

CONTACT

JANUARY, 1954

DEEDS AS WELL AS WORDS

What will the year 1954 bring to South Africa, and what will it bring to the Liberal Party? No one can answer these questions, but one can speculate.

The most common criticism by white South Africans outside the Party is that we cherish beautiful ideals, without any practical notion of how to realise them, and without much hope of getting them realised. There is some truth in this criticism. We have a long way to go in the matter of formulating practical policies. On the other hand, we fought a municipal election in Johannesburg and found no less than 809 voters to support us. Eight hundred and nine white people opposed the removal of the African inhabitants of the Western Areas. They accepted these African people as fellow-citizens of Johannesburg; they opposed the removal of their rights not on legal, but on moral and common-sense grounds. This is encouragement of a high magnitude. It means that a considerable number of white people, even if they may sometimes think in terms of colour and race, reject apartheid as an all-important guiding principle.

Now amongst our own members there is considerable difference of opinion as to whether our Party can become an important political factor, or whether it must be a group influencing public opinion. There are even those who hold the view that it is a group that will only become important when the country enters a disturbed and chaotic period. I think we must, even if we hold the third view, act as though we do not. And the first two views we must hold together. We must try to win political power, and we must try to influence public opinion. There is abundant evidence that we are doing the second, that the Nationalists, the U.P., the Labour Party, and the Federalists, have said more about the racial *future* of the country than they have ever said before, and in more generous terms.

But we must try to win seats. We must carry out our duty to those white South Africans who will support our candidates even if they will not support our Party as yet. We shall no doubt begin very modestly, but we must begin.

We must increase our knowledge of and strengthen our connections with non-European political organisations. It seems that these connections will be informal ones rather than alliances. We may differ on immediate franchise policies. But of our sympathy with non-European aspirations there can be no doubt. This is the most important basis for friendship, and such friendships should be numerous and strong. Our sympathy with the aspirations of non-Europeans to participate more fully in the life of South Africa we should express openly and often.

Within our own ranks we must seek to maintain a truly representative membership. This is very important. We do not want any *token* non-European membership; we want a real one. But we shall only get a real one by deeds; we shall not get it by words alone.

Our cause is just. Time, justice, world-opinion, common-sense, all are on our side. We could hardly have more powerful allies, but we must co-operate actively with them. Our greatest task is to convince all kinds of South Africans that race domination is a foolish, dangerous, unrealisable ideal, and to demonstrate that a considerable number of already existing voters agree with us. Every time we demonstrate this, the possibility will grow that South Africa will achieve a non-violent transition to that common society which we all believe must come.

A.S.P.

MUNICIPAL BYE-ELECTION

Ward 9, Johannesburg, November 18th, 1953

An Analysis by the Chairman of the Transvaal Provincial Division

The Municipal Bye-election in Ward 9 (Killarney, Saxonwold, Parkview, Greenside) was the first election of any kind contested by the Liberal Party. This analysis attempts to extract significant features of the campaign and to underline lessons which may be helpful in the future.

We had to nominate a candidate at short notice and to compress our campaign into about five weeks. We looked for a well-known personality to put forward but gave preference finally to a member of our Council who was a voter in the ward—Mr. L. Cooper. Mr. Cooper proved to be a very good candidate. He threw himself wholeheartedly into the campaign, was a competent platform speaker and made himself well-informed about the issues on which the election was fought. The manner in which he contested the election emphasised a point of great importance to the Liberal Party. We have very few really well-known personalities associated with the Party. We have, however, numbers of young, able and energetic members who will undoubtedly prove themselves if given the opportunity. We need never lack candidates if we are prepared to make full use of the services of these people.

Ward 9 is one of the strongest U.P. constituencies in the Country and has, like all such constituencies, at least an element of liberal opinion in it. The Party had no Branch in the Ward and had not done any work in it. We were therefore faced with the problem of organising an intensive short-term campaign in a constituency where no preparatory work had been done and with a comparatively unknown candidate. In addition the voters' roll was badly out of date.

The Canvass, etc.

An appeal was made for canvassers and the response was so good that we had about 150 people canvassing regularly. As a result, one full canvass of the Ward was completed and over 500 voters who were marked "doubtful" on the first canvass were visited a second time. Again, on polling day members responded very well and we had more than enough cars, drivers and clerical and other workers. This was a very good effort and the response of members was the most significant feature of the whole campaign.

Results of the Canvass were :

Total number of voters	5,200
Removals and deceased	1,200
For	1,000

The actual election results was :

For	809
Against	1,955
Total	2,674

i.e., the Party polled just under 30 per cent. of the total vote cast in a very high poll for a municipal bye-election and on an out-of-date voter's roll.

The Campaign.

Because of the energy put into the campaign the Liberal Party determined the issues on which the election was fought. The U.P. Candidate would have preferred to fight on parochial issues (*e.g.*, traffic lights and better pavements) and general pro-U.P. feeling. We insisted on forcing attention on to the two most important issues in local affairs—Native Housing and opposition to the Western Areas Removal Scheme. We took these two issues to every voter in the ward and found very strong support for our attitude on these two questions.

In addition we placed our whole policy before the electorate and the Party's Principles were stated in full in Mr. Cooper's manifesto. In the closing stages of the campaign, and particularly at the very successful public meeting held two days before the election, the U.P. tried to embarrass us by focussing attention on our colour policy. We refused to run away from any issues and were prepared to have our whole policy tested in the election.

We found that the biggest single factor against us was traditional loyalty to the United Party. This point should be stressed. Although most of us believe that the U.P. will inevitably tend to disintegrate (and we see signs of its happening all the time) we must realise

that it is a large Party with a long tradition, a strong organisational machine and a firmly entrenched hierarchy of leadership. A Party like this only disintegrates slowly and we shall face this reluctance to abandon the U.P. for a long time to come. It was the greatest single factor we faced in this election.

As the campaign developed, our two issues forced themselves to the forefront both in the ward itself and in the press. In the final stages the U.P. candidate took over the issues himself. At his public meeting held the night before the election he pledged himself to support a vigorous Native Housing policy and to oppose the Western Areas Removal Scheme.

Assessment of the Result.

Taking everything into account the Party feels that it did well to poll over 800 votes. Its enthusiastic voluntary effort was in marked contrast to that of the U.P., which, despite the assistance of several full-time paid organisers, did not succeed in completing a first canvass of the ward. The daily press in Johannesburg adopted a similar attitude and both the Rand Daily Mail and the Star interpreted the vote for the Liberal Party as having political significance. It was described as a "red light" to the U.P.

The Campaign cost just under £150 and its results for the Party were :

1. The amazing response of members. The Party entered the campaign with a membership which was largely inexperienced and whose enthusiasm was not known. It now has a substantial body of experienced political workers whose keenness and morale are on a high level.
2. The Party received much valuable press publicity. Generally speaking the Press was fair and gave our candidate ample opportunity to put forward his case. There was a swing towards the U.P. during the last few days of the campaign.
3. A thousand voters told our canvassers that they would vote for the Liberal Party. These people will be canvassed to join the Party. Over a period at least 10 per cent. response can be expected and this means 100 new Party members.

Conclusions.

In Johannesburg about 15 of the 42 Municipal Wards bear the same general character as Ward 9. There are probably about 15 to 20 Parliamentary constituencies of a similar sort in the country. What applied in Ward 9 will probably apply, more or less, in these other areas. The result in Ward 9 is similar to the results of trial canvasses conducted in Hospital Hill and Sea Point. We can conclude that in this type of constituency we can get 25 to 30 per cent. support in a well-run campaign. This means that we are going to lose many elections before we win our first one and faces us with the problem of how to boost our 30 per cent. support to the necessary 51 per cent. We believe that it can be done under the following conditions :—

1. If our opponent is very weak or if his campaign is very badly run. Obviously we can do nothing to determine this.
2. If our candidate is an outstanding personality such as Mrs. Ballinger, Alan Paton or Leo Marquard. Unfortunately we only have a few of these.
3. If enough preparatory work is done in the Constituency over a long period.

We have learnt this lesson in Johannesburg and intend to apply it. We propose to contest some seats in the general municipal election which is due in October, 1954, and the Provincial Council Elections which will probably take place in about November. We intend to start preparing for these elections this month (January, 1954). We will decide tentatively what seats we will fight and will make our nominations. This will give us just under a year in which to make our candidate known in the constituency, to get in amongst the voters, to form one or more Branches in the Constituency, to hold a large number of drawing-room meetings and several public meetings, to register voters, to canvass, etc. By the time the intensive campaign is started, two or three months before polling day, all preparatory work will have been done and the Party will have an organisation firmly rooted in the constituency itself.

We believe that this preparatory work is the one activity within our resources which can step-up our basic 25—30 per cent. support to 40 per cent. and eventually to 51 per cent. We urge this lesson strongly on other Regions—wherever possible start the preparatory work now, long before the elections are due.

PARTY NEWS

In future issues this column will be devoted to statements of Party policy, announcements of interest to members and an account of events which have taken place in the various centres during the preceding month. At this time of the year, however, when the Newsletter follows so soon after the annual political lull which coincides with the Christmas holidays, there is not much to tell about the past month's events. So, in this first issue of "Contact," most of our space will be devoted to plans for the New Year.

In the National sphere plans are already being laid for the Party's second National Conference. At the moment the suggestion is that the Conference should be held in Durban early in July and the Executive Committee has suggested the long week-end beginning on July 10th as a possible date. The date is subject to confirmation by the Provinces and will be up for discussion at the next Executive meeting. Final arrangements will no doubt be discussed at the next full meeting of the National Committee which is scheduled for the last week-end in February.

In Johannesburg there has been little opportunity to enjoy Christmas as another Municipal Bye-election is in the offing. During the last three months Branch meetings have been dropped in order to allow all members to concentrate first on the Ward 9 Bye-election and since then on the contest which is due to take place in Ward 4, which was until recently represented by the late Councillor O. B. Gordon. After some discussion the Party decided to contest this vacancy. Polling day is January 20th and before then it will be necessary to canvass some 5,000 voters—a task involving some 40 canvassers per evening. Ward 4 is similar to Ward 9 in character and it is hoped to get as satisfactory a response from the electorate.

The Party has been very lucky in getting Miss Betty Spence (Mrs. Pinfold) to stand as its candidate. Miss Spence is a qualified Architect and Town Planner who has studied pre-fabrication and other building methods overseas and has worked for the Building Research Institute as a specialist in Native Housing. She was responsible for drawing up the Spence Scheme as an alternative to the Western Areas Removal Scheme. As opposition to this removal and the urgent question of Non-European Housing in general are again to be the two main planks in the Party's platform, it is clear that the Party has been singularly fortunate in having Miss Spence to put forward as its candidate.

Despite the urgency of the Bye-election Transvaal members found time, on New Year's Eve, to hold a highly successful private dance which netted some £100 for Party Funds. Once the election is over an all-out drive will be made to enrol as members people who voted for the Party in the two bye-elections and at the same time preparatory work for the Provincial Council and General Municipal elections will be started.

In Natal the last items outstanding from the Provincial Congress have been dealt with and the Administrator-in-Executive has been approached and requested (1) to provide compulsory education for all children in the Province, (2) to extend the Municipal Franchise to Non-Europeans, and (3) to improve Health Services for all the people of the Province and particularly Non-Europeans.

As far as the New Year is concerned plans are going ahead to contest the Provincial Elections and it is hoped to start a canvass on a fairly large scale in one of the Durban constituencies during this month. Main priorities for the coming year will be the elections and the extension of the Party's influence throughout the Province. It is intended to devote the early part of the year to a campaign which it is hoped will lead to the establishment of a number of Branches in the smaller country centres and in other places which have not yet been touched. The Division also intends carrying on its fight to expose the full implications of the Bantu Education and the Group Areas Act, as they are put into effect. Every effort will also be made to improve contact and increase co-operation with the representative African, Coloured and Indian organisations operating within the Province.

In the Cape, too, the Party's efforts will be bent on fighting the Provincial Council elections. The two canvasses which have been conducted, in Sea Point and part of the Cape Flats constituency, have indicated fairly substantial support for the Party and arrangements are being made to conduct further canvasses in other areas soon.