

# SOUTH AFRICA'S STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY

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The fundamental principle in our struggle is equal rights for all in our country, and that all people who have made South Africa their home, by birth or adoption, irrespective of colour or creed, are entitled to these rights. The fight for a democratic South Africa is assuming greater dimensions. Since the 1952 Defiance Campaign, the liberatory movement, faced with extreme difficulties, has not again taken the offensive on so wide a scale. Yet the movement is gaining momentum in its general mobilisation of the non-European masses, with the support of a small, but determined and growing number of European democrats. The country is in a state of ferment. The racial segregation and racial conflict on which the Europeans have based their government is now reaching unprecedented heights as a result of the numerous repressive apartheid laws of the Nationalist Government of Mr. Strijdom.

In dealing with the development of South Africa, it is important to mention two events which will go down in history as the two major turning points since the end of the frontier wars.

The first was the formation of the Union, when four separately-ruled provinces were brought under one central government on the 31st May, 1910. From the very day Union was established the Europeans allocated to themselves the exclusive right to govern and, except for the non-Europeans in the Cape Province who had a qualified franchise, to vote. Even this slender qualified right of the non-Europeans in the Cape to vote on a common roll with the whites was taken away from the Africans in 1936 and from the Coloureds in 1956, although the legality of the latter act is still being tested in the courts. Following Union the exploitation and the robbery of the Africans was legalised, mainly by the Labour Regulation Act of 1911 and the Land Act of 1913. The Africans lost their land and their movements were increasingly restricted.

The second important stage was reached when the Nationalist Party, inspired by Nazi racialist ideology, came into power in 1948, after furiously whipping up racial hysteria among the more

backward section of the electorate, especially in the rural areas. They impressed upon the electorate that the Afrikaner nation was fighting for its very existence against Black domination and Communism, which they alleged were encouraged by what they called the "liberal" policy of the United Party. They claimed that they had a solution to the Native Problem—a systematic apartheid policy, which would prevent the dangers of miscegenation, integration and equality.

In an attempt to implement their policy, the Nationalists passed numerous oppressive laws. They promoted their chief propagandist and architect of the apartheid policy, the former newspaper editor, Dr. Verwoerd, to a key position in the Cabinet, to become, as Minister of Native Affairs, "Ruler of the Black Colonial Empire". His appointment as Minister of Native Affairs was appropriate, for Dr. Verwoerd was, during the war years, an ardent admirer of the Hitler Nazi regime.<sup>1</sup> His arrogance and the ruthless manner in which he administers the apartheid policy, as if he cared nothing for human dignity, shows this up clearly. Only a man of his type could have spoken the way he did at Potchefstroom recently, where he is reported to have said:

"The fight which our forefathers fought against an overwhelming majority of barbarians is still being carried out, but now it is not against uncivilised people and barbarians, but the shrewdest, cleverest and most dangerous enemies, both from overseas and in our country".

The effect is to imply that open warfare exists and to incite the Afrikaner people against the African people. What a statement to be made by a Cabinet Minister!

The European opposition parties have shown themselves incapable of offering any effective opposition to the Nationalists. They have confused themselves by waging a battle of words, unrealistic and meaningless. "What is the meaning of apartheid, what is the definition of this mysterious word, apartheid?" Answering themselves, it means *Fanakalo* (like this). To the present day, the United Party does not seem to know exactly what it wants, what in fact it should tell the country. The United Party is not ashamed to tell

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<sup>1</sup> "The question is whether . . . he (Dr. Verwoerd) is entitled to complain if it is said of him that what he writes supports Nazi propaganda and makes his paper a tool of the Nazis. On the evidence he is not entitled to complain. He did support Nazi propaganda, he did make his paper a tool of the Nazis in South Africa, and he knew it".

Excerpt from Judgment of Mr. Justice J. Millin in the case of Verwoerd versus Paver and Others, 1943. Witwatersrand Local Division of the Supreme Court of South Africa.

townsmen that apartheid means oppression, and then to go to the platteland and tell the Nationalists' supporters that the Government is spending too much money on the Natives.

The non-Europeans have no time to look at dictionaries, nor to pretend not to know what apartheid means. They have known Apartheid to mean precisely what Hitler's racialist policy meant to the Jews and to the world. For this reason they forewarned the country of the dangers of apartheid. And now Europeans also in the country are beginning to see and appreciate the correctness of these predictions made almost ten years ago.

The non-European political organisations have grown in strength and in status and have aroused confidence in their ability to save South Africa from the iron rule of the Nationalist police state.

The bitterest battles which have been fought by these organisations since their inception have been on the land question and restriction of movement. Even to the present day, these are still the burning issues, issues which will inevitably bring about continued clashes between oppressor and oppressed until the people have won the rights to own land and to move freely without passes. Both the Indian Congress and the African National Congress have fought against the pass system as far back as the beginning of the present century. The latest phase in this fight was the Defiance Campaign of 1952 and even to the present day, a vigorous struggle is being organized around the pass system, Group Areas and restrictions on the Trade Union movement. Recently there have been a number of women's demonstrations, the biggest of which was the 20,000 strong march of women to see the Prime Minister on the 9th August, 1956, in protest against the extension of the pass system to African women. Successful All-In Group Areas Conferences have been held by the Natal Indian Congress and the Transvaal Indian Congress. The people seem to be in no mood for retreating.

The fact that the women have now taken such a firm stand in the fight against the tyranny of the Nationalists must be regarded as the writing on the wall, the warning to all those who still have illusions of the permanency of White domination. It is true that the youth of the country has not yet been organised to take part in the liberatory movement, but any struggle waged against the passes is bound to bring the African youth into the movement.

Foremost in the freedom struggle in South Africa is the Congress movement, comprising the African National Congress, the South African Coloured People's Organisation, the South African Indian Congress and the South African Congress of Democrats, the

Federation of South African Women and the South African Congress of Trade Unions. The Congress Movement having realised that the majority of the people were very much concerned with the future of their country and in particular the solution to the racial problem, convened a Congress of the People, to which political, economic and cultural organisations of all races were invited to participate and which was held at Kliptown, Johannesburg, on June 25 and 26, 1955. Among the numerous organisations invited were the Government Nationalist Party and the Official Opposition, the United Party, both of which declined.

This most historic multi-racial assembly adopted a Freedom Charter based on the demands of the people throughout the land. The Freedom Charter is now the policy and programme of the Congress Movement. It declares that the Government of the country shall be based on the will of all people, Black and White, and that all adults shall be entitled to a Universal suffrage, and that all national groups shall be equal and racialism shall be considered a serious state crime.

This distinguishes the Congress movement from the Nationalist Party Government policy of apartheid, United Party policy of segregation and the Labour and Federal Party policies of qualified franchise.

To many Europeans, this policy is "unrealistic", yet to the followers of the Congress movement, this policy is not only correct in principle, but represents the only real alternative to apartheid, segregation or White domination. Yet though Congressmen are convinced that the struggle for the Freedom Charter is the only correct policy, they are prepared and anxious to co-operate on specific issues with all who oppose any manifestation of oppression and apartheid.

The alliance in the struggle against apartheid is broadening. Congress realises that not all people who are opposed to apartheid accept the Freedom Charter. But if for instance, the Liberal Party, the Labour Party, or the Black Sash Movement do not yet accept all demands of the Charter, they may nevertheless stand with us on many questions.

An important step in the direction of broadening the basis of a united front against apartheid was taken at the recent All-In African Conference at Bloemfontein. This Conference which was called to discuss the Tomlinson Report, after full discussion, held in a calm and objective atmosphere, unanimously rejected the Tomlinson Report and the policy of apartheid. It further called for

a multi-racial Conference and concluded its three-day session by making the following stirring call to the country:—

“This Conference is convinced that the present policy of apartheid constitutes a serious threat to race relations in the country. Therefore, in the interests of all the people and the future of the country, this Conference calls upon all national organisations to mobilise all people, irrespective of race, colour or creed, to form a united front against apartheid.”

It is heartening to note that some of the newspapers in the country welcome the proposal for the calling of a multi-racial Conference to consider an acceptable solution to the country's problems. Most of these newspapers have hitherto tacitly or expressly supported reactionary policies. Their attitude is an indication that the idea of a united front is gaining ground.

Thus we see two powerful forces crystallising out in the country — the one represented by the Congress movement and its allies, and the other by the Nationalist Party. As far as the Nationalist Party is concerned, any serious analysis will reveal that it has reached its high-water mark. There is no possibility of the Nationalists growing stronger than they are at present. They have played all their cards, but one — namely, the Republican issue, which itself appears unlikely to arouse any greater enthusiasm for the Nationalists than exists today. Already there are signs that the edge of the Nationalist blitzkrieg is blunted in the face of the determined and growing resistance of the people.

On the other hand, the liberatory movement does not only derive strength from the knowledge that the Colonial peoples everywhere are achieving their independence, and that a larger part of the world is hostile to racialism and White domination, but even more than that, they derive strength from the fact that their forces are growing, the resentment against oppression is becoming greater every day, and in particular, the Europeans of the country are gradually beginning to see that South Africa has no choice but to follow the road to a multi-racial society free from sectional domination and on the basis of the Charter of Human Rights.

The coming year will be decisive in the struggle against the Nationalists. Even the United Party will have to make up its mind. It will be faced with the question of joining with the Nationalists completely and sharing the fate which will face all racialists, or joining with the larger family of the democratic forces against apartheid.