**POL 3013: SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT**

**TUTORIAL 4: SMUTS AND THE NATIVE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL**

The following extracts are taken from the report on General Smuts’s meeting with members of the Native Representative Council held in May 1947—about a year before the election of the NP government and the introduction of apartheid. The questions below form the basis for discussion in tutorials. In the tutorial discussion, you should draw on whole report (document 32 in *From Protest to Challenge*, pp. 233–57), included in the course reading list.

*Smuts:* The problems before us in this country call for a spirit of goodwill. These problems can only be solved in a spirit and in an atmosphere of goodwill between the various sections of our people. There must be understanding and sympathy; there must be patience. Otherwise the situation may become an insoluble problem. I think it would be a mistake to indulge in blame and recriminations. They are not helpful. Mistakes may have been made. Mistakes may still be made. Human nature is like that. The world will always be like that, but we have to be patient and practise a spirit of goodwill and understanding towards each other and try to make a fresh start and a fresh move to right things. (p. 235)

*Smuts*: My idea is that the child is growing up. This young child, South Africa, is growing up and the old clothes do not fit the growing boy. You must make some new clothes. The fashion also changes. We have to move with the times. It is no use standing still, or sitting down, as you are doing in the Native Representative Council now! . . . Please don’t think that in these matters the Government is standing still. Our ideas are not stationary. We know that a forward movement is taking place and must take place and that we must carry our whole population of all colours and races with us in this forward movement. (p. 238)

*Matthews*: I feel that the Europeans in this country should not lose hope as far as the African is concerned. We would like to feel that at any time when we express the opinion or point of view of our people that we should not be regarded in any other light than that we also want to make a contribution to the Government of this country. . . . The deadlock between the Council and the Government—the sit-down strike to which you have referred—is something that we should like to see terminated, but we want to see it terminated on conditions that leave us the necessary self-respect. (p. 243)

*Thema*: We have made progress and whether the white people want it or not, we are making it, but I am just wondering where this progress—in education, at the universities, etc.—is going to end. Although the people are being allowed to progress with their education, they are being restricted by segregation . . . . The majority of my people don’t want to come to parliament—I want that, but not the majority of my people—but they want something done which *they* can feel. If the Pass Laws, for instance, had been abolished, they would have been satisfied. (pp. 243-4)

*Mosaka*: If you ask the African people—the Councillors, the Advisory Boards or other bodies—to help in the administration of Native Affairs today, what are you in fact asking them to do? You ask them to carry out a policy which they don’t accept; you ask them to be policemen . . . . The big feature of the present legislation, as far as the Africans are concerned, is a check on the townward movement of Africans . . . . We have never felt so homeless as we do today both in the town and in the country and we want a measure of security. (p. 245)

1. When Smuts speaks of “our people” having to solve the problems of the day who is he speaking of? Do you think he can include black and white South Africans in this people (this “child growing up”), while acknowledging their inequality of political rights? Do the other participants at the meeting contest this conception of the South African people?

2. What do you think Smuts means when he says it would be a mistake to “indulge in blame and recriminations”? Does this mean accepting the established political order as his starting point? Do the other participants at the meeting contest this starting point, either explicitly or by implication?

3. When Thema asks where the progress made by Africans in South Africa “is going to end,” is he putting forward an alternative conception of progress to that of Smuts? How does each of the speakers conceive of progress in South Africa?

4. To what extent do you think the promise and failure of Smuts’s talks with the Native Representative Council can be explained by uncertainty about the future of the global political order, including the future of Western colonial empires, in the aftermath of World War II?

5. Do you think there was any viable basis for negotiation between Smuts’s government and the Native Representative Council? On what point could they have negotiated—for example, on a democratic constitution, increased powers for African representative bodies, abolition of pass laws, or acceptance of an African middle class in the cities? Put differently, was there a real option of liberal reforms that could have taken the place of apartheid?