

## TOWARDS A CLIMAX

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LAST year's State of Emergency has done nothing to restore equilibrium to a South Africa now in a condition of permanent and ever-deepening crisis. Outwardly, the situation may appear depressingly familiar, and the cynics will see little sign of progress. The Government seems miraculously to survive every ordeal; in fact it gains steadily at the polls. Dr. Verwoerd, the Prime Minister, continues to claim his faith in God, while strengthening the Defence Force and the police. There is still no crack visible in the "granite" front of Nationalist Afrikanerdom.

Yet there has been a profound transformation in the Union during the last year. The Government has never really recovered from the Emergency. Not only materially, but also emotionally, it has been irreparably damaged. Where in 1948 the Nationalists swept into office with the firm conviction that in apartheid they possessed the answer to all the country's problems, today their optimism has vanished. Oppressed by a multitude of doubts and anxieties, attacked by enemies both inside and outside the country, the Nationalists today admit that they are fighting with their backs to the wall.

Giving his reasons for withdrawing South Africa's application to remain in the Commonwealth after becoming a republic, Dr. Verwoerd told the House of Assembly on 23 March 1961 that the other members of the 'club' had not demanded full equality between black and white in South Africa.

"They did not ask at this stage for this complete surrender, but to begin with they asked for small concessions. They said that all we had to do was make small concessions and then we could find a bridge. . . . It was perfectly clear to me, however, that those small concessions were to be made not only to overcome an immediate problem, namely to keep us within the Commonwealth, but also with an ultimate object. It was to be the beginning of undermining our policy and therefore the thin end of the wedge to create the prospect of full equality in the sense which I have just mentioned".

So there are to be no concessions. The smallest concession will only encourage the clamour for more, and the white man will eventually be drowned in the rising black flood.

While Verwoerd lay near death, with two bullet wounds in his head during the momentous April days of 1960, Acting Prime Minister Sauer took the opportunity to proclaim that the old book was closed and to hint at the need for a new one. He was repudiated as soon as Verwoerd recovered the use of his tongue. Later in the year the Nationalist 'moderates' began toying with representation of the Coloured in parliament by Coloured—to make them firmer allies of the whites and prevent their forming any mass alliance with the blacks. Again they were firmly slapped down by Verwoerd, who made it quite clear that parliament was for whites alone and that no non-white would ever have the right to sit there.

This "granite wall" policy of the Prime Minister (the phrase is his own) has eliminated all real possibilities of change from within the white sector. In parliament itself, all representation to the left of the Progressive Party has been steadily removed. First to go were the Communists, under the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act; then the Labour Party, abandoned by its United Party allies; then the so-called Natives' Representatives—most of them Liberals—under the quaintly-named 'Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act'. Judging by recent performances at the polls, the parliamentary life of the Progressive Party may end with the next general election. The United Party has sold itself completely to a policy of appeasement as the only hope of winning over the marginal 5 per cent. floating vote which, like some will o' the wisp, lures it ever further into the political marshes. Dissident elements in the Nationalist ranks there undoubtedly are, but they see no future outside of Afrikaner nationalism, and can only be regarded, at best for the moment, as unwilling prisoners of Verwoerd's intransigence.

The white politicians mouth the same old phrases, without conviction, without enthusiasm. The parliamentary quarrels are conducted without either light or heat, in a sort of 'never-never' land where nothing that anybody says or does makes any difference anyway. The Nationalist die-hards scarcely deign to talk at all; they have put all their faith in force.

So most whites rush, like passengers in a driverless bus running downhill with the brakes off, towards disaster. They are

fascinated by the fate which stares them in the face, but seem overcome by a feeling of helplessness and futility. Even the Nationalists do what they do, not because they know it is right, but because they cannot bring themselves to do anything else.

Afrikaner nationalism has reached the peak of its possible strength, and is already declining. It has proved unable to win allies, apart from its paid servants, among any other section of the people. The English-speaking South Africans are more antagonistic than ever before. As in all times of crisis, there is talk of a coalition, but there can be no such coalition on the basis of Afrikaner nationalism, and if it does come about on any other basis, Afrikaner nationalism is broken anyway. The Nationalist Government claims to stand for the survival of the white man in Africa, but its greatest strength—its Afrikaner exclusiveness—is at the same time its greatest weakness, preventing a united white front because it automatically rejects an alliance with all non-Afrikaners.

On the other hand, African nationalism grows persistently in strength and, if one excludes the Pan-Africanist Congress, has shown its superiority to Afrikaner nationalism in its willingness to work together with other racial groups on a basis of full equality. The Congress Alliance already embraces Africans, Indians, Coloured and Europeans within the framework of a single united front. The influence of African nationalism can be measured in the birth and development of the Liberal and Progressive Parties, which represent attempts by a growing but still small number of whites to come to terms with it.

Since the Emergency last year, the African political movement has taken a great step forward in organising and holding the Pietermaritzburg Conference on March 25 and 26. The plans for this conference were laid at a meeting of 36 African leaders, of differing schools of thought, in Johannesburg last December. The general purpose of the meeting was to discuss the political situation that had arisen with the ban on the African National Congress (A.N.C.) and the Pan-Africanist Congress (P.A.C.), and to create unity among the African leaders in the fight for adult suffrage and for the right of Africans to take part in moulding the future of their country.

Sponsors of the December meeting included the Rev. N. B. Tantsi, who presided; Adv. Duma Nokwe, former Secretary-General of the banned A.N.C.; Professor Z. K. Matthews, former Acting Principal of Fort Hare University College; and

Chief A. J. Lutuli, former President-General of the banned A.N.C. Former members of both the A.N.C. and P.A.C. took part in the meeting and, for the first time since the latter body broke away from the former, agreed to work together on the Continuation Committee, together with members of the Liberal Party and independents.

The December meeting unanimously proclaimed—"that this conference agrees on the urgent need for African unity and pledges itself to work for it on the basis of the following:

(a) The removal of the scourge of apartheid from every phase of national life;

(b) The immediate establishment of a non-racial democracy;

(c) The effective use of non-violent pressures against apartheid."

A second resolution observed events in Africa, to which South Africa's policies were diametrically opposed, and warned the Government that the banning of the A.N.C. and P.A.C. aggravated the cause of strife, racial tension and conflict in the country.

A new constitution for a Nationalist republic, in which the views of the African people were contemptuously disregarded, had been imposed. Because the Africans were denied participation in the referendum on the establishment of a republic, they refused to accept the result. The meeting therefore called on the African people to attend an all-in conference, representative of urban and rural areas, to:

"(a) demand the calling of a national convention, representing all the people of South Africa, wherein the fundamental rights of the people would be considered;

(b) consolidate the unity of the African people."

A Continuation Committee was appointed, consisting of the original sponsors together with the Rev. B. R. Raujili, Secretary of the Interdenominational African Ministers' Federation; Mr. Julius Mali, Transvaal Organiser of the Liberal Party; Mr. Marks Shope, Chairman of the African Laundry Workers' Union; Mr. Joe Molefi, former P.A.C. official; Mr. Jordan Ngubane and Mr. H. Bengu, of the Liberal Party; Mr. Congress Mbata, of the South African Institute of Race Relations; and Mr. Govan Mbeki, former A.N.C. Executive Member.

The date of the conference was fixed for March 25 and 26, and the stage seemed set for the most representative all-in African conference in the Union's history. It was not long,

however, before the united front created at the December meeting was cracked, once again by withdrawal of one-time members of the banned P.A.C.

A statement issued at the beginning of March, signed by sponsor Joe Molefi and other former P.A.C. leaders, proclaimed:

"We will not be party to any discussion relating to the calling of any multi-racial conference whatsoever. We genuinely seek a basis of unity among the African people into a compact whole, ready for an assault on white domination.

"Africans alone can solve the problems besetting South Africa. We alone can achieve freedom and independence. We therefore cannot be party to any conference based on preparation for a futile barren indaba".

The statement maintained that though the Pietermaritzburg Conference had started as an attempt to unify the African people, it had now shifted ground to preparations for a multi-racial convention that would prepare a new constitution for South Africa. The former P.A.C. leaders insisted that their formula was "unity in positive action on the basis of African nationalism".

Following the withdrawal of the P.A.C., Liberal Party members Jordan Ngubane and H. Bengu, and Congress Mbata of the South African Institute of Race Relations, also withdrew. The Liberals claimed that without the P.A.C. men, the conference would not encompass a sufficient range of African opinion.

A further heavy blow was struck at the preparations for the conference when shortly afterwards the entire Continuation Committee (ironically enough, including those who had withdrawn) were arrested on charges—under the 1960 Unlawful Organisations and 1950 Suppression of Communism Acts—of having taken part in the activities of an illegal organisation. No details of the charge have yet been made available in court, and the accused have all been remanded to 15 June.

It might have been thought that the defections of some of the leaders, together with the arrests, would have killed off the Pietermaritzburg Conference before it was born. In the event, however, the conference was held and attended by some 1400 delegates from all parts of the country, including the rural areas. Main speaker was former treason trialist and attorney Nelson Mandela, appearing on a public platform for the first time in five years since his 1956 banning order under the Suppression of Communism Act.

The time had come, he stressed, for the African people to fight back against Nationalist oppression. He was followed by delegate after delegate who came to the platform to endorse his call for action.

The conference unanimously demanded "that a national convention of elected representatives of all adult men and women on an equal basis—irrespective of race, colour, creed or other limitations—be called not later than May 31, 1961".

The conference also resolved—"should the minority Government ignore this demand of the representatives of the united will of the African people . . ."—

"(a) To call on the people to organise mass demonstrations throughout the country on the eve of the declaration of the Republic on May 31:

(b) To call on all Africans not to co-operate or collaborate with the proposed South African Republic or any other form of government which rests on force to perpetuate the tyranny of a minority; and to organise and unite in town and country to carry out constant actions to oppose oppression and win freedom:

(c) To call on the Indian and Coloured communities and all democratic Europeans to join forces with us in opposition to a régime which is bringing South Africa to disaster. . . ."

It is the challenge presented by this resolution which, by the end of April, had already led the Government to cancel all police leave, to step up Defence Force manoeuvres for dealing with "internal disorders", and to threaten the re-imposition of a general State of Emergency under the Public Safety Act, should it be found difficult to maintain order under the ordinary law.

Far from being cowed by last year's Emergency, however, or by threats of another one, the prevailing mood among non-whites seems to be one of defiance, typified by Chief Lutuli's Africa Day message, in which he said:

"When Dr. Verwoerd and those who accept his leadership stand 'granite-like' for our oppression, let us, and all freedom-lovers, be even more granite-like for our emancipation and with 'a courage that rises with danger' defy apartheid".

The attitude of a large section of the public, especially the non-whites, has been drastically changed by a succession of Government defeats—the forced departure from the Commonwealth, the series of anti-apartheid votes in the United Nations General Assembly, the collapse of the treason trial. It is obvious

to all that Nationalist Afrikanerdom cannot long survive a combination of its internal and external enemies. The pressures for change which are being exerted on the Government are enormous and grow all the time. Nationalist isolation has never been so complete as now.

The mood of confidence among the non-whites is matched by the temper of uncertainty, helplessness and, perhaps most important of all, sheer negation in Nationalist ranks. Pleas from Nationalist intellectuals, and even the Nationalist press, for "adaptability" are assiduously ignored or slapped down by the Verwoerd Government. Yet it remains a biological law that the organism which cannot adapt to a new environment must eventually perish.

Most disturbing phenomenon of all to the Nationalists has been the rapid and concrete growth of opposition amongst the Coloured people.

For years the Coloured have remained politically passive while the main attacks of the Government were directed against the African people. Not since 1939, when mass demonstrations were staged against General Hertzog's segregation plans, have the Coloured people as a whole taken united political action in defence of their rights.

Traditionally, they have been treated, to use the phrase of General Smuts, as 'an appendage of the whites'. They have been denied full equality; but at the same time they have been given a superior status, politically and socially, to any other section of the non-white peoples. The substantive inequality has rankled, producing such bitter manifestations as the tracts of the Non-European Unity Movement; but the substantial privileges, such as higher wages, better housing and fewer pinpricks from apartheid, have effectively prevented this irritation from spreading into action.

In fact, the more conservative Coloured have fully identified themselves with white supremacy in their attitude towards other non-whites. When British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan met the members of the Union Council for Coloured Affairs in February 1960, the Chairman of the Council, Mr. T. R. Swartz, welcomed him with these words:

"We are glad to have Mr. Macmillan here with us today, because the Coloured people of South Africa and especially those of the Cape have from the earliest days of the settlement fought side by side with the white man to break down the power

of heathenism in this land and to establish Christianity”.

It should not, however, be thought that Mr. Swartz was staking a claim for equality with the white man.

“The establishment of the Union Council for Coloured Affairs is accepted by a large and growing section of the Coloured population”, he told Mr. Macmillan, “as the beginning of a new era of racial co-operation between themselves and the Government, which will actively promote the positive aspects of the Government’s policy”.

It is doubtful whether Mr. Swartz would care to make the same claim today. In the meanwhile many things have happened to his people. Dr. Verwoerd has made it clear that the Coloured will never sit in Parliament; the most they can hope for is some sort of local self-government “in their own areas”.

The possibility of crossing the colour line is being steadily narrowed by the application of the Population Registration Act and the issuing of identity cards on a racial basis. The Coloured have been excluded from the “open” universities. Finally, Group Areas have been proclaimed in the Cape Peninsula, which will involve the uprooting of 79,248 Coloured and 3,658 Asians—a total of 82,906 non-whites—compared with the 7,271 whites who will have to move.

In March 1960, when Africans were marching in their thousands through the streets of Cape Town in protest against the pass laws, Edgar Deane, Secretary of the Furniture Workers’ Union, was one of a small group of people who issued a statement appealing to the Coloured people not to support the Africans by staying away from work. One year later, in March 1961, this statement was an important factor in the defeat of Deane for re-election to the Cape Town City Council. Elected in his place was George Peake, an executive member of the South African Coloured People’s Congress and a detainee during the State of Emergency last year.

Perhaps the most striking manifestation of Coloured militancy has been the proposal, initiated in Cape Town recently, to call a National Convention of the Coloured people. Among the sponsors of the proposed Convention, which is likely to be held in June, are men of a wide range of political opinion such as Bishop Francis Gow; Dr. R. E. van der Ross, the well-known educationalist; Mr. J. C. A. Daniels, of the Liberal Party; Mr. N. S. H. Kearns, of the Coloured Legion of the British Commonwealth Ex-Servicemen’s League, who earned some notoriety

when he defended South Africa's policies at the B.E.S.L. Convention in Australia not so long ago; and Mr. Barney Desai, of the Coloured People's Congress.

Discussions at the Convention will be based on the demand for the total abolition of the colour bar in every sphere and full citizenship for all the peoples of South Africa.

A statement issued by the Cape Town committee said that—after initial meetings of Coloured representatives, including leaders of Church, teacher, cultural, trade union and political bodies—it was agreed “that the only policy that can succeed in South Africa is one of complete equality for all people.” The statement continued:

“Having accepted that we stand for complete equality in a non-racial South Africa, we therefore reject all political and social agencies that have as their purpose the perpetuation of a system which implies the inferiority of, and imposes inequality upon, any South African of whatever race or colour.

“Bearing in mind that the stated policy of the Government as enunciated by Dr. Verwoerd, and the political and social institutions which are being used to implement that policy, are entirely repugnant to and inimical to the true interests of the people, it was agreed that there could be no compromise or collaboration with the present Government”.

More significant than the words have been the attitudes accompanying them. The Convention leaders have consciously tried to get the support of prominent African leaders, and one of the stated objectives of the Convention is to bring about more solid unity between Coloured and African in the struggle for democratic rights.

“Over a period of years, there has arisen a feeling that there must come about a united voice and force, embracing all democratic elements in South Africa, and drawn from all sections comprising the nation, i.e. whites, African and Coloured, to protest unitedly against the whole set-up of white domination and apartheid”.

Even more remarkable has been the statement issued in March of this year by four Muslim organisations and nine prominent Muslim leaders, and read in all Cape Peninsula mosques at Eid services. Headed ‘Call of Islam’, the statement reads:

“For too long a time now we have been, together with our fellow-sufferers, subjugated, suffered the humiliation of being regarded as inferior human beings, deprived of our rights to

earn and to worship freely according to the Divine Rule of Allah.

“We can no longer tolerate further encroachment on these our basic rights; we therefore stand firm with our brothers in fighting the evil monster that is oppression, tyranny and baasskap. . . . We call upon our Muslim brethren and all brothers in our sufferings to unite under the banner of Truth, Justice and Equality to rid our beloved land of the forces of evil and tyranny”.

Coming from the most conservative section of the Coloured people, a statement of this sort is unprecedented in our recent political history. It is believed to be the first of a series of moves which will eventually lead to a conference of all Muslims aimed at unanimous agreement strongly, militantly and uncompromisingly to oppose all forms of apartheid and discrimination.

The Coloured people are today more politically active than they have been for many years. The militant leadership of the Coloured People's Congress is receiving widespread, mass support at public meetings, attended by thousands of Coloured people who cheer to the echo all references to the planned demonstrations at the end of May.

“Stock up your food. Pull in your belts. The time has come”, said C.P.C. leader Mr. Barney Desai at a meeting attended by 8,000 Coloured people on the Grand Parade, Cape Town, on Van Riebeeck Day, April 6. And C.P.C. Secretary, Mr. Reg. September, told an Africa Day meeting attended by several thousands on the Parade on April 15: “We are no longer prepared to let the African people struggle alone. The days when the Coloured people stood aside will not be repeated”.

It must not, however, be thought that the Convention leadership is yet ready to take part in the end-of-May demonstrations planned by the Action Council, which was appointed in terms of the resolution of the All-in African Conference at Pietermaritzburg.

What we are witnessing today is the slow, and sometimes painful, withdrawal of the Coloured people as a national group from the white camp and the beginnings of their adherence to the black one. This in itself is a sign of the times. Black power is widely seen to be capable of challenging white supremacy. As the balance of power shifts, whole sections formerly attached to the one camp will begin to move towards the other. They may at first adopt a half-way position of neutrality; but that very

neutrality will still further weaken the position of the white supremacists and increase their isolation.

Most conscious of this danger are the Nationalists themselves. Pleading with the Government to do something to allay Coloured unrest, *'Die Burger'* said on April 20: "Let everything which the agitator can seize on and which can be removed, be removed with the utmost speed, for future race relations in the Cape are at stake as never before".

Only two days previously *'Die Burger'* had stated that "enemies" both inside and outside the country were precipitating "altogether the most serious crisis in South African history . . . not in the undefined future but in the next couple of months".

No one should be guilty of underestimating the power of the Nationalist Party, which remains the strongest and best organised political force in South Africa, with a multitude of weapons at its disposal. To think that Verwoerd will be easily defeated and apartheid wiped out overnight would only be to sow illusion among those fighting for democracy both inside and outside South Africa. The Government is still capable of, and will almost certainly take, ferocious reprisals against those in the country who engage in struggle against them.

Nevertheless, it remains true to say that never since the Nationalist Government came to power have conditions been more propitious for an all-out assault on the citadel of apartheid. The birth of the Nationalist republic on May 31 will take place against a background of growing hostility from the overwhelming majority of the population. Few babies could survive in such unpropitious circumstances. It is to be hoped the statisticians will shortly be able to record one more case of infant mortality resulting from pernicious anaemia.