

very often gets them. We can't do that. We can't offer a kind of cops-and-robbers attraction; that can only be done by the Nationalist Party, that is forever fighting with its back to the wall and urging people to get inside the white laager. Except in the overheated minds of the Security Branch we have no cloak-and-dagger stuff. The only appeal of the Liberal Party and of liberalism is to ask South Africans of all races to join in applying their minds to South Africa's problems. This is not glamorous. And it is emphatically not easy. Seventy years ago Keir Hardie told the Labour Party in Britain to think. "It will hurt like hell at first", he said, "but keep on trying."

Years ago a friend asked me: "Can't we have a militant liberalism?" You can't — by definition you can't. What liberalism asks is a much harder thing. It is the intellectual equivalent of "blood, sweat and tears" that it calls for.

Thus far, in history, liberalism has never called in vain. South Africa has never been without men and women of all races who have devoted themselves to liberalism. So, let's not waste time on dramatics, but let's get on quietly with what we have to do.

I have, in the past, quoted John Morley and I shall no doubt do so again:

"Let us not be afraid of our own shadows. We have principles we believe in, we have faith, we have great traditions, and we have a great cause behind us and before us. Let us not lose courage and straightforwardness."

— From an address to the Annual Conference of the Natal Provincial Division of the Liberal Party — May, 1967.

WILL BOBBY BOB TOO ?

By "Vortex"

I

IN spite of South Africa's so-called isolation from the rest of the world (in fact, of course, it is the rest of the world that has isolated itself from South Africa), our country manages to keep abreast in many fields of human achievement. One such field — one that is sometimes neglected, surprisingly, by our otherwise enterprising propagandists — is philosophy.

The philosophers and psychologists of the so-called West were given a rude shock recently when they realised that a most significant philosophical truth had

been enunciated, and with remarkably little fuss, in maligned South Africa. And it is an indication of the intellectual vitality of the Republic, of the wide diffusion of probing and profound thought, that the great formulation was made not by a professional thinker or research worker, but by the Prime Minister himself. Happy is the nation that is ruled by a philosopher-guardian of the sort that Plato used to dream about!

In a fine speech Mr. Vorster pointed out (modestly and casually: he gave no sign that he was breaking through one of the big mental sound-barriers) that human intercourse is in one respect far more complicated than most people have naïvely supposed. He took the case of a meeting between two Prime Ministers. Until now most people have assumed that such a meeting would be, to put it in layman's language, both a personal confrontation and a matter of international relationship. What Mr. Vorster demonstrated — brilliantly, and with his usual lucidity — is that such a meeting may often be EITHER personal OR international. . . . Now this newly-discovered truth is clearly of tremendous importance: it is staggering that the world has not come upon it before.

II

GREAT VALUE

In considering the great value of Mr. Vorster's discovery, let us stick to the instances, the experimental data, that he cited, and to his own field of reference.

A white South African cannot (it is axiomatic) have a social relationship with a black man. But his relationship with a black man from another country can be of a decently unsocial, cleanly international nature. And once things have been put on a properly inhuman footing, great freedom of intercourse is possible: a white man can, without any unnaturalness, drink tea with a black man, take a meal with him, even (some progressive thinkers daringly affirm) pass food to him. In older days people would have suspected that ugly feelings of friendship might creep into such an event; but Mr. Vorster has now shown that this is not so — that the personal and the international are different in kind, not merely in degree. A white man may, then, have dealings with a foreign black man — and even perhaps with a foreign black woman — without compromising himself in the slightest: the conversation between them is tainted by no trace of affection or esteem; their handshakes are touchingly free of sincerity.

COROLLARIES

Once an intellectual achievement has been announced to the world, it is of course seized on and developed by many alert minds. No people have been

quicker off the mark, however, than Mr. Vorster's own disciples, his personal research team. Already they have elaborated some important corollaries to the essential principle. Here are three of them:—

(a) If the circumstances are such as to permit human as well as political relationship (as for example in the case of a meeting between two white Prime Ministers), both parties would be able to practise what the research team calls "bobbing" — that is, a switching constantly from the personal plane to the wholly-distinct political plane of intercourse. The aim of each person would of course be to get the other to accept a statement as having political validity when in fact it was merely personal, and vice versa.

(b) Even when a white man is meeting a black man internationally, a certain amount of controlled bobbing may be permitted. (It is rumoured, incidentally, that Mr. Vorster's legal experts are already at work on a Bobbing Licence Bill, and a Bill for the Standardisation and Stabilisation of Separate Bobbing Facilities.) For example, a white Prime Minister may bob a little at the airport: as the black visitor appears at the door of the aircraft, the white man may wave to him, if he wishes to, in a wholly personal way; as the black man walks down the steps and across the tarmac, he may be smiled at semi-personally (or, it seems, in the case of a black woman, demi-semi-personally). But of course once the two are within a yard of each other — the more conservative members of the team say three yards of each other — internationalism takes over.

FURTHER SITUATIONS

There are some further situations, however, in which bobbing may be permissible. If, say, a black man

should for any reason spill his international teacup, or fail to notice on which side his impersonal bread is buttered, the white man is permitted, even urged, to sympathise internationally, but to laugh personally. The research team has predicted that, for all white negotiators with black men, the frown-smile will become an indispensable facial expression. Then again, if the black man should by any chance praise the white man's country, a gentle bob, performed paternally, is allowable. (The theoretical justification for this bob — known as the Strydom bob — is that the relationship momentarily moves in the direction of the traditional master-servant one.) Finally there is the Van der Merwe bob — a mixture of a cry of pain and a guffaw, reserved especially for those moments when a fellow white man refers to a visiting black Prime Minister as "boy".

(c) Mr. Vorster's philosophical principle has another very valuable advantage for South Africa. For some time the Republic has been looking for a method of clinching, of formalising, its relationship with those countries that have rashly isolated themselves. It is now possible, by a simple application of the Vorster theorem, to internationalise all hostile countries and their representatives. This procedure would have a double delicacy: on the one hand, it is a new and interesting way of being cold and unfriendly to isolated nations; and yet, on the other hand, it will make it possible to establish closer and more communicative relations, since apparently-personal conversations and apparently-cordial handshakes will not be in danger of meaning anything. Thus, when the tea-break comes in the talks between our Prime Minister and the visiting Senator Kennedy, Mr. Vorster will be able to have his melktert and eat it.