

Mnr. Auerbach het my meegedeel dat hy nie 'n studie van die geskiedenis gemaak het nie: hy is ook nie geskiedenisonderwyser nie, maar doseer Engels op skool.

F. A. van Jaarsveld.

THE CRITICISM OF SCHOOL HISTORY BOOKS

A great deal of prominence has been given in recent months to the subject of bias in South African history textbooks. Although the authors of these books, and I include myself, may chafe at the unwanted publicity given to the allegations of bias, the teaching of history in our schools may benefit, provided that the critics approach their subject in a constructive manner and without arousing unnecessary antagonism, and provided the authors give heed to the criticism. Unfortunately the recent criticisms of history books have aroused bitter feelings of a personal nature, and this makes clear reasoning on contentious subjects even more impossible.

Fairness should be the keynote of all such criticism. Unfortunately some of our critics in pleading for an unbiased approach to history reveal that they too have very strong leanings. As Professor van Jaarsveld has pointed out in recent articles it is difficult for the writer of history, and I may add for critics too, to escape from certain forms of subjectivity in their interpretation of historical events. I have also sensed that critics, in quest of examples of bias to support their arguments, tend to single out words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs, giving an interpretation which they assume was the one intended by the author. Criticisms would be fairer and have greater value if the impressions created by a whole chapter, even the entire book, were taken into account when passing judgment. I suspect that many of our critics, and especially those who presume to review history books without the necessary experience, read only those sections of the books where they are certain to find controversial matter.

Certain of my publications have recently been criticised by Professor van Jaarsveld in *Historia* (September 1962) and by Mrs. E. H. Lewin in *Symposium* (1962). It is not the intention of this article to reply to all the criticisms of these two writers: space makes this impossible, and in any case I consider many of the criticisms valid, and I intend making several changes when the new editions of the books are prepared. There are several points, however, which I consider it necessary to discuss.

From my accounts of the frontier wars and the position of the Hottentots in the Cape Colony Mrs. Lewin draws the conclusion that I regard all humanitarians and missionaries as unpractical visionaries and that I interpret South African history from the point of view of the colonists. Yet in the chapters discussing the origin and aims of humanitarianism, as revealed by the missionary movement, I consider that I have been most sympathetic to this movement. Indeed Professor van Jaarsveld claims that my sympathies obviously lie with the missionaries. „Uit voorgaande is dit duidelik dat Boyce as Engelssprekende skryf en die tradisionele Engelse en sendelingvisie op die oorsake (van die Groot Trek) weergee en dat sy simpatie by die

sendelinge lê". I think that Professor van Jaarsveld's conclusion is correct; I am the son of a missionary and lived until a few years ago on a mission station.

I am prepared to concede that my chapter on the frontier wars, especially in the time of Maynier, is unsatisfactory and I intend rewriting it completely, but I consider some of Mrs. Lewin's criticisms to be unfair. I cannot see anything wrong with the statement, "but the governor in Cape Town, being anxious to avoid the expense of a war, replaced him (Maurits Woeke) by a man called Honoratius Maynier with instructions to come to terms with the Xhosa". Mrs. Lewin has altered the sentence in her article by implying that the sentence begins, "A man called Honoratius Maynier".

I am sorry that I should have created the impression that Maynier was an unsatisfactory character, and that Professor Marais' monograph on the subject is of no consequence. This was never intended and for that reason I shall rewrite the chapter.

Mrs. Lewin also singles out the sentence, "Both Janssens and de Mist were firm believers in the principles of the French Revolution — liberty and equality — nevertheless they were practical men and able administrators" as implying that any one who believes in liberty and equality is unlikely to be a practical man or able administrator. As a matter of interest my friend M. S. Geen in his *Making of South Africa* expresses the same idea. The rest of my chapter on Janssens and de Mist is devoted to the liberal measures and reforms which they introduced, but it should be clear to an intelligent reader that in their desire to see the extension of liberty they also saw the need of strong government. Neither did they immediately proclaim the liberation of the slaves.

Mrs. Lewin claims that my account of the Black Circuit episode reveals that I am in sympathy with the colonists because of the statement, "The verdicts of the court were really a vindication for the colonists, and an indication that the missionaries had been too credulous." The meaning I intended to convey here was that *in the opinion of the colonist* their good name had been cleared. I realize that this sentence will have to be omitted in future editions to prevent further misunderstanding. It appears that the less an author has to say about controversial issues, the better.

My account of the 50th Ordinance is also criticised because the colonists' point of view is emphasised, and the good that came of the ordinance ignored. This I consider to be a valid objection, and intend to make amendments. I wish, however, to point out that teachers who have had to teach the subject of Hottentot policy for many years in order to explain the origins of the Great Trek have, as might have been expected, fallen into the error of discussing this period of history from the white man's point of view. Although I know this is a very inadequate defence, teachers of history, struggling to get weak candidates through an examination, tend to be guided by what examiners will expect candidates to know.

In my account of the causes of the South African War, a controversial subject under most circumstances, I have tried to show that the underlying cause of the war was Britain's determination to assert her supremacy in

South Africa and her fear of the possible domination of South African affairs by the South African Republic under Kruger. I have tried to show that it was Milner who turned on the pressure in Britain's dealings with the Republic. I fail to see how Mrs. Lewin can interpret my statements as implying that Britain's right was so strong that she was entitled to enforce it even by going to war. I have explained Milner's point of view but this does not imply that he was justified in his conclusions.

What conclusion is one to draw from this paragraph taken from Professor Marais' *Fall of Kruger's Republic*?

"He (Milner) came to the conclusion that the independence of the South African Republic was incompatible with the interests of Britain because the Republic was the prime cause of the growth of Afrikaner nationalism throughout South Africa. Afrikaner nationalism was the real enemy. What was this Afrikaner nationalism of the late 1890's? Its portrait as painted by Milner looks remarkably like the visage it wears today when it has grown to full stature as a result of the Anglo-Boer War and an effort extending over half a century. A nationalist himself, he recognised the symptoms of a *malady* to which the patient was not to succumb until many years later."

Shall I declare that Professor Marais is guilty of an implied assumption that he and his readers are agreed that this Afrikaner nationalism was an evil which Milner had every right to condemn? Having a very high regard for the scholarship of Professor Marais and his efforts to be completely objective, I would not dream of putting this interpretation on the paragraph quoted above.

Unfortunately the writers of school books are subject to a form of criticism which assume that they are deliberately trying to distort the facts. Is it fair that a critic, having spotted a few ill-chosen words, the careless rendering of a phrase, or omissions resulting from the necessity to condense in a textbook, should allege that there is deliberate distortion and that some sinister motive lurks behind every adjective used?

In quoting Keppel Jones in her conclusions Mrs. Lewin has delivered a harsh judgment. She asserts that the impression which these textbooks will leave on the minds of the pupils is that South African history is the history of the white race, and that other races figure in it merely as problems; that in the treatment of these other races the opinion of the colonist was a practical common sense opinion grounded in sound knowledge, but the opinion of the philanthropists, etc., was visionary and impractical based on ignorance of the native.

It was not the original intention of this article to refute all critics, for as I have said much of the criticism is valid and will lead to amendments. I feel, however, that I should reply to some of Professor van Jaarsveld's criticisms.

In my discussion of the causes of the Great Trek, Professor van Jaarsveld is of opinion that I have over-emphasised "land-hunger" as a cause of the Great Trek, and said too little about all the other causes. I am afraid he has not studied the book in question (*Legacy* Std. 7) well, for the other causes of the Great Trek, e.g. influence of missionaries, anti-slavery move-

ment, insecurity on the frontier, etc. are discussed in pages 120 to 132. What appears on pages 144-5 is only a summing up of the causes. Professor de Kiewiet, whom I consider a reliable authority, has in his *History of South Africa* devoted considerable space to the question of land-hunger.

Professor van Jaarsveld claims that I have painted such a gloomy picture of conditions in the Transvaal on the eve of annexation in 1877 that I justify Britain's interference. Surely I have made it quite clear that Carnarvon was seeking a pretext to interfere in the Transvaal's affairs in order to promote his federation schemes. I have also quoted Professors de Kiewiet and Uys to show that it was not the Transvaal's weakness, but her strength that Britain feared. This chapter should be read again, and it will be quite clear that Carnarvon was merely trying to take advantage of conditions in the Transvaal, and that the reports he received were exaggerated.

In regard to the Boers' petition signed by more than 6,000 Boers, which Professor van Jaarsveld quotes as an example of deliberate omission because I have not mentioned that only 587 Boers voted in favour of annexation, I wish to draw his attention to my senior textbook, *Europe and South Africa* in which the *both* figures are given accurately. The figure 587 was omitted from *Legacy* Std. 8 only because I was anxious to condense and simplify. It is wrong therefore to assume that this is an example of deliberate distortion.

The same applies to the reference to the Uitlanders outnumbering the Boers in the proportion of seven to three. I am grateful to Professor van Jaarsveld for pointing out that these figures are incorrect, but my reason for quoting these figures (however erroneous they may have been) was to illustrate Kruger's fears, which were justified, and not to strengthen the case of the Uitlanders in demanding the franchise. The reader is referred to page 417 of *A History for South African High Schools* where this is made quite clear.

The space allocated to this article does not permit a reply to many other criticisms contained in Professor van Jaarsveld's article. I appreciate that his motive in analysing some of my books was, not to find fault, but to show that no textbook in history can be regarded as free of bias of one kind or another. I find it hard to accept his summing up to the effect that I am "anti-Kruger, anti-Boer, anti-Hollander", and "pro-Uitlander, pro-Brits, en pro-Imperialisme". If this is really the impression the books give as a whole, I am very sorry that I ever wrote them. I think it is unfair to generalize on the treatment of South African history in a book from a discussion of a limited number of topics.

In regard to Professor van Jaarsveld's rather unpleasant insinuation that in writing my book for Std. 8 I sat with his books in front of me, may I point out the following: My Std. 8 book is based on my senior book *Europe and South Africa* which was published a year before van Jaarsveld's book. The chapters to which he refers in his footnote bear a close resemblance to the chapters in *Europe and South Africa*. Only on one matter will I agree that I have been influenced by Professor van Jaarsveld and that is his reference to the first appearance of Afrikaner nationalism at the time of

the Great Trek as a factor responsible for the South African War — the rest of my chapter on the causes of the war bear no resemblance to his chapter. My style and the manner in which the text is arranged are quite different from that of Professor van Jaarsveld. Surely it is a contradiction for the Professor to say that the contents of our books are so similar when he has already come to the conclusion that I am anti-Boer, anti-Kruger, etc.

What then is the solution to this vexed question of bias in the teaching of history?

Firstly, we should be grateful to our critics for making us aware of the existence of bias especially in its more subtle forms. Unfortunately the criticisms usually come too late to have a beneficial effect on the first editions of textbooks: but as Professor van Jaarsveld has pointed out, the publication of a book is not something static or unchangeable — the first editions are really experiments and amendments are possible.

The elimination of bias is concerned with the fundamental question of aims in the teaching of history. I think this has to be put right first, for bias usually stems from a writer's conception of his aim in teaching the subject. If a writer's aim is to reveal the guiding hand of destiny in the growth of a nation or a particular race, or if his aim is to glorify the leaders of his nation in the past in order to inculcate patriotism and prejudice against other groups, he cannot give an objective account of events. Writers of this sort of history do not concern themselves with questions of bias: they are so convinced that their cause is a worthy one that the end justifies the means. History becomes the handmaiden of politics, to be used on every possible occasion to stir up feelings for the advantage of the party or group. The unveiling of statues in memory of our great men and stirring events of the past, in itself a most laudable idea, is unfortunately generally a political occasion rather than an historical one.

Fortunately for the study of South African history we have writers, both in Afrikaans and English, whose sole aim is to explain, "Wie es eigentlich gewesen ist", to quote Leopold von Ranke's famous dictum. Even these writers of history, however, are human beings who cannot escape from the influences which have moulded their outlook, be it the cultural influences of the group to which they belong or the age in which they live. Therefore, as Professor van Jaarsveld has pointed out, the subjective element in the interpretation of history cannot be entirely eliminated: this is not to say that we should not strive for objectivity.

The appointment of a committee representing all groups in our population to revise history books is obviously one solution to the problem. From my experience of discussions at conferences of history teachers the greatest difficulty is to persuade the representatives of these groups to come together for frank discussions.

The use of sources by pupils at the secondary school level has also been suggested. This is not the easy solution which certain critics claim it to be. Pupils would have to have unrestricted access to *all* the documents relating to a period of history — not to a few documents, or extracts from documents, specially selected for them by a teacher or made available for them in a

school textbook. In the use of sources there is still the possibility of bias creeping in, for what is to prevent the person selecting the documents for study from choosing only those documents, or extracts, which fit in with his interpretation of events?

Apart from this factor, the use of sources does not appear to be a very practical solution: the length of the history syllabus and the limited time allotted to pupils to cover this work would make it a cumbrous approach to the subject. It is also doubtful whether many of our high school pupils are equipped with the necessary critical faculty to enable them to undertake the investigation of documents.

Mr. F. E. Auerbach in his dissertation, *The Measurement of bias in South African History textbooks* has suggested a more scientific or objective method of assessing bias in history textbooks. His method is based on the *quantitative* analysis of the content of textbooks, that is the facts given, the manner in which the facts have been explained and the length of the texts regarding certain controversial topics. This method would certainly entail a great deal of work for any investigating committee, but should provide a more satisfactory solution to the problem of evaluating textbooks.

A. N. Boyce.

REPLIEK

Ek waardeer die konstruktiewe gedagtes wat mnr. Boyce in sy artikel uitgespreek het. Voordat ek met 'n positiewe voorstel kom, meen ek om op twee punte in te gaan. Die eerste is my konklusie, op grond van *enkele bladsye* waarna ek gekyk het, nl., dat daaruit af te lei is dat hy „*anti-Kruger, anti-Boer, anti-Hollander, en pro-Uitlander, pro-Brits, en pro-Imperialisme*” is. Ek gee toe dat ek dit moes gekwalifiseer het, soos onderaan p. 162 (Sept. nr.), met die omskrywing dat dit op grond van die enkele bladsye was, terwyl dit *nie* vir die boek in sy *geheel* geld nie. Dit was my te doen om te toon hoe „leuensbeskouing, tradisionele siening en vooroordeel sy beeld onbewus en bedek vorm gee” — soos dit die geval met enige skoolboekskrywer is.

Ten tweede: wat sy sinspeling op 'n kontradiksie betref i.v.m. my bevinding van die *eendersheid* van die *inhoud* van sommige *afdelings* van sy boeke (dit geld die St. VIII-boek), en myne: die ooreenstemming lê by die *inhoud* van die betrokke paragrawe hoewel die *gees* of *toon* waarin dit gestel is, verskil. Verder wil ek graag 'n moontlike misverstand uit die weg ruim: waar ek daarop gesinspeel het dat hy „met my boeke oop voor hom gesit en werk het”, bevat my bedoeling nie meer as om *beïnvloeding* aan te dui nie. My St. VIII-boek was reeds in 1959 in Engels beskikbaar en mnr. Boyce gee self toe dat hy op die punt van die verskyning van Afrikaner-nasionalisme of die Groot Trek as beginpunt van die Anglo-Boere-Oorlog (sy sin is nie heeltemal duidelik gestel nie) deur my „beïnvloed” is. (Vgl. bv. p. 104 en 135 van Boyce en my *History* St. VIII, p. 155 en 193, aspekte wat nie in sy *Europe and South Africa* 1959 so volledig of glad nie voorkom nie). Ek gee toe dat ons benadering deur metode en inhoud van die stof, my in die ander gevalle (vgl. voetnoot op p. 163) ooreenkomste