

ASSUMPTIONS: A REBELLIOUS MONOLOGUE

by Edgar H. Brookes

In the long years of controversy about South Africa's racial situation there is nothing more annoying than the way in which arguments are based on unproved assumptions and slogans are allowed to take the place of reason. Such assumptions are found all the way along the line which separates Nationalism from Communism, sometimes among those who are so mild that they hardly count as colleagues, sometimes among those who are so ferocious that they would be almost more acceptable as enemies. There are, for instance, those who assume that always, everywhere and in all circumstances force is wrong, which may conceivably be a good tactical argument to put up under examination by the Security Police, but leaves one ashamed to think that such men can decorate themselves with the name "Liberal" borne by Hofer and Garibaldi or the name "South African" borne by John Vorster or Christiaan de Wet. Their assumption is that rebellion must be wrong because St. Paul so taught a struggling Christian Church in the mighty and law-preserving Roman Empire. Even more annoying are those who meet the most indefensible bannings with the remark, "Where there's smoke there's fire." The assumption here is that the Security Police never take action without good reason, are never misinformed and never make a mistake. And yet, even if all these assumptions are true, can any Liberal defend punishing a man for his opinions, and that without a fair trial?

But further along the Liberal spectrum there are those who, while protesting vigorously against this flouting of the rule of law, rather inconsistently assume that the South African situation can never be put right except by force. It may be said that this assumption underlies a very large proportion of the anti-apartheid movements in Great Britain. It may regrettably turn out to be true, but at present it is pure assumption. Other remedies have never been given a fair trial. Moreover (and this one finds peculiarly annoying) it must always be someone else's force. Freedom fighters are vigorously supported by students and well-to-do professional men who have not the slightest intention of joining them and who (incidentally) would be far from welcome if they tried to.

A writer on French politics cites the case of a Frenchman who voted Communist. His friends who knew him to be

an anti-clerical bourgeois supporter of the very individualistic French Radical Party asked him why he voted Communist. "Well," he said, "I have always voted for the most extreme and now **they** are the most extreme". There is much of this striving after the reputation of extremism for its own sake and for one's own glory in certain circles among young South Africans. "No enemies to the left" is an ideal which requires some sort of defence before we can all accept it. It is a slogan based on unproved assumptions, and historic liberalism is based on a courageous use of reason, not on slogans.

Can it be expected that South Africa's affairs are capable of solution without bloodshed unless some sections of South African whites can be led to change their opinions? Yet there are those who will neither use their abilities to convert their white fellow-citizens nor their strong right arms to assist the freedom fighters. They prefer to win a reputation as valorous leftists by unconciliatory speeches and ineffective action.

On the Government side there are plenty of apologists who argue that we are not so bad after all because there are other sinners. What would a priest make of a penitent who said, "Father, I have sinned by my fault, by my own fault, by my own very grievous fault, but Mrs Jones has done a lot worse"? But what a **gaffe** we have fallen into here! We are actually quoting religion as if it still mattered, as if it could ever be anything but a bourgeois opiate for the masses! Well this is a pure assumption too. Are men like Trevor Huddleston and Ambrose Reeves not to be honoured among Liberals? Or are they to be accepted with the reservation that, strong-minded in everything else, they are weak-minded fanatics about religion.

Imagine a religious revival in the N.G. Kerk which led it to pronounce against apartheid. One does not necessarily suggest that this **will** happen, but if it **did** happen it would quite obviously be more valuable than blowing up twenty pylons or stopping forty rugby matches.

Let us come back to the question of other people's sins. I do not think that General Amin in Uganda is any better than Mr Vorster in South Africa, but can one imagine an S.R.C. in any South African English-speaking University

passing a resolution condemning General Amin? There is undoubtedly a double standard of judgement in international affairs. We as South Africans have no right to grumble. We deserve the criticisms which are passed upon us. But on what basis is colour differentiation worse in itself than arbitrary executions, the throwing overboard of the rule of law, or the imprisonment of political opponents? This is one of the many assumptions. It may be provable but it should be proved.

Or is it assumed that things which are wrong if done by a white man become noble if done by a black? We all know if we have studied the Africa of the 1890's or 1900's that white men have been responsible for much evil. But has the liberation of Africa made evil good if done by black men? This is another unproved assumption.

It is further assumed that no amount of honest talking in a friendly atmosphere can produce worth-while results. Why not try it? It is assumed that South Africa with its large white population of three centuries' standing must go essentially the same way as Zambia or Tanzania. Is this so?

Quite undoubtedly we cannot heal the ills of our country lightly. A high price must be paid. No window-dressing in

the Transkei or elsewhere will carry conviction. The white man has to learn to be a fellow-servant of the South African community, not its master. Alike as regards the franchise and as regards wages immense changes have to be made. We Liberals must not underestimate the difficulties of our task. But why make those difficulties greater by unproved assumptions and undigested slogans and an attempt to link up our terrific struggle with theoretical leftism?

The writer of this querulous monologue may claim to be a Liberal. Since he has publicly more than once advocated a common roll with no loading of the franchise, he may claim to be a Radical. Though Socialism is a permissible creed for a Liberal he has no ambition to be a Socialist, and nothing in the world will make him a Communist. His Liberalism is deeply rooted in history, and he would make his own those lines of Robert Browning written in reply to the question, "Why are you a Liberal?"

"But little can or do the best of us.
That little is achieved through liberty.
Who dares hold, emancipated thus,
His brother should continue bound? Not I
Who live, love, labour freely, nor discuss
A brother's right to freedom—That is why! □

MEMORANDUM ON THE PASS LAWS AND INFLUX CONTROL

The Black Sash has issued a revised edition of their memorandum. It is a reference book of great value and can be obtained from the Black Sash, 37 Harvard Buildings, Joubert Street, Johannesburg, for 50c.

The following is the introduction to the memorandum:

The pass laws are being evermore rigidly applied and more and more people are being affected by their implementation. Government policy is to reduce the number of Africans residing in the "prescribed areas" and to ensure that as many as possible of the workers needed in the metropolitan areas are migrants. In the year July 1970 to June 1971, 615 075 people were prosecuted for pass law offences; that is, an average of 1 685 prosecutions per day.

We are deeply concerned about the effect these laws are having on the African people, morally, socially and economically. We are concerned about the discrimination, the injustice, the breakup of family life, the increase in crime, the poverty, the insecurity of all urban Africans,

and the breakdown of the whole social fabric of the African community.

The system used to control the use of African labour has dehumanised the official, the employer and the African worker. It has made authority a monster, and the worker a labour unit. *The pass laws are inhuman laws and they cannot be administered humanely.*

This Memorandum is based on the knowledge gained from the work in the Black Sash Advice Offices in Johannesburg and Cape Town. The examples given are factual, from information given to us and they are typical of many similar cases in the files. Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the people concerned. For every person who comes to the Advice Offices for help, there are hundreds more who are in the same predicament.