

2. FATIMA MEER — — — AGAIN

Five years ago Fatima Meer was banned for five years. REALITY had a leader about that ban, which asked one question --- Why? We haven't had the answer yet.

This year, the ban was renewed for a further five years. Without expecting an answer we ask the same question --- Why?

Is it because Mrs. Meer successfully fought a prosecution brought against her for allegedly breaking her ban by attending a dinner party? Or is it because she is now contesting another prosecution, for allegedly having been out of the area to which her order confined her, and on the premises of an educational institution, where the order said she shouldn't be? We don't know.

Has somebody made a mistake? We ask because, on the day Mrs. Meer's old ban expired it was announced that banning orders on 24 other people had been lifted. How many mistakes had been made there?

As a matter of fact we don't think that Mrs. Meer has been banned by mistake, we think she has been banned on pur-

pose. And we think she has been banned because the Government didn't like the things she was saying when it banned her 5 years ago and thinks she may start saying the same kind of things again if it unbans her now. Which we are sure she would.

However, given that the Government has never liked the kind of things Mrs. Meer has said, and is not likely to now, it is still important that it should hear them. For, although her views may be radical by government standards, she has never wanted to drive every white person into the sea, she believes in a non-racial future which would offer hope and security to everyone (including those who presently ban her), and she can express in an articulate manner the aspirations of an important body of black opinion which shares her views.

She is just the kind of person a sensible Government would be listening to and talking to.

May the day when it can bring itself to do that come before this next five years is up. □

GRADUATION ADDRESS CHALLENGED

(A letter addressed to the Editor of the Rand Daily Mail on 19-7-81)

Dear Sir

I apologise for so belatedly referring to an important news item which appeared in the RAND DAILY MAIL in April 1981, but I have not seen it until now. It is the Address given on 14 April at the Graduation Ceremony at the University of the Witwatersrand by Mr. Allister Sparks, then editor of the RAND DAILY MAIL. The Address is a tribute to the "liberal institutions" of the second half of this century, and to the great influence which they have exerted on the current politics of our country, although the institutions themselves were despised, maligned, and often regarded as subversive. The argument of the Address is one of which I wholly approve.

At one point in his speech Mr. Sparks lists these "liberal institutions". They are the Institute of Race Relations, the Black Sash, the Christian Institute, the Council of Churches, NUSAS, Polstu, Helen Suzman and van Zyl Slabbert, Wits, UCT, and the RAND DAILY MAIL. But I was astounded to read that he made no mention of the Liberal Party which was the political pioneer of the very causes that Mr. Sparks both lists and approves.

I have been a loyal member of the Institute for over 40 years, and a loyal supporter of the Black Sash for nearly 30, and would not denigrate either of them. But it is a fact of history that neither of these organisations paid more than a fraction of the price that had to be paid by the Liberal Party for the maintenance and propagation of its principles.

I am an admirer of Dr. van Zyl Slabbert, and a profound admirer of Mrs. Helen Suzman. But it is a fact of history that neither of them was called upon to pay the price paid by Mr. Peter Brown, who paid ten years of his life for his chairmanship of the Liberal Party, and his refusal to keep silent, or to desist from the attempt to win sup-

port for the policies and principles which Mr. Sparks so much admires. He was one of the many in the Liberal Party who paid a heavy price for his endurance, though none paid so heavily as he.

Why did Mr. Sparks then omit all mention of the Liberal Party? If it was intentional, it was unforgivable. If the omission was unintentional, it was reprehensible in a speaker who was purporting to give an account of the liberal struggle of the second half of the century. He was delivering an important address at an institution which has always been a supporter of liberal values and principles, but what is more, at an institution devoted to the pursuit of truth.

The Liberal Party was outlawed by the Prevention of Political Interference Act in 1968. It held its last Johannesburg meeting in the Darragh Hall, and the RAND DAILY MAIL reprinted (verbatim if I remember correctly) the final address of the National President of the Party, who at that time was myself. Mr. Lawrence Gandar paid high tribute to the Party in an editorial that was a consolation to many of us.

It would appear that a generation has arisen that knows nothing of these things.

Yours faithfully
Alan Paton.

FOOTNOTE:

The Rand Daily Mail declined to publish the above letter for two reasons:

- i) that Mr. Sparks was out of the country
- ii) that the matter was now some months old.

I am glad to say that the Editorial Committee decided to publish my letter and this footnote. For historical reasons alone, Mr. Spark's defective account must be challenged.