

# Liberation

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## Editorial

### 1960: YEAR OF DESTINY

**A** FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT told, a year or so ago, a strange story of an interview with the then Minister of Native Affairs, Dr .Verwoerd. Verwoerd was telling him all about the fine work his Department was doing for "the Bantu," when he asked, innocently enough, why, in that case, there seemed to be so much trouble, riots and so forth. Suddenly, to his amazement and embarrassment, the Minister burst into tears and buried his face in his hands. "Everything is going wrong!" he sobbed.

"Everything is going wrong! Nobody understands us! Everybody is against us! And we mean so well!" Such is the pathetic chorus of the Nationalist Party leaders, as they peer out anxiously, through the barricades they have erected, at the great wide world beyond them, and at the

sullen masses of the people over whom they rule, all so hostile and so menacing.

Look what happens at UNO. All these years the Nationalist Government has been insisting that apartheid and discrimination against Africans, Indians and Coloured people is strictly our domestic concern and nobody else's business at all. But, at last, in view of persistent criticism, the Government sends Minister Eric Louw to go and explain patiently to the General Assembly exactly what great benefits apartheid is conferring upon the Africans. Instead of bursting into cheers and passing a hearty vote of thanks to Dr. Verwoerd, the General Assembly adopts, with an overwhelming majority a resolution, sharper than ever before, condemning the Nationalist Government's oppression of Africans. Since the resolution has been practically buried by our newspapers, let us record the gist of it here. It expressed the Assembly's

*"concern at South Africa's racial policies," and its "deep conviction that policies which accentuate or seek to preserve racial discrimination are prejudicial to racial harmony."*

*Sixty-two countries voted in favour of the resolution. Three voted against. Britain, France and Portugal.*

Sapa's special correspondent (The Star, 18.11.59) interprets this voting as being "favourable for South Africa in the circumstances." Really, how inane can Sapa get?

But one does not have to look as far afield as UNO to find trouble for the Nationalists. Following shortly upon the disturbances in Natal (when Dr. Eiselen complained of the way the Zulus criticised "everything the State does for the benefit of the Bantu") came the hot reception accorded to Minister of BAD, de Wet Nel, at Orlando. And the equally unpleasant experience of certain "Bantu Authorities" (i.e. B.A.D.-approved Chiefs) also in Johannesburg recently—even though they were under the patronage of no less a personage than Dr. Xuma. Then there was the spontaneous outbreak of unrest at Paarl, following BAD Minister Nel's banishment order against Mrs. Mafekeng. Of course the Minister followed up with the usual explanation that it was all the work of agitators. That might have been good enough to satisfy his followers. It certainly wasn't good enough to satisfy anyone else in South Africa or the whole wide world beyond.

Here, as a matter of fact is one of the flaws that runs right into the heart of the Government's position. They are superb "politicians" all right, among the best anywhere, and their record in the last three elections proves it, highly skilled and creating and evoking the desired mass conditioned reflex from their electorate. But the passionate oratory that sweeps the Party to a hundred per cent. victory in the Free State can hardly raise a single handclap at Lake Success, and the arguments that seem so brilliant and convincing, packed up by a steamroller majority, in the Assembly and Senate debates sound utterly feeble and puerile the moment they are



exported beyond the Union. Or for that matter, the moment they are repeated among the sane, realistic majority of the people of our country itself.

### ***The Emperor's New Clothes***

What is the good of Verwoerd proclaiming and trumpeting forth to the world his revolutionary new policy of "Bantu self-government" when all the world can see that the rechristened "Bantu territories" are nothing but the undeveloped, overcrowded, eroded Reserves whose gross inadequacy has been the subject of bitter Congress complaints since 1913, and of denunciation at practically every session of UNO? When the "Bantu authorities" are mostly nothing but wretched stooges, appointed to usurp the places of better men deposed by the B.A.D., who crown their bad consciences in a permanent alcoholic fuddle? When, even presuming that the Reserves were large enough to sustain their populations, and the "authorities" really representative of their people, their powers extend no further than the administration of laws passed by the Union Parliament?

What is the good of spending a fortune in public money on propaganda throughout the world, of honeyed addresses by Mr. Louw and goodwill missions by Mr. Boydell, when at any moment Nel is liable to perpetrate an act of sheer savagery like the Mrs. Mafekeng deportation? While tomorrow's newspaper is bound to disclose some new example of police hatred and inhumanity towards Africans, Immorality Act prosecution, or special branch raid on political opponents? While the Treason Trial drags its weary length into its fourth year?

Each and every one of these facts, and a hundred more, prove that there is no "new" policy, there is no change of heart, there is nothing but the same old racialism, reaction, repression, cruelty and exploitation, the novelty consisting solely in an excess of sanctimoniousness which makes the mixture as a whole more, and not less, nauseating than before. Like the Emperor in the fairy-tale, Verwoerd is very ill-advised to strut forth before the world in the imaginary garment of a non-existent new policy, flaunting the naked repulsiveness of oppression for all to admire.

Yet, if a genuine, not a make-believe, *new policy* were ever urgently required of South Africa's rulers, the time is now, at the dawn of 1960, perhaps the last opportunity of effectively adopting any policy at all.

We doubt if it has ever been possible, since Van Riebeeck's futile palisade around the Fort at Cape Town, to implement a policy of "apartheid"—i.e. an area of white exclusiveness and autarchy—in Southern Africa or elsewhere in this continent. Today, when White ownership prevails over 87 per cent. of the Union, to hark back to the sort of talk that used to prevail when the Fish River was being debated and fought over as the "frontier," is like a feeble-minded old addlepate chewing ancient rags in his sleep. The concept of apartheid is a grotesque delusion.

It is the more fantastically unreal in the light of the particular era of world-history in which we live, when, with irresistible force, mighty currents of change are flooding through the five continents, emancipating hundreds of millions of non-European people, dynamically altering the balance between the nations.



## 1960—Africa's Year of Destiny

Of course for some years now, White South Africa has become dimly aware of certain untoward happenings beyond the Limpopo. Egypt, Morocco, Tunis, the Sudan, Ghana and Guinea joined Abyssinia and Liberia. Egypt, the Sudan, Ghana and Guinea joined Abyssinia and Liberia as States governed by Africa, and for the latter two independence itself began to be less of a formality than was previously the case. But what has happened in Africa until now has but been the overture to the concert of freedom; the first few heavy drops that precede the outburst of one of those vast and torrential storms, the grandeur and terror of which we in Africa know so well.

*The year 1960 sees the accession of no less than four new countries to this select company of self-governing African territories. They are Togoland, Somalia, the Cameroons and Nigeria. The first three are former League of Nations mandates to whom the United Nations promised independence after an interim preparatory period. It is interesting, in this connection, to note that, had the South African Government fulfilled its obligation as Mandatory power, South-West Africa would also be among this group of States achieving independence in 1960.*

It is difficult to overstate the far-reaching implications of this sudden addition of four countries, covering a vast area and millions of people, to the fraternity of Free Africa. It is in itself sufficient to make 1960 a memorable year in the history of Africa; but of at least equal significance is the effect it is bound to have upon the many millions of Africans still under colonial rule or under minority White domination, stimulating a hundredfold their ardent aspirations for self-government, liberty and economic progress. For not only will the knowledge that African brothers in twelve countries govern themselves inspire the liberation movements in all the remaining countries; but also the new governments of Free Africa cannot refrain from extending aid and encouragement to those who are still in bondage, both because they are moved by natural and understandable motives of fraternity and solidarity, and also because their own freedom can never rest upon a secure and lasting basis so long as the curse and the threat of colonialism remains in a single area of this continent.

This sort of continental transformation is not without precedent. Its dynamics are simple and easy to understand. It has taken place but recently in Asia. It took place, following the collapse of the Spanish-Portuguese imperialism, in the last century in South America. To anyone with a sense of historical reality the African Revolution has already begun. Its momentum is becoming more rapid and irresistible with every month that passes. Its complete victory in the near future is inevitable.

In vain do Britain, in Nyasaland, France in Algeria and the Belgians in the Congo, the Portuguese in Angola and Mozambique, attempt to stifle it in blood and violence; or De Gaulle in the rest of French Africa to divert it with insubstantial concessions.

It cannot be said that the Nationalist Government is totally unaware of the new situation. Indeed the present attempts to refurbish the Tomlinson Report, and to present the whole shabby farce of "Bantu Authorities"



*as if it were in line with developments up North towards independence and self government* is precisely the Nationalists' attempt to meet and deal with the new situation, the African Revolution.

These efforts are ludicrously inadequate, like a man who relies on a silk sunshade to protect his head from a volcano about to erupt.

### ***Again, the Progressives***

But if the Nationalists—with their paranoiac persecution-mania, and their cast-iron rigidity of thought—are unable to comprehend and foresee the full implications of the African Revolution, there are others upon the political scene in White South Africa upon whom it is beginning to dawn that things simply cannot be allowed to drift on as they are; that the road chosen fifty years ago at the time of Union was a false one, a fatal dead end; that there must be a new approach, a new beginning, if anything is to be saved from the wreck of the dreams and ambitions of Rhodes and others who planned to build at this end of the Continent a bastion of "Western civilisation" (read "European-dominated capitalism") which would stand firm forever. We are, obviously, not referring to the official Opposition. The United Party does not even attempt to think any more; it drifts aimlessly from one mess into another. We are reminded of the cutting remark of an Afrikaner acquaintance, commenting on the tragic plight of the thinking Afrikaner youth of the country, faced with the choice between the "kranksinnigheid" of the Nats and the "wansinnigheid" of the U.P. And it is true: if the Nats. are mad, the U.P. is feeble-minded.

In this context, the appearance of the new Progressive Party marks a welcome turn in the direction of political sanity and realism. It is true that the Progressives have nothing to say to White South Africa which the Congress of Democrats and the Liberal Party have not been saying, more forcefully and unambiguously, for the past six years. But the bulk of the European public is timid and conventional; it is fearful of losing its passport or being spied on by the special branch; it has long persuaded itself that Conscience is an impractical luxury. There are thousands who agreed secretly with what the Congress and the Liberals were saying, but feared to show their agreement. They were not prepared to listen to Alan Paton and Piet Beylveld, but they are prepared to applaud and support Harry Lawrence and Ernest Oppenheimer when they say the same things because they seem to offer some assurance of respectability and security.

A friend of ours came away from the inaugural public meeting of the Progressive Party moved almost to tears. The Johannesburg City Hall, crowded to the doors, had risen and given Dr. Steytler a standing ovation after a magnificent speech in which he bluntly repudiated White domination, demanded a non-colour-bar franchise on a common roll, and denounced the pass laws and apartheid and all its works. "These are the things we have been scoffed at for saying, for the past twenty years," she said.

And we, too, can scarce forbear to cheer, as we promised that we should in our much-criticised Editorial in our last issue (Liberation No. 38). In that article we predicted that we should be criticised, and offered space in our columns for the purpose. A reader has taken advantage of this



offer; his eloquent letter appears in the current issue; we invite further comment on the theme.

Our correspondent reproaches us with over-haste and lack of caution. We do not think this is warranted. We specifically said "Perhaps we under-rate the rebels—we shall be most happy if this is so." Our purpose was rather to check the hasty and incautious over-enthusiasm of some of our friends whom we thought—and still think—*overrated* the progressives, regarded their emergence as bringing about a "qualitative change" in the situation, "the most significant event of the past decade," and so on.

In this correct aim we made a faulty assessment, when we doubted whether the Progressive's policy would differ significantly from the U.P. It does differ a good deal, all for the better, and we are happy to concede it. Yet there are many aspects in which the Progressives' policy is unhappily ambiguous and lacking in firmness of democratic principle. They say "political rights" should be given "to those who deserve them on a basis of civilisation, regardless of race." (But what is conceded, on conditions, is a privilege, not a right!) The Party is still deliberating whom should be regarded as "suitably qualified people" to vote. It wants full trade union rights—but only for "certain African employees." Do we discern the qualms of Anglo-American behind this qualification? But, enough! The Progressives' policy contains more good things than bad: it is still a far cry from the unequivocal democracy of the Freedom Charter, but it is moving in a *direction* which no democrat can fail to applaud and encourage.

The danger was, and remains, that people will expect too much from the Progressives, and against that danger we were concerned in our last Editorial, and still are, to warn. The Progressives have only *begun* to understand that the transformation of our country is something that will be accomplished not by the minority electorate and its Parliamentary representatives, but by the masses of the South African people and their national organisations. They "consulted" African leaders—it was a good, and unprecedented thing to do—but they were not bound by the wishes of these leaders, and, indeed, Oppenheimer told London businessmen (*Rand Daily Mail*, 6th November, 1959) that the political demands of the "small number of politically conscious Africans" were "pitched unreasonably high." He also, in the course of a spirited defence of the efficiency of the Nationalist Government, and the "impartiality and incorruptibility" of its civil service, pointed out that the press and the opposition M.P.'s "can criticise."

### ***The Buffer***

We refer to this because it links up with the last point in our correspondent's letter upon which we wish to comment. Mr. Oppenheimer does not seem to realise that if there is still some vestige of opposition and free criticism left in South Africa for anyone, it is because the people's rights have stubbornly defended during the Nationalist decade not by the Parliamentary opposition but by the African National Congress and its partners in the democratic Alliance. The same truth must be pointed out to our correspondent, when he brings forward the strange theory of the Progressives as a "buffer." In order to be a buffer one must be in the front line, in the direct line of fire of the enemy. And it is not the Par-



liamentarians of the Progressive or any other Party who occupy that honourable but uncomfortable position; it is the Congressmen and trade unionists who for the past ten years and more have borne and fought back against the bans and banishments and victimisations and persecutions of the autocracy, and thus acted as the shield of the liberties of all in our country, Black and White alike.

This is no mere debating point.

The Progressives, like the courageous Nationalist professors who have recently taken their stand against the excesses of apartheid and for new and realistic thinking about our country and continent, are not in themselves representatives of the New Africa that is emerging so inspiringly, and amidst so much strife and difficulty, from the ruins of rotten, hateful imperialism and herrenvolkism. They are rather symptoms of change, and however much we may welcome their consultations with Congress and other leaders, we must note that this is still far removed from the democratic principle that the majority has the right to determine its own destiny. They still make the mistake of imagining that a minority alone is destined to play the leading role in the re-moulding of our country in the image of a true democracy.

That role rather belongs to those whose epic struggles against apartheid tyranny all down the years have inspired the country and the whole world, who are part and parcel of New Africa in the making and whose leaders and members daily suffer and struggle back against the hammer-blows of reaction.

That is the central factor in South African politics. We need to be reminded of it sharply as the delegates to the national conference of the African National Congress are beginning to assemble in Durban for what may prove the most fateful gathering in South African history, coming as it does on the even of Africa's year of destiny, and the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Union of South Africa.

24th November, 1959.

## LIONEL L. FORMAN

The death of Lionel Forman, at the tragically early age of thirty-one, was a loss which democratic South Africa could ill afford. Our readers will miss the occasional articles, always lucid and stimulating, which he found time, in his amazingly energetic and full life, to contribute to *Liberation*. The Editorial Board expresses its condolences to his family, and pays tribute to the inspiration which his dedicated life holds for all who strive for a Free South Africa.