

HUNGARY AND SOUTH AFRICA

NOWHERE else in the world was support for the Hungarian rebellion more vigorous than in white South Africa. Afrikaans students paraded fervently in Pretoria and Stellenbosch against the Soviet terror and men and women from the plush English-speaking suburbs rushed into the centre of the cities to collect and give money for relief. Not since the unmentionable days of the Second Front was there such emotional pre-occupation with the affairs of Eastern Europe. There could be no doubt that white South Africans were profoundly stirred by the reports of Hungarian civilians protecting their country with rifles and sticks against the tanks and heavy artillery of the Russian army. And throughout this convulsion of anger and compassion that seized the country, it was sympathy with the ideals of the rebellion that provided the strongest stimulant. It was ultimately in the cause of freedom and the right of a people to self-determination that the students of Pretoria marched in procession through the streets and the citizens of Cape Town and Johannesburg so generously collected and gave.

All this must have been greatly puzzling to the millions of black South Africans who suffer every day the multitudinous private agonies of the oppressed and whose lives in the prison of their colour are every bit as bleak and cramped as were those of the Hungarians. It is hardly surprising therefore, that many of them read the reports of the rebellion in the 'white' press with an easy scepticism. It was grotesquely inconsistent that a government which held them so tightly by the throat should applaud the loosening of the strangle-hold on any other subject people.

Of course there is truth in the remark that the South African government and the South African whites would support any people, regardless of the issue, which fought against the Soviet Union. But this is surely only part of the truth. In the Hungarian rebellion, it was the issue itself that gripped white South Africa by the heart. Mr. Mikhel Truu, the leader of a group of Stellenbosch students who volunteered to do relief work among the Hungarian refugees in Austria, set the question securely on its feet in an article written for the *Cape Argus* late last year. "The Stellenbosch movement to render personal help to the Hungarian victims of Communism is founded on the incompatibility of the ideals of Communism and those of a free world", he

stated. "We protest against the flagrant destruction of the most elementary rights that any human being is entitled to possess—personal freedom, free worship, security and family life".

Coming from students at a University usually identified with the hunchback ideology of the Nationalist Party, this was a quite unexpected stride into the twentieth century, a splendid affirmation of faith in the rights of man. If it meant indeed precisely what it said, here at last was a whisper from out the conscience of Afrikanerdom, the first motions of a revulsion against the politics of oppression from deep within the vaulted mind of the Afrikaner people. Surely those who believed so strongly in the right of every human being to personal freedom, security and family life would now begin to struggle against its denial in their own country.

A certain 'B.P.' read Mr. Truu's article and immediately replied that the right to personal freedom, security and family life was a right persistently denied to the vast majority of South Africans and that it would be more fitting if the students at Stellenbosch University concentrated their attention upon "the flagrant destruction of the most elementary rights that any human being is entitled to possess" taking place so ruthlessly before their eyes. Indignantly, together with a fierce and rather devious defence of apartheid, Mr. Andre L. Muller, a member of the Stellenbosch movement, wrote back: "If B.P. still feels that there is a suppression of individual freedoms in South Africa nothing prevents him from thinking so—just as nothing prevents the Stellenbosch and University of Cape Town students from thinking that this is the case in Hungary. *B.P. should realize that everybody does not necessarily have the same political outlook as he has*".

This was not a reply, it was a revelation. Here at last was the soul of South Africa, stripped and standing out in the open. For freedom in South Africa is not an absolute right, to be enjoyed by all men as their natural portion. It is a matter of political outlook, and "the elementary rights that any human being is entitled to possess" remain rights only this side of the colour line. Crossing over, they shrink into presumptions and provocations.

The truth is that the normal white South African does not think in terms of freedom at all when he thinks in terms of Africans or Indians or Coloureds. Hungary and South Africa present totally different issues to his mind because Hungary is white and white men are born to certain unalienable rights. If

non-whites were white they also would be human beings and entitled to possess personal freedom, security and family life. This is the reason so many whites in South Africa are so astonished when they read or hear the accusation that non-whites in South Africa are oppressed. For oppression entails a moral judgment and the whites do not judge the non-whites morally. Where no rights are admitted, no oppression can be acknowledged.

And so, in this midnight world of moral schizophrenia, what would be a massacre of unarmed civilians in Hungary becomes police action to restore law and order in an African township. The inhumanity of mass deportations in Eastern Europe becomes the policy of separate development and the removal of black spots from urban areas. The indoctrination of helpless white children in Hungary is that brutal effacement of personality essential to the continued existence of the police state. The indoctrination of black children in South Africa is Bantu Education. This is the reason that the Hungarian rebellion was for all white South Africa the heroic struggle of a desperate people for freedom and self-determination, and riots in our African locations are irresponsible outbursts of savagery stimulated by agitators and Communists for their own ends. It has been said that most white South Africans have very pliable consciences. In fact, of course, when they think of Africans or Indians or Coloureds, they have no consciences at all.

And so the South African government, without seeing anything bizarre in its gesture, grants a token £25,000 for the relief of Hungarian refugees. The impudent hypocrisy of one tyranny's assisting, in the name of freedom, the victims of another, makes one wonder at the extent to which even the South African government is capable of moral effrontery. It cannot be believed that the Minister of Justice, by whose edicts so many men have been prohibited from expressing their political convictions, can remain chastely unaware of the work of his Department. Yet in his New Year message to the country, he declared that we should all thank God that South Africans were living in a free country and should consider ourselves lucky and be grateful that we lived in such a South Africa. The picture of nine million Africans sinking onto their knees in thunderous gratitude for the liberties they enjoy in South Africa is a profoundly improbable one. And the kindest thing one can say about its author is that he is living in a moral dream-world of his own.

And so white South Africa deceives itself perpetually, deceiving itself nowhere so completely as in its faith that the non-whites too are taken in by the moral fraud. The whites may not think of the Africans and Indians and Coloured people in terms of rights and freedoms at all. But the non-whites do. They know that they are oppressed and they know to what rights as men they are naturally entitled. If the government does not see reason in time and continues to reply to their cries for liberty with batons and sten-guns, bannings and prison sentences, if its only reaction to the suffering of the non-white peoples is to increase it, one day sooner or later what has happened in Hungary may happen in South Africa too. And the men and women of South Africa who have never known what it is to order their lives in freedom, may take for themselves what they have so brutally for so long been denied. And when that happens, not the least tragic aspect of it all will be the utter moral astonishment of most of the white population. Not even in the final disaster that they are so scrupulously preparing for themselves, will they understand.