

# CONTACT

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## NARROWING THE



**IT HAS** often been truthfully said that one of the most appalling features of South African life is the complete ignorance of Europeans of the way in which the other four-fifths of the South African community lives. Wrapped up in a false sense of security, happy in their own limited acquaintance, meeting Non-Europeans only as subordinates, never as equals, the picture most white South Africans have of conditions of life in their own country is as far removed from the reality as chalk is from cheese. How many of them have ever seen a shanty-town or a location? How many of them have ever visited an African or an Indian or a Coloured in his home? How many of them have ever spoken to a Non-European, man to man, without condescension and without embarrassment?

The answers to these questions are not reassuring. To any objective observer the position must appear fantastic: the hard fact remains that, to the average white South African, it is a perfectly natural and acceptable state of affairs. To break down this ready acceptance is a challenge to the Liberal Party. It is one of the Party's duties to bring European South Africans face to face with the truth that there are Africans, Indians and Coloureds living in this country in whose presence the question of inferiority or superiority simply does not arise. The easiest and most obvious way in which this can be done is by introducing Europeans to South Africans of other groups who, in themselves, demonstrate clearly that inferiority stemming from race is a myth.

The forthcoming Provincial Council elections will present the Party with a chance to meet this challenge. It can do so by making the fullest possible use of *all* its members in almost every sphere of election work. One thing which has emerged clearly from the experiences of the last nine months is the tremendous difference it makes, at any meeting, if the speakers come from a variety of racial groups. In the first place the Party's multi-racial character is demonstrated immediately and without equivocation. Secondly, the accusation that Non-European members have no active part to play in the Party is refuted. Thirdly, the fact that South Africans of different racial groups can still advocate the path of co-operation and share a common political ideal is a comfort and inspiration to many people of all races. Lastly, and perhaps most important of all, white South Africans are presented with the *fact* of a person of another racial group who is a reasonable, intelligent and moderate human being and not the bogeyman their fears and prejudices have led them to expect. For the first time, possibly, they are presented with the Non-European view of South African conditions and hear, at first hand, the story of Non-European hopes and aspirations. Perhaps the frost of prejudice begins to thaw and the seed of the ideal of the Common Society is sown.

It is a function of the Liberal Party to attack colour prejudice wherever it finds it. One thing is certain. Such prejudice will never be overcome by running away from it. It may well be overcome sooner than at present seems possible if we take every opportunity of confronting Europeans with clear and unmistakable evidence that there are standards of culture, dignity and humanity shared by South Africans of all races. Let the Party use the opportunity offered by the coming elections to make the speakers at its meetings as representative as possible of our South African community.

# A PEEP AT PROGRESS

BY HANS MEIDNER

**W**ITHIN one year of its formation the Liberal Party has fought two Municipal Council by-elections and finds itself engaged in election work for the Provincial Councils in three Provinces and contesting a Parliamentary by-election in the Western Cape. During this same year the first National Conference of the Party took place and a Provincial Congress was held in Natal. Formulation of detailed policies has been taken a long way and will be taken further at the next National Conference. Recruiting of members and formation of Branches has progressed in all Provinces. If activity is any measure of the "aliveness" of the Party then it certainly has no need to be dissatisfied.

In the course of this first year of the Party's existence support from the public, both enfranchised and unenfranchised, has varied. In the Johannesburg elections it was most encouraging. On the other hand the membership of the Party has grown slowly and it does not yet enjoy the substantial support from unenfranchised citizens which it would like. However, while admitting these facts and facing up to them, we need not be discouraged. Real support comes when a party proves its worth by its own actions. During the year in review opportunities for such action have been limited and distrust of political parties is an understandable attitude amongst people who have, so often in the past, been fed on empty promises. Nevertheless friendly relations have been established between the Liberal Party and various Non-European political organisations and these relations may yet blossom into active support from people who, for the time being, prefer to watch and remain critical.

There is another very important field in which a political party makes its existence felt and that is in its impact on public opinion in general. Perhaps it is in this field that the Liberal Party has met with its most notable success, although it must be realised that those forces which gave rise to the formation of the Party have continued to bear on the South African political situation and to act as valuable allies to the Party. However, let us see what effect the Party itself has had in influencing the political atmosphere of South Africa and in putting the liberal case before the public.

On the whole the Party has received fair publicity. Its policies have been published and its meetings have been well reported. This fact alone has put "liberalism" before the public eye and helped to keep it there. How have other political organisations reacted to the existence of the Party? The radical left has complimented the Party by subjecting it to constant criticism and severe attack. The Nationalists have paid it the compliment of saying that Liberalism presents the only logical and honest alternative to Nationalism. The Labour Party, we are tempted to think, has been forced to make its own policy more liberal. The United Party has clearly taken full account of the Liberal Party programme and is struggling to meet its challenge as best it can. That a Liberal Party platform need not necessarily frighten away white voters has been clearly shown in Johannesburg. In Durban, certain very significant points emerged from the Berea by-election. The existence of a Liberal vote and constant questioning by Liberal Party members forced both the United and Federal Party candidates to change their ground and to speak in more and more liberal terms as the campaign progressed. Most recently, within the unhappy United Party, comparatively liberal statements have been made. Mr. Strauss has been forced to make his over-celebrated "integration" speech and, it is said in some quarters, that it was the existence of the Liberal Party, offering an alternative home to some of his supporters, which induced him to do so. Although there is much to be criticised in Mr. Strauss's speech and although the United Party is already saying that the speech has "been misinterpreted outside the house" the Liberal Party welcomed it as a sign that the United Party may at last be going to make up its mind on the questions which really matter in this country.

It is in this situation then that the Party embarks on its first Provincial Council election. In Natal the elections will be held earlier than in the other Provinces. In Durban candidates have been nominated, canvassing is under way, and the Party has held its first public meeting in the campaign. In Maritzburg canvassing is about to start and the Party will probable contest one seat. In Johannesburg it is hoped to conduct a "model" campaign in the

Hospital Hill constituency and other seats may also be contested. What prospects there are of success can only be judged by the people on the spot. Important as the winning of an election is, there are other advantages to be gained from an election campaign. The name of the Party is brought to the front-doors of a number of the electorate ; the policies of the Party are distributed and are publicly debated ; the Party's members take part in a campaign which calls for a common and combined effort from them. Finally, other political parties are forced to meet the challenge with which the Liberal Party confronts them. All these things are, in themselves, worth while.

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## PRESS COMMENTS

The publication of the Party's first newspaper *Liberal News* was widely reported and several papers ran a picture of Mrs. Ballinger and Mr. Gibson (Cape Western candidate) inspecting the first issue.

In the *Natal Daily News* "Crossbencher" comments on the fact that during the last year Liberalism has come into the open and the public is not nearly so disconcerted as might have been expected. Of the Party he writes, "The Liberal Party, for all its extreme youth, its small membership and its Puritan principles, is held in notable respect, not least by the Nationalists who see . . . the thing they fear most of all—an anti-Nationalist alliance of White and Black". He feels that, with the gradual acceptance by white people of partnership with the Non-European, "an historic stage is being reached" in South Africa.

Three different Indian newspapers carried leading articles criticising the Natal Indian Congress's recent criticisms of the Liberal Party's franchise policy and method of struggle. *Indian Opinion* considers that one of the "essential principles of satyagraha is never to lose an opportunity of honourable compromise if it can be found". It thinks that the proposed franchise of the Liberal Party "on a common roll but loaded for the time being" is a step forward which should not be spurned but to which serious thought should be given. These sentiments are themselves a step forward and the Party would welcome more Non-European support along the same lines.

In Natal considerable publicity has been given to the Party in different ways. Both the *Natal Witness* and the *Daily News* quoted extensively from the leading article in February's *Contact*. The Party's meeting at Kokstad was very well reported and in addition, "Crossbencher" of the *Daily News* gave up his column to Mr. Paton's "Liberal Point of View" on Mr. Strauss's integration speech in the Assembly. At Kokstad Mr. Paton again stressed the fact that the path which led to a common society was the only one which could be followed if South Africa was to be saved. In his article in the *Daily News* Mr. Paton praised Mr. Strauss's speech although he also found grounds for criticism. The U.P. had at last moved forward from the vague country in which it had for so long lived. However, Mr. Paton regretted that the speech dealt only with the material motives for extending political rights. "Admittedly", he said, "it is difficult to stress these moral motives in politics ; but they are real and very powerful". Speaking of the Liberals he wrote "It is said they go too far and too fast ; they must continue to go as far and as fast as they think it is right for them to do. By going as far and as fast as they have they have at least caused some movement, some break in an iron system, which if not broken will break us all".

From the Afrikaans Press there have been lurid details of what will happen in South Africa if Liberalism is persisted with. *Die Vaderland*, apropos of the formation of *Liberal News*, does not doubt the intellectual honesty of the Party but wonders if the ultimate results of our "unpractical idealism" have been sufficiently thought out. *Die Volksblad* maintains that we have no need of the *Liberal News* as papers like the *Rand Daily Mail*, the *Star*, *Argus*, etc., do our work for us ! This same paper hails as a triumph for the Liberal Party the now expressed liberalism of the United Party.

In the *Evening Post* a correspondent discusses the misuse of the word "liberal". Apropos of Dr. Jonker's favourite term "neo-liberal" he writes "After hearing . . . and Dr. Jonker expound on the colour issue, however, I felt that if either of them had been liberals they must have been neolithic-liberals".

# PARTY NEWS

## NATIONAL

The 1954 National Committee held its first meeting in Cape Town over the week-end of February 27/28. High on the agenda was the election of various officials for the current year. The National office-bearers were unanimously re-elected, the National Finance Committee will remain virtually unchanged but the National Publicity Committee has been enlarged and strengthened.

It was agreed that a National Organiser should be appointed as soon as the funds were available. It will be the organiser's job to co-ordinate and expand existing Party activities and to develop the potential support for the Party in areas as yet untouched. It will be necessary for the Provinces to devise ways and means of raising the organiser's salary.

Suggestions for the Party's Provincial Council platform were discussed and arrangements made for the National Congress which is to be held in Durban during July. Revised and amplified Education, Economic and Housing Policies are being circulated and will then be submitted to the Congress. In addition a Land and Agricultural Commission has been appointed and it will also make recommendations in July.

## TRANSVAAL

The Division has found difficulty in carrying out its "follow-up" canvass owing to the fact that many of its members quite understandably feel that they have had enough of canvassing for the moment. Nevertheless some 500 people have been visited and of these some 12 per cent. have already joined the Party while another 20 per cent. are interested in joining.

The postponement of Branch meetings during the election has meant losing contact with some of the Party's less enthusiastic members, but Branches are now meeting regularly again. Amongst other things each Branch has been given a fund-raising target of £200 for the current year.

Preliminary arrangements are now being made for the Provincial elections. Hospital Hill will definitely be contested and the Party's candidate will be Mr. Leslie Cooper. Other constituencies and candidates are also under consideration.

## CAPE

In this area every available person's energies have naturally been inspanned to help with the contest in the Cape Western seat and ordinary Party activities have taken second place.

However, a most successful public meeting was held in Paarl on the night of March 1st. The speakers were Mr. Alan Paton, Mr. Leslie Rubin and Mr. Jimmy Gibson. The meeting was well attended by a mixed audience and went off without incident. It was the first Liberal Party meeting to be held in a Nationalist stronghold and was very widely reported in the Cape Press.

*Liberal News*, the Party's newspaper, which is being used in the Cape Western by-election, has met with favourable comment in a number of spheres. Particularly encouraging is the fact that it has been welcomed in certain African quarters. It is possible that this paper will continue to be published regularly even after the election is over.

## NATAL

At a nomination meeting held in Durban on February 26th two Liberal candidates were nominated to contest Durban seats in the Provincial elections. Miss Violaine Junod will contest the Gardens seat and Mr. Ronald Morris the Point seat. Miss Junod is a member of a family well known throughout South Africa and is at present lecturing at the University of Natal. Mr. Morris is chairman of the Point Branch of the Torch Commando and a publicity agent by profession. The canvass in Gardens is already under way and one will shortly be started in Point.

In Pietermaritzburg the Pietermaritzburg South constituency is being canvassed and it is probable that this seat will also be contested.

During the month very successful multi-racial meetings were held in Ladysmith and in Kokstad. Both meetings were well attended and were rounded off with a very interesting discussion. The Ladysmith meeting was held in a house surrounded by Nationalist homes. The Kokstad meeting received very wide publicity in the Natal Press. Follow-up visits will be paid to both places shortly.

During the month further meetings have been held with Non-European leaders and another meeting is projected for late March.