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Right Wing  
Opinion

*Anton Rupert continues to give proof of such vitality, sensitivity and originality, that it is hard to associate him with a 70th birthday celebration, and impossible to think of him as an old man. He is a truly remarkable personality, a fine scholar, an outstanding industrialist, and a great patriot. No-one has done as much as he for the preservation of our historic and artistic heritage, and for the conservation of the wildlife of this beautiful land.*

*But Anton Rupert is more than a great South African. He is also a great citizen of the world, with a deep, intuitive understanding of the thoughts and feelings of men and women in other countries and on other continents. How I wish that in these difficult times more of our leaders were like him in that respect.*

*There has never been a time when his qualities of understanding, humanity, and courage – and the influence which he exercises on our national life – were more necessary than they are today.*

H F Oppenheimer

# ANTON RUPERT

*On October 4, Dr Anton Rupert, chairman of the giant Rembrandt Group, turns 70.*

*He and Mr Harry Oppenheimer stand unchallenged as South Africa's premier business leaders. Some would say they are the country's only real statesmen. At home, and abroad, they are legends.*

*It would be gratuitous to make comparisons at all, except that they lead by quiet example and understated brilliance.*

*So who better to pay tribute to Anton Rupert than Harry Oppenheimer?*

*Rupert seldom gives interviews. Indeed, he is almost reclusive when it comes to the media. Leadership editor, Hugh Murray, was therefore particularly pleased at the opportunity of spending several hours with Rupert in Stellenbosch – shortly before he left on an overseas trip. As often happens with people of Rupert's stature, some of the conversation was not for the record.*

*Nonetheless, the great man had some important things to say for publication.*

**Murray:** You have always had a fascination for leadership, and even published a book called *Leaders on Leadership*. What are the essential ingredients of the kind of leadership required in South Africa today? Do we have real leadership potential?

**Rupert:** Of all the characteristics of leadership which can be named, the attribute which I regard as one of the most important is selflessness – the willingness to serve

others and to help them to develop on their own.

Leadership depends more upon judgment than upon mere specialised knowledge, and therefore the "generalist" – the person who has the ability to see the diverse components of a matter as a whole and who can assess rapidly what is important – is in my opinion better equipped to lead than the specialist.

It is for this reason that I have repeatedly pleaded for the versatile, the balanced, the many-sided leader – the man for all seasons.

To lead, to administer, to manage and to motivate, we need versatile leaders who will be able not only to explore a new course for our country, but who will also be able to understand and to reconcile diverse views.

Versatility embraces more than knowledge. It indeed implies a broader humanity.

Yes, we do have a lot of leadership potential – we may even have an excessive potential. That is why the potential for conflict is also very high.

Our problem may even be that there are too many people who want to be leaders themselves rather than followers. The ultimate result could be that we would have too few reliable followers.

To me the most urgent need right now and in the future is for the development of more and better leaders in all fields of endeavour – leaders who will have the know-

ledge, courage, conviction and human understanding to cope with the specific problems of our time.

There are these leaders among our population groups, and I have been privileged to know some of them. A mentor of the standing of Bishop Alpheus Zulu, in my opinion, compares favourably with any of the elder statesmen I have ever met. But we need more of his calibre.

**The recession, combined with political pressures, have caused an atmosphere of gloom and despondency among businessmen in SA. How can this be shaken off?**

We should strive to fill our people with hope for the future through an approach of live and let live. Our sub-continent offers enormous opportunities if only we would realise that we are interdependent and could achieve more if we work together.

Attempts will have to be made to siphon off capital from defence and state administration to development. Too small a percentage of our national income has been available for necessary development.

In the private sector development over the past 10 years has been lop-sided, the emphasis having been excessively on prestigious buildings rather than on industrial activities.



LEADERSHIP  
COVER STORY



Each group thinks it has the ability to lead. Unfortunately we have few leaders with the necessary perspective of their role and responsibilities. There is too much jockeying for position and too little direction given.

South Africans should be freed to pursue their own interests. Let us abandon fear of the future and free ourselves from the damping-up of creative energy. Creative energy is like running water – it creates power as it flows through the mills of industry, commerce and agriculture. When it is free again, it rushes on without restraint. But, like water, energy, when stagnant, goes bad. It cannot be bottled up and still be a source of power.

**Will South Africa continue to be the heart of the regional industrial complex beyond the turn of the century?**

South Africa is the catalyst for development in Africa. I do not expect a huge inflow of foreign investments to the Third World in the foreseeable future.

Taking the current situation into account and the threat of the West imposing cynical sanctions to the detriment of all in Southern Africa, I nevertheless remain convinced that South Africa will retain its dominant economic position.

The Republic's ability to feed, clothe and house its peoples; to create enough energy from its enormous natural resources; and to further develop its treasure-house of metals and minerals will ensure its position as the economic leader in the subcontinent.

**The creation of wealth seems to be taking a back seat to the distribution of wealth. Can the emphasis be changed and, if so, how?**

The emphasis is already changing. Many countries in Africa are beginning to realise that the creation of wealth should get preference to the distribution of wealth as the first step towards meaningful economic and social development.

Prosperity has to be created before it can be shared. We are living in times of political and social upheaval; we are experiencing a revolution caused by increasing expectations. The most important characteristic of this revolution is the pursuit of political independence without the potential of economic viability.

The process of wealth creation will have to be increased and a prerequisite for this to materialise is the removal of all unnecessary regulations and controls in order to free our people economically and to allow them to bring about innovations and to offer their

labour wherever the demand is greatest.

The moment opportunities are diminished and people are deprived of the responsibility for their own destiny, the way is paved for inefficiency and stagnation, and for a dull, unimaginative form of survival.

**Your group has been at the cutting edge of change for much longer than most "liberal" businesses. Has this ever meant a serious conflict with government?**

The only conflict occurred in talks with Dr Verwoerd. When in 1959 we tried, with the necessary self-confidence, to implement an economic partnership between whites and coloureds in a factory in Paarl, Prime Minister Verwoerd threatened to close the factory in spite of a unanimous and positive decision by the board of Rembrandt.

The second time we had a difference of opinion was after Sharpeville in 1960. I pleaded with him to grant land ownership to the blacks in the biggest city, Soweto. He said no, and also refused my suggestion for 99-year and even 30-year leasehold.

It was not merely a conflict of personalities but rather an ideological conflict: a conflict caused by the difference in approach and emphasis between the policy of apartheid and of co-existence through partnership.

The government's obsession at that time to monopolise development and to try to be all things to all people was also demonstrated when:

- ☐ The business sector established the South African Foundation in 1959 with a view to pleading South Africa's cause abroad, the Department of Information followed but had to pay the price of the wrong ethical concept that "the end justifies the means";
- ☐ The private sector inaugurated the Sports Foundation of Southern Africa, the Department of Sport and Recreation followed quickly on its heels. Unfortunately we are now out of international sport;
- ☐ The private sector was in the process of establishing the Development Bank for Equatorial and Southern Africa, the Minister of Finance announced in 1971 that it was going to establish a similar bank in this country. The announcement effectively withheld considerable capital from EDESA, even though the government's counterpart was established only 12 years later.

Personally I believe that private initiative can do these things better and with more credibility than the public sector.

**The Rupert group's involvement in social responsibility projects across a wide front (housing, nature foundation, historical homes, etc) have cost enormous amounts. Why are projects of this kind so important?**

It has been our consistent viewpoint over the

years that a company has a three-fold responsibility: towards its shareholders, towards its personnel, and towards the community in which it exists and from which it derives its success.

From the beginning, we realised that the confidence and goodwill of the public are one of the most important foundations on which a healthy enterprise should be based. Thus, it has always been a matter of honour for us to fulfil, to the best of our ability, our obligations to the community as a whole.

You cannot do long-term business successfully in an unhappy and deprived community without any hope or prospect of a better future.

**Through the World Wildlife Fund, and its SA Nature Foundation connection, you have shown great interest in the environment. Demographics show the SA environment and ecology to be severely threatened. Is the situation as hopeless as some make it sound? Can business make a major contribution in this regard?**

Our region is no stranger to the world's environmental problems. It is indeed so that the planet's capacity to support people is being seriously reduced in both developed and developing countries. The figures of population growth in relation to limited natural resources are frightening – but only if we do nothing. While the problems may be stark, fortunately the possible solutions are clearly set out in the "World Conservation Strategy", initiated and published by the World Wildlife Fund.

The goal is sustainable utilisation, where population, urban growth, food production and development are all in proportion; all capable of being sustained. A means to this end is conservation.

Development means using the earth's living and mineral resources for human benefit. But economic development without conservation is like financing an irresponsible spending spree on credit, without thought for tomorrow's budget. By digging into future income through the wasteful exploitation of natural resources, temporary gains are made at the cost of impoverishing our future.

This is cutting down an apple tree to pick the apples, and we sentence our children's children to a lifestyle spent in the pursuit of mere survival.

Business has started making a contribution in this respect. A number of them have appointed senior managers, with direct access to the chief executive, to overview all company activities which may impact on the environment. Environmental concerns are being referred to in corporate advertising and annual accounts.

In South Africa the SA Nature Foundation is mainly funded by commerce and industry. This organisation has been instrumental in:



## COVER STORY



- The creation or enlargement of 25 National Parks in Southern Africa over the past 18 years;
- The launching of the SA Natural Heritage Programme, encouraging conservation on private land in co-operation with the owner;
- The establishment of Africa's first chairs in conservation and wildlife management at Pretoria and Stellenbosch universities;
- The initiation of a National Parks Trust Fund of R9m where interest will be available for land purchase for urgently needed new national parks;
- The implementation of protective measures for more than 25 endangered or threatened animal species, and the promotion of plant conservation nation-wide;
- The funding of special programmes to teach youth the necessity of conservation, stewardship and sustainable utilisation;
- And finally, in supporting inter alia the Institute of Natural Resources which specifically sets out to address the problems of population growth and limited natural resources.

**What about socio-political change? Is business doing enough to ensure the survival of free enterprise?**

South Africa today is fortunate to have an enlightened business community. Our business leaders have shown that they are not prepared to watch the process of evolution in Southern Africa from the sidelines.

When positive initiatives need to be taken, they are willing to give support. The establishment of the Small Business Development Corporation is a case in point, as are the activities of the Urban Foundation in its efforts to enhance the quality of life of urban dwellers.

As catalysts these organisations, under the able leadership of Dr Ben Vosloo and Jan Steyn, are doing whatever they can to address the main components of economic and social upliftment; namely job-creation, housing and education. Their three-pronged approach to unemployment, the shortage of housing and dearth of educational facilities has already proved to be a stabilising force in our communities.

**Many believe the least change SA will be able to get away with would be to move the country into the mode of Zimbabwe with its mixed economy. Are there other alternatives?**

In a certain sense SA already has a mixed economy, as evidenced by the magnitude of State corporations and government control of services such as our airways, transport

services, post and telecommunications, the supply of electricity and television and radio services.

The alternative would be to move away from excessive government regulations to free enterprise and the allocation of more resources to private initiative.

The free enterprise system ensures the most productive utilization of resources. One of the stabilizing qualities of the free enterprise system is the fact that it relies on the profit motive, which is a powerful human incentive.

Private initiative has often been accused of pious selfishness, but an important defence against these charges is the simple reality of the system. It functions best.

**South Africans are awaiting publication of the book written by Willie Esterhuyse to co-incide with your 70th birthday. I believe it has a message to South Africans of all race groups. Can you elaborate on the central theme of the book?**

The book has not been initiated by me and therefore I think the author would be in a far better position to elucidate the central theme of the manuscript.

**How can we draw blacks into the system on a basis that will be acceptable to the most significant number of South Africans?**

Once we have clarity about the government system that will evolve, everything possible should be done to draw all South Africans in.

Personally I believe that the Swiss canton system with its maximum local autonomy is the most successful example of its kind for a country with a multi-cultural population.

**It is widely believed that the Afrikaner nationalist is not prepared to bend to international pressure and would prefer to tough things out. In this sense, it would seem that Western pressure has been counter-productive. Where does SA go from here, if this is the case?**

In a certain sense we are all prisoners of a past fraught with misunderstanding. Incidentally, we have reached a situation where most of our peoples agree on the necessity of reform. It is unfortunate that at this stage the West deems it fit to apply punitive measures against the country.

The Afrikaner obviously finds himself in a tight corner as he believes that he is fighting for his very existence. I fear that his political leaders will scratch out the eyes of the many friends we still have because they do not agree with everything done here. This would be counter-productive.

What we all need is a definite time-table for reform. It is also of the utmost importance that we achieve the highest possible degree of consensus among all South Africans.

**How will sanctions, in your view, affect SA?**

It will depend on the extent of the sanctions and whether these will be regarded as an honest and constructive effort to influence change or merely as punitive measures with the aim of bringing the country to its knees.

Sanctions applied in the past against Mussolini's Italy, Franco's Spain and Castro's Cuba did not prove to be very successful and were in fact counter-productive.

After World War I at the Treaty of Versailles General Smuts predicted that the punitive measures contained in that treaty would cause another war. He was proved to be right.

Punitive sanctions can never be constructive. They merely prolong the agony of all.

**Are there any benefits of a siege economy? Some believe it will create great opportunity, others warn of disaster. Could we have your thoughts on this matter?**

It depends very much on how a country reacts. It could stimulate the economy by creating immediate opportunities but in the long-term it harms all parties involved.

I am afraid that if sanctions were imposed with any degree of success, it would amount to hara-kiri in this part of the world and be a severe blow to private enterprise in the whole subcontinent.

**Is there anything you did not do, and regret, in relation to the development of South Africa?**

I am only sad that it took so long to convince people that apartheid or separate development, regardless of the good intentions with which it may originally have been imposed, can never be a practical solution in Southern Africa.

It is a myth that apartheid is a safeguard for the Afrikaner's survival. On the contrary, it endangers the existence and future of all.

What I regret is my inability to have persuaded more of my fellow-countrymen that peaceful co-existence in Southern Africa could best have been achieved through partnership and sharing. Also that we shall not be able to sleep in peace if our needy neighbours do not eat.

**Can the Afrikaner come to terms with a dilution of power?**

Yes, indeed, but I believe that he will only settle for a system in which he still has some say in the affairs of the country and not be subjected to one-man-one-vote once.