

# Liberation

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## **Editorial**

# THE WEAKEST LINK

How strong is the Nationalist Government? The question is asked everywhere; and everywhere it is differently answered. By the Nationalists themselves it is claimed that the Government is stronger than ever before, more firmly entrenched behind the seemingly unshakeable battalions of ja-broers in the swollen senate. By despairing opponents in other countries the government is compared with the Hitler regime, which kept its deadly grip on Germany till almost the last street had been pounded to rubble by foreign armies. And by wishful thinking United Party politicians and press it is said to be bursting at the seams through its own internal dissension.

All such answers are wide of the mark. The United Party clutches at every slender straw in the hope of keeping its head above water; the Wassenaar revolt against the Nationalist Party, and the faltering Dutch Reformed Church uneasiness over the "church clause" of the Native Laws Amendment Bill are presented as evidence that the edifice of Nationalism is disintegrating, its ranks split from top to bottom and its foundations wrecked by upheaval. Such claims, made in the petty party-point-scoring tradition of parliamentary politics in South Africa, cannot be taken seriously.

But the incidents that give rise to these extravagant claims cannot be ignored. The Wassenaar revolt is a first tiny ripple on the surface of Nationalist unity, revealing some uneasiness and discontent in Nationalist ranks; but all Wassenaar's speeches since the break reveal also that the uneasiness arises mainly from frictions over personalities and scarcely at all from basic policy differences. Wassenaar, the apostle of English-Afrikaner unity to which every demagogue from both United Party and Nationalist Party platforms pays lip-service, has nothing more to offer than the old platitudes of "white supremacy with justice to the native." Concretely, his policy is Nationalism with its anti-British character diluted; or — if you will — United Party policy with its anti-republican jingoism discarded. Such deviations from South African orthodoxy neither weaken nor strengthen the democratic opposition to Nationalism, nor mark the beginning of the government's end.

The first, faltering assertion of independence from the Government made by the Dutch Reformed Church is of more significance, even if the assertion was made hesitantly and semi-secretly, and even though the Church leaders rapidly stepped back into line when the Government gave 'assurances' which assured nobody except the church leaders themselves. A first, microscopic crack has developed in the unholy trinity of party, state and church; and one which will widen, not only because Nationalist ambitions leave no room for those who would 'render to God the things which are God's', but also because the D.R.C., with the largest number of African members of all the European missionary churches, becomes increasingly torn between the needs to maintain those members and yet bolster up their government enemy and persecutor.

## SURFACE SYMPTOMS

There can be little doubt that it is the Nationalist ambition to entrench themselves as securely in power as did Hitler. But those who compare the strength and stability of the Verwoerd-Strydom clique with the regime of Hitler are being led astray by surface symptoms. It is true that all the paraphernalia of the Nazi state — the Gestapo, the tame judiciary, the unrestricted power to rule by decree, the racial categories and persecutions, the master-race creed — all these are being faithfully rebuilt in South Africa on the Hitler pattern. But these are the surface trappings and not the essence. The strength and stability of the Hitler state rested on two props; on the indoctrination of the masses and on their acquiescence and even support for the regime which was established at home; and on the military, political and economic support which was secured from the imperialist world outside. It is here that the similarity between South Africa and Hitler Germany ends.

South African fascism has feet of clay, because it has failed to indoctrinate the mass of the people with the ideology of fascism. Although the massed ranks of the self-constituted Nationalist majority in the Senate, and the steady majority in Parliament gives the Government the surface appearance of solid, majority backing, Parliament and the Senate together represent — at best — only a half of a one-fifth minority of the people, — at best, only one-fourth of the four main national groups which make up the population. Where the Hitler government stood by virtue of the silence or the support and backing of the German people, Strydom's stands

by virtue of a tatterdemalion army of hired policemen, petty bureaucrats and native commissioners, themselves drawn from that same tiny minority of the population, and acting amidst the hatred, opposition and open hostility of the masses of the people. A state founded on such unstable ground is at all times unstable, torn by inner doubts, ripe with the seeds of its own collapse. The only weapon in its armour is law; and the force that backs the law.

## NO FASCISM BY LAW

"We cannot take humanity to heaven with laws." The happy phrase is Mr. Swart's. Nor can one take humanity to fascism with laws, as the Nationalist Government has discovered. There are laws on the statute book cancelling out civil liberties. Meetings of the opponents of fascism have been attacked or outlawed by the Riotous Assemblies Act, the Suppression of Communism Act, the Natives Urban Areas Act, by municipal ordinances and by traffic bye-laws. And still the opposition meet and organise. Each Parliamentary session adds another law to seal the loophole of the last; this year it is the Native Laws Amendment Act. But fascism is not built by laws.

There are laws placed on the statute books by the Nationalist government to outlaw opposition organisations and suppress opposition newspapers — the Suppression of Communism Act, the Public Safety Act. There are laws to imprison opposition activists without trial, to deport them, to restrict their movements — the Native Administration Act, the Natives Urban Areas Amendment Act, the Riotous Assemblies Act. There are laws to break movements of popular protest, the Criminal Laws Amendment Act, the Transport Amendment Act, the Natives Settlement of Disputes Act, the Industrial Conciliation Act. There are laws to raise the police above the law, laws to cut off all printed matter entering the country from abroad, laws to permit the Government to rule without laws. But fascism is not built by laws. Still the opponents of fascism, the majority of the people, meet, read, speak, discuss, protest and organise against the government of fascism.

Nothing illustrates more clearly the dilemma of the Nationalist Government than its successive, futile steps to suppress the national liberation movement. In 1950 it was hoped that the Suppression of Communism Act and the outlawing of the Communist Party would meet the need. Failure. The Communist Party vanished but the Congress movement flourished. Communists were listed, banned from organisations and from meetings; but the Defiance Campaign raised the whole anti-government movement to new heights. In 1954, there was the Criminal Laws Amendment Act to smash the Defiance Campaign, followed by prosecution of the Campaign leaders, and by arbitrary Suppression Act and Riotous Assemblies Act bannings of a multitude of liberation leaders. Again failure. There followed the Congress of the People, drawing in the Coloured and European opposition for the first time, forging a stronger unity against the Government than ever before. More bannings, mass police raids, intimidation and secret police. And again failure. In December 1956, the arrest of 156 leading figures of the liberation movement, a single swoop on a charge of treason, designed to immobilise them all for untold months, to restrict them all from meetings as a condition of their bail: the trump

card to cripple the liberation movement, and to persuade its several limbs to wither and die. Again failure. With the 156 in jail or in court, the struggle against the Government rose again, in the mass demonstrations at the Treason Court, and later in the mighty, and victorious bus boycotts on the Reef, Port Elizabeth, Worcester. And already, with the Treason Trial still not at its half-way mark, there is talk of new laws to outlaw the Congresses and silence the opposition.

## MASS HOSTILITY

Fascism is not built by laws. In the end, as Hitler demonstrated to all who seek to follow along his road, it depends on naked force and mass terror. That lesson, too, the South African Government has learned and taken to heart. Force and terror is an essential element of the fascist state they seek to entrench. But there is a difference; the people are not with them. In Germany, a simple Gestapo or stormtroop expedition against an enemy group of Jews, or communists, or trade union militants passed off easily, quietly, amidst a population which either joined in the strong-arm sport, or acquiesced, or applauded, or merely looked the other way in cowardly shame. If there were broken heads, they were always amongst the enemies of the state, never amongst the bully-boys in the brown shirts.

Not so South Africa. Here, everywhere, and in everything, the government has to reckon with the mass hostility of the people. Every simple administrative action designed to tighten the screws, to intimidate or terrorise the 'enemies of the state' threatens to become a full-scale pitched battle, with the forces of fascism heavily outnumbered. A routine police raid on an African hostel in Johannesburg, a search for 'trespassers' and illicit liquor flares up in seconds to pitched battle, with police shooting blindly into a hostile crowd, while retreating under heavy counterfire of stones and brickbats. A routine administrative deposition of a tribal *chici*, (already in government eyes no more nor less than minor and temporary civil servants), blazes out into mass tribal resistance, with incipient guerilla skirmishes, summary revolutionary trial of 'enemies of the people' and a mass return to the countryside of kinsmen from the towns, coming to strengthen the fight against the government. South African fascism can command an overwhelming force of arms. But it beats against and breaks itself on the force of a people united against it..

Nor can the Nationalist Government draw strength and comfort from international ties and backers. Hitler Germany was financed, aided and abetted by reactionary circles amongst the ruling class of all the imperialist nations — Britain, France, America, Italy, Japan and others — for a single purpose; for the purpose of building up Germany's military might, and launching it in full-scale war against socialism in the U.S.S.R. For this sinister — and in the end suicidal — purpose, nothing was too much for Hitler to ask and be given, the Saar, the Sudetenland, Austria, Czechoslovakia. Much as the Nationalist Government may seek to inherit the Hitler role, history is against them. Imperialism is not what it was in the Hitler age. Such teeth as are still left in the dying system are still, it is true, bared against the enemy of socialism; and military, strategic and financial aid is still given to the running dogs who are prepared, against the moral lessons of Hitler's and Germany's destruction, to lend their

people as cannon-fodder for military adventures against the expanded socialist world. But South Africa is not to be counted seriously amongst the foremost contenders for such aid. Strategically we lie outside the main cockpits of a new anti-Communist war; and militarily, the deep chasm between the people of South Africa and its government makes it unlikely that military aid, even if given to the Nationalist government, will ever be used for any more bloody purpose than the maintenance of that government in power against its own people. For the sinister anti-socialist military adventures of today, imperialism looks to the more strategically placed and the less powerfully challenged riff-raff that cling to power in Formosa, South Korea, Japan and West Germany.

## AFRO-ASIAN BLOC

But even the most reactionary circles of Western imperialism have to reckon with realities other than those contained in the rigid concepts of strategy and manpower. Calculations of policy have to be based on the realities of life, however difficult they may be to swallow. And the realities of life are that imperialism, as a world-wide system of colonial subjection, has declined till it is but a shadow of its Hitler-age self. Half the former colonial world has passed into the world of independent peoples' states, some socialist, some peoples' democratic moving slowly towards socialism, some bourgeois, capitalist. A new force in world politics has emerged, the Afro-Asian bloc of powers, holding the balance of world power between the lands of socialism and the lands of imperialism, reflected in the balance of voting strength in the United Nations Organisation. This new world force is not only a powerful weight in the world balance of peace and war, but is also a great lever for the national liberation and independence of all surviving colonial states, and oppressed nations. Imperialism, willy-nilly, is being forced by the realities of life no less than by self-interest to seek and find a way to peaceful co-existence, trade and commercial relations with this new world force.

The Nationalist visionaries dream of themselves as battle-scarred Horatios, boldly holding the bridge of imperialism and of white man's subjugation of the black, against the world. But these are dreams. Life passes the dreamers by. The government which, three years ago, fulminated and threatened against the fearful prospect of what it calls 'native states' in Africa has been forced to bow before the march of world events. Ghana, the first independent 'native state' in British Africa exists; the Nationalist government, albeit grudgingly, recognises its existence, and moves towards an exchange of diplomatic representatives, even while the initiative in convening an 'All-Africa Conference' passes from the hands of the South African white supremacists, who talked of it two years ago, to the hands of Nkrumah.

## AMERICAN HANDOUTS

There are still crumbs to be had from the rich imperial pickings. The Nationalist Government still touts for, and will, no doubt, receive, crumbs from the American imperialist handout, in exchange for continued action against "Communism"; that is to say, in exchange for its gendarme action to ensure that the rising revolt of Africa against imperialism is strangled

before it goes too far, before it becomes infected with the radical ideas of socialism, of peace and of friendly relations with the East. But these are crumbs. They are incapable of cementing over the weak and cracking foundations of South African fascism. There are minor pleasures to be gained by Nationalist fanatics, too, from 'tweaking the tail of the British lion', from abolishing the singing of 'God Save the Queen' or from hauling down the Union Jack. But these are poor substitutes, and yet the only substitute possible, for the grandiose role they seek but will never play.

How strong is the Nationalist Government? There is no measure of political strength, no unit, horse-power or ergs or volts in which to measure. One of the world's greatest statesmen, answering the question why Russia became the first socialist state, answered that Russia was the weakest link in the chain of imperialism. There in Russia, all the internal strains and stresses, conflicts and antagonisms of the year 1917 were at their highest. The chain snapped where it was most strongly stressed, at its weakest link.

It might be too much to claim that of all the world, it is here in South Africa, in the year 1957, that the chain of imperialism is at its weakest; that here all the conflicts and contradictions between imperialist oppressors and the people struggling for liberation are sharpest and most acute. But that can not be far from the truth. South Africa is a weak link in the chain; its government holds on by the most tenuous of grips. But its people stands like a rock. Those who have gone over to the other side, to the side of the government, can be counted on the fingers — Cyprian ka Dinizulu, P. Q. Vundla, a handful, the few grains of sand that time erodes from any rock. The people stand like a rock; and while they do so, the Nationalist Government, by every new act of desperation, wears itself out and is ripe for the splitting.

## **GOOD THINGS COMING**

An ambitious programme of articles has been planned for future issues of LIBERATION. A Symposium "After the Nationalists?" from different viewpoints; important contributions on trade union policy and the "Economics of Afrikaner Nationalism" are among proposed features. Make sure of your copy by subscribing or renewing your subscription now (form on back cover).