

## Editorial

# A SHAM DEMOCRACY

"The general election has once again proved that democratic rule in South Africa is a sham."

Sunday Express, April 20, 1958.

**W**HILE representatives of the new independent States of Africa were meeting at Accra in Ghana, to pledge their solidarity for the dignity, self-rule and freedom of their peoples and those of all Africa, a demonstration of a very different kind was taking place at the Southern end of our mighty Continent.

Both in the Union and the Federation, the very mild and tentative approaches towards slightly more liberal alternatives, as suggested by Graaff and Todd, were resoundingly rejected by the White minorities who monopolise political rights and economic privileges. In terms which could not be misunderstood, they served notice upon Africa and the world that they intend to defend their ill-gotten and untenable domination to the bitter end.

For freedom-fighters in South Africa the General Election result is grim and foreboding.

Back in Parliament, with more seats and votes than ever, is a hateful Party like the Nationalists, the party of bigoted racial narrow-mindedness: with all its degrading contempt and inhumanity towards everyone who hasn't a pink skin, all its ignorant hostility towards everything that is advanced and forward-looking.

True enough, the U.P. is not much better — always kowtowing to the Nats and always blathering about "White" supremacy. But after ten years of hell, every African, Coloured and Indian was convinced of one thing: Nothing, but nothing, could be worse than the Nats. Apart from a handful of intellectual parlour-politicians, of the dismal 'emancipation-through-suffering' school, every Non-European was hoping eagerly for a U.P. victory. And the same is true of the hundreds of thousands of European anti-Nats who had pinned their hopes on "Div."

And it's a grim prospect that faces our country in the immediate future too. A new round of oppressions and restrictions, no doubt. With the treason trial proper soon to start and with the new packed Parliament due to reassemble soon and start anew with odious legislation. It's another depressing thought that this time there won't even be those two grand fighting M.P.'s Alex. Hepple and Leo Lovell to cast a ray of truth and sanity into the murky and crazy debates in the Assembly.

We have dwelt on these uncomfortable realities, not because we wish to depress our readers, or because we ourselves are pessimistic about the future — far from it! — but because the starting-point of political wisdom is the recognition of facts as they are, not as we would like them to be. Let us know the worst. Then we can start soberly and realistically thinking and planning, to consolidate our forces, to eliminate our weaknesses, to parry the attacks of the enemy, to achieve future advances and victories.

It is not good enough merely to feel indignant at the Nationalists' return to office. We must ask why these things happened, and what must now be done.

We began this article with a quotation: the first sentence of the Editorial in the "Sunday Express" of April 20, headed: "A Sham Democracy." Quite right, it is a sham democracy. But why does the "Express" think so? For one reason only: because the electoral system is loaded against the United Party.

"In form and in theory, last week's election had the classic and fundamental quality of a democratic poll, since every qualified person had the right to vote," continues the "Sunday Express" (our emphasis.)

"In fact and in substance, however, the democratic character of the election was wrecked," it goes on, "by the electoral system which, in effect, gave most people the equivalent of half a vote each." (Again, our emphasis.)

The Editorial goes on to prove its point by showing that whereas the Nats and the U.P. received approximately the same total number of votes (about 700,000 each) the Nats have almost twice the number of seats in the Assembly (103 to 53) and 77 seats in the Senate to the U.P.'s eight. "By no stretch of the imagination can such a pattern of Government be the product of a truly democratic election."

Now, there are times when half-truths are worse than blatant lies, because we can see and recognise the lie, whereas the half-truth can take us in. It is precisely because the "Express" Editorial says — and says so admirably — some things which are true and important, that its failure to tell the whole truth becomes the more reprehensible and inexcusable.

Indeed, the two paragraphs we have quoted above contain two glaring mis-statements.

Mis-statement No. 1: That "the classic and fundamental quality of a democratic election" is that "every qualified person" has the right to vote. A clever juggling of words — but it just isn't so. The fundamental quality of a democratic election is that the people shall be qualified to vote.

Mis-statement No. 2: That the election of April 16 gave "most people the equivalent of half a vote each." Wrong again. The election gave "most people — most adult South African citizens — no vote at all.

The reasons why we have a sham democracy is that four-fifths of our citizens are excluded from the franchise.

To say that "democratic rule in South Africa is a sham" without including or even mentioning that simple, essential and universally-known fact, is nothing but empty playing with words and ideas, devoid of any serious content or intention.

Of course the Nats. have wangled and jerrymandered the delimitations and the Senate. Of course the Government is determined — to quote the "Express" once more — "to entrench itself and perpetuate itself in power." And the United Party and the newspapers which support it come along now and complain that the whole thing is a swindle and a sham. But all along they have connived and been accomplices in the far bigger swindle of holding elections with only an unrepresentative fraction of the people allowed to vote — and calling the result "democracy." And, what is more, they continue to do so.

This is more than a question of scoring debating points off the "Express" — if it were we should not have wasted so much space on it. It is the fundamental question which lies at the root of the U.P.'s futility and ineffectiveness, inside and outside Parliament: its intellectual dishonesty, hypocrisy and political opportunism.

#### **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

"There is no evidence to suggest that the Government will take any steps to change our electoral system in order to make it genuinely democratic." With this colossal understatement we bid farewell to the "Express" (to which, although it might no seem so, we are in fact grateful for at least trying — unlike most of its contemporaries — to discuss the significance of the election seriously.) So, what's to be done about it? Neither the United Party nor its supporting Press has made the slightest effort to answer this question for the benefit of the 700,000 who voted against the Nationalist Party, or the ten million who have no votes but who loathe and detest the Nationalist Party and everything it does and stands for. How de we ever get rid of the Nats? Do you go on contesting crook elections in which they fix it so that you are bound to lose every time? (And how long do you think it will take to tear the heart out of your supporters playing that game?) Do you go on substituting empty half-truths, dishonest evasions and meaningless platitudes, for a genuine fighting democratic faith? (While the Nationalists who at least stand for some sort of principle — a nasty, Nazi principle though it is — are capturing the minds of the White youth, inside and outside the schools; and your members, and some of your leaders too, schooled in flabby opportunism, are ratting one by one to the winning side.)

We have no doubt that the majority of the members, leaders and journalists of the United Party honestly and sincerely dislike the Nationalist Party and fear a future of increasingly unrestrained dictatorship under it. But they will be contributing absolutely nothing to the struggle against Nationalist dictatorship — in fact they will positively be helping it — if they keep ignoring and hiding away the plain facts:—

1. That we can never get rid of Nationalist Party government under the present electoral system;
2. That this system is grossly undemocratic and has been so ever since Union because it excludes the Non-White majority from the vote:

3. That the only way to defeat the Nationalists is by overwhelming and united pressure from all democrats, White and Non-White, in favour of radical electoral reform, a universal franchise as recommended by the 1957 Multi-Racial Conference.

We know this is unpalatable advice to the U.P. people, soaked and schooled as they are in the conventional racial prejudices of our South Africa. And we should not deceive ourselves that many of them will take it. Yet, it is the truth; let them summon up the courage and intellectual integrity to admit it, or stand condemned as agents and accomplices in fastening the chains of Nationalist slavery on our land.

Fortunately the future of our country does not depend on the doubtful prospect of discovering hitherto hidden qualities of courage and integrity among the spokesmen of the United Party.

### THE THIRD PARTY

A stranger to South Africa would have been astonished to find, on polling day, that not a single candidate of the African National Congress was standing for election. For there was hardly a day prior to the election on which Congress and its partners in alliance was not prominently featured in the newspapers. The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition kept appealing to the people not to vote for Congress, and so did all sorts of other people ranging from General J. Edgar Rademeyer down to Dr. Verwoerd's tame Chiefs and the lickspittle "Bantu" newspapers.

It is not our purpose, in the present Editorial, to debate the details of the stay-at-home on April 14, the extent to which the response was disappointing to the Congress movement and why, or the soundness of the back-to-work call. These are matters which are being thoroughly discussed at present within the movement itself, and which we hope to return in our next issue; we shall content ourselves at present by expressing the opinion that throughout the Congress leadership displayed statesmanship of a far higher order than that of either the main Parties to the election itself.

What we think is of larger significance is that, to all who have eyes to look below surface appearances, the Congress emerged from the election period with immeasurably increased stature, as the only genuine opposition to the Nationalist Party.

Inevitably, it is now around the Congress movement that there is beginning to form that united democratic front of the South African people which, in the end, will put an end to the ill-omened era of Nationalist dictatorship. We do not wish to belittle the role of the Liberal and Labour Parties, the democratic Churchmen and other progressives who, at the Multi-Racial Conference and elsewhere have taken their stand for democracy. But the Congress alliance has established itself today, as never before, as the hard core — alike of resistance to the tyranny of Baaskap and of the rallying for future advance to Free South Africa.

From the bitterness and the harsh lessons, the debates and the added clarity that will flow from the events of election week, 1958, the movement will emerge, we are convinced, more closely-knit in unity, more steadfast and hardened in struggle. And from now on it will increasingly enjoy the support of thinking South Africans of all races who have seen through the fraud and the sham of our so-called "democracy" as it was revealed on April 16.