

# THE GATHERING STORM

**T**HE disturbances in Natal cannot be understood in isolation from other events. No doubt each incident had its proximate cause: the injustice of the beerhall system, the wickedness of "influx control" and in particular the extension of this aspect of the pass system to women; the wretchedness and inadequacy of wages paid to Africans, especially for farm labour; the people's rejection of Bantu Education, finding its expression even in the angry and apparently unreasonable destruction of a school; the incivility or brutality of B.A.D. and other officials in their treatment of Africans — all these and many other immediate "grievances" may be found as causes for the demonstrations of many kinds, ranging from peaceful and ordered protests to the gatherings of impis and acts of arson which have been reported in our newspaper columns over the past weeks.

There would be an element of truth in such findings, but it would not be the whole truth.

Even wider of the mark are those who seek, as usual, to ascribe the troubles in Natal to the work of "agitators." Already, inevitably, the senior police official has popped up to blame everything on Congress. This time it is Assistant Commissioner, Brigadier C. J. Els, who has anticipated his chief, Rademeyer, by announcing ("Rand Daily Mail", August 19) baldly that "the African National Congress is behind the Natal disturbances." His proof for this sweeping statement is, apparently, that it was "repeatedly" found that "some of the leaders" were "dressed in A.N.C. colours." By now it has probably occurred to the geniuses in charge of the Department of Justice that this "evidence" is somewhat thin, and we may not unreasonably suppose that the Special Branch will soon be out again raiding for something more substantial.

What is taking place in Natal, as it is throughout the country, is a people's upsurge against intolerable injustices and for freedom. True, people are turning more and more to Congress as the organisation of protest and the voice of their aspirations. Congress in South Africa is a symbol of resistance and struggle. It is understandable that those who are swept into one or other aspect of resistance—even though they are not members of Congress, and even though the methods they choose may not be those of Congress and even disapproved of by Congress—may well don the black-green-and-gold, raise their thumbs and cry "Mayibuy' i' Afrika!" That is an indication of the people's support for Congress, and the depth to which its message, its symbols, slogans and liberationist outlook have penetrated among the masses.

## STUPIDITY — OR DISHONESTY?

But it is preposterous to adduce from these well-known facts that the African National Congress is "behind" every spontaneous manifestation of the people's disgust and resentment at the treatment they are receiving from this Nationalist Government: treatment so vile and savage that protests have risen against it from every corner of the world where men and women are free to raise their voices against inhumanity and injustice. The police seem to imagine, or to want the public to believe, that the Congress leaders sit somewhere in an office and work out a time-table: on such a date we shall destroy the dipping-tank here, on another the school there, or the sugar-cane somewhere else. If they really believe such trash it throws a pitiless light upon their lack of intelligence and understanding of the history that is in the making about us; and if they don't believe it they are guilty of trying to deceive the public. We need not exercise our minds debating whether they are stupid or dishonest; let us rather assume that it is the characteristic mixture of both stupidity and dishonesty which Mr. Swart's department has so amply demonstrated elsewhere.

The path of wisdom and sanity would have been for the Government to recognise that what is happening in Natal today — just as what happened in the Transvaal and Eastern Cape so recently—are symptoms and deep and heartfelt grievances, of intolerable tensions and strains which their administration and their policy has imposed upon the already sorely oppressed and suffering African people. To face these unpleasant truths — and then to take at least the first urgent steps to rectify the people's complaints, steps which they will delay yet further only at their utmost peril.

Alas, wisdom and sanity are not and never have been among the gifts of the Nationalists. Dr. Eiselen's statement ("Rand Daily Mail", August 21), is an almost unbelievably smug and silly document to have been produced in this year of grace, 1959. The Secretary of the B.A.D. says the people were "confused" by criticism of "everything the State does for the benefit of the Bantu" (like pass laws, mass removals and the prohibition of traditional home-brewing.) Eiselen does not recognise—what is as plain as a pikestaff to everyone else—that the Zulus are furiously angry with his Department and his Government. He speaks of "supposedly aggrieved persons."

Not a single concession is announced by this bad Secretary, not the slightest alleviation of the harsh pressures which called forth the disturbances. Instead he has announced a series of punitive measures, including recourse to collective fines, one of the few ugly features of colonial rule which, hitherto, has not been prominent in this country. Equally sinister is Eiselen's threat that pressure will be brought to bear on "Bantu communities" to become police informers on "agitators and wrongdoers" and that "it is expected that some of the detained misguided persons will divulge the names of the instigators."

## DONT BURN THE BRIDGES!

What does Dr. Eiselen have in mind? Are we going to see in Natal, under the auspices of the police and the Bantu Affairs Department, a reign of terror, along "Kenya" lines, designed to break the spirit and the solidarity of the Zulu people? We trust earnestly that Eiselen and Verwoerd are not proposing to embark on any such ill-advised attempt. They may not be deterred by the wickedness and injustice of trying to reproduce in South Africa the worst excesses of British and French imperialism. But we would offer them the sobering warning that wherever such methods have been tried, whether in Africa or Asia, over the past ten years, they have resulted in humiliating defeat and disgrace for their instigators. Faced with the inglorious collapse of their colonial wars, the West European imperialists could at least retire to their own countries, and try to console themselves by painting, for those who cared to believe it, a flattering picture of themselves as magnanimous benefactors, conferring the gift of freedom on their former subjects. No consolations await the imperialists of Union Buildings, once they have burnt the last bridges to conciliation and concession. They should bear in mind the crude and homely wisdom of the saying that you should not mess on your own doorstep.

Whether they were influenced by such considerations we do not know, but the fact is that, prior to the ominous Eiselen statement, the authorities had acted with rare and astonishing restraint and caution in Natal, so much so as to earn a public and quite unprecedented "thank you" from the President of Congress. It is sickening to have to record that the one to step in with hysterical demands for draconic B.A.D. and police punitive measures against the Africans, to inflame the totally unwarranted panic of the Whites in Natal (there is no evidence whatsoever that a single one of the disturbances was directed, racially, against Whites as such), and in general to shout for the absolutely suicidal policy of civil war in Natal, instead of the sane path of reasoned enquiry and rectification of intolerable grievances—was none other than Mr. Douglas Mitchell, leader of the United Party in Natal.

## WHITHER THE UNITED PARTY?

Now when Eiselen blathers about "supposedly aggrieved persons" and "everything the State does for the benefit of the Bantu", one may be charitable enough to assume that, with typical Calvinistic righteousness, he really believes that, in some devious way or other, all the hateful oppressions which the Nationalist Government loads upon the backs of the Africans are really intended "for their benefit." After all, the human mind has an infinite capacity for self-deception. During the Spanish Inquisition, the executioner-priests wept and prayed for the souls of those whose bodies they were burning at the stake.

No such charitable assumptions can be made in the case of the United Party. However half-heartedly and equivocally, the U.P. and its press opposed most of the outrageous oppressive measures of the Government which led directly to the Natal protests. They are perfectly aware that these measures are not meant to benefit the Africans, but are calculated

to drive them to desperation. Yet Mr. Mitchell and his colleagues do not point out to the Government how all their brutal measures are now coming home to roost. They do not demand an immediate reversal of apartheid policy in the interests of the well-being and safety of all the population of Natal. Instead Mitchell attacks the Africans for protesting against intolerable conditions, and actually incites the Government to take even harsher punitive measures.

This wicked and irresponsible act of cynical political opportunism is a true indication of the sort of behaviour which we can expect in the future from the "purged" United Party, with the Right Wingers firmly in the saddle. We must confess that we do not share the optimism which has seen in the exodus of the "Progressives" an encouraging major development in White politics in this country. The Steytler group did not break away from the U.P. in order to found a new and better political party, with a reformed platform and programme of its own. In fact, several weeks after their resignation, they have still failed to produce any programme at all, and when they do we doubt if it will differ significantly from that advanced by the United Party at the last election. It is true that they have said, and we must welcome even this timid beginning, that "the non-Europeans" should "be consulted." But which non-Europeans? Consulted about what? All is conveniently vague.

#### HOUNDED OUT

The truth is that the "Progressives" did not leave the United Party voluntarily. They were hounded out of the Party. Their departure does not mark a turning on their part to the Left; they stand where they stood before. It marks a turning by the dominant Party leadership to the Right.

We do not question the sincerity of the "rebels" — thus called by the newspapers. Indeed, they have rebelled, against the incredible depths of political immorality reached by their erstwhile colleagues, and all honour to them for so doing. Some of them — we do not recall Dr. Steytler among them — spoke out valiantly against the farm labour scandal at the last Session. In quitting the Party, they have jeopardised their Parliamentary seats and their political prospects, with not much prospect of any return save the intangible blessing of a clear conscience. In the morass of naked careerism and vulgar opportunism which distinguishes the Parliamentary political scene in this country, their behaviour shines out like a good deed in a naughty world. The "Progressives" themselves are not really a homogenous group; their delay in publishing any common statement of plans and aims is not the only indication of divergencies among themselves. It may well prove that we shall witness further regroupings and interactions between some of them and elements of the Liberal Party, perhaps, symptoms of the shifting political scene.

Yet the blunt facts of the matter show that the "Progressives" have taken their stand, and earned their title, in defence of the legislation and the plans adopted under General Hertzog in 1936 — and rightly regarded at that time as the most extreme move to reaction since Union. In that astonishing irony lies the true measure of the new situation. Today we have Hertzog Progressives; Malan Moderates; Dönges Liberals.

## TO OUT-NAT THE NATS

Henceforth we shall witness a degrading attempt by the U.P. leadership to out-Nat. the Nats. We shall see an exhibition of political dishonesty the like of which even South Africa has never seen before.

Take the question of the "Bantustans." We know and Verwoerd knows that the Government has not the slightest intention of delegating any real authority to the Government-appointed Chiefs in the Reserves. It is a wretched bluff, meant to throw dust into the eyes of the world. It hasn't deceived anyone.

The "brilliant" new tactic of the United Party lies in *pretending* to be deceived by this bluff. They are going to rush to the voters screaming that the Nats. are handing over the country to the Blacks. They are going to run around the platteland opposing land purchases for the reserves and holding themselves up as the saviours of White domination against the wicked Nats. who are concealed kafferboeties. (The White electorate of this country have showed in the past that they will swallow almost any nonsense, but even they are not likely to swallow this!)

In stripping itself thus of the last shreds of political decency and principle, the United Party finds the Steytlers, the Suzmans and the Wilsons—the main targets of Nationalist abuse at the last Parliamentary session—nothing but an embarrassment. Hitherto the hope of ousting the Nats. in an election has kept together the miscellaneous assortment of people with widely divergent views which constitutes the United Party. The theory is that under a "two-party" system, sooner or later the pendulum will swing and the "outs" will become the "ins". That theory may work out under more or less stable conditions where both sides play the parliamentary game according to the rules. It doesn't work when the conditions are inherently unstable, and where the "in-group" keeps drastically changing the rules to its own advantage. The Nats. aren't playing cricket; they won't give the Opposition an innings; they prefer all-in wrestling, with no holds barred.

A belated recognition of this unpalatable truth is the real factor behind the disintegration of the United Party. And the appropriate solution found by Graaff, Mitchell and Co. is apparently to try and make themselves so like the Nationalists that the voters won't be able to tell the difference between the two Parties. A cheerless outlook for South Africa: as if one Nationalist Party wasn't bad enough, we now have to put up with two of them.

Without even such restraining influence as may have been exercised over the Nats. by the criticisms of the United Party newspapers and by such a doughty fighter as Harry Lawrence; with the "Opposition" vieing with the Government in corrupting the moral sense of the White electorate; with every protest against each new iniquity branded as disloyal and playing into the hands of the growing movement abroad to quarantine racialistic South Africa—what a picture of the immediate future of "White politics" in our country, drifting helplessly towards the horrors of a one-party police state!

## ECONOMIC REALITIES

Yet the situation is by no means without its compensatory features. The logic of political events and economic realities may yet impel the "Progressives," or at least some of them, along paths more in keeping with the needs of a country in this awakening continent and this dynamic world than anything they have thus far said or done entitles anyone to expect. In his extremely interesting article "Why Oppenheimer Left the U.P." (New Age, September 10) Mr. Brian Bunting points out that the relative strength of manufacturing industry in the country's economy has grown steadily; its percentage contribution to the national income has gone from 17 per cent. in 1936 to about 25 per cent. now. Manufacture and commerce — unlike mining and farming — require a more skilled, stable and adequately remunerated labour force; Verwoerd is driving the country in precisely the opposite direction.

It is tempting indeed to hope that the emergence of the Progressives parallels in the political field the statements of organised commerce and industry (we only wish they were backed up by more substantial practical gestures to alleviate the desperate position of their starving African workers!) acknowledging that wage-levels are too low. No doubt the special interests of the manufacturing capitalists are one of the elements in an extremely complex situation. But we should do well not to underestimate the complexity of that situation. It is not their share of the national income alone which determines the relative weight of mining and farming in our political economy; indeed, manufacture and commerce are bound by a thousand invisible strings to the predominant mining monopolies. Hence the traditional timidity of these elements in advancing any radical alternatives to the characteristic South African labour structure — whose pillars are the colour bar, the pass system and the reserves — which cripples the development both of a trained, stable working population and of an adequate and expanding home market.

There are other and even more cogent reasons why we cannot really expect to find South Africa's white manufacturers and shopkeepers espousing the cause of freedom and democracy, or challenging the pass laws and the colour bar. It is true, and we have seen it happen in many colonial countries in recent times, that capitalists have joined with their people to win independence and the modernisation of the home economy. That is the classical path of capitalist development. We cannot forget, however, that our country is not "classical". Everything is twisted and distorted to fit the monstrous pattern of white domination, which has made the Union the target of outraged decency and humanity throughout the world; and frankly we do not believe that Oppenheimer and the Progressives have the slightest intention of doing anything which might disturb that highly-profitable pattern. They do not like Verwoerd and his Apartheid, but they do not like Lutuli and his Charter either; where they are going we doubt if they really know themselves.

## TWO CHEERS FOR THE PROGRESSIVES

We have no doubt that these surly-seeming remarks will be found most unwelcome by many of our readers; who will regard them as a poor and churlish acknowledgment of a gesture by a group of men and women which (though in the interests of their self-respect they should have made it long ago) required some courage and moral fibre. We most cordially offer any such readers the hospitality of our columns, for we have never claimed a monopoly of political wisdom, and believe that out of genuine disputation comes enlightenment. Perhaps we underrate the rebels from the U.P. — we shall be most happy if that is so.

Yet, we cannot find it in us, at this stage, to offer more than two cheers for the Progressives. There are a thousand urgent challenges and causes for anyone in South Africa today who is truly progressive; the fight against passes, Bantu education, Bantu authorities, Group Areas, political persecution and censorship, apartheid, the "Immorality" Act, bigotry and indoctrination in the schools; the fight for a minimum £1-a-day wage, for democracy, for free speech . . . Let us see the Progressives meeting some of these challenges and fighting some of these causes, and we shall with goodwill and enthusiasm add the third cheer and many more.

We have seen too many demoralising disillusionments in South African politics. We have seen how, every time honest people's anger against the Nats. has risen in the past decade, the "progressive" aunties of the United Party and the Chamber of Mines have hastened to quell the storm, lest it rock the boat of White Supremacy. We have seen these selfsame Harry Oppenheimers and Strausses kill the Torch Commando movement stone dead; just as Auntie Joel Mervis of the Sunday Times now hastens to reprimand the Maritzburg students for being nasty to dear, democratic Dr. Verwoerd.

Of course, times have changed. We live in days when Man has learnt to shoot the moon. We may yet live to see the day when Harry Oppenheimer will call for the abolition of pass laws — or even, for a start, allow the Congress of Trade Unions permission to send organisers into his mine compounds.

Meanwhile, as stormclouds gather fast, history is being made out in the streets and the fields of South Africa, by the men and women who have seen in the Congress message and the Congress movement their sole hope for a better life for themselves and their children, who have been warmed and inspired by the vast tide of goodwill and solidarity that flows to their fight for freedom from all Africa, all the world.

Will history spare a chapter for those who stand outside the struggle, ignoring the struggle, pretending it does not exist? Or a page, or a paragraph?

Let them beware, lest it be only one phrase — "Too little — far too little — and too late!"