

Words Words Words

THIS APRIL WILL SEE the first anniversary of the death of John Harris, executed in Pretoria Gaol for sabotage, one of the scores of South African patriots who have given their lives for the freedom of their people from the oppression of a privileged minority. Harris differed from the others in being the first to give his life in the loneliness of alienation from this minority, of which he was born an unwilling member. After his body had been cremated, a short service was held by his friends, Africans and whites, and among the readings was a poem by Patrick Pearse, who was himself executed for leading the Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916. Called "The Fool," it asks:

"I have squandered the splendid years that the Lord God gave me my youth
In attempting impossible things, deeming them alone worth the toil
Was it folly or grace? Not men shall judge me, but God."

Men have indeed judged Patrick Pearse and the realisation of his dream will be commemorated this April, fifty years after the abortive Easter Rising he led. Like Harris, he asked:

"What if the dream come true? and if millions unborn shall dwell
In the house I shaped in my heart, the noble house of my thought."

For South Africa it is still a dream; but in Ireland the dream has begun to come true. After fifty years, the people are emerging from the effects of those centuries of oppression which Pearse and his comrades sought to end. Still poor, with 70,000 Irish men and women emigrating every year for want of work at home, there seems to be a new spirit of progress and development, despite the terrible effects of the landless, serflike conditions of the peasantry in the centuries of British rule. May South Africa recover even more speedily from the centuries of domination and may it take South Africa only as short a time as it did Pearse's Ireland to complete the work started in South Africa by the Vuvusile Minis, the Mtutu Aplenis, John Harris, and those hanged for their part in the 1960-1 Pondoland rising. The British forces left Ireland in 1922 — six years after Patrick Pearse's Easter Rising in 1916.

THE COMPARISON BETWEEN the Irish and South African revolutions must not be pressed too far. The disastrous months of civil war which followed the withdrawal of the British must not be repeated in southern Africa. Above all, a great difference lies in the nature of the enemy. In *Bloody Sunday*, (Four Square, 3s

6d) James Gleeson wrote: "The fight by the Irish taught many other peoples how to prosecute a successful guerrilla war against British forces. It became a 'copy-book' war for countries like Israel and Cyprus, who learned from it how to use inferior forces to make rule impossible by much superior forces." Why has South Africa learned no apparent lessons from it? As Gleeson writes of Michael Collins, leader of the victorious Irish Republic Army 1920-1, "he knew the gun to be but a propaganda weapon, its power of destruction a headline, its detonation a slogan. He had no intention of challenging the might of an Empire. He was determined to challenge its weakness."

Collins wrote after the truce: "We applied the pressure in the proper places . . . World opinion regarding us was being forced on Britain . . . World opinion has forced them to these conferences. They want to clear their name with the World." When the fight comes white South Africa will scarcely worry about its reputation with the World. Indeed there will be no Asquiths at liberty in the country to talk about their own Government's "inhuman conduct."

NOT THAT MICHAEL COLLINS'S TACTICS in the successful campaign that led to the truce of 1922 were solely to goad the British to commit atrocities for which the people at home had no stomach and which the outside world deplored. The killing of 14 key British intelligence officers by Collins' men on the early morning of Sunday 21 November 1920 was essential if the I.R.A. were to survive at a moment when the British intelligence system was close to tracking down the resistance leaders in their Dublin hide-outs. Years later George Bernard Shaw expressed to Dan Breen (*My Fight for Irish Freedom*, Anvil Books, 3s 6d) his "surprise that the Volunteers allowed the (police) to function for such a long time. They should have been eliminated with greater ruthlessness. If this had been done the British Government could not have carried on for one day without their 'eyes and ears'." Collins saw this: the "eyes and ears" were

THE NEW AFRICAN/JANUARY 1966/17 shot down on Bloody Sunday, some of them in their beds. Later the same day, the British 'Black and Tans' fired in revenge on Irish crowds at a football match, at Croke Park, Dublin, killing 14 men, women and children and injuring 62. In England Bloody Sunday was so named because of the killing of the intelligence men: in Ireland, because of the Croke Park massacre. But it is in Ireland where Bloody Sunday is most recalled today.

SOUTH AFRICA'S DIVERGENT revolutionary path from Ireland's is due not only to the less sensitive nature of the enemy and their being based outside the oppressed country. After six years of slaughter and fifteen years of Cold War, after Gandhi's bloodless freeing of India (from a power that had lost the will to rule), the mood of many of South Africa's resistance leaders was near-pacifist up until the late 1950s, Satyagraha was found unsuited to the mentality of the Afrikaner nationalist oppressor, and it has taken time for South African political leaders to plan a new technique.

AFRICA'S UNLIBERATED TERRITORIES can all learn from Ireland's story, but perhaps South Africa can learn most. Dublin's bookshops (such as Hanna's of Dame Street) are well stocked with the source material. In addition to those paperbacks already mentioned, there are Max Caulfield's *The Easter Rebellion* (Four Square, 6s.), Richard Bennett's *The Black and Tans* (Four Square, 3s. 6d.) and the poet James Stephens' *The Insurrection in Dublin*, written in 1916 (reprinted by Sceptre Books, 6s.). Rex Taylor's *Michael Collins* (Four Square, 3s. 6d.) tells the story of "the big fellow" whose commanding presence, clear views and organising ability irresistibly call to mind Nelson Mandela. The bitterness of the Civil War accounts for the shortness of the list: participants were unwilling to reopen old wounds when the Republic of Ireland's unity was at stake.

"Come along now! Next please . . .
there's no apartheid in our till"

