

AFRICAN AVALANCHE

THERE should be something elementally tragic about the trek of the Afrikaner into fantasy, an inevitable blindness from which only suffering can offer an escape-route to sight. Africa is surging around his ankles already, and he busies himself in building dykes with the sand. Tribalism is to be resurrected in the cities, the African proletariat proselytized to submission, and supremacy remounted on horseback with a rifle in its hand. Is it possible that the Government genuinely believes itself capable of accomplishing a sudden political atrophy in Africa? Or are the laying of plans a protracted protection against panic, a sort of playing of patience in the tents before the battle to keep the mind from preying on results? Either way, events such as last year's Accra Conference and the January rioting in Leopoldville must make it difficult for Dr. Verwoerd to maintain his Messianic self-confidence.

He cannot have squeezed much encouragement from the first All-African People's Conference at Accra. For it clearly revealed the development of what Dr. Nkrumah has called an 'African Personality'. Africans *do* confess a Continental identity—a common oppression, whether past or present, unites them in antagonism and aspiration alike. Techniques of struggle obviously differ, as do the techniques of repression to which they react. Guinea is not Algeria. But there is no Balkanising of objectives, as cracks the shell before the chicken has a chance. An immense solidarity unquestionably exists, and Dr. Verwoerd will have to face the fact that political 'group areas' are not for export.

The Congo is the pulse of classic colonialism in Africa, and the recent coronary in Leopoldville must have jolted white supremacy from Cape Town to Nairobi. For if the Congo goes, African liberation will have driven a stake into the very heart of imperial rule and laid its ghost forever. No doubt the South African Government would offer military assistance to Belgium if rioting ever turned into rebellion. But not even South African troops can make it possible for Belgium to continue its control over an area as vast as the Congo, should the 13,000,000 Africans there lose popular patience with hollow promises and programmes. And it is by no means certain that the Belgians would be willing to engage themselves in the type of ruinously expensive attempt at pacification that has drained the moral and

financial blood of France in Indo-China and Algeria and that ends inevitably in the defeat of utter exhaustion. Indeed, the rapidity with which political concessions followed the Leopoldville rioting pledges an early abdication of colonial rule in order to salvage some form of economic hegemony.

With French West Africa and British East also in ferment, the shutters are being wrenched open one after the other, and white supremacy can feel the breath of black Africa hot on its neck. The Union, together with its two Portuguese protectorates and the Rhodesias, may scratch around for sympathy and assistance from the West, but it is growing steadily more embarrassing for Britain and America to acknowledge any open association. The vast new markets of Africa and Asia are up before the hammer, and cash bids require the backing of propaganda. That the United States should have voted—for the first time—to condemn South Africa's racial policies at last year's meeting of the United Nations reveals her recognition of this. And doubtless the pressure upon her to be a great deal more forceful will grow, as will her readiness under a battery of trade retreats. Even the Conservative Government in Britain is becoming publicly impatient with the acrobatics of 'partnership'. Suez set the Commonwealth tottering dangerously. A political orgy in Central Africa would throw it flat on its face.

It would be asking too much of settler Africa, however, to expect it to come to early terms with reality. White Rhodesians are obsessed with the superstition that practical democracy promises a fate far worse than death. And white intransigence is likely to increase as black demands for non-racial government grow. British settlers are loyal to Britain only up to a point, and in a choice between white supremacy and the 'connection', sentiment will rapidly evaporate. Should a British Government indeed decide to call the settler bluff, delay dominion status and refuse assistance in the event of an African uprising until substantial political concessions are surrendered to the blacks, it is very probable that the white populations of the Rhodesias will seek salvation in the South and adjust to some form of federation with the Union. In that event, $3\frac{1}{4}$ million whites will have to rule by suicidal terror a population of more than 19 million non-whites, with the ever-increasing pressure of an antagonistic free Africa to the north. The end cannot be very long in doubt.

Should a British Government, however, collapse to settler

blackmail, deliver dominion status at call, and then assist in the resultant repression of Nyasaland and the African populations of the Rhodesias, the 'connection' may be saved for a while, but bloody little else. As the example of Kenya showed, emergencies are extravagant. And only radical concessions can save the state from economic chaos. With Britain firmly seated in the saddle, reforms might be forced upon settlerdom in time to save Central Africa from the anguish of the Union. But either way, whether the white Rhodesians hitch themselves to South Africa or not, democracy will flood down the Zambesi as surely as it is doing down the Congo.

Within the Union itself, those whites who have given up any real hope of influencing an intransigent electorate through logic or through fear, stand on the sidelines wringing their hands or write frantic pamphlets describing the debauchery they despise. Yet they fly from the one real political function they can valuably fulfil—by working with the non-white political organizations, to assist and influence them, keeping them democratic and non-racial in objective and struggle. Their despair is self-perpetuating, for they reject the disease of white supremacy together with its only possible cure. By keeping the African political movements in racial insulation, they encourage the growth of the very black nationalism they fear.

And meanwhile white South Africa as a whole delivers itself up to the glamour of its *Götterdämmerung*. There may—who knows?—be a few deranged enough to believe that they can make history freeze fast in its tracks if only they will it strenuously enough. But most enjoy the luxuries of race rule with a foretaste of disaster, planting their retribution at some indefinite date in the far future and anticipating heroics in its shade. They sense, as they must, that the cards of the contemporary world are stacked against apartheid and that every deal can only be a defeat. Fascinated, they watch the advance of the African avalanche, blind to its momentum and moral cohesion alike. That they should choose wilfully to be buried underneath its rocks ought to constitute the stuff of tragedy. As it is, the vanity of their gesture is so vast that history will point out their mound as a monument to the melodrama of stupidity and greed.