

CONTACT

FEBRUARY, 1954

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.

LABOUR SEES THE LIGHT

BY PETER BROWN

This last month has seen interesting developments in and out of Parliament. The Nationalists have announced a programme of legislation containing enough "apartheid" measures to satisfy their most ardent supporters. There have been indications that the United Party may be prepared to compromise on the Coloured Franchise and already the split in their ranks has widened. But it is the Labour Party proposals that interest us.

The Labour Party has shown that it, at any rate, is in no mood to compromise and it has done so before the opening of Parliament by making an announcement of a new franchise programme. Its proposals are interesting and significant. Briefly they involve the extension of the franchise on the Common Roll to all Coloureds and Indians in the Transvaal and Free State on the present Cape basis, and its extension to women; three M.P.s, three M.P.C.s, and two Senators, who might be Indians, to represent Natal Indians; Africans would be directly represented by ten M.P.s, ten M.P.C.s, and eight Senators, and in the Northern Provinces there would be for Africans a Standard V literary qualification for the vote. In addition, provision is made for a limited representation of Africans and Indians in local government. The proposals are not regarded as being final and for all time.

These proposals present a most significant advance on the part of the Labour Party and for that reason, if for no other, they are to be welcomed. To welcome them, however, is not necessarily to agree with them and we believe that they have certain fundamental weaknesses. The greatest and most obvious of these is that for the Africans as a whole and for the Indians in Natal the Labour Party continues to pin its faith to the communal franchise. The Liberal Party believes that there are very real dangers inherent in any system of communal representation and for this reason it stands by the common roll franchise for all who have attained a certain cultural standard. It believes that until all South Africans can be persuaded to think of men as men and not as individuals having a particular colour there can be no end to our problems. It believes that rather than help to achieve such a state of affairs the communal franchise is likely to encourage the opposite. Group representation must inevitably lead to sectionalism in outlook and to the development of an attitude of mind which regards the interests of the group as being in conflict with, and attainable only at the expense of, the interests of other groups.

Experience with the separate roll in this country has shown it to have other disadvantages. Since 1936 when the Cape Africans were transferred to a separate roll the whole responsibility for attempting to put the African point of view has devolved on the Native Representatives—other members have ceased to regard it as one of their duties to press African claims. The result has been that the Native Representatives have found themselves in a perpetual minority and often dismissed as a bunch of sentimental "kafferboeties".

There are other arguments against the separate roll. It makes it extremely difficult to get people to think of the interests of the country as a whole—they are too busy thinking of their own sectional interests. There is also no reason whatever to believe that unenfranchised South Africans support the idea of a communal roll, except those who are seduced by Nationalist propaganda. It was rejected by Indians in 1946 and since then all major non-European organisations have come out strongly for the universal adult franchise on a common roll.

The Liberal Party does not believe in any restriction of the franchise on the grounds of race or colour. Under prevailing circumstances, it believes that the only restriction on a person's right to vote should be a cultural one ; but it also believes that this cultural voting standard should, as soon as possible, be brought within the reach of everyone. It believes that South Africans should vote on a common roll and that the constituencies should have a territorial basis. It believes that, under this system, each constituency will, up to a point, represent a cross-section of our population ; its voters will consist of members of all racial groups and this fact alone will make it impossible for representatives to neglect or disparage any one section of the community.

Of course the case for a common roll has here been over-simplified for the purposes of this article but the Liberal Party has other than intellectual reasons for its adherence to the common roll. No white person who works in harmony with non-white persons, no non-white person who works in harmony with white persons, no person who possesses or has learnt to possess a deep respect for the personalities of others can consent to the principle of a separate roll, nor to the principle of white supremacy which is concealed behind the whole seductive array of separation arrangements. That fundamentally is why the Liberal Party stands for the common roll. It is the only way in which the dignity of man can be upheld. Nevertheless, even if we may disagree with the Labour Party programme, the Party must be given full credit for its courage. It is the first of the old-established parties to produce a progressive franchise policy since Union. If it can persuade its supporters among the white workers that additional political rights must be given to non-Europeans now, it will have influenced a substantial body of white opinion to think progressively, and the Liberal Party's task will have been made that much easier.

PRESS COMMENTS

The first issue of *Contact* has had press mention only in Natal papers. *The Natal Witness* carried a leader on Mr. Paton's article in which the writer stated his conviction that the Party's most effective service to the country would be as an active political party rather than as a mere ideological pressure group. In the former role it could " exert a sort of countervailing pull on the U.P." and might thus " be able to exercise indirectly a not inconsiderable influence on public life ".

C. W. M. Gell continues to expound the liberal viewpoint in a variety of journals. In the Port Elizabeth *Evening Post* he answered a view, put forward by *Die Vaderland*, that people of dissimilar cultural levels and different races cannot live together in a common society. *Die Vaderland* gave, as supporting evidence, the examples of Europe (with its 25 countries) and India and Palestine " before the apartheid solution was applied ". Mr. Gell shows how differing peoples can live together in one society, citing Brazil, the U.S., Switzerland, etc., and goes on to explain liberalism as the only alternative to nationalism.

In *Indian Opinion* Mr. Gell takes up the challenge presented by *Church News*, an Anglican magazine, which recently doubted the wisdom of the formation of a separate Liberal Party. *Church News* thought it better for national stability if " Afrikaans-speaking and U.P. politicians were to become more individually liberal ". Mr. Gell feels that not the least justification for a separate party is the indirect pressure exerted on established parties to liberalise their policies or lose their liberals. He then justifies the existence of the Party on more positive grounds, concluding with words that many South Africans would do well to ponder : " *Liberalism makes an effort to reach out to men as individual personalities on their merits, stressing their common humanity in a common citizenship as against the tribal call of any sectional nationalism whatsoever* ".

PARTY NEWS

CAPE

In the Cape all the Party's energies are being directed towards the Parliamentary bye-election for the Natives Representative for the Cape Western constituency. Polling day is April 21st and the Liberal candidate is Mr. James Gibson, a young Cape advocate.

Although the successful candidate will only remain in office until November, the Party decided that the constituency was an obvious one in which to present its policies and fight its first Parliamentary seat.

The vacancy occurs through the expulsion of Mr. Brian Bunting, successor in this seat to Mr. Sam Kahn. Mr. Gibson's opponents will be Miss Ray Alexander (Independent), former secretary of the Food and Canning Workers' Union, who was banned last year, Mr. L. B. Lee-Warden (Independent), national vice-president and Cape chairman of the Congress of Democrats, and Mrs. J. Jonker-Fiske (S.A. National Coalition), who has for some time been urging a coalition of the big parties.

The campaign will be an arduous one and it would be foolish to under-estimate the opposition. However, Mr. Gibson is being assisted in his campaign by a number of prominent Africans and at gatherings which he has already addressed at Langa Township there have been some indications of a gradual drift towards the Liberal point of view.

NATAL

In the Coastal Region a decision on the constituency to be contested in the Provincial elections will be taken within the next fortnight and nominations will be made on February 26th. Arrangements for a canvass are being completed both here and in Maritzburg, where the Maritzburg South constituency will be covered.

Amongst the Branches, Berea is producing a memorandum on the Municipal Franchise for submission to the National Committee. The Midlands has been asked to work out suggestions for an Agricultural policy and to submit a memorandum on the conversion of the Reserves to individual ownership. No new Branches have been formed during the month but meetings have been arranged to take place in Ladysmith and Kokstad during February.

A programme of informal meetings with Non-European leaders has been drawn up. The first of these meetings took place during January and a second is being arranged for February.

TRANSVAAL

The Southern Transvaal division has contested another bye-election in Ward 4, Johannesburg, and the results were very similar to those in Ward 9. The poll was considerably lower, only about 43 per cent., due partly to the large number of removals from the roll and partly to a heavy downpour during the last hour or two before polling closed. There were 609 votes cast for the Liberal candidate and 1,522 against, so the Party polled about 28.5 per cent. of votes cast. As this ward is rather more conservative than Ward 9 and as there was only a fortnight in which to canvass, this result was considered satisfactory.

The fact that since these two elections the United Party in the Council appears to be launched on an energetic Native Housing programme is in no small measure due to the stress laid on this question by our candidates.

In this election there was a notable improvement in our transport control and canvassing ability—although one exasperated canvasser put as her comment on one potential voter "unconscious"!

Since election day a follow-up canvass of "fors" has been undertaken and so far 185 people have been visited.

Rather noticeable in this election, in contrast to the former one, was the reluctance on the part of the *Star* and the *Rand Daily Mail* to give our candidates and our policy publicity. Apparently the results of the previous bye-election made them hesitate to give us news space lest the United Party be seriously affected: flattering, but inconvenient.

Now that the elections are over the Division has made it a first priority to find a first-rate full-time organiser and to raise the necessary funds to guarantee his salary.

NATIONAL

The National Executive has confirmed that the second National Congress of the Party will take place in Durban over the long week-end of July 10th, 11th and 12th. Agenda items will have to be submitted by May 31st. The form of the Congress is being discussed and in Natal a Congress Committee has been set up to deal with the local arrangements.