

THE SAME BOAT

AN ANONYMOUS CORRESPONDENT

SOUTH AFRICA'S State of Emergency uncovered many cracks and widened some in the social structure. Spokesmen of industry, commerce and finance, even of groups of farmers, criticized aspects of the Government's racial policies and pressed for reforms. As the composition of the 2,000 'political detainees' illustrated, Coloured, Indians, Europeans and Africans appear on the lists of subversive persons compiled by the security police. A significant section of the white population gave tangible evidence of its sympathy with the detainees and their cause.

The referendum on the republic appears to have succeeded in its main purpose of diverting the attention of the white electorate from the Government's racial policies. It also consolidated the great majority of Afrikaners behind the Nationalist Party. At the moment South African politics are again being dominated by the issues that divide the Afrikaners from the English-speaking.

The disfranchised peoples regard these issues with indifference or disdain. They would have cheered a defeat for the republicans as a defeat for the Government, but they see little difference in the attitude of the major parliamentary parties towards themselves. In their eyes, the English-speaking are as much a part of the dominant race as the Afrikaners, and no less determined to keep power in the hands of the whites.

In the minds of the 'extra-parliamentary' opposition, the State of Emergency constituted a crisis far more significant than the referendum. True enough, the Pan African Congress achieved none of the aims with which it launched the campaign of March 21st for the repeal of the pass laws and a minimum monthly wage of £35. Some employers have been galvanized into raising the wages of African labourers. The Minister of Bantu Administration has appointed a committee of officials to revise the pass system. But the Government has made no concessions and promises none.

It is the unforeseen results of the PAC's campaign that make it significant. To list the most important, we should instance the brutality of the police at Sharpeville and Langa, the world-wide nature of the revulsion against the shootings, the drastic decline of South African shares, the banning by act of parliament of both the Pan African Congress and its parent body, the African National Congress, and the emergence of an illegal Communist

Party. These events, their inter-relations and consequences, are being furiously debated by the groups that make up the extra-parliamentary front. This article is concerned with the debate, rather than with events that have led up to it.

The Congress Alliance

The extra-parliamentary opposition includes a number of organizations which represent not only the disfranchised, but also that minute fraction of the white population which identifies itself wholly with their struggles. The organizations proliferate by schismatic process, combine with or make war on one another, and between them express the political beliefs and values that have shaped the attitudes of black and brown people for the past half-century.

Three streams of thought have contributed to the political awakening of the dispossessed: Christian liberalism, Marxist socialism, and African nationalism. However incompatible these doctrines may appear elsewhere, in South Africa they provide a basis for common action. All three reject the criterion of race or colour and enunciate a doctrine of equality. Equality, whether socialist or liberal in content, is destructive of the feudal rigidities of colour-caste divisions. Whether avowedly so or by implication, the doctrines are revolutionary in the South African setting.

Their compatibility has been demonstrated by the Congress Alliance. The term is used to describe the continuous and intimate partnership that has been maintained since the advent of the Nationalist Government among the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the Congress of Democrats (which consists of whites), the Coloured People's Congress and the South African Congress of Trade Unions.

The Alliance is multi-racial or, as some people would have it, multi-national, for it unites ethnic groups and not individuals. It is also non-sectarian, since it includes communists, liberals and nationalists. Each section of the Alliance, though autonomous in principle, operates strictly within the bounds of an agreed programme, *'The Freedom Charter'*. It is predominantly liberal in content, but has a socialist strain.

Chief Albert Luthuli, the president of the ANC, describes its aim as "the policy of forming a multi-racial united democratic front to challenge the forces of reaction." Emphasizing a spirit of tolerance and goodwill towards other racial communities, he has claimed that:

“Africans applaud and honour those Europeans who work for the liberation of Africans on the basis of making the Union of South Africa a true democracy for all people regardless of their colour, class or creed. Hence we are grateful for the formation of the Congress of Democrats, with which the African National Congress is in alliance in the liberatory movement. . . . We are grateful also for the existence of the Liberal Party, between whom and ourselves there exists a warm sympathetic understanding and friendly co-operation on specific issues where our policies agree.”

The Opposition

Opponents of the Congress Alliance condemn such sentiments as ‘multi-racialism’ and a rank heresy. One of the severest critics is the Non-European Unity Movement; yet it, like the Alliance, is really a federal body linking together racial groups. It was set up in 1943 by the Anti-CAC (later Anti-CAD), a Coloured ‘united front’ formed to organize a boycott of the Government-appointed Coloured Advisory Council, and the All-African Convention, a rival of the ANC. Though open to any organization that subscribes to its ‘Ten Point Programme’, the NEUM has attracted few Indians and hardly any whites.

The Ten Point Programme calls for the removal of all colour bars. Less radical than the Freedom Charter, it contains nothing of which a liberal could disapprove. Nevertheless, the NEUM leadership has been strongly influenced by Marxist theory, which came to it through an earlier Trotskyist opposition to the South African Communist Party. The NEUM is persistently hostile to Soviet Russia, ‘Stalinists’, liberals and the ‘Herrenvolk’, a blanket term applied to all whites irrespective of their class or political outlook.

Within the past two years the NEUM has split into two factions, each claiming to be the sole proprietor of the organization and its Ten Point Programme. It is basically a split between the two founding fathers. One section, consisting largely of the Anti-CAD, is predominantly Coloured; the other predominantly African. Each accuses the other of being racialistic. Both continue to inveigh against the Congress Alliance, the liberals and the ‘Herrenvolk’.

Liberals and Communists

In contrast to the members of the Congress Alliance and the two sections of the NEUM, the Liberal Party is ‘non-racial’ and

opens its door to people irrespective of their skin colour or identity card. Like the Freedom Charter and the Ten Point Programme, the Liberal Party's statement of aims includes the extension of the franchise on a common roll to all adult persons. Its policy, however, contains no trace of socialist tendencies (in this respect it is more conservative than the British Conservative Party), and it is publicly committed to a policy of non-violence. In the language of the opposition, it is a 'bourgeois' party and, according to the NEUM, a section of the 'Herrenvolk'.

The Communist Party is also non-racial. Outlawed in 1950 by the Suppression of Communism Act, it surfaced during the Emergency as an illegal organization. Before it was suppressed, the party called for the abolition of all colour bars, the nationalization of banks, factories, mines and land, and the introduction of a non-racial adult suffrage. The illegal Party presumably retains these aims; but pamphlets circulated under its name since the Emergency declare that "the first stage" must be the winning of democratic rights for all and, therefore, that communists should work in the Congress Alliance for the achievement of its common aims as defined in the Freedom Charter.

The Emergency was interpreted at one stage by some sections of the opposition front as presenting great revolutionary potentials. In this mood other socialist groups took shape, one in Johannesburg under the name of The Socialist League, the other in Cape Town as The Workers' Democratic League. Impatient of the 'two stage' theory, critical of 'bourgeois' African nationalism, and hostile to the USSR, these organizations condemn the 'Stalinists' and urge the development of a purely proletarian party without commitments to any other class.

Pan Africanists

The Pan African Congress, like the ANC, consists only of Africans. It alone, of all the organizations here discussed, repudiates deliberately and of principle any association with members of other racial groups. Formed in April of last year, banned in April of this year, the PAC was unknown to most people before March 21st, 1960, when it launched its campaign against the pass laws. But its meteoric career reveals much of the ferment that is at work within the African population.

The PAC attributes its spiritual origins to Anton Lembede, a promising lawyer whose premature death in 1947 left a tradition amounting to a myth rather than a record of achievement. A

nationalist of the West African type, he opposed common action with non-Africans and urged that the African middle class constituted the ideal leadership of the peasants and workers.

Lembede's theories, real or apocryphal, were expounded by a dissident group, known as Africanists, who formed a faction inside the ANC in Orlando Township, Johannesburg, about 1955. Speaking at a Lembede Memorial Service in 1956, Sobukwe defined one of the basic claims of the new nationalism. "Only we Africans, and no one else, can or will determine our destiny."

Africanists adopted the slogans 'Africa for the Africans' and '*Izwe Lethu!*' (Our Country!) and interpreted them to mean "unfettered freedom from foreign domination" within and outside the ANC. They accused its leaders of being "wedded" to the white Congress of Democrats and to the Indian Congress, which existed only "to steer the revolutionary movement along constitutional paths of struggle and non-violence. In other words to put a brake on struggle." White and Indian allies of Congress were really "selfish white capitalists and the Indian merchant class", or "lackeys, flunkeys and functionaries of non-African minorities", or agents of Moscow and New Delhi. White liberals were "hypocrites, for they cannot accept clear-cut African nationalism."

Such criticism, which flows copiously also from the NEUM, discloses a deep-seated lack of self-confidence in relation to whites who occupy a higher status in the social order. But the Africanists failed in their bid for the Congress leadership. They broke away, and formed the PAC with their leader, Potlako Leballo, as its national secretary. Robert Mangaliso (meaning 'Wonderful') Sobukwe, a lecturer in African languages at Witwatersrand University, was elected the national president.

Multi-Racialism

In his presidential speeches, Sobukwe has rejected the "arrogant claims" of white and Indian "minority groups" to plan and think for Africans. He has objected to 'multi-racialism', by which he means the recognition of ethnic differences in political organization. He has claimed that it perpetuates group prejudices, panders to white bigotry, and serves to safeguard white interests. It implies that the differences between colour groups are basic and insuperable and that the groups ought to be kept permanently distinctive.

The PAC aims at "government of the Africans by the Africans

and for the Africans". An African means "everybody who owes his only loyalty to Africa and is prepared to accept the democratic rule of an African majority". The PAC will not guarantee rights to minorities, Sobukwe has said, "because we think in terms of individuals and not groups". He has claimed that the literate and semi-literate masses, acting under the banner of African nationalism and in an all-African organization, will destroy white supremacy and establish a true democracy. Freedom for Africans will bring freedom for all, runs the argument, because it will guarantee a society in which men will be governed as individual citizens of a common state and not as members of separate communities.

An ethno-centric vision is not necessarily racialism, if we mean by that term a belief that other races are innately inferior to one's own. The PAC's spokesmen never make such a claim, but their absolute repudiation of co-operation with non-Africans is widely attributed to a racial bias. In any event, the theory has obvious weaknesses. South Africa is not West Africa, where there is no large, settled non-African population. Here there are only two blacks to every white and brown South African, and power is monopolized by the whites. Their destinies are inextricably bound together. As the Emergency showed, even the PAC cannot operate without the backing and goodwill of other racial groups.

White, Coloured and Indian members of the extra-parliamentary opposition can in no way subscribe to the PAC's theory. Belonging to minority groups, they can find a mass basis only by identifying themselves with the African. They do this either by linking up with an African organization on a federal basis (as in the case of the Congress Alliance and the NEUM) or by joining a non-racial organization, which is the pattern followed by liberals, communists and socialists. Coloured and Indians, however, can conceive of an alliance with Africans to the exclusion of whites.

The Herrenvolk Myth

The NEUM is such an alliance, or was before it broke into a predominantly Coloured and a predominantly African section. Both make prolific use of the term '*Herrenvolk*' (which has strong Nazi overtones) to describe the entire white population. They recognize that the whites are divided into classes and national communities, but deny that this is of significance to the dis-

possessed. Afrikaner and English, capitalist and worker, liberal and communist are all part of the Herrenvolk. It is the Herrenvolk that legislates to exploit non-whites, secure white privilege at their expense, and cement "the unholy alliance between the Herrenvolk State and the white labour aristocracy."

A sophisticated version of the Herrenvolk Myth appears in a pamphlet issued by the African section of the NEUM and entitled '*The Pan African Congress Venture in Retrospect*'. The writer ties up the Government with "the Afrikaner petit-bourgeoisie" which, he says, "cannot comprehend the complex functioning of finance capital." The Government's "pettifogging legislation", made to uphold "a petit-bourgeois utopia and racial myth", has "the cumulative effect of seriously interfering with the natural flow of capital and clogging the economic development of the country."

Financiers and industrialists consequently clash with the petit-bourgeois functionaries who control the State. The former, backed by international finance, call for a "revision of the old crude *baasskap* attitude". They "appear bold, courageous and even revolutionary", but their sole concern is to safeguard their economic interests.

They used the situation created by the PAC's adventure to discredit the Government. "Those shots that reverberated throughout the world were fired in the battle between the last-ditch elements, the Broederbond, and finance capital". Industrialists, mine magnates, businessmen, liberals, Black Sash, the whole "regiment of the idle rich", rushed to exploit the situation and turn it against the Government. The PAC became a pawn in the hands of the liberals, who were "eager to recapture the leadership of non-European organizations".

For all its refinement, the NEUM's conception of the white population does not differ notably from the PAC's. All whites belong to the Herrenvolk and in the last resort unite "against the common enemy, the oppressed". When they are threatened, "the basic identity of their interests transcends their internal and temporary conflicts". The oppressed must turn their backs on these quarrels. "Our battles are distinct from those of the Herrenvolk".

But they are not distinct, as the NEUM would realize if it drew logical conclusions from its analysis and postulates. It insists, as do the other constituents of the anti-apartheid front, that all South Africans form a single, indivisible society. This being so,

what affects one part must concern the rest. In any event, a disfranchised people cannot be indifferent to cleavages within the ruling class. Their interest is to widen the cracks in its solidarity and attach the biggest possible section to their cause.

NEUM theorists, who take their history seriously, should recall the classic version of the change from feudalism to capitalism. It was the bourgeoisie who led the struggle, but workers and peasants also benefited from the abolition of legal inequality. Whites whose self-interest leads them to desire a free, competitive society are similarly the natural allies of Africans and Coloured.

Invective on the Left

It is not only the NEUM that reserves its choicest invective for political near-of-kin. The severest critics of South African communists are other Marxist socialists who stand outside the Congress Alliance. One such group, calling itself the Workers' Democratic League, has issued a clandestine, mimeographed bulletin entitled '*Lessons of the March Days*'. Ponderously modelled on '*The Class Struggles in France*' and '*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte*', it attempts to follow their style but makes no allowance for South African deviations from mid-19th century France.

Racial and national divisions are dismissed as unimportant. Multi-racialism is said to be "utterly obsolescent" and "anti-historical". South Africa's only "crisis" is that between capital and labour. Racial discrimination "must be seen as class war, as a war by capital to exploit labour more efficiently and to coerce it more rigorously". The colour bar "is both the mode of operation and mode of domination of capitalism in South Africa". All capitalists have the same interests, and liberals, acting in defence of property, attempt to "limit the democratic strivings of the people to the boundaries of capitalism and bring them under the rule of (bourgeois) law."

The analysis agrees largely with that of the NEUM, but the pamphleteer of the League will have nothing to do with that organization, which represents for him the Coloured "petty bourgeoisie"—"a motley group" of teachers, traders, well-paid artisans, students, doctors. They adopt a "non-class approach", want to confine democratic change to the bounds of small property, and use radical phrases to justify their failure to take part in the struggle.

Since class divisions cut across colour lines, one would expect the writer to conclude that workers of all races should and do combine against the capitalist class. But he makes no mention of white workers, considers that Coloured workers feel "no community of interests between their relatively privileged position" and the African's problems, and wants to "force unity" among them, Indian workers and Africans.

Undeterred by these difficulties, the writer claims that the proletariat will use its main weapon, the general strike, if it is led by a revolutionary party, to wit the Workers' Democratic League. It must organize "the most class conscious, the most advanced and courageous elements of the working class only" into a closely-knit and disciplined organization.

This, of course, is the Leninist formula for a revolutionary party and formed the blue-print for the South African Communist Party. Yet the League will have nothing to do with the communists either. They are 'Stalinists' and work with multi-racial organizations like the Congress Alliance "in order to promote the traditional collaborationist and opportunistic policies we have come to associate with this leprous camarilla". They use the liberatory movement "for collaborationist ends in the interests of Russia". Being members of the "white" national group, says the writer, they have been the cause of the "ominous anti-white feeling which sections of the PAC displayed".

Ultimately then, in spite of its class theory, the League arrives at much the same conclusion as the PAC and the NEUM about the whites. All of them, whether nationalist, capitalist, liberal or communist, are on the side of the oppression. Those who reject racial discrimination and oppose apartheid—even to the point of risking imprisonment, loss of job, social ostracism, constant surveillance by the security police—act out of self-interest and to guide the liberation movement into innocuous channels. Their real aim is to safeguard white domination.

The Basis for Unity

The Coloured and African theorists of the NEUM do not really believe that all whites have teamed up in a solid block against non-whites, or that white radicals join the 'liberatory movement' in order to betray it. It is not because of intellectual considerations that they turn their backs on their white allies. Their reaction is basically emotional, and a symptom of the heightened colour-consciousness to which all South Africans, and

especially the Coloured, are prone.

To meet and work together on an equal footing, South Africans must emancipate themselves from racial attitudes. Radicals find it comparatively easy to reject the racial myth, but the related habits, attitudes and feelings are more tenacious. To eradicate the complex, whites must learn to subordinate themselves to Coloured and African leaders, while the latter must in turn accept leadership from one another and from whites.

It is more difficult for Coloured and African radicals to subordinate themselves than for a white radical. Having freed themselves from the racial myth, but unable to escape the reality of social inequalities, they develop an inverted racialism. Many of these intellectuals, the Coloured to a greater extent than Indians and Africans, see in every display of authority by a white man, or evidence of mental or moral superiority in him, an exhibition of *baasskap*. To avoid contact and competition with whites, they withdraw into voluntary associations where they can be masters in their own house. The PAC practised the strategy of withdrawal in its extreme form and justified it with a theory. The NEUM denies withdrawal in principle and achieves it in practice.

By diagnosing the primary cause of dissension, one takes a long step towards finding a remedy. Another step would be taken if the opposing factions were to abandon the clichés—'Herrenvolk', 'Stalinist', 'Trotskyist', 'liberal', 'racialist', 'opportunist'—that obscure real issues. As this article has shown, there is a wide area of agreement between the factions. If they were to admit as much, and concede that their quarrels arise largely from a competition for leadership, the actual differences among them could be defined and debated with some semblance of reason.

The most serious difference arises over the problem of method, and not of aim. The Congress Alliance, which has borne the brunt of the fight against apartheid, is wholly eclectic in this regard. It has used passive resistance, defiance of apartheid laws, strikes, boycotts, demonstrations and every other form of non-violent resistance. The Liberal Party, as we have seen, is committed to 'non-violence', but has not defined its methods of struggle. The PAC claims to practise non-violent, passive resistance.

As for the NEUM, it has kept aloof from the long series of actions led by the Congress Alliance against the flood of racial legislation, denouncing them as "opportunist", "adventurism"

and “*ad hoc* forms of struggle”. But it has not put to the test its holistic theory of ‘principled struggle’ against the “whole machinery of oppression”.

In the final analysis, it is the enormous concentration of power in the white oligarchy that causes dissension among its opponents. Having battered their heads unceasingly against the hard, unyielding wall of segregation without making an impression, they blame the failure on one another. Where no faction achieves success, new factions invariably arise. A PAC local leader, explaining the disaffection of his organization from the ANC, gave a biblical analogy. “The Israelites took 40 years from Egypt to Israel, while the ANC has been going for 47 years and cannot reach its destination”. Except for the time span, the same reproach can be levelled against every other section of the anti-apartheid front.

The article must end on this note, but one further observation needs to be added. Disunity is a cause, as well as consequence, of failure. All sections of the opposition are in the same boat, but they pull in different directions and quarrel about the course and the steersman. Until they learn to pull together, none will reach the destination.

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