

# LIBERATION

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One Shilling

## DRUNK WITH POWER

Mr. Swart: "Do you think I like exercising these powers?"

An Opposition Member: "You love it."

(--Assembly debate on the Amendment to the Suppression of Communism Act, February 1954.)

**T**HE Nationalist Party is about to enter its seventh year of office as the Government. Each year that passes sees Dr. Malan and his Ministers becoming more autocratic and intolerant of restraint and opposition, more remote from the ordinary people and their needs and problems.

Nothing illustrates this attitude of mind better than the career of Dr. Verwoerd as Minister of Native Affairs. Dr. Verwoerd is busy carving himself out an empire within South Africa, a state within a state. A "Bantustan" in which the word of Rajah Verwoerd is law. At the word of the emperor thousands of African families must tumble themselves out of their established homes and begin afresh to build in the desolate wastes of Meadowlands and Diepkloof. Another word from the emperor and thousands of "foreign natives" (was there ever such a contradictory and revealing expression?) must quit their jobs and their way of life in exchange for the serfdom of agricultural labour.

Reading such Verwoerdian documents as the notorious "Mentz Report" on the expulsion of Africans from Johannesburg, one cannot help being struck by its utter cold-bloodedness and inhumanity. So many thousand "natives" must be removed from here and put down over there. There must not be any "natives" South of the railway line, that wouldn't be neat; it would spoil the plan. These are not people, this crazy plan is talking about, real live flesh and blood people, with homes and friends and likes and dislikes and dreams and aspirations. They are abstract figures. We cannot avoid the comparison of a man laying out pieces on a draughts-board; black men this side, white men that side: wooden pawns.

But of course these aren't wooden men at all. They can think and learn; and they mightn't like what the Minister is doing to

them. The Minister has provided for that, too. The new Bantu Education schools will see to it that they don't learn anything to upset them, and that the piccanins will be taught to love and revere the name of the great Baas Verwoerd and his Native Affairs Department who can do no wrong.

Another baas who can do no wrong is Minister Charles Roberts Swart. One of the most highly prized of human rights is that an individual accused of a crime should be brought before an unbiased Court and allowed to defend himself before he is punished. The crime of which he is accused should be explicitly stated; he should be allowed to question the witnesses and bring witnesses of his own refute to them. The proceedings should be held in public, according to established rules of evidence and procedure. There should be a right of appeal. All these rules have been established, after bitter struggles against older tyrannies, to protect the people against arbitrary injustice.

Mr. Swart, the Minister of Justice, does not hold with all this. In terms of the Suppression of Communism Act, he has had himself endowed with the power of a judge to punish people without trial. He is scarcely impartial, for he has clearly shown himself to be the victim of an obsessive mania which leads him to believe that "Communists" are busy plotting to poison the water-supplies and burn down buildings and trees. His victims are not made aware of the evidence against them, nor even informed of the nature of the crime they are supposed to have committed. Indeed, the first they hear of whatever secret proceedings may have gone before their conviction is the conviction itself: a letter signed by the Minister informing them of his verdict.

It is not to be wondered at that the Appellate Division judges upheld the appeal of Mr. Ngwevela on the grounds that to condemn a man thus without a hearing was contrary to the principles of natural justice; nor that the Minister whose twisted and tyrannical mentality evolved these procedures should rush to his tame Parliament for additional powers to close the "loophole" thus revealed. He is drunk with power, and like any drunkard, craves ever more and more of the heady liquor which gives him such pleasant illusions of divine omnipotence.

Happily for South Africa, there are formidable obstacles in the way of our would-be dictators, and so far from overcoming or destroying these obstacles, every new Nationalist onslaught serves only to fortify them. The main barrier to the evil designs of the Government consists of the steadily growing organised unity and

resistance of the majority of the people of South Africa. Those who like to compare South Africa under Malan with Germany under Hitler would do well to reflect that, while the Nazis managed by demagogy and racialism to gain a substantial basis of mass support, nine out of every ten South Africans are bitterly opposed to the Nationalist Government.

The problem before democratic South Africa is how to mobilise, express and make effective this vast majority against fascism.

It is appropriate that the guidance and inspiration for this great patriotic task should have come from the organisation most truly representative of the greatest number of South Africans — the African National Congress. For with the decision at its national conference in December to approach other democratic bodies with the purpose of their jointly convoking a great Congress of the People to frame a charter of freedom for all who live in our country, the A.N.C. has shown the way forward to save our country.

We would emphasise the need for speed and effective measures to implement this historic decision. The work of planning and preparing such a great conference cannot be accomplished overnight. It will take time and hard work on the part of every Congressman and woman, every trade unionist, every conscious democrat. All the more reason why the preliminary work should be accomplished as soon as possible, so that the rank and file can get down to the real task among the people without delay.

There can be no doubt that the call for the Congress of the People will meet with a ready response among the Non-European majority of our population. Africans, Indians, Coloured people, all feel the bitter edge of apartheid and police terror in their daily lives, and are anxiously seeking a democratic way out. But what of the Europeans? No doubt, they too, for the most part are beginning to awaken to the menace of Malanism to the economic future of the country, to the freedom and independence of South Africa. This consciousness, which finds its most clearheaded and encouraging reflection in the emergence of S.A. Congress of Democrats, with its uncompromising policy of racial equality and political co-operation with the African and Indian Congresses, is also beginning to make itself felt elsewhere. Our South African liberals betray the characteristic flabbiness and opportunism on the question of equal human rights for non-whites which seems to be endemic in this country. Yet that they have emerged at all in these conditions of Nationalist intimidation has a serious significance which should not be overlooked. Even more significant is the new turn in policy on the Non-European franchise made by the South African Labour Party at its forty-third annual conference in Durban.

The Labour Party is the oldest political party in the country. Forty years ago it split on the issues of imperialism and war, the majority adopting an opportunist and unprincipled policy which found its practical expression in the Party's desertion of the workers' watchword of internationalism and its toadying to the colour prejudices of the white electorate. The result has been to reduce the Party to the lowest ebb in its history, so far as organisational strength and popular support are concerned.

It would be too much to claim that with its new statement of policy the Labour Party has decisively turned its back on the past, and entered a period where it will seriously embark upon a policy in accordance with its socialist professions. Yet, for the S.A. Labour Party the statement contains many refreshing and hopeful features. It "declares as a matter of principle that it accepts the universal franchise for all adult literate (why literate? — does the Labour Party imagine that the Chartists who fought for the vote in Britain a hundred years ago were all literate?) inhabitants." It "is opposed to the ~~the~~ diminution, curtailment or disqualification" of any existing franchise rights, with particular reference to Cape non-European voters. It realises that it is "futile for one section of the population to legislate for the whole population."

"But," — of course there had to be a "but" — "realising the need for the implementation of the franchise for non-Europeans in stages" the statement proceeds to advocate a series of "franchise reforms" embodying such objectionable features as communal representation and other forms of race discrimination. Like the Liberal Party, the Labour Party falls into the trap of trying to reconcile the irreconcilables: democracy and white supremacy.

The real issue in South Africa today, however, is not whether a voter should have a Labour Party Std. 5 qualification or a Liberal Party Std. 6 one; but whether any sort of democratic rights at all can survive the onslaughts of the power-drunk Nationalists. And this real issue can be resolved in favour of democracy for those who understand that the major bastion of democratic freedom in our land is not the feeble opposition in our minority Parliament, but the masses of oppressed non-white people outside it, as represented by their national Congresses and political and trade union movements.

The acid test for the Labour and Liberal leaders is whether they are sufficiently mature and emancipated to accept this truth, and to accept the hand of partnership extended by the Congresses in the calling of an all-in interracial congress of the people.

For there can be no doubt that the successful convention of so great and representative an Assembly will rally our country against the perils of continued Government by the Nationalist clique, will expose past redemption their pretensions to speak for South Africa. It is the first indispensable step towards a national awakening that must in the end relegate the Verwoerdjies and the Swartlings to the limbo of forgotten would-be dictators.