

CONTACT

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What Does Mrewa Mean?

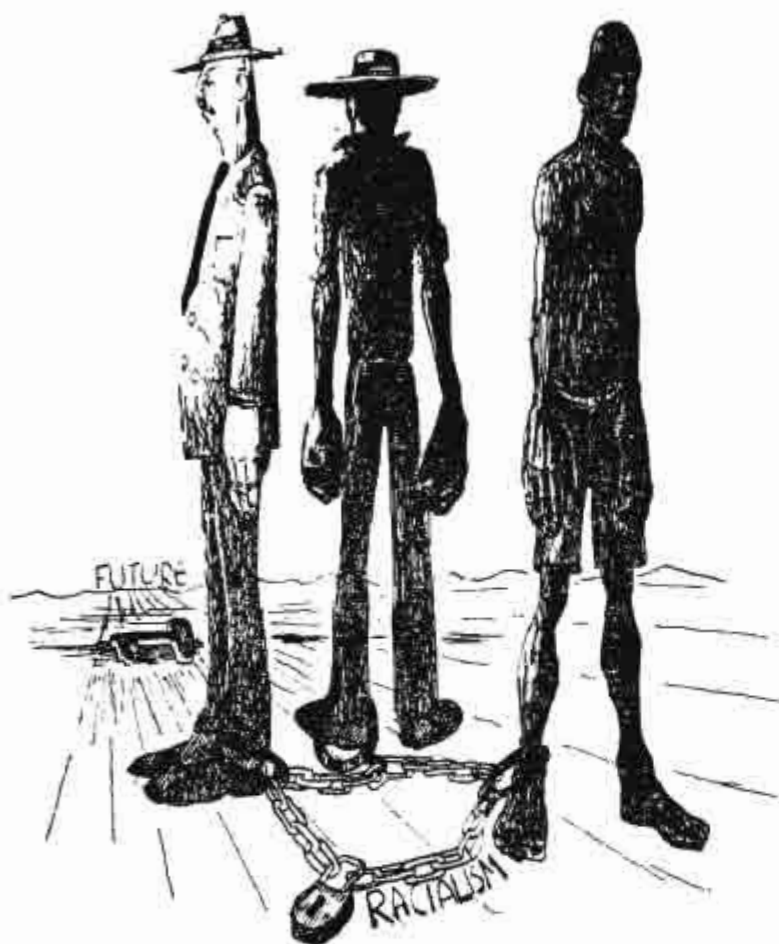
EARLY IN JUNE there was a by-election in the Mrewa constituency of Southern Rhodesia. The seat, previously held by a member of Sir Roy Welensky's Federal Party, was won by Mr. Winston Field, leader of the opposition Dominion Party. What significance has this for the Federation and, of more particular concern to us, the Union?

Sir Roy Welensky has publicly shrugged off the loss of this seat as not being unexpected. Perhaps it was not, but, for all Sir Roy's public display of unconcern, we doubt if there is much room for complacency in his private thoughts. Certainly, even if the result was expected, its importance is not diminished by that fact. The Federal Party, despite its many shortcomings, is committed to the ideal of racial partnership on which the Federation was ostensibly founded. The Dominion Party, though it may be far-removed from the Nationalists with whom we in South Africa are so unpleasantly familiar, is still nearer to them than is the Federal Party. It represents the forces of reaction.

Of this particular by-election it has been said that Mr. Winston Field is a more liberal man than his opponent. It has been said that he was the better candidate of the two. It has been said that enfranchised Southern Rhodesians want to see a

worth-while opposition in Parliament, if only to keep the Government on its mettle. It has been said that some people will vote in a by-election as they would never dream of doing in a General Election. There may be something in each of these contentions, but they will not help to undo the potential damage of the Mrewa result. To those on the sidelines this was a victory for reaction.

Africans have had good grounds for suspicion of Federation since its inception. They have suspected, from the beginning, that most Southern Rhodesian White people do not really subscribe to the partnership ideal at all. This election will confirm them in this view however much the result may, in fact, have hinged on minor issues of personality and pique. For Liberals in the Union there is a deep significance, too. Every blow to progressive ideas in the comparatively receptive atmosphere of the Federation is a set-back to Liberals in the Union. The achievement of a true and successful working partnership in the Federation would add immeasurably to the strength of the advocates of the Common Society in South Africa. Any backsliding towards apartheid is not only a blow to the ideals on which the Federation was said to be based. It is a blow to every single Liberal south of the Sahara. The developments which have taken place in the Rhodesias in recent years have not always been cause for optimism. If the recent by-election result panics the Federal Party into abandoning its stated goal of racial partnership it will also be abandoning every person who works for a real, non-racial society in Africa. Even if the Federal Party decides to "go-slow" on its partnership programme, it will be disastrous. If Africans are ever to be convinced that "partnership" is worth backing, they will have to be convinced soon. Pandering to White prejudice will not carry that conviction.



From the harsh and bigoted racial climate of South Africa we look to those who share our views in the more congenial atmosphere of the north to make their experiment a real and enduring partnership to which men of all races can genuinely subscribe. A catch-phrase with no substance is no good to anyone. If the white Southern Rhodesians do not meet their challenge now it will be too late and they will soon find themselves in the same dismal circumstances as we in South Africa find ourselves. May they save themselves from that bleak prospect.

MR. LOUW AND AFRICA

IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT of Mr. Eric Louw being remembered for anything in 50 years' time, it will probably be for his contributions to the art of international gaucherie. Some say his contribution has been unique. Certainly his replies to international critics of the Union show a singularly offensive spirit—something often lacking from the pronouncements of others whose function is the management of affairs between nations. In the recent External Affairs debate Mr. Louw showed some of his old belligerent temper but he also emerged in a new guise—as the friendly advisor of the emergent states of Africa, cautioning them to “hasten slowly” along the road to independence.

Now, there may have been some sound sense in what Mr. Louw had to say about economic stability and independence being a prerequisite of stable political independence. What is laughable is that he should for one moment imagine that any African, striving towards independence, is going to pay the least attention to Eric Louw's advice. Any advice that any Nationalist gives to almost any African will be treated with certain suspicion and probable contempt. The ridiculous thing is that the Minister of External Affairs should either not know this or should choose to ignore it. If Mr. Louw had his finger on the pulse of Africa—as his job demands—he would know that what counsel he may give to Africa will almost certainly provoke a reaction in the opposite direction. If he seriously wants his ideas followed in this continent his best approach is to advise courses of action precisely the opposite of those he supports.

TWO BY-ELECTIONS

THE TRANSVAAL PROVINCIAL DIVISION has recently been concerned with two by-elections. The first was for the Provincial Council constituency of Pretoria East, where Mrs. Margaret Brink stood as a Liberal Party candidate.

The task which our small Pretoria Branch took on was a formidable one. There were some 14,000 names on the voters roll, and it proved quite impossible to canvass them all. It was also the Party's first venture into the electoral field in Pretoria and its first attempt to fight a seat in which there is a large Nationalist vote.

The result was that Mrs. Brink obtained 446 votes—about ten per cent. of the poll. This is a promising result in such a constituency, but the value of the campaign was far greater than the figures would suggest. The Party received a great deal of publicity in both Pretoria and Johannesburg newspapers during the election and has certainly been put more prominently on the map in the Transvaal than ever before. Mrs. Brink's meetings were attended by hundreds of Nationalists, mostly students at Pretoria University. They created a certain amount of disturbance, but they did not come merely to break up the meetings. Especially interesting was the meeting at which Jordan Ngubane spoke. At question time he faced a barrage of critical but courteous questions from the Nationalist students, many of whom stayed on after the meeting was closed to discuss points with Liberal Party members.

Although the United Party succeeded in turning out a fairly large vote, the general impression was that U.P. morale is low. One public meeting called by the U.P. had to be cancelled because nobody came to it. For every one voter who supported Mrs. Brink, there were half a dozen who privately told our canvassers that they were dissatisfied with the United Party for one reason or another.

The second by-election was a municipal contest in Parktown, Johannesburg. Here the Liberal Party did not nominate a candidate, but supported Mrs. Jean Sinclair, who stood as an independent. Mrs. Sinclair stood on a platform of “No Party Politics in the City Council”,