

Points to be pondered on the defector

When considering Lt Bomba's defection ... it would be better if South Africans did not fall into the trap of hailing it as a psychological victory over critics who brand us as racists. Our Government does enforce racist policies ... Lt Bomba's flight to South Africa cannot alter that.

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MANY South Africans will view Lt Adriano Bomba's impressive escape from Mozambique to South Africa as something of a coup and whatever else may be said about his request for political asylum here, there are indeed grounds for optimism that the impression it may create internationally will be more positive than negative.

The incident is unlikely to cause very much of a stir, at least among the Western powers which have from time to time had to contend with similar experiences, but for South Africa it would at face value seem to be quite extraordinary.

Many people beyond our borders will undoubtedly wonder what drove a member of a revolutionary government's armed forces to abscond to a country like South Africa, which can hardly be described as an ideal sanctuary for a black seeking a better life despite the endless statistics dragged out by South African Government agencies to show just how much better off blacks are in this country than almost anywhere else on the sub-continent.

Whenever such comparisons are made the one notable omission is always the failure to state that elsewhere in Africa the average black

does at least have a measure of political and social freedom. The degree of that freedom may vary from country to country as may the true benefits of such freedom but the principle, at least, is embedded in the status quo.

In South Africa it is not part of the status quo for a black to share politically in the system which governs him, nor does he have true social freedom. The pass laws, Group Areas Act, Population Registration Act and Separate Amenities Act are testimony to that.

This explains the peculiarity of the situation in which South Africa and Lt Bomba find themselves. But it is a stimulating and thought-provoking situation.

There is the question whether the black pilot will be granted political asylum and whether he will be allowed to join the South African Air Force as a fighter pilot, a career for which he has been trained.

This is in essence a decision to be taken by our Defence authorities and should not be decided politically, although the obvious implications of placing an alien in a strategic position demand careful investigation and consideration.

But when one considers Lt Bomba's defection in terms of deeper political significance, it would be better if South Africans did not fall into the trap of hailing it as a psychological victory over critics who brand us as racists.

Our Government does enforce racist policies and we do subscribe to them as South Africans, whether willingly or in protest. Lt Bomba's flight to South Africa cannot alter that.

It would be as well for us to remember, too, the thousands of young black South Africans who have fled this country with the express purpose of taking up arms against South Africa.

The Minister of Police, Mr Le Grange, has acknowledged that hundreds of young black men fled South Africa after the 1976 Soweto riots. None were pilots. But they were South Africans who opposed the system so vehemently that they committed themselves to a cause dedicated to the violent overthrow of the Government. And there is no reason for pride in that.

Even before the 1976 riots young men were slipping quietly out of the country, not to fanfares of welcome but to enlist in what is known to them as the freedom army and to us as the forces of terrorism.

There is every reason for us sincerely to hope that there are no undercurrents of intrigue in Lt Bomba's dramatic flight and that the

authorities will employ the skills he has to offer in a sensible manner.

One other aspect of the incident deserves special mention. It is the way in which blacks must see the affair.

There arrives on South African soil an old but still lethal fighter aircraft piloted by a black Mozambican air force officer, the first black ever to pilot a fighter plane through our skies.

How come a black can become a fighter pilot in Mozambique but not in South Africa? Or can a black South African become a fighter pilot?

It was reported this week that theoretically it was indeed possible but that no blacks had yet taken the entrance exami-

nation. The obvious question is whether the education system for blacks is of a high enough standard to prepare blacks for a highly complex career as a pilot.

South Africa has hundreds of black lawyers and doctors, so why no black pilots? The implication is that no official encouragement exists for blacks to train for this highly skilled job.

There can be little doubt that the arrival of the Mozambican pilot will provide blacks with an unprecedented source of encouragement.

THE South African Government's irrational sensitivity to criticism from outside was highlighted recently by the Jane Fonda affair.

But another case has drawn attention once again to the way in which a foreign visitor may one minute be acclaimed by National Party supporters when he makes positive statements about the South African situation

and the next be damned for criticising it.

Mr Hiwi Tauroa, a New Zealand race relations expert and coincidentally a Maori, found himself under the SABC and Nationalist Press spotlight during his recent visit to South Africa.

While he was here his discoveries of progress made in sport led him to comment quite favourably

about conditions now prevailing in sport in this country.

Naturally the SABC, not to mention Afrikaans Nationalist newspapers, made great play of what he had to say. Reading between the lines one would have been forgiven for gaining the impression from these interviews that Mr Tauroa was mightily impressed and had not a bad word to say about us.

The image of this man, presented by the pro-Government media, was that he was indeed truly objective.

But what happened next? Landed on his home shores Mr Tauroa remarked on the injustice of a social system in which a black felt obliged to call a white "boss". And suddenly the man who presumably came here on a fact-finding mission has been labelled as an undesirable visitor by the Nationalist Press.

He was reported as saying, safely back in New Zealand, that a black could actually be thrown in jail for showing disrespect to a white. And based on that fallacious statement the Government has been commended for "exercising discretion" in deciding whom it should allow into South Africa.

Some people, especially blacks, would probably sympathise with Mr Tauroa for gaining this impression. Blacks can, after all, be thrown into jail for simply being black — if they are found in an area from which they are barred, a white urban area in which they do not work or live, for example.

So it seems that unless the Government can be certain that visitors will have only nice things to say about us when they leave, they will be unwelcome to say the least.

It is just as well that we have entered the age of sophisticated technology. Soon the only visitors we may have may be robots programmed to see solely what the Nationalist Government wants them to see.