

# REPORT ON CONGRESS

The second National Congress of the Liberal Party was held at the Kajee Memorial Hall, Durban, over the long week-end of the 10th—12th July.

Unfortunately Mrs. Ballinger, who was due to open the Congress on Saturday morning, was taken ill on her way down from Johannesburg and was not able to be present. Instead her opening address was read by Advocate Leslie Rubin, Chairman of the Cape Division of the Party. In it Mrs. Ballinger referred to "the most significant development in recent times in South Africa"—the emergence of Liberalism as an accepted political force. Mrs. Ballinger went on to say "All Opposition parties offer a brand of Liberalism and even the Nationalists, in their milder moments, tell the world that they are the real liberals". All these were heartening signs of a saner outlook in South Africa but they were inadequate, because they were accommodations between the less liberal attitude of the past and the more liberal attitudes of the present. Today the Liberal Party was the only party which really knew where it proposed to go and which had really made up its mind about the type of society it proposed to establish.

After the opening address, Congress went into closed session, with attendance limited to delegates and observers. There were some 60 delegates present, representing members throughout the Union, and a varying number of observers.

Saturday morning was devoted to reports given by each of the Provincial Chairmen and those who were present were able to gain a clear idea of progress made during the first year of the Party's existence. It has been considerable and encouraging.

On Saturday afternoon delegates divided up into Commissions, each one of these given the job of thrashing out policies on the basis of memoranda submitted to it, or of revising and amplifying policies which had been accepted at the previous year's Congress. By Saturday evening most of the Commissions had completed their work and thereafter Congress met in plenary session. Discussion covered a wide field. In addition to the Policy reports, the future of the Party, improvements in its organisation, and questions of publicity and fund-raising were discussed at some length—although it is clear that insufficient time was devoted to the vital problems of Party organisation with which we are confronted.

Of the various Commission reports, those on External Affairs, Housing and Civil Rights were accepted without the Commissions' recommendations being altered to any marked extent. It was decided that those on Agriculture, Liquor and Health should be sent to continuing commissions, which would sit after Congress and report back to the National Committee.

Discussion on the report of the Franchise Commission occupied a considerable time. Two points of view were strongly advocated—that which felt that the Party must recognise the Universal Adult Franchise as its ultimate aim, the other feeling that a *qualified* Franchise, based on compulsory education, should be the final objective. After very full and free discussion the former view prevailed, the Universal Adult Franchise was recognised as the Party's ultimate objective and in a note of explanation reference was made to the stages by which this objective might have to be reached and which would "have to be determined by interim qualifications for the franchise designed to create an informed electorate and provide opportunity for their obtaining political experience".

In its relations with other organisations the Party decided to use its influence to attempt to liberalise the existing Opposition parties and to co-operate with them where possible. It also placed on record "its sincere desire to co-operate with the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress and other representative bodies of Non-European political opinion in their struggle for the removal of all discrimination against the Non-European peoples".

The Education Commission report was accepted by Congress with certain minor alterations but it was agreed that the whole question of the control of education—whether by the Union Education Department, Provincial Councils, Local Boards, etc.—should be referred to a special committee set up after the Congress. As regards Economic Policy, discussion centred around the wisdom of committing the Party to any rigid policy expressly based on private enterprise and it was eventually agreed to accept a fairly elastic formula, based on private enterprise, but subject to the provision by the State of those services which are today generally regarded as lying within the sphere of its responsibility.

Congress had completed its business by lunch-time on Monday and after a meeting of the National Committee that afternoon a very pleasant braaivleis was held at Mr. Alan Paton's residence in the evening.