

EDITORIAL

Reality's new look

WITH change in South Africa has come the need for this journal to find a new approach if it is to widen its influence on a society now potentially more receptive to the liberal ideals to which we have always been committed.

There is little doubt that the obvious iniquities of the old order provided liberals with an easy target. Liberals moved quite effortlessly on to the moral high ground and not a few succumbed to the temptation of smugness.

The process of constitutional reconstruction which is just beginning confronts liberals with an infinitely more difficult challenge.

Scrapping constitutionally entrenched apartheid does not automatically guarantee an end to repressive legislation and individual freedom. Talk about reform is largely talk. Great as was the iniquity of institutionalised racialism the iniquity of the laws that gave its enforcement muscle, was greater. And those laws are still firmly in force.

Nor is it by any means certain that the enemies of National Party illiberalism are themselves supporters of liberal ideas and institutions. After becoming an anti-imperialist, said George Orwell, it took him twenty more years to realise that "the oppressed are not always right."

Because liberalism has been trapped for so long in a reactive phase (reacting, that is, to the illiberalism of the old order) it has never really come to grips with the immense problem of translating the liberal ideal into a viable political programme. There was a tendency in some to

assume the relevance and workability of their values in this kind of society. When social scientists ask whether the conflicts engendered by ethnically-inspired nationalism within a society can be resolved without coercion, they are raising a serious question which liberals dare not duck.

It is clear that a new and enlightened order will not spring effortlessly out of the ashes of the old. Constitutional reconstruction will be long and painful enough. Social reconstruction could be decidedly more painful.

In this there will be many compromises with the principles and policies to which we hold. Which of these compromises will be called for? Which will be beyond the pale, in the sense that they would undermine the liberal ethic? For instance, can liberals accept some form of detention without trial if the transition to the new South Africa is attended by extensive social instability? *Reality* believes it could have a critical role in examining these issues.

But all is not gloom.

In the fast changing South Africa there is much that is creative, constructive and exciting. In their personal lives, on the playing fields and beaches, in the theatres, in business, in schools and at universities more and more South Africans are joining in moulding a normal society.

Reality will reflect these changes too. Every issue will deal with some aspect of the new thinking among writers, artists and on the stage — with the whole revolution that is part of the dynamic of this nation in the 1990s.

Join the debate on
changing South Africa.

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EDITORIAL BOARD.

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