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THE ROLE OF LIBERAL FORCES.

It is strange but true that the more rigid the South African Government gets, the more fluid does the future seem to be. No one really believes that the present state of affairs can last, not even the loudest supporters of "baasskap" or white supremacy.

How is this change going to take place? No one really knows. I don't believe anyone really believes it will take place gradually, not even the United Party, which stands for gradual and safe change. Will the change come about by revolution or evolution? Most thinking people agree, that the longer the choice is put off, the more indistinguishable these two will be.

In other words, the choice is between revolutionary evolution or just plain revolution. It is the role of liberal forces to hasten evolution so as to avoid revolution. Revolution in South Africa will not be what revolution was in North America, where it led to the creation of the world's greatest democracy. Revolution in South Africa would lead to a totalitarian state; but also it would lead to a poorer spiritual and material life for all. This remark reflects, not on the nature of African people, but only on the inevitable nature of revolution in Africa.

We are in fact already in this pre-revolutionary stage, although this is not evident to all. What is more, we shall at no point be able to predict whether our attempts to break the ice may not precipitate an avalanche of destruction. We must proceed on the

assumption that evolution has a chance, and that the new South Africa we aim for will in fact be a better and happier country for all, except those who stand for unqualified white supremacy.

There is also a psychological reason for proceeding on this assumption. If one thought there was no hope for evolution, what point would there be in working for it? In other words, this hope is the motive for one's work. In the realm of religion one may pursue right for right's sake; but in the realm of politics one pursues right for the sake of oneself, one's children, one's friends, one's country.

And what is the right? Simply it is this - a South Africa in which the use of opportunity, the exercise of rights, the assumption of responsibilities, are open to all South Africans, whosoever they may be.

It is this political aim that immediately brings together liberals from the Liberal Party, the African National Congress, the Indian Congress, the Congress of Democrats, and other bodies. This cooperation is not always easy, because clearly the different organisations represent different viewpoints, and very importantly, different temperaments. But on certain specific clear-cut issues, cooperation has been close.

All these organisations, for example, reject the Group Areas Act, that infamous law which is going to divide the whole country into racial areas, and which means in effect that hundreds

of thousands of non-white citizens are to be uprooted, are to be moved further and further away from the cities, and are in many cases to suffer severe material loss.

The women of these organisations have cooperated closely in opposing the carrying of "passes" by African women, while both men and women have cooperated in raising money for the defence and maintenance of the 156 accused persons on trial for treason.

Furthermore, the forces have cooperated in the organisation of a multi-racial conference to be held in December in Johannesburg, which will be the successor to the famous conference called at Bloemfontein last year by the Interdenominational African Ministers' Federation, and which will consider the nature and structure of a multi-racial society as distinct from an apartheid society.

All these things have a tremendous importance in the fight against a government pledged to racial separation and the racial domination of the white people.

It is something to be proud of, that after nine years of harsh racial legislation, there are still so many people who, by their very cooperation, reject apartheid openly and completely.

It is this rejection, more than any other single factor, which has filled the Government with so much uncertainty about the practicability of its divinely-ordained mission. And the growth of uncertainty in the minds of rulers is a powerful aid to evolutionary change.

Of course it may also be a stimulus to revolution, and

this is precisely the accusation brought against liberal forces by white supremacists. I have already discussed this possibility and have nothing more to add. Change may well be dangerous, but rigidity is more dangerous still; that is our view.

Liberals are often taunted that in the revolution, their heads will be the first to roll. That is one of the reasons why they try to hasten evolutionary change. They want to keep their heads in the days of liberation; just as they try to keep them now, while so many around them are losing theirs.

Liberal forces have another important function to perform in the fight against apartheid. They are the only forces in the country that enjoy general world support. This is not a question of politics, it is simply a question of race discrimination. Liberal forces stand above all else for the abolition of the colour-bar; therefore the whole world, except the white supremacists of Algeria, Kenya, and backward areas like Mississippi, stands on their side.

There is already a growing dissatisfaction in world circles with South Africa's colour-bar in sport and art. There is growing evidence that South Africa will eventually be excluded from international participation, or will be represented by organisations largely non-white but having no colour-bar.

It will be the function of liberal forces to see that this outside pressure is maintained. Such actions are of course regarded as unpatriotic by white supremacists, but are welcomed by the great

majority of the South African people.

I shall conclude with a few words about the liberals who form the Liberal Party. At the moment the Party is active in cooperation with other liberal and democratic forces, but of course its cooperation is only of value while it maintains a vigorous identity of its own.

This raises certain problems, and one might as well face them. The Party is open to all races, and therefore arouses antagonism amongst some members of the Congresses, which are all un-racial organisations. Further, the Party is not wedded to any particular economic theory, which again arouses antagonism amongst some. Thirdly, the Party antagonises those who would not hesitate to exploit bitterness and resentment; it is therefore regarded by them as unrealistic, sentimental, and worst of all, cowardly.

In my view, cooperation will remove some of these difficulties, though not all.

The Party therefore has a specific function amongst liberal forces. Being a multi-racial party it has a duty to convert white people as well as to draw in non-white people. It must try simultaneously to persuade white South Africa to conquer its fear, and to convince non-white South Africa that the Party is not a hypocritical front of white supremacists.

The attempt to perform simultaneously both these tasks is very difficult, and draws the fire of both left and right. But every organisation faces just such dilemmas; and what is more, this

dilemma is a result of psychological necessity.

One thing you may be sure of, if the Liberal Party should die, then that is a sign that the stage is set for a bitter black-white struggle that will poison the life of South Africa and its people for generations to come.

Having discussed what I think is an inescapable topic, I return to the theme of "liberal forces" in general.

Our first task, briefly, is to cooperate to keep vigorously alive opposition to racist themes, and to keep alive the sturdy independence of all kinds of people who reject absolutely any ideas of State divinity and human insignificance.

Our second task, briefly, is to keep touch with the humanitarian opinion of the outside world, to keep it informed, and to enlist its help when justice demands it.

It is my reasonable hope that in doing these things we shall learn a truer love of country, which will save us from partisan loyalties, and will lay the foundations of a new South Africa that will belong to all.