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EDITORIALS

WHAT HOPE FROM THE U.P.

It is understandable that members of the United Party should feel elated that after 24 years in the wilderness, some rain has fallen. Even some of us who are not admirers of the Party, and who believe that the policy of race federation is an attempt to return to a past that can never come back, the past of 1936 in fact, welcome the erosion of Nationalist power, which has been so cruel in its operation, not only towards those who opposed it militantly, but towards millions of voiceless people.

There are some of us who, if we have to live under white government, would prefer to live under the United Party, because while we would not expect any realistic measure of change, we would expect less governmental cruelty and indifference. On the other hand there are others who find advantage in living under a Nationalist Party that will grow more and more intransigent, in the belief that its continuance in power will hasten the desirable catastrophic end.

In this editorial we shall try to state the conditions under which the United Party might come to power, and what it would be expected to do when it did. And ever hopeful, we shall say what we think it ought to do if it did.

SWING TO U.P.

It seems clear that the swing to the United Party has little to do with endorsement of its race federation policy. Nor is it in any important sense due to a revulsion from the policy of separate development, except, no doubt, on the part of those whose enterprises are hampered by lack of labour. Nor is it in any considerable measure, due to a revulsion from the use of detention without trial. It is largely due to increasing resentment against the continuous rise in the cost of living, and against the shortage of housing. In a lesser degree it is due to a wearing-off of the charisma of Nationalist Government, a decline in the fervour of Nationalism itself, and a growing dissatisfaction with the incompetence of some Cabinet Ministers, not to mention that of some public officials.

It is a fact of vital importance that the swing is not due to dissatisfaction with any racial policy of the Government, nor to increasing approval of the United Party's policy of race federation. What might bring the Party in would be a further deterioration in the living standards of white people, and a further crumbling of the Nationalist image that has been worshipped for so long. And what would the Party dare to do then?

STRONG AND COMPETENT

The boast of the Party is that it will give strong and competent government. It could hardly give less competent government than the Nationalists. But in what way will it be able to give strong government? Its main task will be to arrest the climb of the cost of living. One of its methods will be to ease the restrictions on the use of black labour. If this were done moderately, the Party could get away with it. If it were done boldly the Party would require a measure of determination which is not its most striking characteristic. Although the black population of the towns and cities has increased spectacularly under Nationalist rule, it would be the Nationalists who would focus the attention of the white voters on any further increase, in the hope of attracting back those who have deserted it.

Would the Party risk a new labour policy on the mines, where white miners have so long resisted any change, and where they have so long resisted any improvement in black wages unless their own wages were improved proportionately, a feat totally beyond the powers of the mining industry? It is

true that a new mine labour policy might not lose many voters (because white miners traditionally vote Nationalist), but there would be serious industrial troubles.

Would the Party seriously start to implement its race federation policy, and prepare and pass the massive legislation required for it, on the strength of a majority that would certainly be slender? It seems improbable. What makes it worse is that the policy is not only vague, but has already been repudiated by leaders and future leaders of the black territorial authorities created by the Nationalists. It seems unlikely to get support from any influential black people. And still worse, the policy of having black people represented in Parliament by white people, though endorsed by the Nationalists of 1936, was later totally repudiated by the Nationalists of 1948. What was destroyed once after having been endorsed by a tremendous majority in Parliament could hardly be recreated in the 'seventies by a party with a slender majority. What black person would have the slightest confidence in it?

NO MANDATE

If the United Party came to power because of economic dissatisfaction, it could hardly take this as a mandate to make drastic changes in race policy. Yet its only hope seems to be to come out with a new federation policy in which at least the race groups would be represented by members of their own groups. And would the Myburghs and the Douglas Mitchells support such a policy? Would the new United

Party members support it, after having won back their seats on a totally unrelated issue? It seems doubtful.

One concludes that if the United Party were returned to power it would be tempted to watch its step very carefully. It would require courage to govern boldly and imaginatively, and one must remember also that its definitions of boldness and imaginativeness would be very different from our own.

If these prognostications are true, then a change from Nationalist to United Party government would hardly affect the urgent issue of our time – will white South Africa produce a race policy, or a non-race policy, which will arrest our slide towards catastrophe? This conclusion is sombre.

There is only one creative choice that the United Party can make, but if self-interest and self-maintenance are its main concerns, it will not make it. That would be to revise radically its federation policy, to bring back hope to millions of people who have so little, to fix a minimum wage based on the estimates of what is required for a family to live a decent and law-abiding life and to announce that it will repeal or amend those apartheid laws which weigh down so heavily on voiceless people.

We say to Sir de Villiers Graaff: in these days when electoral opinion seems to be swinging in your favour, your responsibility can only be described as tremendous. We hope that you will be ready to shoulder it.□

DOCTOR NKOMO

The death of Dr. W.F. Nkomo less than four months after his election as President of the South African Institute of Race Relations will be mourned by many South Africans of all races. The Institute has had more than one African serving as Vice-President in the past, but Dr. Nkomo was the first African President and his loss is the more to be regretted.

A kind, just and moderate man, Dr. Nkomo was widely known as a leading figure in the Moral Rearmament movement. Not all the readers of "Reality" are Christians, and probably very few are supporters of Moral Rearmament, but most of us will agree that one of the hopes for a better South Africa is that spiritual and moral change in individuals for which M.R.A. works.

Pledged though he was to this personal persuasion, Dr. Nkomo did not hesitate to raise his voice on political issues when the need arose, and he was heart and soul committed to those hopes and ideals which "Reality" cherishes. We therefore join in commemorating his unselfish public service, and offer our condolences to his family and his wide circle of friends.□

BACK ISSUES :

These numbers are still available.

- July 1970 (Vol 2, No. 3) : Joel Carlson on Terrorism Act, J.V.O. Reid on Malnutrition.
- Sept. 1970 (Vol 2, No. 4): Dennis Hurley, A.L. Borraine.
- Nov. 1971 (Vol. 3 No. 5): Nadine Gordimer on Black Consciousness
Anthony Barker Mahatma Ghandi Memorial Lecture
- Jan. 1972 (Vol 3 No. 6): Norman Middleton – on C.P.C., Jonathan Crewe on Camus.
Robert Molteno on S.A. Expansion Policy.
- March 1972 (Vol 4 No. 1): Steve Biko on Black Consciousness
Alan Paton on Black Consciousness
Dudley Horner on S.W.A.

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