

THE REFERENDUM AND AFTER

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By a meagre majority of 74,580 votes, South Africa has decided to become a republic. The referendum on October 5th was confined to registered white voters, in terms of Dr. Verwoerd's statement on January 20th that "the white electorate will decide the destiny of their South Africa in this respect." There are 1,864,197 such registered white voters on the rolls, a surprising increase of 288,197 over the voters' roll figure for South Africa and South-West Africa in 1958. In a 90% poll on October 5th, 1,633,772 whites voted—850,458 for a republic, 775,878 against it. The 12,000,000 non-whites looked on sullenly.

This is the first time the Nationalist Government has ventured to test white public opinion in a poll in which every vote is counted, and the result has confirmed the customary Opposition view that white South Africans are fairly evenly divided between pro-Nationalists and anti-Nationalists. Most election experts are agreed that the voting on October 5th was largely on party political lines.

If the composition of Parliament had reflected fairly the will of the white electorate, the Government to-day would have at most 81 seats in the Lower House of Assembly and the Opposition 75. Instead, the present electoral arrangement gives the Government 102 seats and the Opposition 54. If this electoral system is one of the heritages of "Western Christian civilization", it is no wonder that the Nationalists feel it is a civilization worth fighting for.

The enlarged Senate, created in 1955 to give the Government the two-thirds majority it required to override the entrenched clauses in the South Africa Act and so to remove the last non-white voters from the common roll, was abolished in October last year; and the Opposition, instead of being outnumbered 78 to 12 in the Upper House, will now be outnumbered only 39 to 15. The sum, then, is as follows: in the referendum, where every white vote counted, the Government polled 52% of the votes and the Opposition 38%; in the House of Assembly, where M.P.s are elected according to an ingenious delimitation system, the Government's 52% share of the votes ensnares 65% of the

seats; and in the new Senate, where election is based on a system of "proportional representation"—"proportionate", that is, to the seats held by the Nationalists in the House of Assembly and Provincial Councils—the Government has 72% of the seats.

There are those who hold that the Opposition did not poll its maximum number of votes on October 5th. There were several disturbing features about the campaign. A few months before the referendum was held, the electoral authorities in Cape Town informed a number of those registered as white voters that they were being removed from the roll because their race classification had been challenged. Those concerned were required to produce affidavits showing they were white if they were to retain their votes. An anti-republican official told a Cape Town newspaper that no fewer than 37 voters in a racially "borderline" suburb had received notices. Colonel J. R. Bowring, organizing secretary of the Cape Peninsula Council of the Opposition United Party, was quoted as saying: "It has been reported to me that, in several parts of the Peninsula, persons who informed Nationalist canvassers that they intended to vote against the republic, shortly afterwards received a letter from the electoral authorities informing them that it was intended to remove their names from the voters' roll in terms of the section in the Act which lays down racial and other disqualifications. The impression was created that there was some connection between replies given to canvassers and the receipt of letters."

The United Party also complained that the voters' rolls appeared to have been drawn up hurriedly, and that thousands of people might not be able to vote. The United Party office in Pretoria complained to the Chief Electoral Officer about the confused state of the rolls and was told it was the business of the political parties to bring to his notice any errors, so that these could be amended. "We have little enough time left", retorted the United Party, "to prepare for the referendum, without having to do the work of the electoral office. The inefficient manner in which the rolls were compiled is due almost entirely to the short notice given by the Prime Minister of the date of the referendum." The Prime Minister had given less than three months' notice of the date of the referendum and had also kept the State of Emergency, with its stringent regulations, in force until a month before the actual referendum date.

The postal voting system, whereby persons who cannot be at a polling station on polling day are allowed to vote by post, also

gave rise to comment. Clearly, the system was wide open to abuse. One newspaper quoted party officials as saying that the postal voting system had "got completely out of hand". About 200,000 people voted by post in the referendum (12% of the total poll)—an unprecedented proportion. A United Party official said that not only did the law make it too easy for people to vote by post, but that the system was open to abuse. The voter cast his vote in secret, "but the opportunity was always there for an imprudent commissioner of oaths to cajole voters to vote one way or the other". The United Party intends asking for the electoral laws to be tightened.

Another cause of complaint was the scarcity of polling stations in some Opposition urban constituencies. Whereas some strongly Nationalist rural constituencies had as many as 50 polling stations, in congested urban constituencies like Durban Central and Hillbrow (Johannesburg), there was only one polling station each. It was calculated that votes would have to be cast at the rate of almost four every second if all were to be recorded.

The Nationalist majority in the referendum must be attributed to factors of the kind mentioned above, and to the teenage vote, or as the Opposition prefers to call it, the ducktail vote. Recently, the Nationalist Government lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 (while steadfastly refusing to grant any political rights to the non-whites). At the same time, it has been assiduously turning the Afrikaans-medium schools into political indoctrination centres. In the referendum, the strategy paid dividends for the first time. A minor public opinion poll, conducted by a Cape Town newspaper before the referendum, revealed some hesitancy among Government supporters to vote for a republic; but students questioned at the Afrikaans University of Stellenbosch (the philosophic fount of *Afrikanerdom*) were enthusiastically, even arrogantly, pro-republican. The Nationalist youth of South Africa, clearly, has no qualms about the future.

Pro-republicans and anti-republicans made no apparent attempt to distinguish between the republican issue and the race issue. The referendum result, therefore, must be accepted as an endorsement, *by those who voted for the republic*, of the Government's racial policies. It would be wishful thinking to pretend otherwise. The question which naturally arises is whether the Government can ever be defeated in the ordinary way at the polls. The usual estimate of the ratio of English-speaking to Afrikaans-speaking South African whites is 40:60; but some experts say it is nearer

30:70. The problem confronting the Opposition, therefore, is not only one of Nationalist ingenuity, but also of Afrikaner fertility. The chances of a Nationalist defeat at the polls in the ordinary way at an election are negligible, therefore. Some Opposition leaders think the Nationalist Party will split, and that the victory over Nationalism at the polls will be achieved in this way; but this is putting the cart before the horse. Nationalism will split only when something causes it to split, and this something can only be the internal upheaval which everyone has been predicting for so long. It is absurd to imagine that the Nationalist Party will split as a result of an academic argument over race policies.

South Africa, now that the referendum is over, stands between the immovable object of the Nationalist Party, invincible at the polls, and the irresistible force of African Nationalism. This does not mean, of course, that the whites have no other part in the struggle; in fact, white opposition is growing stronger, not weaker. What it does mean is that the initiative for change rests with the non-whites, aided by external pressures. The next few years in South Africa will not be pleasant.

At one stage, it seemed that the threat of expulsion from the Commonwealth might bring South Africa's Nationalist Government to its senses. It was a hollow hope. The Nationalist leaders surveyed the scene and came to the conclusion that, however many threats were hurled at their heads, the Commonwealth would stop short at the final drastic step of kicking out a member country. Mr. Macmillan would see to this.

In its official referendum booklet, *'Advent of the Republic'*, and also in other statements and speeches, the Nationalist Government adopted the approach that, in the last resort, the older (white) members of the Commonwealth would persuade the younger (non-white) members not to blackball South Africa. Nationalist leaders said privately, and wryly, that South Africa was far too valuable for Britain to lose. At the time of writing, it looks as though this calculation has proved correct. Britain's attitude appears to be that one day the Nationalist Government will go, and that South Africa must still be a member of the Commonwealth when that happens. It is probably easy enough to get South Africa kicked out; it would be practically impossible to get her back in once she was outside, even if there was a multi-racial government here by then. Who can say whether the African National Congress would want to return to the bosom of

the Commonwealth? It is being suggested now that the Commonwealth Premiers will raise no objections to a South African republic's remaining in the Commonwealth, but that they will make it clear that this consent in no way signifies approval of apartheid; it is also being suggested that, because the idea of exerting Commonwealth pressure on South Africa might be abandoned, the United Nations will now become the instrument of pressure. The Nationalist Government has no objection to this plan of action. Its reputation has already reached rock bottom anyway, and it is firmly convinced that the U.N. will funk the final act of sanctions just as the Commonwealth is funking the final act of expulsion. Dr. Verwoerd, at the moment, has a grin stretching from ear to ear.

He has attained his present happy position without departing one inch from his stand as the world's leading exponent of white supremacy. After Sharpeville, when the world was hurling abuse at him and the entire business community in South Africa was urging him to introduce racial reforms, he said calmly and deliberately that apartheid must proceed; now, after the referendum, when English-speaking South Africans, in their usual trusting way, are eagerly awaiting the delayed reforms, Dr. Verwoerd repeats that—apartheid must proceed. In a post-referendum address to students in Church Square, Pretoria, Dr. Verwoerd warned anti-republicans not to expect the Government to sacrifice any of its principles to achieve unity. There was no question, said Dr. Verwoerd, of the Government's giving way on racial policy. There you have it, from the highest possible source.

There was something else Dr. Verwoerd told the Pretoria students: that political freedom would always exist in South Africa, and that nobody need fear suppression "as long as he conducts his campaign in a civilized, decent and democratic way." Dr. Verwoerd, it will be recalled, was Editor of the Nationalist newspaper '*Die Transvaler*' when this newspaper, in 1942, published the notorious 'Draft Constitution for a Republic.' This piece of distilled totalitarian thinking envisaged a one-party State for South Africa, with Afrikaners ruling as the privileged racial group, and with English as a second language. Dr. Verwoerd has never departed from this aim. When he became Prime Minister in 1958, he made an extraordinarily frank speech in Parliament, during which he outlined his view of the future: a "conservative" party, embracing nearly all the whites, and an insignificant liberal movement, catering for the

few cranks. Now Dr. Verwoerd has added a rider, that the cranks will be permitted to exist only if they behave in a "civilized, decent and democratic way." Dr. Verwoerd's aim is a tightly-controlled, fundamentalist State, in which "un-national" elements will be denied political rights. In 1941, Mr. C. R. Swart, now Governor-General, said: "We must eradicate British-Jewish democracy root and shoot, and in its place we shall have the old republican system adapted to modern conditions."

These are the true aims of the Nationalist Party. It is no longer expedient for the Nationalist leaders to state these aims as frankly as they did in the early war years, when they openly prayed for a German victory; but everything they do to-day takes South Africa further along the totalitarian road.

The republic itself is a device to further totalitarianism in South Africa—to strengthen Dr. Verwoerd's personal position in the Nationalist Party, to strengthen the Nationalist Government's position and to prepare for the introduction of a new, rigorous era of apartheid. In the circumstances, it is surprising that some South African liberals and progressives, pursuing the current South African myth that when the republic is "out of the way" the country will be able to get down to bed-rock discussion of racial problems, have accepted the referendum result so readily. The leaders of the Progressive Party have gone out of their way to describe the referendum result as an "overwhelming" majority in favour of a republic and as a "mandate" for Dr. Verwoerd; while the bulletin of the Pretoria branch of the Liberal Party states that "the republicans have scored a clear, if not convincing, victory. . . . Dr. Verwoerd is justified in taking the result not only as favouring a republic now, but as a vote of confidence in the Nationalist Party and its policies." A vote of confidence by whom? By the same Nationalist supporters who have voted for apartheid persistently for 12 years? One must accept the proposition in the bulletin that the Government "will not be beaten in the normal way at the polls", but it is astonishing that the Progressive Party and the Liberal Party should for one moment accept as a "clear victory" a result in which the 12,000,000 non-whites had no share. It is the myth again: the myth that the republic was a "red herring", designed to distract attention from the racial issue. The republic is nothing of the sort. It is a carefully calculated move to obtain "white unity", so that the application of apartheid can be intensified.

The second myth which is doing the rounds is that, as part of his appeasement programme, Dr. Verwoerd will make concessions in racial policy. Those who peddle this hope, however, reveal only their fundamental ignorance of Afrikaner Nationalism. Political parties are flexible, they can bargain and make concessions; but nationalisms are set, unless of course they have come to the end of their road and are ready to beat out a new, broader and un-nationalistic path. And Afrikaner nationalism shows no signs at all of doing this. Dr. Verwoerd's aim is still *Afrikaner* supremacy. If he were personally to make concessions, the Afrikaner movement would simply replace him by someone imbued with the genuine fervour of nationalism. The fact that Afrikaner nationalism has passed the point of legitimate aspirations and already become an imperialism, does not alter the validity of the argument. The basis of Afrikaner nationalism is its inflexibility and its exclusiveness. Concessions open gates. Is it conceivable that Dr. Verwoerd will embark on a policy which will undermine his whole Afrikaner citadel?

Take the example of Pondoland, where tribesmen have been in a state of chronic revolt since March. The Government cannot possibly enforce police control over this large territory, yet the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development has declared that no major changes will be made in the Bantu Authorities policy principally responsible for the tribal revolt.

Rapidly, now that the State of Emergency has been lifted, political activity among the non-whites is reviving all over South Africa. Dr. Verwoerd's last desperate gamble is that, through the instrument of the republic, he can swing the support of the vast majority of the whites behind his apartheid policies. If he succeeds—and the inclination among the Opposition to treat the republic as a "red herring" may assist him to succeed—then any real white buffer between the Government and the non-whites will be removed, and the clash, when it comes, will be titanic.