

LIBERATION

A Journal of Democratic Discussion

No. 16. February, 1956

One Shilling

CONTENTS

Editorial—Before the Storm	1
The Role of Capitalism in South African History	4
The Special Conference of the A.N.C.	10
Transkei Re-visited	16
On the Ideological Front	19

Editorial

BEFORE THE STORM

THE last few weeks have seen the long-drawn Parliamentary dispute over the rights of Coloured voters moving steadily to its climax. This is the issue which, over the past four years, has roused the electorate perhaps more than any other. It is the issue which gave birth to the Torch Commando with its peak membership of fifty thousand, and its series of torchlight demonstrations in all the major centres, culminating in the great demonstration on Cape Town's Parade. It is this issue which gave impetus to the organising of the Coloured people for political struggle, and led to the birth of the S.A. Coloured People's Organisation to join the Congress movement. It is this issue which led the Appeal Court to declare the disfranchisement Act invalid, and thus paved the way for drastic Nationalist reconstitution of the Court. It is this issue which brought European women into organised political activity on a wide scale, through the Women's Defence of the Constitution League and the Black Sash Movement. It was this issue which provided the Government pretext for enlarging the Senate and packing its benches with an unassailable majority of faithful ja-broers and henchmen.

The dispute, centreing round the Separate Representation of Voters Act, has been, on the one hand, the pretext for the most extensive Government subversion of established customary and constitutional rights, and the stage-setting for a rapid advance towards a one-party dictatorship. On the other hand, it has been the mainspring of the most widespread political stirrings and organisation of the electorate against the Government since 1922. And yet, as the struggle nears its culmination in Parliament, the climax is marked not by turmoil, strife and clash, but by an atmosphere of unprecedented calm. There is neither determined, bitter, last-ditch verbal resistance inside Parliament, nor organised, mass, popular demonstration and protest outside it. This strange lull characterises the South African scene today.

THE ROAD BEHIND

Facts must be faced. The Parliamentary Opposition has repeatedly sounded the retreat. It undermined and scuttled the Torch Commando at the height of its power. It compromised on the Senate Act, and retreated from its own former promises to restore the Coloured Voters to the common roll if they are ever removed from it. And now, at the critical moment of decision, it has retreated entirely from the struggle, and has abandoned the future of the Coloured vote to the hands of the new Appellate Division. The United Party retreat has become an abdication. Its decline has reached the point of no return; and with it has declined the fervour, the confidence and the spirit of the European electorate, which, forcefully led and inspired, could have swung the balance decisively in favour of South African democracy.

But the decline has not been confined to the white electorate or its leading party alone. Unpalatable though the fact may be, it must be recognised that a faint echo of that decline has begun in the ranks of the non-white democratic organisations as well. Two years ago, when the Government claimed that a section of Non-European opinion supported their measures of apartheid, they lied. Today, there is a basis, however slight, for that claim. The Transkei Bunga has voluntarily accepted its own dissolution, in exchange for the ephemeral enticements of the Bantu Authorities Act. Traders associations have welcomed territorial apartheid in the specious hope of inheriting the profits of white and Indian traders in Verwoerd's "white spots." The votes cast by chiefs and advisory boards for apartheid candidates in Native Representative elections have risen. A growing army of open collaborators and apologists for apartheid have crept out from under stones to write fulsome praise of Nationalist policy in the official publication "Bantu." This is the measure of the ground that is being won by the Government amongst the non-white people. It is a minority trend, a tiny minority trend; but it would be futile to deny its existence. This is the measure of the decline in the anti-Government resistance of the Non-European people.

THE TIME AHEAD

It is simple to pinpoint accurately and precisely the causes for the decline of the United Party and its opposition to the Government. For

its opposition has always rested on feet of clay. With the Government's basic concepts of white supremacy and non-white subjection it has no quarrel. Its fight has been not on principles, but on methods, not on essentials but on trimmings. The very slogan of its whole fight against the Separate Representation of Voters Act—"Hands off the Constitution"—reveals its basic belief that this "constitution," the Act of Union, which enshrines white supremacy, which entrenches the disenfranchising of the Non-European people, is an immutable and unchallengeable basis for the South African state. A struggle on such foundations is at best a shadow fight, inspiring neither the democratic vitality of the white electorate nor the mass support of the non-whites.

But to find the source of the lull in the opposition of the non-white peoples is less simple. It could, perhaps, be argued that the explanation lies in objective circumstances: in the overwhelming force on the side of Government; in the bannings and banishments of prominent and experienced leaders; in the laws and regulations which have curtailed political liberty and freedom of organisation to a minimum. It could be argued, too, that the amendment or the preservation of the Act of Union, racially oppressive and discriminatory to its very marrow, is not a matter to rouse the passions of those whose fight is for race equality. There is perhaps a germ of truth in all these arguments. But they are too facile to be accepted as the whole truth.

TESTING TIME

When the Women's Federation, in the last months of the old year, organised the spectacularly successful, mass deputation of women to the Union Buildings, exceeding in numbers the wildest expectations of their own supporters, all the same "objective circumstances" existed. But they were mastered by a combination of determination, leadership and correct policy. The test of a movement and its leadership is its ability to master the objective circumstances in which it finds itself, and to turn those circumstances to its own ends.

It is in this light that the Congress of the People came through with flying colours. For here, mastering all the objective difficulties, the four Congresses successfully turned the oppressive measures of the Government into the driving-force for the pouring out of the people's protest and dissatisfaction which has been gathered into the first, united people's programme of liberation in South Africa, the Freedom Charter. Here in the Freedom Charter, for the first time, there is a widely accepted, inspiring programme of the liberation movement, set out in fullest detail by the people themselves—just such a programme as is lacking in the Parliamentary Opposition and whose lack is causing its undoing. If ever there was a real basis for a sharp and sweeping advance of the democratic opposition to the Government it is now, in the days of the Freedom Charter. The policy for advance has been laid down: and everything hinges on leadership and organisation.

It is in this light that the recent activities of the Congress movement have fallen short of what is needed. In the place of intense and concentrated organisation around the Freedom Charter, and of the

mobilisation of the people to struggle for it, there has been a resting on the oars. Half a year has passed since the Congress of the People, and still the breach that it made in the armory of reaction has not been followed up with organisation. In the last days of the old year, the African National Congress meeting in annual conference at Bloemfontein could devote hours of time to the debate on the admission of the "Bantu World" reporter, and do no better than postpone discussion on the vital task of mobilising for the Freedom Charter to a future conference in April. It is not possible to rouse the country by procedural debates, while the burning issue of the moment is the new threat of passes for women. It is not possible to break through the lull by discussing freedom of the press, while the meagre voting rights of the Coloured people are being destroyed. This way lies disaster. Once the correct policy has been decided, says one of the world's greatest political leaders, organisation decides everything. This is the lesson which needs to be taken to heart and acted upon by all those who seek their liberation.

This is the beginning of a new year. And the correct policy has been decided upon in the Freedom Charter. The first step has been taken. And now organisation decides everything. Organise! Organise! And organise again! This is the message that must be driven home to the whole opposition movement in South Africa. And if it is learnt and acted on, the lull which marked the opening of the new year will prove to be the herald of the storm to follow.

THE ROLE OF CAPITALISM IN SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY

By H. LAWSON

IN SOUTH AFRICA, perhaps more blatantly than elsewhere, the falsification of History has long been used as a propaganda weapon by the ruling groups. Oppression is justified by the liberal use of historical myths. Different "schools" among our historians reflect certain divisions among the ruling groups themselves, each historian acting as an official apologist for one or other of these groups. Thus there is the traditional Imperialist school of Theal and Cory which is still the basis for a lot of racialist propaganda in the schoolroom; for academic purposes the liberal historians like MacMillan are more suitable, because they abhor the crudeness of the old school and replace it with all sorts of pleasant illusions; and finally there is the growing squad of historical scribes in the service of Afrikaner Nationalism who live in a world of myth that is all their own.