

CONTACT

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HILLBROW

MR. BERNARD FRIEDMAN's expulsion from the United Party has evoked different reactions in different quarters. It has even evoked different reactions in different United Party quarters. Mr. Alf Every, M.P.C., past Chairman of the Eastern Province General Council of the U.P., and other prominent members have come down firmly and openly on the side of Dr. Friedman. No doubt many less conspicuous members of the Party have done likewise. In most striking contrast has been the hesitancy shown in official U.P. circles. While, to the uninitiated, the ramifications of the U.P.'s organisation are rather difficult to follow it does seem that at almost every level there has been a reluctance to see Dr. Friedman go. He has been given every—almost more than every—chance to reconsider. It has seemed as if the U.P. was not only reluctant, but ashamed, to part with him. The United Party has acted rather like a man bidding farewell to his conscience.

However, this hesitancy is not likely to be allowed to continue for long, particularly if the U.P. hopes to win Hillbrow. In fact, even before the final act of expulsion took place at Pretoria the first rumblings of the anti-Friedman campaign began to be heard in the English press. A certain amount of blame has been put on Mr. Strauss for ever having made the statement (on the Coloured vote) which gave rise to the dispute, but most has been laid at Dr. Friedman's door. He is being accused of weakening the opposition, of acting against "the interests of the nation": we are even being told that "the Friedman issue has fallen away." No doubt we will hear much of these and other equally convincing arguments during the next few months. How valid are they?

The background to the present disagreement is well known. For some years the Nationalists have been doing all they can to get the Coloureds off the Common Roll. For the same number of years the U.P. has been fighting to keep them on the Roll. One of its past arguments, not heard so frequently today, was that what the Nationalists proposed amounted to a shameful diminution of the rights of Coloured voters and could not be tolerated. In 1951 Mr. Strauss stated unequivocally that, if the Coloured voters were ever removed from the Common Roll, his Party would put them back on it. In 1955 Mr. Strauss issued another statement on exactly the same issue which gave no such definite assurance. Revolt followed, to be followed in its turn by a further statement. This second statement still failed to repeat the categorical assurance given in 1951 and although it satisfied the rest of the United Party in Parliament it did not satisfy Dr. Friedman, who has only insisted that his party should stand unequivocally by a promise made four years ago. Why, then, is he in trouble? In normal circles a promise is made to be kept. Is there any reason why the same rule should not apply in political circles? There most certainly is not. In fact the reasons for a political party keeping a promise of this sort are overwhelming. Is the name of white South Africans not already bad enough in the eyes of non-white people in South Africa and beyond? Have there not been enough broken promises in the past? Has the U.P. not contracted enough compromises at the expense of non-white interests? This last threat of retreat from a firm undertaking, coming as it does from a party confined to white people and threatening an assurance given by it to non-white people, can only throw the white South African into additional contempt in Africa and cause further deterioration in inter-group relations.

Dr. Friedman is accused of further weakening the opposition to the Nationalists. The validity of this accusation is very questionable. Is it, in fact, possible to weaken an opposition as feeble as that part of it which the United Party represents? The strength of an opposition is not judged merely by the number of its members but by their willingness to oppose the government and the spirit they show in doing so. It is the duty of an opposition to speak out forthrightly against the policies of the existing government and to offer policies which are alternative to those of the government and not just paler and politer versions of the same

policies. We believe that Dr. Friedman will do all these things much more effectively than those he leaves behind him in his old Party and that, should he be returned for Hillbrow, his expulsion from the U.P. will have strengthened and not weakened the opposition.

Finally, the Friedman issue has *not* fallen away. It is quite simply the issue of whether a promise is made to be kept or not and, particularly, whether an assurance given by a political party should be abided by or not. It is no more and no less than that: and no amount of glib talk and slick leader-writing can make it anything else. Dr. Friedman seems to think that such promises should be kept. At the risk of being thought unusual, we agree with him entirely.

ONLY THE FUTURE BELONGS TO US

THE passing of the Senate Act, in spite of the great movement against it, and the apparent powerlessness of the continuing campaign against the Act, has given rise to a new wave of despondency among some Liberals. How, they ask, if the united opposition of all the anti-Nationalists cannot stop the Senate Bill, can the small number of Liberals in South Africa hope to achieve anything at all?

Natural though this despondency is, it is not justified. It is true that the opposition to the Senate Bill failed, as the Torch Commando failed and all other attempts to "stop the Nationalists" have failed, but that was to be expected. The Nationalists are not a sudden invasion of the life of South Africa, which can be repelled in a short, sharp battle. They represent the culmination of that tradition which has governed South Africa since 1910 and the Northern Provinces for a hundred years; they represent the last-ditch struggle of that tradition against the social and economic forces which are rapidly undermining it. Such a force can only be stopped by a long, steady, relentless struggle lasting for years and the courage and persistence which such a struggle requires can only be found by an organisation with a clear basis in principle. That is why the broad fronts of anti-Nationalists have all collapsed and the future belongs to those organisations like the Liberal Party whose principled basis equips them for a long battle.

And it will be a long battle. It is true that social and economic forces, not only in the outside world, but also in South Africa, are working in our favour, but, except where change is precipitated by war, social and economic forces work slowly. When we become discouraged by the lack of obvious progress and of visible results from our efforts, it is as well for us to consider the stories of some of the other great movements for social reform in history. In England, the agitation for the abolition of slavery took thirty years to achieve its object. It was more than thirty years from the time when the demand for manhood suffrage became a major popular movement until the first substantial step towards it was taken; it was another twenty before it came near to final achievement. The campaign for votes for women took twenty years to gather momentum and another twenty to achieve its object. It was forty years from the foundation of the movement to secure the recognition of Afrikaans as an official language until it gained that recognition. Nor must we make the mistake of thinking that those who believe in violence achieve their objects more quickly. The first Communist revolution took place 69 years after Karl Marx issued his communist manifesto, the Chinese Communist Revolution 30 years later. In South Africa Communists have been busy for over 40 years without having much to show for their efforts.

We tend to ascribe a certain inevitability to events which have already happened, but it is very doubtful whether we do so correctly. These movements succeeded not only because circumstances favoured them, but largely because of the courage and pertinacity of the people who pioneered them through years of little apparent progress and even of apparent failure. May we of the Liberal Party show the same spirit.