

Nats. Pass Dangerous New Laws Amid Rising Tensions

By GEORGE CLAY

Who reviews the 1957 Session of Parliament

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THE 11th Parliamentary session of the purified Nationalist regime was a session of legislative window-dressing for short-term political advantage with the most hazardous long-term implications for the future of the country as a whole.

In the opinion of Opposition members and many independent observers some of the laws passed in the 1957 session are potentially more dangerous than any this Government has previously introduced.

The Nationalists were uneasy when they came to Parliament this year.

In the previous session they had called their own bluff on *apartheid*. By its failure to accept the key proposals of the Tomlinson Report in the 1956 session the Government demolished its own *bona fides*; it demonstrated to the Afrikaner intellectuals—who had all along backed the Government in the belief that it was sincerely heading for equitable territorial *apartheid*—that it was not in fact prepared to go farther or faster than political expediency dictated.

At the same time the Tomlinson Report, and even the Government's alternative proposals, had brought home to the taxpayer the enormous costs and problematical returns of *apartheid*.

REASON TO FEAR

The Nationalists in Parliament, therefore, had good reason this year to fear flank attacks from their own supporters as well as the frontal attacks of the Opposition on both the morality and practicality of *apartheid*.

They were nervous, too, about the fact that in spite of *baasskap* measures and the intimidatory effect of the treason hearing, the non-White anti-*apartheid* front, particularly in the towns, showed no signs of losing its militancy.

The 1957 session began with the remarkable bus boycott in full swing on the Rand, presenting the Government with a formidable challenge to its ability to govern.

Stresses and strains, personal feuds, and disillusionments inevitable after nearly 10 years in office were beginning to disrupt the internal serenity of the Nationalist Party.

Money was getting tight—a distressing development for the governing party just before a general election.

ENLARGED SENATE

And, not least of the Government's embarrassments, the enlarged Senate still obtruded on the political scene, reminding the country not only by its

existence but by its swollen costs, of the manner in which the Government had circumvented the constitution.

The challenge of the bus boycott defeated the Government. It blustered and threatened, and eventually produced a Bill which would enable it to withdraw for ever the unused buses—a measure which it could not pretend was anything but a negative piece of intimidation. It refused to tackle the basic economic causes of the boycott and became almost hysterical about the boycott's political overtones without being able to counter them.

The intervention of commerce and industry—against the Government's wishes—brought an end to the boycott. And later in the session the Government was forced by pressure from commercial employers and industrialists to make legislative provision for a perpetuation of the transport subsidization plan temporarily administered by the employers.

INTERNAL TENSIONS

The internal tensions in the Nationalist Party were brought into the open by the defection of Dr. Wassenaar—an incident which the Government did not succeed in living down, in spite of its assiduous attempts to make light of it.

The tight-money problem was also not so easy to conceal. The Minister of Finance, Mr. Naudé, was hard put to it in this pre-election year to keep tax increases down to an additional ten per cent.

There were no pre-election concessions, and Mr. Naudé had to prune even necessary expenditure to the barest minimum in order to make ends meet. And the 1957 Budget does not augur well for the country's post-election finances. The next Budget threatens to be a most unhappy one.

The Government tried to cover up its embarrassment over the Senate by investing it with a new significance. Cabinet Ministers began making major policy statements and other important announcements in the Senate, and the Government Press reported at great length the numerous decisionless discussions on general topics with which the Government senators occupied their time.

FOUGHT BACK

The tiny Opposition in the Senate fought back hard against the weight of numbers and the aggressive debating tactics of the Government senators.

The new Nationalist senators this session developed a technique of personal attack, however, which offended even the most hardened politicians on the Opposition benches, and at the end of the session the Opposition walked out in disgust at the remarks of one of the Government senators.

In spite of this, however, Dr. Verwoerd claimed on the closing day that the standard of debate in the Senate held "great promise" for the future of that institution, and the publicity which it had received in the Press showed what a useful function it could serve.

(To be continued)