



The New African

Time for a United Front IN South Africa?

IT IS AXIOMATIC that the freedom movement will continue to be ineffective in this country for as long as the deep divisions exist between the various widely separated groups of which it consists. It follows that before the freedom movement can be successful, its various organs have to be co-ordinated and its activities rationalised in some form of Front. This Front will, of necessity, have to comprise groups and individuals who differ basically in their desired eventual outcome of radical change for South Africa.

The most obvious divisive factors between movements in South Africa are two: race and ideology. The most significant attempt to remove race from political organisations has been in the steady life of the Liberal Party; the most significant attempt to create an organisation in which ideological differences were to a certain extent forgotten, was the Congress Alliance. And perhaps the most significant outcome of attempts to impose an ideological pattern on the Congress Alliance was the birth of the Pan-Africanist Congress.

Until these three movements and their subsidiary organisations can reach some sort of operational agreement, or until a new movement can develop which can proclaim the wishes of the majority of South Africans who oppose apartheid, and in its newness outstrip and absorb the mass of the other three, opposition both inside and outside South Africa will be of little avail.

There are indications that such a movement may come into existence. Within the present membership of the Congresses, and, it is rumoured, among former members of the banned ANC, there is an attempt to have the Alliance drop its outworn emphasis on uniracial organisations. If this is successful, it may provide the framework for the type of mass organisation that has existed in other African countries in which an oppressive regime is the single focus of opposition.

Admittedly, this would only solve part of the problem. There would still remain the barrier of ideological differences. But there are a sufficient number of objectives which all groups have in

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common, over and above their agreement on the need to destroy apartheid, to enable to unite—in the situation that both Dr. Blaxall and Mr. Evans describe in this issue—and to keep the ideological fundamentalists from exerting a destructive influence.

Only when there is a united force inside the country, will it be possible for the leaders (inside and outside the country) to speak with any authority, and to be able to press for the kind of action which would seem most likely to topple white supremacy. ●

South Africa's Revolutionary Opposition

1. Two years After Sharpeville

ARTHUR BLAXALL

MARCH 21ST 1962, SECOND ANNIVERSARY of Sharpeville: behind me on that day was the figure of a University lecturer, Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe. What was he doing? What was he thinking at that moment in Pretoria gaol?

There are those who say that Sharpeville and all that happened in those fateful days, marked a turning point in the history of the Union of South Africa, which was at the time on the threshold of becoming a Republic.

On the other hand there were those who gnashed their teeth because they saw in Sharpeville a set-back to years of struggle, which led through 1952 to Klip-town with its Freedom Charter, and all the miseries of the Treason Trial, which nevertheless ended in triumph.

The switch of the footlights in the play for African leadership unquestionably led to confusion, suffering and apparent victory for the arm of the law.

In a matter of weeks prominent personalities from the various unofficial—but nonetheless real—oppositions to Apartheid were finding their way as refugees across the vast continent of Africa, to the imagined freedom of ancient lands.

Deep, and even bitter, as were the differences between the groups, in exile they found common cause, largely because of the hunger and thirst among their hosts to know the truth about the strange anachronism called the Republic of South Africa. In the face of such a

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demand how dare the refugees reveal the weaknesses of their division while the legal power in the Republic steadily gained strength by virtue of unity?

In two years much water has flown under the bridges and then, alas, on the very eve of the anniversary of Sharpeville came news that the slender cord which held together the United Front had snapped. In exile and at home the disruptive force of division rears its ugly head while Authority entrenches itself ever deeper and deeper.

What does the collapse of the United Front spell for the forces of liberation (using that word in its widest sense, which includes the liberation of white rulers from their fears, as well as the liberation of the unenfranchised from all that retards growth)?

At its simplest level the failure to work with at least one common purpose is pathetic—as an exile, deeply involved, wrote:

“Now we are going to engage in petty struggles for recognition by international bodies and governments. This is going to absorb most of the useful time which we could employ in more important directions. How apt is the saying that Nero fiddled while Rome burned.”

“Nero fiddled . . .”; is that the beginning and the end of the tragedy? personal power, prestige and so on; and the virtual inability of the average leader to use his power while he himself is in the shadows.

And yet there are people who can.

An American Quaker, who has lived and worked in closest possible association with East Africans, wrote in a circular letter to his friends in the middle of 1961:

“Spiritually and morally Julius Nyerere of Tanganyika stands head and shoulders above most African leaders, except perhaps Kenneth Kaunda of Northern Rhodesia and Albert Luthuli of South Africa. Whether this will continue to be so under the weight of complicated responsibilities of power one cannot know, but one hopes that the future will be built upon the past.”

Nearly a year after those words were written we know that Julius Nyerere had divested himself of the trappings of power and . . . well, time alone will show the measure of his single-mindedness.

For South Africa the collapse of the Front spells the failure of leaderless people. Of the four organisations which formed the front two have been illegal in their homeland for nearly a year, with leaders immobilised in various ways. Whether or not their immobility will add to their stature only time will tell.

To men of shallow thought all this, only two years after Sharpeville, suggests the collapse of effective resistance to the tyrannies of racial discrimination. At the same time there are signs which show us what the apparent victory of Government policy really is. In the morning paper of that very anniversary day it was stated that the Transkeian Chiefs, who had been brought to Pretoria to discuss home rule with Government officials were lodged in a special house at Vlakfontein, *with armed police mounted guard*, and that *no visitors were allowed*.

Truly there is no victory anywhere for contending political forces in this infant Republic, but the way is wide open for the emergence of new leadership, and real unity not of white with white, or black with black, but all who are dedicated to a single South Africa, fit to take an honourable place among those nations which are moving towards the One World of the atomic age. ●