
L I B E R A L O P I N I O N

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W H A T N O W ?

On the day after the general election, when results from all but the safest of safe Nationalist seats were in, somebody remarked that South Africa would now have the worst Parliament in the world. If this is not absolutely true it is very nearly so. For a long time we have had one of the worst governments in the world. Now we have one of the worst oppositions as well.

While there were still Labour, Liberal and Natives' Representative members, forthright and principled opposition to apartheid was common in Parliament. When the United Party eliminated the Labour members, the Liberals and other Natives' Representatives remained. By the time the Government had disposed of them, the Progressives had emerged. Now the United Party has virtually eliminated them and, in the new Parliament, only Mrs. Helen Suzman will bring some sanity into an increasingly unreal

institution. In a world which has rejected racialism, the South African Parliament will present the strange spectacle of a white racist government sitting down to confront a white racist opposition and to debate with it the merits of two impracticable racist policies.

Point of no Return

In spite of this it would be ridiculous not to be encouraged by the number of votes polled in this election by Progressive and, to a lesser extent, Liberal candidates.

But against this gain must be weighed the fact that Dr. Verwoerd has more seats now than ever before and that he has committed himself, within the next five years, to take the application of apartheid to the point from which (he says) there will be no turning back. His cabinet inspires no confidence in anyone with any respect for democratic principles. His Minister of Justice continues to threaten "agitators", and there is every reason to believe that he will bring in legislation next session aimed at curbing still further the activities of his critics. Mr. Waring and Mr. Trollip have been drafted into the cabinet, in return for joining the Nationalist Party, but this does not indicate a softening Government attitude. All it means is that these two have now gone where they always belonged.

Democratic Veneer

Wherever the real opposition to Dr. Verwoerd's threatened attempt to make apartheid work comes from in the immediate future, it is not going to come from Parliament. That

is certain. Parliament, over the years, has become more and more of a rubber stamp, useful to the Government only because it gives to its decisions a respectable democratic veneer. It is certainly not the place where Nationalists are persuaded to change their ideas, and it is certainly not Parliamentary debates which have made some white South Africans start thinking. They have started thinking, to the tune of 70,000 Progressive and Liberal votes, but the reasons for their doing so are to be found outside, not inside, Parliament -- in the Defiance Campaign, in the activities of the Liberal Party and the Black Sash, in the events leading up to last year's emergency and the emergency itself, and in South Africa's isolation from the Commonwealth and the world.

Main fight Outside

Where does the Liberal Party stand in the post-election picture? The success of the Progressive Party in terms of the votes in polled in the election will undoubtedly make it more difficult to recruit white Liberals for a time. But this should only be a temporary problem. The fact of the matter is that the main fight against apartheid in the future, as in the past, is going to be carried on outside Parliament. This is something most Progressives have still to learn. Liberals can help them to learn it.

Dr. Verwoerd is not going to stand quietly by while he is voted out of power, nor are his supporters going to desert him until they are convinced that his policies can't work. It is still important to face white South

Africans with Liberal policies in elections, but there is only one force which can challenge Dr. Verwoerd and shake the confidence of his supporters and that is the combined opposition of all those who oppose apartheid. This opposition must be soundly based on a complete acceptance of South Africa's non-racial destiny if it is to be an effective answer to racialism. Only the Liberal Party has so far faced the full implications of South Africa's non-racial future. Here, too, Liberals have something to teach not only Progressives, but most other opponents of apartheid.

Opposition at Every Level

We would make a serious mistake if we were to underestimate Dr. Verwoerd's threat to take apartheid to the point of no return in the next five years. Short of abandoning it, this is the only thing he can do to persuade the world that it is a policy which offers something to everybody. That he will fail is certain but that he will try is equally certain, and we can now expect a more ruthless application of apartheid measures outside the "reserves" and a consequent increase in frustration, bitterness and straight race hatred.

In this situation the first task of Liberals is to fight a "holding action" to oppose at every level every single attempt to impose apartheid, and to oppose these attempts non-racially. This is the only way to prevent a disastrous drift to race hatred.

The second task is to build an organization of all races throughout

South Africa which can present non-violent and disciplined opposition to apartheid in the extra-Parliamentary field. This will not come easily. Opposition of this kind requires self-discipline at the individual level and it requires the discipline, which only comes from confidence in an effective organization, if it is to be successful on a wider scale. And if such opposition is to mean anything at all for the future of South Africa it must be carried out by people

of all races together.

Giving the Lead

In building such an opposition the Liberal Party is better equipped to give the lead than any other organization. A difficult task? Of course it is. But time, the world and most South Africans are on the side of the non-racial ideal to which Liberals subscribe. What is needed is the resolution and energy to build the organizational framework to turn the ideal into reality.

T H E C O N V E N T I O N M O V E M E N T

A remarkable feature of the South African political scene during 1961 has been the growth of what has come to be known as the "Convention Movement". Two very successful conventions have been held, the Natal Convention in April and the Malmesbury Convention of Coloured leaders in early July.

Radical Changes

Although the scope of both these "conventions" was limited, they had two important characteristics in common. In the first place, they were supported by many people whose views might generally be regarded as conservative and who would certainly not have attended them a few years ago.

Secondly, in spite of this, they came out, almost without a dissenting voice, for radical changes towards a shared future for all South Africans. Universal franchise and an integrated educational system were to such radical changes contemplated. Neither convention discussed how this

new, shared future was to be achieved but both agreed that there should be a similar "convention" on a national scale as a first step.

Further Steps

Since the two Conventions met, the first steps towards such a national gathering have been taken. The Natal Convention Committee initiated a move which culminated in a widely representative meeting of South Africans of all groups, from all over the country, in July, in Johannesburg. A working committee to explore the ground for a national consultation was set up.

The follow-up to the Malmesbury Convention has been more spectacular. A Conference of Representatives from all races, mainly from the Cape, but including several from other provinces, took place in Claremont just before the election. A week later a regional conference was held in Port Elizabeth. Both meet-