

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Violence and S. African culture

IT IS difficult to gauge the exact tone and intention of Professor M.G. Whisson's article 'Violence: an integral part of S.A. culture'. Some of his concluding remarks suggest that he may be concerned to make readers of *Reality* ('starry-eyed liberals?') realise that there are many extremely tough elements at work within the current South African political process. In so far as this is his aim, one must accept his insights grimly but gratefully.

But in many parts of his article he seems to overstate his case (if this *is* his case) in an alarming manner. He frequently lapses into the suggestion that the political contest is fundamentally a question of coercion and violence, and that moral and political arguments — what the contest is usually taken to be all about — play a merely subsidiary and instrumental role in the ruthless and violent struggle for power.

Thus he says: 'Any moral argument used in the debate must be seen as an attempt by one party to deny authority or legitimacy to another as the accuser may well not be in a position to use the force necessary to compel compliance'. In other words, force and violence are the norm; 'arguments' are a subterfuge and a desperate last resort.

He also implies (and it's an inevitable corollary) that the current strength of the ANC, for example, must be understood in terms of coercion: 'The strategy of violence and intimidation has been successful to a degree in that the ANC coalition now controls sufficient territory nation-wide and sufficient influence through the media to be able to present itself as a player to operate on equal terms with the National Party government'.

What does all this imply? It implies that people, or most people, never hold views because they believe those views; they hold them, or pretend to hold them, because they have been forced to. Now we all know that coercion and 'pressure' of various sorts are operative within South Africa, as in most other countries; we know too that very few people are capable of holding political or other views with a total purity of motive and commitment. But to suggest that all or almost all statements of political conviction are essentially

bogus is ferociously and unacceptably cynical.

Why is such a suggestion unacceptable? Because it is illiberal: nobody with such a contemptuous view of humanity can pretend to take humane values seriously. And because it is undemocratic; how can one claim to believe in democracy if one holds that no expression of majority opinion can have any authenticity?

COLIN GARDNER Pietermaritzburg

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PROF. WHISSON is to be complimented on a most illuminating commentary on the violence in our society, and the measure of deceit involved in its effective political manipulation.

I think, however, that it is a pity that he has associated himself by user with the inept expression "culture of violence". This is glib and superficial journalese at its worst and most careless.

Prof. Whisson should be sufficiently perceptive to realise that by using this expression he plays into the hands of precisely those people he seeks to expose. It is not a matter of culture: it is a matter of political manipulation.

My edition of the Shorter Oxford Dictionary is some thirty years old and does not reflect this pejoration of language. It defines culture as "the training and refinement of mind, tastes and manners; the condition of being thus trained and refined the intellectual side of civilization."

S.L. GAWITH Rosetta, Natal

Liberalism and democracy

WE whites should learn to know our place and, as democrats, to throw our support behind the democratically chosen and democratically motivated leaders of the black majority."

Nobody who read the September issue of *Reality* could have missed the pro-nouncement by Donald Woods, so boldly blocked out and emblazoned.

And a fitting blazon it is for Donald Woods and those many one-time liberals like him, who, in their zest to jump onto the rumbling, squeaky-

wheeled ANC "freedom" wagon, have (unwittingly or witlessly) forgotten what liberalism or democracy is.

Being dragooned into "knowing one's place" and being blackmailed into supporting the "democratically chosen" (since when?) "majority" hasn't so much as a whiff of democracy about it; what it does have is the fuliginous stench of totalitarianism and the one-time Eastern bloc.

What distinguished democracy from all other forms of government is the existence and toleration of *opposition*. And what distinguishes the true liberal from those of other political persuasions, is not only the belief in this principle, but also the strength *not* to give blind support to a majority government; however democratically it may be chosen.

The liberal assurances that surround Donald Woods's key statement might suggest that he does not demand blind support for the ANC, but the support he implicitly demands is blind nonetheless. He implicitly demands support for an organisation that has identified itself with, and has hitherto shown that it is totally incapable of distinguishing itself from, the Communist Party.

In other words, as history will tell the blindest, he is demanding support for a political movement that, with its trigger-happy Hanis, its "smiling" dodo Slovos, its sea-green Cronins etc., will inevitably lead to: no opposition, no tolerance, totalitarian inefficiency and corruption, a new set of fat cats, and far worse poverty for a newly-suppressed majority.

Anyone who believes, as some Communists themselves do that "it won't happen here; here it will be different" is being dangerously naive. And we have been given a very clear indication of the direction things will take here, by the ANC-Communist Party's tell-tale silence, the tacit support these champions of the people gave, when the recent attempted coup in Russia looked as though it was going to succeed.

True, when the coup failed, the leaders of the Communist Party-ANC put on their sheep's clothing once more, but it was too late, their silence had already spoken the truth.

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