

# A LUNATIC ACT

“Whom the Gods would destroy they first make mad”, “they’ve got a death wish” – we’ve said it all before, about the people Nationalist Afrikaners have elected to govern us, and we say it again.

What else can one say about the people who, on October 19th, within the course of less than 24 hours; banned the Christian Institute and four of its leading officials, Beyers Naude, Theo Kotze, Brian Brown and Cedric Mason; banned 17 Black organisations and either banned or detained an undisclosed number of their members and leaders, including Black People’s Convention President, Mr Hlaku Rachidi, and Dr Nthatho Motlana, Chairman of Soweto’s Committee of Ten; banned the Christian Institute publication *Pro Veritate*; banned the Black newspaper *The World*, the paper with the largest circulation in South Africa and the accepted voice of the people of Soweto; detained Mr Percy Qoboza, internationally renowned editor of *The World*; banned Donald Woods, the brave and brilliant editor of the *East London Daily Dispatch*; house-arrested David Russell, friend and supporter of the abandoned Africans of the Nationalist Government’s “resettlement” areas and of the defenceless squatters of the Western Cape? What more could they do in one day to move themselves along the road to national suicide?

The Christian Institute was about the only really effective non-racial organisation left in South Africa. Its banned leaders were some of the few white people who had maintained real contacts with the new wave of young black political thinkers. The black organisations banned represent the most important urban-based black organisations in the country, from the overtly political Black People’s Convention to the self-help orientated Black Community Programme. The Soweto SRC was the voice of the young students of Soweto. The Black Parents’ Association spoke out on their behalf. The Committee of Ten drew up a blueprint for a new dispensation for Soweto as a basis for negotiation with the Government – and the Government wouldn’t even talk to it. Percy Qoboza and *The World* presented the story of what Soweto was thinking and doing, not only to its own people, but to white South Africans – and that

was something they badly needed to know. Donald Woods wasn’t just Steve Biko’s friend, he was his friend who was determined to find out and get known just how he died. He wasn’t only Steve Biko’s friend, he was also the friend of black youth in general in its growing rejection of the system under which it is forced to grow up and live. As for David Russell, he, more than any other white South African recently, has tried to live his life in the spirit of compassion the New Testament demands – a spirit which, despite all their Christian pretensions, seems to have passed by our rulers completely. From October 19th all these, and many more, have been excommunicated from the body politic.

One might say that the banning list for October 19th represents a sort of Roll of Honour of the people principally involved in trying to lay the foundations for a new South Africa. Mr Kruger, speaking for the Government, justified his drastic measures by saying the people and organisations he had banned had “endangered the maintenance of public order”. The true explanation of why they were banned, we suggest, is not that they endangered the maintenance of public order, but that they vigorously opposed the maintenance of apartheid. And does Mr Kruger think that his bans will stop such opposition? Surely not!

Seventeen years ago his Government banned the ANC and the PAC. Did those bannings bring to an end resistance to the policies the PAC and ANC rejected? It certainly did not. That resistance is more widespread and intense today than it ever was. Putting the lid on the kettle again won’t help this time either. All one can say with assurance is that, with the changed world in which we now live, the time-scale between one upheaval and the next will be reduced from now on.

October 19th, 1977, will go down as a tragic day in the history of South Africa, not just for the lives and livelihoods and years of precious work which were destroyed that day. It may also go down in the history books as the day on which the Nationalist Afrikaner government of our country finally put paid to the prospects for race reconciliation here and signed away its own people’s future on this continent. □