

CONTACT

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COMMON EFFORT FOR A COMMON SOCIETY

When the Liberal Party was formed, the question was asked, *why does it not confine itself to white members, thus becoming a homogeneous party of the enfranchised?* This question was asked frequently at public meetings, and it deserves examination.

The truth is that members of the Liberal Party regard their common humanity as a common possession far more important than the franchise. It is an accident, or at most an arbitrary design, that gives some of our members the franchise and some not. But the common ideals that we cherish are neither accidental nor arbitrary; they are our true common possession.

These same questioners often suggest that as our main activity will be fighting elections, the Party should confine itself to white or voting members. There is a piece of fallacious reasoning here. On the contrary we take it for granted that when we fight elections, voting and non-voting members will work together wherever it is possible. The Liberal Party and mixed membership are politically synonymous. To conceal the fact of a mixed membership for the sake of winning a few non-Liberal votes would be the worst kind of stupidity.

The Liberal Party does not exist for the sole purpose of converting white voters. It does not exist for the sole purpose of winning elections. It exists also to demonstrate that here and now there are South Africans who already belong to a common society. Their membership of the Liberal Party shows more than a desire to change our society; it shows that in many South African hearts that society has changed already.

Nevertheless let us be alert. This question is not asked with the purpose of getting information. It is asked for the purpose of driving a wedge between the white and the non-white members of the Party. It is asked for the purpose of suggesting that non-voting members of the Liberal Party are asked to sit and suck their thumbs when they might be doing some real work elsewhere.

The Liberal Party does not yet remotely understand the true value and strategic importance of its non-white members. The more white people see that non-white people support the Liberal Party, the more hope they will feel that a racial disaster is not our inevitable end. The more they will be inclined to join a Party that does not measure in terms of race or colour. Every time a non-white member of the Party, whose letter or whose name shows what he is, writes to the newspapers championing the Liberal point of view, some white voter moves towards us. And when such a non-white member at the same time asserts his democratic right to express his opinions clearly and straightforwardly, he is strengthening the cause.

It is a folly to suppose that the non-white and non-voting members of the Party have nothing to do. Perhaps what they do will ultimately be the salvation of South Africa.