
Hard Work and Vision

PETER BROWN

The opposition's road out of adversity

AS THE GENERAL LAW AMENDMENT ACT moves on to the Statute Book and the armoury of the Government's police-state powers becomes more complete, one's overriding impression of South African politics is of a punch-drunk opposition.

The calls to white unity, the war threats, the kite flying in the Transkei are all having the apparent effect of winning more support for Dr. Verwoerd. Some white and some black South Africans, who were once opponents of apartheid, now wonder if there isn't perhaps some good in it for them somewhere. Where support is not won directly, there is a feeling of hopelessness. The Government's seeming invincibility takes the edge off the fight against it. Its growing array of weapons of intimidation makes critics think twice before talking. United Party voters start to vote Nationalist and Progressive voters decide it is safer to stay close to the laager, so they go back to the U.P. In urban areas non-voters are much less militant than a year ago. To relieve external pressure Dr. Verwoerd has struck a compromise over the United Nations visit to South West Africa which, even if it does not solve his problems, at least buys him time to manoeuvre. Some of apartheid's opponents have given up all hope of peaceful change and have made the first, tentative essays into violence, presumably knowing that this could lead in time to a second and more hideous Algeria.

IN THE FACE of this depressed and dispirited and sometimes desperate state of opposition, what does one do and where does one look for inspiration? One could look to the story of the British Labour Party or even closer to home, to the story of the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the example of real perseverance in adversity set by its supporters in their fifty-year struggle for political emancipation. What could have been blacker than their prospects after the second Anglo-Boer War? Defeated, impoverished and rightless, how deep must have been their despair? How did they feel when, ground down by the full weight of the depression, they saw Malan leading them off into the political wilderness in the early 1930's? Or when, in 1943, Smuts inflicted that crushing electoral defeat on them? Yet, in 1948, they were in power! How did they do it?

They did it because on a foundation of endless hard

PETER BROWN is National Chairman of the
Liberal Party of South Africa.

work and meticulous attention to detail they raised the myth of the Afrikaner's divine destiny in South Africa—a destiny which would only be realised when political control was won and Afrikaner domination established. They knew that once most Afrikaners subscribed to the myth the distribution of the vote made it inevitable that they must control Parliament. So, in the face of their defeats, they kept on, behind-the-scenes, through the murky channels of the Broederbond, through the schools and churches, infiltrating into commerce, tightening their grip on the civil service, reasonably certain that ultimately they must win.

Many of the methods of the Nationalists are quite unacceptable to their opponents. Who wants to be a Broederbond bigot? Their ideal of a destiny which will only be realised when they are everybody else's boss is certainly quite obnoxious to everybody else. But their example of dedicated work and meticulous attention to the details of organisation, of an inspiring ideal and determination in adversity, is one from which we can learn a lot.

OF COURSE THE NATIONALISTS had many advantages in their struggle which they are careful to see that their opponents do not get. They had the vote. They had an expanding system of education. They had growing opportunities for employment and improvement. They were, through their churches, already a potentially highly-organised community in 1902. Against this anti-Nationalists today must wrestle with the vast organisational problems created by influx control, migratory labour, an educational system which leaves many children illiterate and attempts to persuade the others that their destiny lies in apartheid. This is quite apart from the administrative pressures which can be put on Africans living in municipal houses and the vast choice of criminal sanctions available to the Government and which it uses increasingly against those who refuse to conform to what it thinks is right.

Concede all this. Concede the fact that the Government comes out of each election better off than it went into it. Concede that it has successfully crushed every extra-Parliamentary campaign since 1948. Concede all this and the fact remains that apartheid has no future in the modern world and no future at all on the African continent. However desperately the Nationalists try to build propaganda on the Transkei and Bantustans the fact is that apartheid was conceived as a policy to entrench white supremacy. In the eyes of the world and Africa that is what it remains. As such it is an affront to the people of Africa and a blot on the continent which they are determined will one day be removed.

THE QUESTION of how the apartheid "blot" will finally go, is one that agitates us all but it seems to me that there are certain things without which it will *not* go and it is about these that we can learn from the story of the Afrikaner Nationalists.

It will not go unless its opponents have an inspiring ideal. This they already have, if they will only capitalise on it. The vision of a non-racial society in which the full potentialities of every individual will be realised is surely a much better one than the narrow urge to survival and assertion which drives the Nationalists on.

It will not go unless anti-Nationalists as a whole work at least as hard and pay at least as much attention to building effective organisation as the Nationalists did. This they have not yet done. They had better start. They have relied too long on miracles and the off-chance of success. If anything they are going to have to work harder than the Nationalists did because the immediate obstacles they face are so much greater.

Finally, they must have the same courage the

Nationalist had in adversity. It may sound priggish to say so but this is not the time for punch-drunk opposition but for an opposition which realises that it must be as determined as its persecutors, confident in the knowledge that race supremacy is a dead faith and knowing that, if it gets down to brass tacks at home, with the world on its side, it will have nothing like the two generations of the Afrikaner Nationalists to wait before it comes into its own. ●

Thinking of BRITAIN

1. BLOKE MODISANE

An African in Britain

The Amateur Racialists

I AM AN AFRICAN from South Africa, where colour prejudice is a national expression, or in the words of Nadine Gordimer: 'Colour prejudice is far more than a question or a matter of discrimination or conflicts or loyalties—we have built a morality on it.' Every thought, every idea, every pronouncement, was conceived in and about, above, below the strangling presence of colour.

English friends in South Africa verbalised with idealism the colourlessness of Britain. We have no colour legislation, they said. You can go into any cinema, theatre, pub, anywhere. Being in South Africa, this seemed the absolute ideal. I could lose my colour in Britain, crawl out of the facelessness, the anonymity, of going under the name. Bloke.

I would outlive the necessity for the anonymity; re-define the features of my face, rediscover my personality and reassert my individuality. I would stop acting and release the essential 'me'. I would re-adopt my real name, and be myself, to myself, to my friends, to all the world. I would find my space, maintain it against all intrusion.

I arrived in Britain, vividly conscious that I had left prejudice behind me; full of love for life, for the world.

WILLIAM ("BLOKE") MODISANE, formerly of Drum, left Johannesburg in 1959 for London, where he is working as a journalist, broadcaster and actor. He has contributed to many periodicals, including *The Twentieth Century*, whose Spring 1962 issue contained the above article.

Not realising that I was the more vulnerable, because I was wearing the scars of discrimination from living in a pigmentocracy. Transition was to be difficult and adjusting hazardous.

I was unaware that my attitude to people, their reaction towards and against me, was not altogether free of colour overtones. When people moved away from me—in buses and tubes—I interpreted this as prejudice. I would be overcome by a sense of rejection. I rejected all self-analysis; it was 'they' who were responsible. And since race prejudice—or the reaction to it—always employs a scapegoat psychology, I accommodated the fear of self-analysis by rationalising my reactions to prejudice—often real—by being intellectual about it: advancing that I had been discriminated against by professionals, that English racialists were amateurs.

But in the streets, when the semi-professionals shouted: Nigger, go home, I would curl up inside and become frozen; afraid to explode, for fear of what I might do. The anger and the hate would be frozen inside. I would be the actor again, submerge myself in the anonymity of being black in a white man's world. One evening a crowd of middle-class thrill maniacs threw a bottle at me in Soho. I rationalised: there's no need to explode, the bottle didn't strike you. I knew then—and now—that the physical reality of my colour was being challenged. My right to be black, to be in Soho, was being called to question. Had it been in South Africa, there would have been a race riot.

The act of violence was not a protest against Bloke Modisane, but a reaction against my colour. I was a black face, a mask without definition. This would have happened to any black face. In a society which demands definite identifiable characteristics, the Negro is especially appropriate. There is no danger of him lowering his high visibility. He can be immediately identified under all conditions. With the Negro it is never a question of class. A Negro millionaire is black; a Negro Oxford graduate is black.

From the acceptance of this attitude come all the clichés about Negroes. The Negroes must conform to all the stereotypes. The Negro, like the Irish, is capable of all the lower forms of behaviour. He does not have to do anything; he is just guilty, by identification. The moment the Negro fails to conform to the stereotypes, he must be humiliated into submission.