

South Africa – General Impressions Title 170

The South African (Apartheid) Government had decided to invite a London science correspondent for a VIP visit to their country at the end of 1968, and their choice had fallen on me. I can only speculate why I was chosen, perhaps because the *Daily Telegraph*, well known for its conservative policy, would publish only a very favourable report. I have explained my personal attitude to politics on Title 145 as a progressive liberal, and could therefore not agree with apartheid under any circumstances. Yet I accepted the invitation after discussing it with the Foreign Editor, Mr Ricky Marsh. He left the decision to me and as a result, scientific curiosity prevailed, my Temper!

I arrived in Pretoria, the capital, on 12 January 1969. At Heathrow Airport in London, BOAC, the British airline, had placed a coloured stewardess at the check-in gate and I wondered if this was intentional. At London Customs control I was informed that the magazine *Playboy* was considered as pornographic in South Africa and would be confiscated. I had never owned a copy. In South Africa I was often reminded of Huxley's *Brave New World* with its class distinctions of all blacks as gamma and delta races, the lowest in the prevailing hierarchy.

There was no television in South Africa in 1969, the official reason being given to me was that broadcasting would be too difficult in the three languages of Afrikaans, English and Bantu, the term used for all black Africans. I was also amazed to find Yale locks on many cupboards in Hotels.

In Pretoria I met high civil servants, most of them dressed in formal black suits, although there was a local heat wave of 35 °C. Only a few wore the sensible safari suits. All private cars were driven by whites, except when they had a black chauffeur, whereas Bantus were walking. Taxis and lifts had prominent signs "Whites only".

I found the semi-tropical flora reminiscent of Australia with eucalyptus trees everywhere and the same garden shrubs with their lusciously coloured flowers. The bungalows were also much alike in both countries, and so was the general absence of any books in them. At night, after 23 hours, Pretoria was deserted, as Bantus had to return to their 'Home Towns', but I was assured "We have of course no curfew in South Africa".