

CONTACT

DECEMBER 1954

“A GREAT STEP FORWARD”

A MONTH ago it was still possible to feel faintly hopeful that, by Christmas time, one would, for the first time in many years, be able to extend the season's customary feelings of goodwill towards the United Party. For, after all, had we not been promised time and time again during 1954 that it would take a “great step forward” at its November Congress? It is perhaps as well that we have come to know the U.P. and not to expect too much of it—for that means that, although it seldom gives us a pleasant surprise, nor does it often disappoint us.

The proposals which Mr. Strauss put forward, and which his Party accepted, at Bloemfontein covered a number of different aspects of “native” policy. It is right that we should examine some of the most important of these proposals so that we may be able to determine whether the U.P. has, in fact, gone forward, whether it has only done a little “side-tracking” or whether it has merely indulged in a little of what physical training instructors call “running on the spot.”

The first point which Mr. Strauss made clear was his acceptance of the economic integration of the African people. He did not mention that this fact—and economic integration is a fact—was conceded by the Fagan Report, upon which the United Party based much of its 1948 election campaign, and was presumably, therefore, accepted by his Party then. Neither did Mr. Strauss show himself willing to face up even to the economic consequences of this acceptance because he almost immediately went on to say that he stood by the maintenance of the Industrial Colour Bar and that his Party was not prepared to recognise African Trade Unions. There is no progress to report here.

The United Party is now prepared to grant freehold rights in urban areas to Africans “who have given long and faithful service”. This is an improvement on the existing position.

In the political field the United Party will return to 1936. It will give Africans two more Senators, try to revive the Natives' Representative Council, and give Africans more opportunities for self-government in their own areas. This particular step forward will take the Party back to a plan which was a failure 18 years ago and upon which it is no longer possible to build anything for the future. The Party will introduce a new element by extending the individual vote, in the Senate elections, to certain categories of Africans. Does it seriously think that any self-respecting man will exercise a vote in an election in which he can be out-voted, a thousand times and more, by a chief representing his tribe?

As far as the Pass Laws are concerned the United Party proposes greater simplification and wider exemptions. Has it forgotten that its own Smit Committee Report commented as long ago as 1942 that “rather than perpetuate the state of affairs described . . . it would be better to face the abolition of the Pass Laws”?

Other steps which the Party took were to accept the principle of enforced removal in the interests of segregation and to decide that the Mixed Marriages and Immorality Acts should remain on the Statute Book. Again, we are bound to report “No progress”.

The tragedy of the United Party is that it no longer knows what happens in South Africa. It produces a policy for Africans without knowing—or perhaps caring—what Africans think or want. It gives thunderous notice of a great step forward and produces something which was already out of date in the Cape a hundred years ago. Perhaps worst of all, it claims that this policy is “in harmony with our fundamental concepts of Western Christian Civilization.” Is it presumptuous to ask upon which fundamental Christian concepts it bases its proposals to let men live and work in towns, but only to own homes after “long and faithful service”: to let men vote but only where their votes can have the minimum effect upon the way in which they are governed: to let men work but to deny the best jobs to them?

It seems that the steps the United Party takes are rather like those taken by a small boy, who decides to pit himself against a moving stairway. With one step he may seem to gain a little, with another he may hold his own but, on the whole, he is too small and loses ground continuously. So also is the United Party too small in imagination and too restricted in vision and so also does it lose ground continuously as it attempts to match its mincing steps against the march of events in South Africa.

THE LIBERAL PRINCIPLE

THE task of defining Liberalism deserves to be undertaken on three main grounds. First, because historically it is a term which has done duty for a variety of outlooks and policies, according to circumstances of time and place. Secondly, because in our own country and some others it has become a term of political abuse, or at least a philosophy no longer fashionable to hold. And thirdly, because no political party can afford either to sever itself from, or to exaggerate the meaning of, the philosophical presuppositions on which its policies rest.

On the first point, it is well known that the word "Liberal" has been used in many ways. It has been used in support of the doctrine of economic *laissez faire*, and of the seemingly opposite practice of compulsory social insurance. Similarly, in the political field, Liberalism developed historically out of resistance to the absolutism of princes or classes or nationalities, taking its stand on an assertion of individual or group rights, and democratic values; yet other generations of Liberals have been as concerned over the tyranny of the majority as over the tyranny of a dictator or a clique.

In the light of these apparent inconsistencies it has not been difficult for the opponents of the Liberal idea in this country and elsewhere, but especially in this country, to use the word "Liberal" in a highly obscurantist manner. We may quote as an example the familiar use of "Liberal" and "kafferboetie" as synonymous terms, with the suggestion that both imply the partisanship of one group against another. A further common device is to describe people or policies as "liberalistic", the "istic" normally conveying malicious imprecision.

The essence of Liberalism as it has developed in all societies consists in the importance which it attaches to the individual personality, as something of value in its own right, and with a legitimate claim to full opportunities for development. Some Liberals have made this value judgment in terms of the religion which they profess; others in terms of a philosophy of natural rights derived partly from Christianity, partly from the Roman concept of natural law, and handed down via the revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; others, again, from the argument of enlightened self-interest, which enables a man to see in the suppression of another man's individuality a very real threat to his own.

The Liberal next argues that personality, for its full development, requires freedom. But "freedom" as an abstract concept needs to be translated into particular freedoms having value in a given historical situation; the power to do certain things, and to refrain from doing others; the freedom to travel from Cape Town to Johannesburg in 1954, for example, or the freedom not to attend a particular church in sixteenth century England.

There is a link between freedom and moral responsibility. If a man, of his own will, chooses to support his family, he is acting more responsibly than he would be if compelled to do so by the State. But it does not necessarily follow, as the British individualists of the mid-nineteenth century argued, that the function of the State should therefore be negative in character. The movement of Liberal theory since the time of J. S. Mill has been in the direction of a more positive, organic conception of the State, whether in the field of social welfare or in the removal of inequalities of the sort which arise out of the uncontrolled concentration of industrial power in private hands. The Liberal, while holding in principle that freedom is better than compulsion, is entitled to determine his attitude towards State activities according to the demands of a particular situation.

Further, the Liberal should give the welfare of the individual and the welfare of the community equal weight in his consideration, in view of their interdependence. A concern for the "natural rights" of the individual needs to be tempered by a utilitarian concern for the "greatest good of the greatest number", and the claims of the individual balanced by a consideration for the type of society which it is desired to create.

Now it is at this point that the Liberal in a multi-racial society finds himself in a unique position. Personality matters, whatever the society. So does freedom, as the means whereby personality can grow. But in a society where, at present, marked cultural inequality exists between one group and another, freedom cannot easily be extended. Liberals of the last century could avoid the problem of the politically juvenile simply by excluding them from the scope of their argument. They could confine liberty to people "in the maturity of their faculties", and consign the backward races to some form of paternal government. This is no longer possible, nor is it desirable. Nor is it possible or desirable to extend liberty and responsibility in such a community in the same sort of way as this has been done in a homogeneous country like the Gold Coast. What then is the Liberal to do?

He must, first, stand by his own convictions, and affirm his intention to extend opportunities to all people irrespective of race or creed. He must insist that race is an undesirable basis of discrimination, especially since it has never been shown that race bears any absolute relation to ability. He can and should take a stand—racial considerations quite apart—on

the principle of the rule of law, involving the condemnation of lawlessness, administrative despotism, corrupt justice and unfair laws. Nor must considerations of race enter into his concern for the dignity of the individual person.

But within the framework of these general statements of principle there is room for great flexibility in the approach to practical difficulties. If reasonable arguments can be brought forward, in the light of these principles, both for extending the franchise to all and sundry, and for limiting it by high qualifications of a non-racial kind, then this becomes a matter of policy but not of principle. The Liberal may find that on account of the disparity of numbers between one racial group and another, it is impossible to protect minorities under a unitary type of constitution, or he may find that such groups can be protected under a system of this sort: the protection of minorities is a Liberal principle, but the manner in which it is to be done is a matter of policy. And so on, in other fields. Hence the importance for the Liberal in South Africa, concerned as he is with the necessity of maintaining the cultural and economic standards of western civilisation, and extending these as widely as possible, to retain the utmost flexibility of mind in his approach to current problems, and therefore to draw a clear distinction between those elements of the Liberal tradition which are purely relative in character, and those which are absolutely binding.

TO ALL MEMBERS

You are invited to write to *Contact* defining, in about 300 words, your concept of the term "Liberal" as it applies to our Party.

PARTY NEWS

NATIONAL AND CAPE

This month has seen the culmination of the election campaigns which have been running in the Transkei and Cape Western constituencies for the past six months and more.

In the Transkei, the Liberal Candidate, Walter Stanford, defeated the sitting member, Mr. Ponto Stuart, by 1,220 votes and will take his seat in the Assembly in January. In Cape Western, probably the most difficult seat contested by any member of the Party in this particular election, Jimmy Gibson did extremely well to increase his poll by close on six hundred votes to 1,556 and to come within less than a thousand votes of Mr. L. B. Lee-Warden, who stood with the support of "New Age".

TRANSVAAL

Following a suggestion by Mrs. Ballinger that she would like to come into closer contact with Party members, she was invited to a meeting with members of the Hillbrow-Hospital Hill Branch on November 12th. The meeting was a great success and did much towards building up enthusiasm in the branch.

During November the Liberal Party has figured more prominently in the Transvaal newspapers. Letters have appeared in the English and Afrikaans papers and both the memorandum submitted by the Party to the Local Government Commission in Pretoria, and Mr. Paton's challenge to the U.P. prior to their November congress, were given generous headlines.

At the time of writing the result of the Transvaal Senate election is not yet known but the chances of Mr. Ballinger's success seem bright.

NATAL

The second Provincial Congress of the Party in Natal was held in Pietermaritzburg on Saturday, December 4th. Some 35 delegates came from as far afield as Kokstad, Ladysmith and Stanger to attend the meeting and a further twenty to thirty members attended as observers.

The opening address was given by the Provincial Chairman, Mr. Alan Paton, to a very representative audience of 150-200 people. Mr. Paton was in excellent form and his address was extremely well received. He was followed by Prof. Leo Kuper, who moved a resolution protesting against the abuses of individual freedom which the Government was indulging in under the Riotous Assemblies and Suppression of Communism Acts. The resolution was seconded by Mr. Leon Lewis and passed unanimously. The final item in the public session was a resolution moved by Mr. E. G. M. Njisane in support of the stand being taken against the implementation of the Bantu Education Act. He was supported by Mrs. Grant and this resolution was also passed unanimously. The meeting then adjourned for tea and, having sorted out members from non-members and policemen, then went into private session.

The private session was very well attended and the discussion on the whole was of a high standard. Important resolutions were passed dealing with education, particularly the salaries of Non-European teachers and the provision of free, compulsory education for

Indian children in the Province, and with provincial health problems. In addition a number of resolutions suggesting improvements in National policy were accepted and will be forwarded to the National Committee. During the latter half of the afternoon a fruitful discussion took place on questions of organisation, publicity, fund-raising and the build-up of the Party in Natal during the forthcoming year.

In the evening a successful party was held and there is no doubt that the Congress was very valuable in bringing members together and giving them an opportunity to meet one another and to swap ideas. The Congress also provided the Party with a fair amount of publicity, although the papers have been much more modest than they were at the same time last year. It has also stimulated interest in the Party in Pietermaritzburg and brought in a number of new members.

LIBERAL BALANCE SHEET

Debit

1. Mr. Strauss, at Bloemfontein, said "European leadership based on justice and fairness will have to be maintained".
2. At the same Congress the "Conservative" Mr. D. M. Streicher was elected Chairman of the U.P. Youth Movement in place of the "Liberal" Mr. R. A. F. Swart, M.P.
3. The Natal Agricultural Union's representative, in opposing the Catholic Church's application for a permit to run a "mixed" training establishment for priests, said that his organisation was in support of the Government in their aim of segregation of the races.
4. At Bloemfontein, Mr. Baily Bekker said: "The fight of the future, will be conservatism versus liberalism. In non-European policy our direction is conservative. There is no place for the present-day left-liberal."
5. Mr. Tom Naude, speaking at Brits, said: "The strongest wing of the United Party, the Liberals, recognised no difference between White and Black, and constituted a grave danger to South Africa. "We must eliminate the Liberal element," he concluded.

Credit

1. In a letter on the Liberal menace in *Die Vaderland*, a reader said: "These liberal views eat away like acid, slowly and surely, so that one fine day we shall have customs and an outlook that would have deeply shocked our forefathers".
2. A letter-writer in *Dagbreek en Sondagnuus* says "I will vote for the Nationalist Party until there is a republic because I have an aversion to everything which is British. But after that I will vote for the Liberal Party because the eventual result in the Union after all will be equality".
3. Mr. F. Burger, after doing preliminary studies at the Stellenbosch Theological Seminary, studied for a doctorate at Amsterdam. In his thesis, Mr. Burger came to the conclusion that Apartheid was not justified by the Old Testament.
4. Convocation of Natal University has decided by a large majority to urge non-segregation in post-graduate classes.
5. The last two months have seen Church leaders of many different denominations make outspoken attacks on Government policy. The Bishop of Johannesburg has announced the closure of his mission schools. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have condemned Apartheid. Dr. J. B. Webb of the Methodist Church has said that his Church could not accept the policy of Apartheid as being compatible with the teachings of Christ. The Rev. Leonard Heap, Chairman of the Congregational Union, said it was time for the Churches to "take the gloves off and hit back with everything they had at the strangling evil of violent propaganda and indoctrination, the creation of fear and prejudice which political expedience demanded in S.A."