

LIBERAL OPINION



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WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE ?

By THE NATIONAL CHAIRMAN

The Liberal Party in South Africa has reached its nadir. Repeated bannings have deprived us of the instructed manpower which we have built up and through which we were able to keep in touch with country branches. Never have there been so many of our members under restriction as at the present time. With the General Election only a few weeks away from us we have regretfully had to abandon the idea of putting up even one Liberal candidate for Parliament.

In view of this it would be surprising if the question did not arise in many hearts whether it is worth continuing as a political party or not. Ought we to go into indefinite recess or ought we to reconstitute ourselves as a purely educational body without political aims or hopes? Where do we go from here?

The principles for which we stand are very dear to us and we believe that they are essential for the future happiness and good government of our country. One does not commit one's self to such principles lightly in the atmosphere of South African life. We did not enter the Liberal Party lightly. These principles have not lost their validity nor their imperative call to loyal consciences. The need

is greater than it has ever been. It is therefore no time for those of us who have a real sense of patriotic duty to withdraw from our position.

COURAGE AND HOPE

The Liberal Party is therefore not going to be dissolved. We are going to continue with courage and hope. Our main task is obviously education, but we are not going to close the door to contesting Parliamentary elections the minute we are in a position to do so. We know deep in our hearts that we are not using or desirous of using subversive methods or sabotage, as we also know that our colleagues who have been banned stood four-square for constitutional and peaceful methods. If we are banned, let it be, as it will be, a tyrannical act of government. Let it not be due to anything in our own conduct which could conceivably render banning justified.

We must meet and discuss new techniques. They will obviously have to do with methods of educating public opinion. It may be that we shall have to concentrate on liberal doctrines and principles and less on the Liberal Party as such. We have a real obligation laid upon us to get across to our fellow citizens the principles for which we stand. We believe them to be just, we also believe them to be in the best political interests of South Africa from the long term point of view. Let us take heart of grace, determined to keep our subscriptions paid up and our activities greater than ever before. Let us also be flexible enough to seek new methods and new ways of making our influence felt.

This is our position in the year 1966, at the lowest ebb of our fortunes. It might help us to remember the words of Marshal Foch in a similar time of darkness: "My centre is crumbling, my left wing is beginning to retreat, my right wing is out-flanked. I advance."

EDGAR BROOKES.

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U.D.I.

Since Mr. Smith declared his illegal independence on November 11th the Rhodesian situation has changed almost daily, and it may be quite different on the day when this article is read to what it was on the day it was written.

As the New Year started there was a feeling in the air that what had gone before was no more than preliminary skirmishing, backed up by a slow and largely invisible build-up of Mr. Wilson's economic weapons. Sanctions had not yet had an opportunity to make themselves really felt and Mr. Smith's supporters were able to ignore the future, drown their uneasy fears about it in the Christmas spirit and put off until tomorrow thoughts which did not bear thinking today.

1966 is that tomorrow and, whatever other uncertainties it may hold, there is one thing about it which is quite certain. Before the year is out Mr. Smith will either be toppled or be very near to doing so, or he will have survived and Western influence in Africa will have suffered a set-back from which it may never recover. And not only the West. Non-racialism in Africa, too, will have been driven desperately on the defensive. The Lagos Prime Ministers' conference had wisely given Mr. Wilson time in which to make his sanctions policy work, but if it has not worked by July, anything can happen.

SOUTH AFRICAN REACTIONS

South African political reactions to UDI have been more than interesting. Dr. Verwoerd continues to be extremely cautious and probably deliberately confusing. Sir de Villiers Graaff is all for Smith. No doubt he hopes that white South Africa's obvious emotional involvement with its Rhodesian "kith and kin", and the fact that only he has come out in open support of them, will bring him votes and seats in the General Election. We think he will be disappointed. The Progressives have adopted a line that "this is no affair of ours and we must keep out of it or we may get caught up in the backwash". It is rumoured that they are gravely split over UDI, many of their supporters wanting all-out support of Mr. Smith as, clearly, do many of Dr. Verwoerd's.