

Editorial

WE'VE GOT TO GET RID OF THE NATS!

TO everyone, except apparently the top leaders of the Nationalist Party, it is becoming glaringly obvious that South Africa cannot continue very much longer in its present course, and that far-reaching social and political changes are urgently needed.

From abroad, icy winds of disapproval blow upon our shores. They come not only from those who can be contemptuously dismissed as heads of Non-European or Communist nations, but from people like Adlai Stevenson (who may well be the next President of the United States) and the British Labour Party (which will probably form the next Government of Britain.) The Nationalist Government of the Union constitutes a standing insult and challenge to the newly emancipated nations of Asia and Africa, from Peking to Accra. It is a constant source of embarrassment to its military and political allies, whose existence troubles them every time they trumpet forth some resounding phrase about the "free world."

At home the Nationalists face an increasingly menacing situation. At first when some new act of oppression on their part led to protests from the people they were able to ignore them. They would ban a few more leaders, make more police raids, and carry on as if nothing had happened. But as their rule grows harsher, their acts of oppression more intolerable, the protests become more formidable. They can neither be quelled nor ignored. Each new Nationalist outrage is followed by a minor upheaval — an earth tremor, the prelude to an earthquake.

Think back on this year, 1957, the year that opened with the ominous clashes outside the Drill Hall. There were the bus boycotts — and the earth trembled. There was June 26, when Johannesburg became for a day a silent city. On the platteland a new front has been opened among the once patient and long-suffering countryfolk, as in one rural area after another the women reject or burn their reference passbooks, or tribesmen struggle against mass removals, or Bantu Authorities, or dethronement of their Chiefs.

Non-European resistance puts new heart and determination into White opponents of the Nationalists. Professors and nurses march through the streets in protest against academic and professional apartheid. The Anglican and Catholic Bishops call publicly for defiance of the law on Church Apartheid.

Such signs — and these are but a few of the momentous happenings of the past few months — are plain to be read by any politically literate observer. Their message is clear. The Nationalists have come to the end of the road. Ten years of their misrule, their brutality, their obnoxious and

unnatural theories, expressed through the humourless bombastics of Father of the Bantu Verwoerd and the certifiable ravings of Sjambok Swart, Minister of Police, have convinced all but the blindest and most infatuated devotees of baasskap — that we have come to the end of the road. The people cannot be bluffed any longer. They cannot be driven any further. To attempt to do so is to court a disastrous explosion.

SIGNS OF AWAKENING

So bold and clear are these indications of impending change that even the Rip van Winkles of White South Africa stir uneasily from their slumbers, become uneasily aware that their cosy dream-world of privilege, stability and illusions of superiority is rapidly vanishing away.

To no section of our population is the awakening more painful and difficult than to the followers and dupes of the Nationalists themselves, their perception of political realities in this rapidly changing world (to say nothing of their consciences) long blunted and dulled by the smug and fixed idea that they have been divinely appointed to rule people of other races and pay them a day's pay for a week's work. This preposterous notion, held with all the blind faith of a religious zealot, has the effect, like all irrational beliefs, of closing the minds of its victims to all facts and evidence to the contrary — the more so, in this case, since it seems to justify and buttress its holders in the possession of not inconsiderable material comforts and privileges.

Yet a glimmering of the uncomfortable truth seems to be penetrating even some of these locked and barred minds. Dr. Wassenaar may be the one swallow that does not make a summer — and his "rebellion" does not seem to go very much further than chewing the cud of venerable clichés about "White unity". But Professor Keet is quite another matter. That, from the inner sanctuary of Stellenbosch a leading D.R.C. theologian should emerge to denounce apartheid in harsh, unsparing terms, as un-Christian, immoral, impractical — here was something new, which not only does great credit to the courage and integrity of Prof. Keet, but has also profoundly accentuated the hidden inner crisis of doubt and uncertainty that has set in in the heart of the Nationalist Party.

The simple-minded plattelander who voted for the Nats in 1948 and 1953 thought he was going to get a republic and an anti-imperialist policy, reductions in the cost of living, and the Non-White population "put in their places" — that is reduced to cowed servility.

But paltry gestures with flags and anthems cannot disguise that so far from advancing to independence, the country is today dominated by foreign imperialism — American as well as British — more than ever. The cost of living is higher than ever. And Non-White unrest and determination to win equality and human rights have reached heights never before known. No matter how much the State and Nationalist Party propaganda organs try to fix the blame on agitators, Reds and Congress, it is plain to all that the cause is the policy of Verwoerd and his colleagues, and that each new attempt to enforce that policy is followed by a new wave of disturbances.

In a word, the Nationalists have failed. Whether they will pay the penalty for their failure at the polls in next year's general election is a matter we do not propose to discuss now. We do not altogether agree with the interesting analysis made by "C.P.E." in this issue, and we propose to

return to the subject next month. But what is of fundamental importance is that the policy of the Nationalist Party has proved itself beyond reasonable doubt as not viable, unacceptable and unworkable. Any further serious attempt to force it upon the country can only lead to a major breakdown.

The big business supporters of the Party, appalled by the chasm that has opened out under their feet through the Songress declaration of an economic boycott, and the far-reaching consequences that can follow, are beginning to have long and deep second thoughts about apartheid and Verwoerd. For the first time since they moved into Union Buildings, the Nats themselves have not only lost their drive and their convictions of infallibility that sustained them through each new absurdity — they have begun to fumble, to hesitate and falter. Schoeman's lion-like roaring about the boycott not being related to fare increases was followed by a lamb-like concession of fare-reductions. The big talk about Poll Tax increases was suddenly dropped and the proposal silently shelved.

We do not believe, and we should not like to give any impression, that the Nationalists are about to change their character, to shed their Nazi elements and turn themselves into democrats, or to retreat. Indeed, they cannot retreat; they have burnt their bridges behind them one by one on their way; they have earned the hatred and contempt of the great majority of South Africans, and the best we can hope of them is that they will, in due course, retire to that graceful obscurity earned by unsuccessful and unpopular politicians.

NO ROAD BACK

If we are able to write with such confidence that the autocratic Nationalist regime is nearing its end it is not because we are sure that, despite all its rigging and gerrymandering of constituencies, it will lose the colour-bar election next year — though that may well happen too. It is because no government can permanently continue to rule without the consent and against the wishes of a majority which is becoming organised and united and determined on change. The time has to come when that government must give way to overwhelming pressure: and the time is approaching fast in South Africa. It is written large upon the events of the past year in our country, in the sweeping advance of all Asia and Africa towards self-government, in the challenging new spirit among the people, in the unwonted vacillations and uncertainty of the Nationalists themselves.

Not that we imagine the change as an easy, automatic process, achieved without heroic efforts, struggles and sacrifices, advances and retreats, the innumerable skirmishes and zigzags and unpredictable eventualities that must inevitably accompany an era of historical transition. No one can foresee the exact time and manner of the change, the precise details of the shape of things to come.

But change there must be; a break with the misery, tension, repression and uncertainty of this unhappy period — and a break, too, with the past, with the deformed and twisted structure that is crystallised in the South Africa Act, and of which the Nationalist Government has been the ultimate misshapen and unlovely product.

For nothing can be more certain than that we shall not return to the period immediately before the ten-year nightmare of Nationalist rule. Not for nothing have we suffered that nightmare. Once we have summoned the strength, the unity and the determination to end it, the people of South Africa will at the same time have the strength and the will to say — and to see — that it shall never happen again. There can be no road back to 1948. Every serious political group in the country — with varying degrees of clarity — has the wit to see that something more inspiring and democratic is need, something more in step with the spirit of our times, than the supine and cynical conservatism that let the enemy through the gate when Smuts went. And that is precisely why every political grouping in the country, from the United Party leftwards, is busily discussing, formulating and discussing proposals for change.

CONSTITUTIONAL PLANS

We do not propose here to weary our readers by analysing the ludicrously inadequate reforms proposed by the United Party. Restoration of the Cape Coloured Franchise; a few White Senators to be elected by Non-Europeans on a separate Jim Crow voters' roll: it is all so far behind progressive public opinion, as the U.P. always is, that it hardly merits serious consideration. The Party's millionaire leader, Mr. Harry Oppenheimer, tells the world that "We (meaning the Whites) must take steps to secure the goodwill of these Natives." Then he adds that Africans, being "uneducated people, still in a semi-barbarous state" are "plainly incapable of managing the affairs of the country." We wonder whether the world will be more impressed by Mr. Oppenheimer's novel method of winning people's goodwill by insulting them in the next breath, or by the odd logic of his claims that those whose rule over the past 300 years has left the bulk of the people still, allegedly, "uneducated and semi-barbarous" are the ones most capable of "managing the affairs of the country."

The United Party is not likely to secure the goodwill or support of the Non-White people; its whole history is one of spurned and neglected opportunities to do so; what it now offers is too little and too late. What is significant, however, is not that the U.P.'s reforms are woefully inadequate, but that it proposes any at all; that in its ponderous way it has inched forward a trifle is a mark not of any progressiveness in itself, but of the strength and intensity of the people's demand for progress sufficient to budge even this mudbound elephant of a Party.

The Liberal Party's recent constitutional suggestions merit more earnest attention. This Party appears to have abandoned, or at any rate put into cold storage, the opportunist conception of an educational franchise qualification which repelled so many democrats when the Party was founded, though traces of the same inveterate hankering to appease White chauvinism by compromising democratic principle remain.

The Liberals now propose the reframing of the Union's constitution to provide for greater provincial or regional decentralisation and the entrenchment of a Bill of Rights guaranteeing basic liberties to all. Perhaps the key clause in the whole lengthy document is the following:

"As to method, the aim of the Liberal Party is to secure the summoning of a new National Convention, this time representative of all racial groups instead of Europeans alone, as was the case in 1909. The power

to recast the Constitution would have to be conferred upon such a Convention by a statute of the Union Parliament, subject to general agreement being reached on the nature of the constitutional reforms desired."

We may all agree cordially with the Liberal's conception of a new National Convention, a Constituent Assembly in which all South Africans shall be represented. But that we shall have to wait until such a conception is approved and enacted by our all-White Parliament, mandated thereto no doubt by our all-White electorate, is a prospect that should cause the most stout-hearted and patient liberal to blanch. It is a prospect that need cause no sleepless nights for the ardent White supremacists; they may be confident that if this recipe is followed there will be no freedom in their lifetime, nor their children's either.

Let us frankly ask our friends of the Liberal Party to tell us whether they honestly believe that they have as much hope of seeing their proposals accepted by Parliament as the average ticket-holder has of winning the Irish Sweep? Of course, it could conceivably happen. We could envisage circumstances in which a Union Parliament would by some extraordinary freak, vote to inaugurate a democratic era; just is., with pathetic disregard of the laws of chance, we continue sending our hopeful quid off to Dublin every now and then. But having done so we do not expend our time working out whether having won the prize, we should travel to Europe first or to Asia, buy a Jaguar or a Buick, endow New Age or the Bishop's Fund.

The chances of Parliament convening an all-race Constituent Convention are, similarly, so remote that it hardly seems worth-while entering into a debate with the Liberal Party regarding the details of its proposals designed to meet so far-fetched a contingency. Whether a Convention with such a genesis would or should adopt their rather fanciful plan for a Federal Constitution "entrenching" Provincial Council authorities and civil liberties — always remembering that the principles of these changes would, according to the plan, have to receive the prior approval of the Union Parliament as now constituted — it all seems rather too academic and fantastic for us to be able to enter the debate with any degree of conviction or enthusiasm.

FREEDOM, ALONG WHICH ROAD?

Are we not, perhaps, being too finical and particular? Should we not be prepared to discuss the proposals on their merits, without regard to the "method" whereby they are to be effected? We do not think so. It is not possible, practically, to discuss specific reforms without some consideration of the manner and the circumstances in which they are to be brought into being. One cannot avoid the overwhelming impression that the new constitutional proposals have been framed precisely with a view to making them more palatable to some hypothetical future all-White House of Assembly and Senate, which the Liberals wishfully envisage as being prepared to consider them. The emphasis on the "tyranny of majorities" which the draft declares to be "as vicious as the tyranny of minorities over majorities" (a proposition which no consistent democrat could for a moment entertain) and the emphasis on Provincial autonomy (under which the Free State, perhaps, could be envisaged as a second Alabama) — these and other features sharply differentiate the Liberals' draft in tone and spirit from the Freedom Charter.

The Charter is meant, and serves, to inspire and guide a majority which is eager for democracy; the Constitutional Draft is meant to coax a reluctant minority which is fearful of democracy. Herein lies the fundamental cleavage of approach, which essays on the relative merits of centralisation and federalism would serve merely to obscure.

Living constitutions are never the product of academic debates on abstractions. A constitution like the society whose institutions it defines, grows out of and expresses nothing but the balance of real social forces in that place, at that time. We do not for a moment believe that the oppressed Non-White majority in our country will ever receive freedom and democracy as a gift from the hands of that privileged minority whose special privileges (and this is the fact which, we feel, the Liberals do not want to face) are bound to disappear in the process.

Thus to divorce proposed changes from the people, movements and events which must inevitably shape them is to put the cart before the horse. The shape of tomorrow's free South Africa will be decided by the majority of our people, of all races — else it will not deserve the name of freedom. And of their traditions, aspirations and ideals will be compounded the mould from which that shape is stamped.

All this is not meant to imply that there should not be, now, a frank and free discussion among all democrats of the broad main principles upon which free South Africa will arise. On the contrary. We ourselves propose to add our share to that urgently necessary process, by initiating in our columns an open discussion of those principles. The details will be found on another page in this issue of *Liberation*. We hope that in the give-and-take of debate all democrats, Congressmen, Labourites, Liberals, Africanists and others will move nearer to achieving that greater clarity of mind and unity of purpose which will enable us to meet the challenge which these stirring and pregnant times present to our generation.

THE OVERRIDING TASK

But while we discuss the future, let us not forget the present, and the desperately urgent work which faces us now and brooks no delay. For before we build our house of freedom, from the varicoloured and assorted materials which each democratic section has to contribute to the building, we must first clear the site by removing the ugly and useless structure — the jail, torture chamber and lunatic asylum — which now stands there.

To come down to earth: we've got to get rid of the Nats.

That is the central and overriding task which faces every democratic group and section in the country. Until it is accomplished all our hopes must remain dreams, and our plans idle talk.

If we cannot agree yet upon long-term perspectives at least we can all agree that no time should be lost in ending the long crucifixion of South Africa at the hands of that agony and degradation of man's spirit, that terror and shame which is the Nationalist Party.

And in the common strivings and sacrifices, the comradeship of that noble and arduous effort, may we discover the oneness of purpose and the mutual confidence that will help us to build liberty together, when they have gone.