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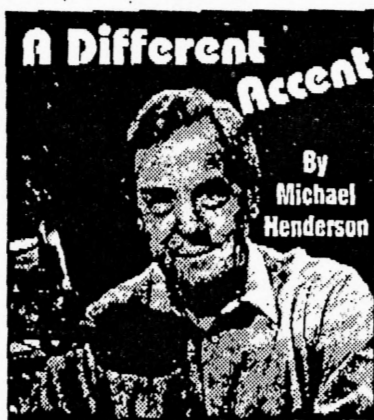
# Liberation For Whites And Blacks In South Africa

**HAVE** just paid my first visit to South Africa in more than 40 years. My wife and I stayed in black, Afrikaner and English-speaking white homes. We travelled several thousand miles. And we were impressed by the determination on all sides to make the new South Africa work. As a former committee member of the South Africa Society in London, I found it moving to be in a land which for so many years was a pariah among the nations and a source of division in our own communities and yet was now universally looked up to as a hope for a different way of doing things in the future.

Our hostess in Stellenbosch, from a leading Afrikaner family, said to us, "This has been a liberation for us whites, too." Our host in Natal, a white English-speaking South African, described his radical change of attitude to President Nelson Mandela because of the inspired leadership he was giving to the country, while our host in Pietersburg, a senior black administrator and still a member of the Communist Party, praised the white Vice President, F W de Klerk, for stepping down voluntarily from his position as President to enable the changes to happen.

## PROBLEMS

Not that there are not serious problems: Growing criminal violence, particularly in the cities, huge and unrealistic expectations for economic improvement in the poorer areas that have not been met and could not have been met in two years of black majority rule; wide discrepancies in the standard of living which are often a matter of race, uneven education opportunities, the continuing division between the largely Zulu Inkatha members and the African National Congress, the dominant party in the Government of National Unity. One cannot also help feeling that in the Present mood of reconciliation which dominates the country there are many who feel otherwise who are at the moment keeping their heads down. So the work of reconciliation has to be carried forward vigorously.



For this to happen the truth also needs to be known. As we were leaving the first sessions were taking place of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which is looking into dirty deeds in the last years of the apartheid regime and the run-up to the elections two years ago. On the eve of the session, its chairman, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, struck the note that we heard on all sides. He said, "One lesson we should be able to teach the world, we should be able to teach the people of Bosnia, Rwanda and Burundi, is that we are ready to forgive. We are building a new kind of country, a society where it does not matter whether you are black or white."

## PEACEFUL

The Speaker of the Free State legislature, Mollalapa Chabaka, said that she believes that the unexpectedly peaceful transition in the country is due to the influence over many years of Christian missionaries. She was welcoming those of us from many lands who had come for a conference on the theme, "Healing the past, building the future."

A few years back the experts were predicting a violent transfer of power from a white-ruled nation to a multi-racial democracy. How wrong they all were. They underestimated the people of South Africa and the role of faith in their lives. Now the fear in some quarters is of chaos when President Mandela retires. One can hope that again the desire for reconciliation and the unexpected stature of new perhaps as yet unknown leaders will prevail.