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EDITORIAL

1. THE OLD YEAR AND THE NEW

In the last months of 1984 a series of heavy blows was dealt to the Nationalist Party's attempt to project itself as an agent of reform. Most of them were self-inflicted by a Government whose reflex reaction to any serious challenge to its policies has, for a generation now, been to ban, or detain, or call in the police.

That reflex remained as uncontrolled in 1984 as ever and the acts of folly it set off included: — the boost given to the boycott campaign against the tri-cameral elections by the last-minute detention of some of its leaders; the slapdash preparation of their detention orders so that, even in terms of the Government's vast security powers, they were still so inadequate that the Natal Supreme Court threw them out and released the detainees; the attempt to by-pass this judgement by issuing new detention orders, which lead directly to the detainees taking refuge in the British Consulate, and all which followed that; the petulant refusal, in retaliation, to return the South Africans charged with arms smuggling in Britain to stand their trial, in breach of a solemn government promise given to the Court; the response to the widespread, post-election unrest in the Vaal Triangle, involving the military on a large scale for the first time, further detentions, and the subjection of whole communities of hundreds of thousands of people to the harrowing experience and indignity of having their homes and persons searched in the dark hours of the early morning;

the uncompromising reaction to the massive two-day stay-away strike called in protest against all this, first through the detention of more leaders, notably trade unionists, second through the dismissal of the entire black labour force of 6,000 from the Government's Secunda oil-from-coal plant because of their support for the stayaway; the alienation of the business community, as it saw its carefully nurtured relations with the new union leaders shattered as they disappeared into detention; the threat to prosecute Dr. Alan Boesak, President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, for statements he is alleged to have made about the army and the police in an Australian press interview, a prosecution which, if it ever takes place, is likely to be far more damaging to the Government on the international stage than it ever will to Dr. Boesak. The list could be much longer, and probably will be by the time this issue of Reality appears.

Did all this wild lashing about in every direction mean that we were on the brink of revolution in late 1984, as some people, including some people in the Governments, would like us to believe? We doubt it very much. But what we certainly do think is that our situation at the beginning of 1985 is rather different to what it was a year ago. For one thing, government actions since last August have almost certainly succeeded in making politically more radical thousands of black town dwellers, especially of the older

generation, who were relatively uncommitted before. The success of the stayaway was surely evidence of this, for at a time when the economy is in a worse state than most people can remember, the response was overwhelming. It couldn't all have been due to gullibility and intimidation. For another thing, businessmen seem at last to have come to the conclusion that it is more important for them to get on well with their workers than it is for them to try to please the Government. If they carry on in this vein they may begin to give the 'free enterprise' system some much needed credibility in those workers' eyes. Finally, the Government's attempt to exclude urban blacks from its new constitutional proposals has proved a total disaster. That exclusion gave to its opponents of all colours and a wide range of political persuasions the one thing they needed most, a single, simple rallying-point cutting across their differences, around which to get together and organise. And how successfully they did it. As a result, as we start on the New Year, instead of standing quietly in the wings, where the Government intended them to be, black urban South Africans stand firmly on the very centre of the political stage.

1984 has seen what must surely be the final collapse of

the Urban Council system, its supporters having been the first unhappy victims of anti-government wrath and violence last year. The Government has for months had a Cabinet Committee working on something to take its place. It is wasting its time. Whatever it proposes will go the same way as the urban councils. Less and less people will be prepared to risk involvement and hardly anyone will vote for those who do.

We need a revolution in 1985 all right, and the revolution we need is in the Nationalists' thinking, so that they start talking to the leaders of black people in the towns who count for something with them. If at first both sides find it too embarrassing to be seen to be talking to one another, by all means let the talking be in secret. Amongst other places, it could start at Pollsmoor and on Robben Island, which shouldn't be too difficult to arrange. A suitable starting point for the discussion could be the suggestion put forward by Rev. Peter Storey of the Methodist Church recently. It was that the Government unban all banned organisations, that in return those committed to violence abandon 'the armed struggle' and that we set off anew from there. That really would give us something to look forward to in 1985. □

By DAVE WALWYN

STENDAHL MISSION : A LESSON FOR THE CHURCHES

The recent removal of 37 families from Stendahl Mission is a strong warning to the Churches not to sell off mission property without taking strict precautions to ensure that the future of the community living on the land is secured.

Early on the morning of Tuesday, 27 November 1984, these families awaited the arrival of government trucks to take them to the Waayhoek Resettlement Camp. They were to leave behind a farm which had been the home of the Stendahl congregation since November 1860. They were to be the latest victims of a widespread State policy to remove gratuitous tenants and illegal squatters from white-owned farmland in the Western district. Since the abolition of labour tenancy in July 1969, nearly 20 000 farm tenants have been evicted and resettled in the Msinga district. For most of 1969, 1970 and 1971, the district was in turmoil ' Tractors demolish kraals — 200 homeless' (Rand Daily Mail, 9/11/70). Large numbers of tenants passively resisted eviction and had to be forced out by hut burnings, bulldozers, arrests and prosecution.

This initial purge passed by the people of Stendahl. They were able to escape because at that time the land on which they were living belonged to the Berlin Mission Society.

The original grant of the farm Middel Plaats in extent 6186 acres, was registered in January 1853 and on 8 May 1860 sold to the Berlin Mission, later renamed the Berlin Missiongesellschaft. After the end of the First World War, and the subsequent collapse of the German economy, the Mission ran into serious financial problems and was forced to sell the major portion of the farm, comprising 6 000 acres, to Mr Moe in 1924. The Church retained ownership of the remaining 186 acres for the use of the Stendahl congregation. Although the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 severely restricted the right of landowners in the white sector to accommodate black people on their land, subsequent legislation in the 1950's specifically enabled the Churches to retain mission communities as legal tenants. At Stendahl, the tenants became closely associated with the mission, the mission school and the outlying preaching stations. At one stage the mission was listed as consisting of 4 Church branches, 18 preaching stations, 1 missionary, 13 preachers, 7 teachers, 126 men, 167 women, 264 children and 5 schools.

Then in 1978 the Berlin Mission Society took a decision to divest itself of its land holdings and sold the property of Stendahl Mission to Sun Valley Estates, who now own