

The Prime Minister and Union Day

SPEAKING from Capetown the Prime Minister, Mr. J. G. Strijdom, made an appeal for national unity in South Africa, and spoke of the great future "which we, with God's will and aid, shall achieve together". He also mentioned with approval the "pattern of life" which our leaders had in view at the time of Union, "a pattern based on the mutual recognition of each other's rights, and respect for each other's cultural heritage".

These are noble thoughts, and we as a Party have nothing but praise to offer for them. But we cannot accept them as being true to reality as we know it. It is allowable, of course, for a leader to outline noble ideals of which our present actions fall far short; but the ideals which Mr. Strijdom outlines seem to us to be actually incompatible with our present governmental policies.

What is meant by a "mutual recognition of each other's rights"? It is widely recognised that the members of the Indian business community face great losses under the Group Areas Act. These businesses they set up and maintained openly and lawfully. Are their rights to have done so now being recognised? And where is the mutual character of this recognition?

Mr. Theo Gerdener, who seems to be the spokesman for a new and vicious brand of Natal Nationalism, has said that perhaps 90 per cent of Indians must seek some other occupation, and he suggested that this might be some form of manual labour. Is this because they had more than their "rightful" share of business? Is it the intention to reorganise farming, in which Afrikaners have more than their "rightful" share? Or the motor industry, in which English-speaking people have more than their "rightful" share?

We hope that we, as Liberals, respect the cultural heritage of others. But it seems to us that it is the Government who will decide what that cultural heritage shall be, certainly in the case of African culture. In any event, whatever cultural heritage we may possess, there is a technological "culture" which is modern man's way of living on the earth. It does not belong to any race or nation, but to man; and the African people have as much right to it as anybody else. But it is in the highest degree improbable that they will ever be able to enjoy it in any of the Bantu "heartlands". And if it should happen that one of these "heartlands" should uncover rich resources, it is in the highest degree probable that "mutual recognition" will come into operation at once.

It is strange to hear Mr. Strijdom, who has just told Afrikaners to sell their farms only to Afrikaners, speaking of the great future "which we shall achieve together". It seems to us no part of Mr. Strijdom's purpose to allow anything important to be achieved by common effort and dedication. His Party is sectional in the highest degree, and its achievements, far from being the result of common effort, are the result of sectional effort of the most determined kind.

What does Mr. Strijdom mean by "achieve together"? He cannot possibly mean "common effort". He can only mean "common obedience" by all other groups in South Africa to the Nationalist will.

Ultimately Mr. Strijdom's entire address is illogical and self-contradictory. There is really **no** Union of South Africa for him at all. He sees South Africa as a battleground, not as a place for "achieving together". He is obsessed by the idea of conflict. His solution is "baaskap", not co-operation. It is impossible to speak on December 16 about the Afrikaner's history as one of unceasing vigilance and struggle, and on May 31 to talk of "peaceful development".

A Liberal, by virtue of his ideals and temperament, is not inclined to pitiless judgment. The leader of any Party can be pardoned if his noble utterances reflect rather the goal than the substance of his Party's achievements. But confronted by the peaceful and tolerant nature of the Prime Minister's speech, one is baffled to know how he can reconcile it with the actions of his Government. And if we who live here are baffled, how much more baffled must be the observers of the outside world?

For the kind of unity for which the Prime Minister appeals, no self-respecting non-Nationalist will raise a finger. We do not believe that kind of unity is God's will, nor that it will receive God's aid. And when he speaks of the "mutual recognition of each other's rights", he may be using words we know, but he is using language in a way that is abhorrent to us.

If there is one man who is unfitted to deal with the great ideals of the Union of South Africa, it is the Prime Minister. Union Day is a public holiday; in future let Mr. Strijdom observe it too.