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EPIGRAPH FOR A PARLIAMENT.

"Parliament is surrendering its control over the executive, and the executive may do anything it likes....."

"Here, where Ministers are imbued with a police state mentality, who have developed the desire to destroy the authority altogether, this Bill is particularly dangerous to the maintenance of democratic life....."

"Tomorrow we shall be ~~virtually~~ in a police state. Tomorrow the Government can proclaim the whole Union to be in a state of emergency without giving any reason. It can suspend every newspaper, adopt the most drastic measures to curtail the freedom of every person, confiscate their property and suspend every law.

"Where a nation is willing to surrender all the sovereignty resident in the people of their own protection to a few members of the executive, we are not far from that famous day when Hitler proclaimed himself to be the source of all power and authority in the state.

"Yet, in spite of this abject surrender by Parliament of its authority at the behest of a Nationalist Government, the opposition has agreed to support this measure. It did so because it believed that European authority must be maintained in South Africa."

We quote these words, not from a leading article in ~~Avon~~ "Spark", but from the speech of Senator Hector Nicholls, leader of the United Party in the Senate, explaining on February 19th, 1953, why his party was supporting the third reading of the Public Safety Bill. His words may well go down in history as the epitaph not only of the United Party, but indeed, of the Union Parliament itself.

It is true that Parliament has "surrendered its control". And it is a lesson which will be increasingly borne upon the country that this "object surrender" which the Senator so lucidly characterised was due to the belief "that European authority must be maintained in South Africa".

"European authority" - that is the maintenance of the dictatorship of a minority - cannot be reconciled even with the forms of democratic institutions. The 1910 Constitution was an attempt to reconcile that contradiction between the outward form of parliamentary and constitutional liberties, and the underlying reality of a harsh and merciless colonial dictatorship over the non-white peoples of South Africa. Thus, the Union's first period has almost largely been a fraud and a sham. Even for the white minority, democracy has been shallow and illiberal. The succeeding Parliament has been more so, and has added to the mass of legislative discrimination against non-Europeans and tight binding of the backs of pressure, against African workers and farmers to force them to labour under ever deteriorating conditions for the benefit of the goldmining and farming plutocracy.

Yet, because of a past bitter political battle, there have been democratic restraints and obstacles to the imposition of naked fascist dictatorship in South Africa. The people have had access to courses of law which, at any rate in their upper levels, have enjoyed some measure of independence. The South African press, although naturally it has been controlled almost entirely by those who have the financial resources essential to maintaining modern newspapers, has nevertheless enjoyed the freedom to attack and criticise the Government. However hemmed about by interference and legislation, the workers' Trade Unions have at least had the right to exist.

The Nationalist Government has shown itself increasingly impatient and intolerant of these rights of the people. They cannot tolerate the existence of law courts and newspapers which are not subject to their direct and immediate control.

They have said so, and continue to say so with increasing bluntness and rudeness. They have made their aim as clear as daylight: it is to abolish every vestige of democratic freedom in South Africa and to establish a total, terroristic, dictatorship of the sort which they so much admired in Germany between 1934 and 1944.

The United Party knows these facts. Senator Nicholls acknowledged that "tomorrow we shall be virtually in a police state". Yet the United Party, which claimed and still claims to have democratic pretensions, failed to oppose this law, as it has always failed and always will fail to defend democratic principle, because the bourgeois backers of the United Party are interested not in principles but in super-profits from the exploitation of cheap labour. Senator Nicholls sees the choice, either a real democracy; or a police state. And he chooses the latter.

The lesson is too plain to be misunderstood except by those who are hopelessly blinded by the spectacles of white Chauvinism and colour prejudice. "European authority" (that is the maintenance of political and economic privileges in the hands of a racial minority; the degradation and impoverishment of the majority) is incompatible in the long run with the preservation of any sort of democratic rights, forms of ideology - even in respect of the whites themselves. A nation which oppresses others cannot itself be free. The rights and the future of the peoples of South Africa, European and non-European, can never be advanced or defended by the colour-bar United Party, by the colour-bar Parliament, or for that matter by those self-proclaimed "liberals" who seek to conceal their own moral cowardice and subconscious Chauvinism by dishonest chatter about a "qualified franchise".

The task, the duty and the honour of defending the cherished liberties of the South African people, must fall on other shoulders; on the broad and worthy shoulders of the masses of non-European workers, peasants and middle-class people, and upon that honourable minority among the

Europeans which boldly and uncompromisingly takes up its stand for equality of rights and opportunities for all men and women in our country.

These classes, organised in the African National Congress, the Trade Unions, the S.A. Peoples Congress and other democratic militant organisations of the people can alone take up the banner of popular liberties and the defence of the people which Parliament has dropped into the fire.

Recent developments in the Union, particularly the unconquerable spirit that manifested itself at the mass conference held by the Congresses in Johannesburg and the Cape Provincial A.N.C. conference at Port Elizabeth, have made it clear that the ordinary people of our country are prepared to answer the call for sacrifice, endurance and courage which the protracted struggle demands.

It is for their leaders the time to grasp the full earnestness of the situation, to cast aside all doubts and indecision and vacillation. The 1952 Campaign of 1952 has raised the liberation movement to unprecedented heights of organised strength and political consciousness. This alone has been a worthy achievement of the campaign, and the democratic people of South Africa will forever remain under a debt of gratitude to the gallant leaders whose courage and example have inspired, educated and revived the movement. Indeed, had it not been for the resolute movement of the non-Europeans, the Malanites would no doubt have long ago succeeded in setting up a full-fledged fascist state in the Union.

But a movement must MOVE. It must go forward with the changing situation, or go down to defeat. It was never envisaged that the campaign would remain forever confined to the first stage of groups of individual volunteers defying selected laws of a minor character. Not only do the savage provisions of the Criminal Laws Amendment Bill

now render a continuance of the first stage impracticable and defeatist, but, more important, the pressing needs of the new situation make it imperative for the peoples' struggle to adopt new forms based on mass action in town and country alike.

The Nationalist Party has succeeded in blackmailing "legal" authority to abolish the laws, from a wretched assembly of frightened men whose pretensions to be a Parliament of the South African people have thus forever been destroyed.

But before the Nationalists can exercise those powers they will have to reckon with the twelve million South Africans, whom we of "Liberation" believe, will never tamely bow their heads to servitude.

In sharp contrast to these critical realities now facing South Africa are the unrealistic, almost dreamlike, speeches and policies being now placed before the overwhelmingly white electorate in the present General Election. No party, indeed no candidate, unfortunately, has come forward with a truly democratic policy advancing the slogan of universal franchise as the alternative to a Police State: votes for all, or votes for none, as the real issue before South Africa. The elections cannot, therefore, be regarded as a decisive field in this major battle. Yet this should not imply that the democrats of South Africa, whether or not enfranchised, can regard the outcome of the election with indifference. We are writing on the eve of the election, at a time when the United Party is conducting its customary quinquennial competition with the Nationalists to see who can sink to lower depths in appealing to the basest colour prejudices of the electorate. These degrading antics cannot but undermine whatever lingering illusions may remain, at home or abroad, as to the invertebrate character of Mrs. Strass and his associates.

It is not surprising that the overwhelming mass of the South African people will rejoice at the electoral defeat of the Hats. Not because they have any confidence in or illusions about the so-called "United Democratic Front", but because they recognize the Malanites as the most brutal and extreme enemies of democracy. The defeat of the Nationalists, therefore, will

It will not of itself lead to any democratic gains, cannot but be a stimulus and an encouragement to that mass movement of the oppressed which alone can achieve the true emancipation of South Africa from imperialist bondage.

Whatever the election results, however, there can be no slackening now in the tempo of organisation, preparation, vigilance and practical work, for those who stand with and for progress. Every Congress member an organiser; every member a teacher and propagandist; every non-European and democratic European an active participant in mass action - these must be our slogans for the difficult and crucial weeks and months ahead.

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