

## 2. No Turning Back

Mr Leon Wessels, South Africa's Deputy-Minister of Foreign Affairs, had some hard things to say about apartheid at an Oslo conference not long ago – as hard as any of the things its opponents have said about it in the last 40 years. That couldn't have been easy for him.

Mr Wessels went on to paint a picture of the new society the Nationalist Party now wished to see replace that nightmare of the past. We might have some differences

with him over detail but on the whole it was a picture of a society most of us could support.

In South Africa the clock could not now be turned back to apartheid, the Deputy-Minister said. We are sure he is right, and every time a Nationalist makes the kind of statements he made in Oslo, that certainty is reinforced. □

## 3. The New Nats.

What Mr Leon Wessels had to say in Oslo received the most emphatic support he could have asked for from the big guns of the Nationalist Party and its grassroots constituency support at its Natal Provincial Congress in Durban a week later. Mr Wessels' "confessions" of the Party's past sins were as nothing to those that came from his boss, Foreign Minister Pik Botha, on that occasion. Mr Botha didn't only catalogue past sins he confronted his audience with some of the consequences of them.... more than six hundred organisations worldwide dedicated to working against apartheid and more than 70 anti-South African resolutions passed at the United Nations. Mr Botha told the Congress that as apartheid had begun to be progressively dismantled over the past months, the international mood towards the country had changed too. "We may not yet smell like roses", he told the delegates, "But we are no longer the polecats of the world".

Barend Du Plessis, Minister of Finance, told the Congress of some of the disastrous effects of apartheid on the economy – "We have one of the most skew economies in the world when it comes to the gap between the haves and the have-nots...". He went on to promise sweat and tears and a very bumpy ride before South Africa could expect to enjoy the stability provided by a generally acceptable economic system.

All this must have been pretty strong stuff for a Nationalist

Party Congress to swallow, after having spent over forty years being soothed by the platitudes and reassurances which were the stock-in-trade of their Ministers' reports to them in the past. But there was more to come – State President F.W. De Klerk's announcement that it was his Government's wish to open the membership of the Nationalist Party to anyone of any race. He said that an all-white Party was inconsistent with its claim to be against racial discrimination.

Almost exactly twenty-two years ago the Nationalist Party sponsored the Improper Interference Act which forced the Liberal Party of South Africa to close down because it was not prepared to compromise its stand on that very principle – that it was quite illogical to fight for a non-racial society in anything other than a non-racial organisation.

Liberals welcome the fact that the Nationalists have at least reached the point, on this question at least, where they were all those years ago. They are heartened by the fact that this complete change of direction seems to have been accepted, apparently without question, by the delegates to their Natal Congress. And they hope that it will be similarly accepted by the other provincial Congresses to follow. □

### Among our contributors

**Greg Mills** teaches International Relations in the Centre for Southern African Studies at the University of the Western Cape.

**Matthew Kentridge** is a political analyst now working for the Urban Foundation.