
Direction or Destination

DAVID EVANS

Liberal Policies Rethought

FOR SOME TIME South African Liberals have been uneasily aware that liberalism as understood in the west has no future in Africa. The experience of the Progressive Party proves it beyond dispute—their concern for private enterprise, for liberty of the (suitably qualified) individual, for parliamentary methods, for “gradualism”, was European liberalism at its most classical. And it was rejected emphatically not only by non-whites—“qualified” and “unqualified”—but also by a large section of the very white-collar workers who should theoretically have formed its strength.

But those Liberals who have been congratulating themselves on their perspicacity in not boarding Mr. Oppenheimer’s now stalled solid gold Cadillac, should pause and contemplate the direction of their own vehicle. And while they are about it they might study the passenger list too.

For there can be little doubt but that the Liberal Party though more radical and rugged than the Progressive Party is singularly short of militant African leaders of the kind called for by the continental revolution, an opinion with which African members of that calibre would probably be the first to agree. The party is resolute and courageous; from the leadership down members have endured all the humiliation and suffering visited on those who fight against racialism and privilege. Yet there is a quality missing—a dash of madness. Liberals in South Africa are essentially empiricists. They prefer negotiation along tried routes, persuasion and cautious pressure—to the sudden leap in the dark, backed by an irrational belief in human infallibility.

And yet it is often irrationality which succeeds—emotion not logic is the stuff of politics. Had Castro been completely sane he would not have taken Cuba. Had Banda been “a reasonable man” he would not be Prime Minister potential of Nyasaland; had Sir de Villiers Graaff taken—on 30 March 1960—a wild leap to the left he might have been Prime Minister today.

On what is this apparent irrationality based—a shrewd grasp of the mood, demands and needs of the people, the ability to project an image of power and competence. And above all the ability to create the belief that the risk is worth taking, that what is offered is something worth sacrificing for. This is both the challenge and the danger.

The Liberal Party handbook *Nonracial Democracy* is the first complete presentation of the policies thrashed out at the party’s annual conference in Durban in 1961. It is also the party’s blueprint for the future South

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African society; it is an attempt to salvage from the liberal past what is of value and to blend with it policies designed to meet the peculiar demands of the South African situation.

It is I must say at the outset an impressive document—it presents a good case well and lucidly; it is probably the most detailed and sensible plan for a common society produced in South Africa and it is certainly the most honest.

And yet in this year of apathy, fear, stray explosions and the “Sabotage” Bill it is somehow slightly disappointing. There is about it a suggestion of compromise with the old liberal tradition: it is, as it were, just slightly sicklied over with the pale cast of second thoughts—on education, on economic policy, on foreign policy. It is aware of the challenge, but apprehensive of the danger.

This is not to say that the policies do not reflect a brave break with the party’s past. The Party shows clearly that it will have no truck with “progressive” “anti-racial” senates and fancy franchise systems, designed (whatever Molteno may say) to maintain white supremacy and the position of the industrial elite. The controlled constitution with an entrenched bill of *individual* rights is sufficient safeguard for the individual; while the danger of the small and uninfluential citizen being crushed in the machinery of the modern state or ignored by the bureaucrats at the controls, is minimised by the provision for a public protector based on the Scandinavian innovation, the ombudsman. Nor is there the talk of groups which so mars the Freedom Charter.

BUT THE PARTY HAS ERRED, I believe, in advocating a decentralised form of constitution, in which certain powers (undefined in the handbook, but to be defined in the constitution) are given to the provinces or regions. There is a strong case for decentralisation only when regional differences and attitudes are so considerable as to make it the only alternative to secession or rebellion. In South Africa the urgent need for comprehensive and rapid planning to combat illiteracy, soil erosion, disease, and lack of adequate housing, among other problems, argues for a powerful central legislature not unduly impeded by regional self-interest.

The Party, as was to be expected, comes out with an ambitious programme to eliminate racialism in education. It lays down that “primary education shall be free and equal for all and higher education shall as far as possible be made available to all on the basis of merit”. This is backed by a firm statement that private schools which seek to discriminate on the basis of race need not approach the State for money. Good. Unfortunately the party did not stop there, but hesitated, awed by its own radicalism . . . and was lost, in a morass of confusion about the relationship between the individual and the community. It was unable to decide whether to permit privately financed schools to discriminate against groups other than those for which the schools were intended and—lest there be any doubt—“groups” included race groups. Now it is possible to agree that there is some kind of case for unaided private schools (the case being, one supposes, that in the past private schools in South Africa have produced—along with

the gentlemen who keep people of Jewish origin out of urban and country clubs—quite a number of liberals and progressives and, who knows, perhaps even a socialist or two).

But is it possible to see a case for permitting the deliberate perpetuation of enclaves of racialism?

Everyone at the conference was agreed that, at the very least, South Africa must be a welfare state—with provision for free medical services, family health centres and preventive medicine; also adequate housing coupled with the elimination of residential segregation. A complete system of social security was also to be provided.

It was decided that major economic changes would have to accompany political changes and that there would have to be a more just distribution of income as well as equality of opportunity for all. To do this, the party *inter alia*, favours taxation which falls most harshly on the rich—"a more steeply graduated scale of income tax and death duties, together with taxes upon luxury commodities and capital gains." This is accompanied by a statement more positive than hitherto that the party, when the Government, will intervene to provide services and necessary industries and to combat monopolies.

This does not seem to me to go far enough. There is far too much production of luxury items and far too little production for use. Production must be geared to meet need and not simply to meet the demands of those who have the ability to pay—or will have the ability to pay when the State, the employers and the workers have finished haggling over what constitutes a living wage. Taxation does not seem to be the complete answer in a country where 75 per cent of the population lives in horrible poverty. As Oscar Wilde once put it "Why should they be grateful for the crumbs from the rich man's table—they should be seated at the board, and are beginning to know it."*

THE ANSWER IS SURELY planning and control by experts responsible to the State which will be in turn responsible to the people. It is significant that in national crises such as wars, few people resist State intervention. South Africa's continuing crisis is poverty: should the State play a less important role than it did in the 1939-45 period?

An indication of the militancy of the intentions of most parties in South Africa is their attitude to the mines. Both the Nationalists and the Labour Party went on record on numerous occasions as favouring nationalisation of the mines; neither had the courage to do so. The Congress Alliance in its Freedom Charter indicates (rather vaguely) that it might do so.

The Liberal Party is also rather ambiguous in its statement: "The Party does not advocate the nationalisation of mines or industry as a principle of universal application." It is well known that the wages paid in South African mines to Africans is obviously inadequate: it is also well known that the mining companies maintain an increase in wages will make continued operation in many mines uneconomic. Is not nationalisation essential? This question is unfortunately not dealt with, and yet it is of grave importance.

*Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*.

In dealing with the land question the party is tentative, but its proposals seem sound and progressive. Redistribution will be achieved by taxation designed to discourage the concentration of large estates in the hands of a few people and by enforcing sale to the state of unused or underdeveloped land. Poor but willing farmers will be helped by long term loans by the state as well as other methods. A difficulty not dealt with is the possibility that large farming units may prove the best thus creating a tendency towards private monopoly. It is something the party may well examine in the future. It is pleasing that attention is given to collective or co-operative methods of farming.

The more radical solution of wholesale nationalisation of the land was rejected because it was felt, I believe, that food production could be disrupted by a Kenya-style emigration of angry white farmers on the one hand and on the other the hostility of Africans who have already been dispossessed of land by the Nationalist government.

Confronted by the need to put forward a foreign policy relevant to the revolution in Africa and Africa's position in a sharply divided world, the party takes refuge in impeccable generalisations. Here one feels it was imperative that the conference should have stated more precisely where it stood. Admittedly it favours close co-operation with other African states but surely more than this is called for. Africa is potentially rich and potentially powerful, sufficiently so for both the "Western" and "Soviet" groupings to regard its rapid development as dangerous to their interests. In such circumstances "positive neutrality" leading perhaps to liaisons with both would seem the sensible position.

It is also disappointing that a strong line against colonialism is not expressed, particularly as United States' behaviour over Cuba and South America has shown clearly that the violation of the rights and security of small countries is not confined to the Soviet group. Similarly South Africa must join the "neutral" nations in impartially condemning the arms race and demonstrations of nuclear 'devices' by east and west.

The Liberal Party handbook is an important document. Not only is it a challenge to the drafters of the Freedom Charter—a document I sometimes feel tempted to describe as neither flesh nor fowl nor good

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red cod—but it also reveals, by contrast the obsolescence of *Safeguarding Your Future*, the Progressive Party statement of policies and principles, which was, regrettably left virtually unchanged by that organisation's congress in Durban in August. The chief value of *Nonracial Democracy* lies in its honest examination of South Africa's problems and its revelation that

somewhere in the Liberal Party there is a socialist party trying to get out.

If *Nonracial Democracy* is a signpost pointing the general direction of the party it is to be welcomed: if on the other hand it is the destination itself Liberals may find they are the only ones who wish to go there. ●

In the Rhodesia-Zimbabwe Process

The Skin-hats Stage

JOHN REED

VISITORS TO SOUTHERN RHODESIA from the Republic have sometimes remarked that events here compared to the grim realities further south have an air of comic opera. The cultural battles described in this article nearly all take place in the sphere of the ludicrous. But the issues involved are not ludicrous. Southern Rhodesia will be the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to move from being a white settler country in the full sense, with a virtually independent white settler government, with its own traditions however jejune and its own European way of life—and to become an African country.

It may take a decade before the change is complete. It will probably only take five years. In any case the process has already begun. For although Rhodesia still has a white settler government, and will continue to have such a government under the new constitution if this is ever put into force, still that government is no longer ruling, in the sense of shaping the country without obstruction according to a settler ideology.

The government is now merely dealing with a situation that has arisen, as best it can, confusedly, on some fronts apparently getting ready for African power, on others trying to postpone or prevent it. The coming of colonial territories to independence if it has not always brought a cultural awakening has usually brought a cultural preoccupation. The coming of a white man's land to African nationhood involves a cultural conflict—not on that deepest level where a conflict of culture has been going on ever since the white man arrived in Africa, and still continues—but on the conscious level of attitudes taken, affirmations made and slogans coined; a cultural accompaniment to the political struggle. In Southern Rhodesia cultural questions—what a man should eat and what he should put on and what past he should revere—now make headlines.

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NOT THAT THE SOUTHERN RHODESIAN European has a culture of his own in the sense that the Afrikaner has. Most adult white Rhodesians were not born in the country and have roots in Britain or South Africa. But there is the local form of the settler mind which is little more than the conviction of the distinction between "us" and "the natives". In Southern Rhodesia this is no longer official dogma. But it continues to be powerful.

"Events which are perhaps even now imminent" . . . "It all points to a crisis". John Reed's article and A. K. Brooks's review (page 6), written just before the banning of ZAPU on 20 September, should be read with the leader on page 1.

As for culture, the settler here feels secure in Michelangelo and Tolstoy. He doesn't have to produce a cultural justification from his own immediate resources (how embarrassing to have to cite Doris Lessing, who is the only major artist Southern Rhodesia has produced) any more than he has to depend on his own resources independently of Europe in any other sphere. With all this behind him, he can remain unimpressed by the massed arts of Africa.

The Africans at the moment are more modest and more local. Their pulses do not much quicken at the thought of Nok culture or the poetic achievement of Léopold Sédar Senghor. Their cultural awakening is the discovery that they themselves have for so long been taken in by a European conspiracy to pretend there could be nothing of value in things African. All they have to do is to affirm what has been denied.

"The missionaries have said we should not dance. Now we dance." They do not have to demonstrate the value of the dance. Sufficient, to quote the principles set down to guide the judges at ZAPU's traditional dance competition, that "the performance should arouse enthusiasm or interest from the audience—it may arouse joy or sorrow". There is no need to demonstrate against any standards the greatness of an African past, of African heroes. It is enough to affirm them. Zimbabwe. Chaminuka. Lobengula.

FOR THESE REASONS, the great International Congress of African Culture held in Salisbury provoked what quarrels it did largely within the European camp. That this very important occasion in African arts took place in Salisbury at all is almost entirely due to Frank McEwan, director of the Rhodes National Gallery, a man who has never once stopped waging his wild, unstinting battle with Salisbury's bleak archaic vulga-