introduced - against the will of the majority of the coloured voters - will, by fomenting their feeling of grievance and resentment at political discrimination, undoubtedly accelerate this tendency.

B. The coloured vote historically.

The coloured vote was at no time since the history of ~~the~~ parliamentary institutions in the Cape ever challenged until recent times. So much was it taken ~~for~~ granted that this vote was ~~safe~~, ^{unchallenged} that when discussing the safeguards for the Cape vote ~~which were~~ agreed upon in the National Convention, only the native franchise was referred to. Similarly in the debates of the Cape Parliament on the draft constitution during the special session of 1909, the emphasis was entirely on whether or not the native vote had been adequately protected. It did not occur to anyone that the Cape ~~native~~ coloured franchise would ever be challenged.

This is of importance, because it embodied a sound appreciation of the fact that the coloured community was an integrated part of the total community of the Cape. To divide it off politically at this stage can only have the effect of producing a common front between coloureds and natives in an anti-white party.

C. Analogy with New Zealand not a sound one.

It should be noted that in legislating for the Maoris, provision was being made for a minority group, one that was geographically isolated, and that, ^{was not at the time} involved, in any important sense, in the total economy of New Zealand. Also, although politically separate in their representation, the Maoris are not excluded socially, and the Maori representatives (themselves Maoris) meet on equal terms in Parliament with other representatives. The motive seems genuinely to have ^{been to} protect a minority group in their rights of representation rather than an attempt to produce political separation, ~~as the~~ as the ideological counterpart of social separation.

Even so, the dangers inherent in the system have revealed themselves, and the Maoris tend to form a separate bloc, who on one occasion recently held the balance of power. No group of representatives should, by reason of a constitutional provision, be afforded ~~the opportunity~~ to be able to find itself in the position of dominating or of holding up the business of Parliament, ^{more especially if that group}

is a racial one. The best historical example of the evils of this system is the "Irish Party" in the H. of Commons to which Merriman referred.

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