

# A JOURNAL OF LIBERAL AND RADICAL OPINION

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## EDITORIALS

### LIBERAL AND RADICAL

In this issue REALITY appears with a new subtitle — and with a somewhat new format to emphasize the subtitle. In the past it has described itself as "A Journal of Liberal Opinion"; now it becomes "A Journal of Liberal and Radical Opinion". This change requires some comment.

When REALITY came into existence nearly four years ago, it was regarded by its editorial board and by many of its readers as largely a continuation — a legal continuation — of one aspect of the life of the Liberal Party, which, as a non-racial political organization, had been rendered illegal by the preposterous (and preposterously named) Improper Political Interference Act of 1967. The Liberal Party's journal had been called "Liberal Opinion": it was certainly no coincidence that those two words reappeared in the subtitle of the new journal.

REALITY has from the first, then, been dedicated to the values of what might perhaps be called classic South African liberalism — a strenuous rejection of racial discrimination, a belief in the essential rights and freedoms of all men, a determination to spread a humane vision and to work in every possible way for the creation of a society based on equality of opportunity. The journal has drawn its nourishment from the assumption that only in the light of such values can the reality of South Africa — past, present and future — be seen with any clarity.

#### IMMORTAL

For people who are aware, there can never be any question of abandoning or modifying the essential principles of liberalism as we have defined them: they are (as Wordsworth said of poetry) "as immortal as the heart of man". But in the last few years some of the traditional attitudes, approaches and formulations of many of those who have supported liberal principles have been criticised, with varying degrees of sharpness, by a number of liberally-inclined people, many of them young. They have complained that liberalism as normally proclaimed and practised — for all the value that it may have had in fairly subtle ways — has certainly not transformed South African society. (It is necessary to add, parenthetically, that the transforming of South African society is no easy task.) Many blacks have decided, largely for tactical reasons, that at the present moment some of the principles of liberalism have to be underplayed so that a special and concrete stress may be placed on other more immediately significant liberal principles. These are people who are helping to foster "black consciousness" and who

believe (with considerable justification, surely) that the first real breaches in the dykes of white South African privilege are going to be made by the bargaining power of black numbers. Others, both white and black, have decided that liberalism can be put into action with a new kind of dynamism — that energy should be channelled into specific projects rather than general exhortations and denunciations, and that at the same time a more radical transformation of South African society must be envisaged. Such radicals tend to feel that traditional liberalism has too often been, like the policies of the Progressive Party, an expression of half-detached generosity on the part of the fairly privileged rather than a genuine expression of the *need* of the dispossessed or of those who are truly prepared to associate themselves with the dispossessed. What is required, radicals feel, is a switch (in the words of Raymond Williams) from the idea of *service* — valid and valuable as that is, as far as it goes — to the idea of *solidarity*.

To talk in these terms is of course to simplify. Sincere liberals have always been fairly radical in important respects; alert radicals are always apt to be liberal in their essential

thrusts. Many liberals have been sufficiently committed to action to suffer severely for their convictions (one thinks, for example, of the large number of Liberal Party members who received banning orders). What is more, very many holders of liberal principles would consider themselves to be both liberal and radical.

#### REAL DISTINCTION

Still, the distinction between "liberal" and "radical" is felt by many people to be a real one, and for this reason REALITY is now to be "A Journal of Liberal and Radical Opinion". The editorial board hopes that each issue will bring out many of the ways in which liberalism and radicalism coincide or merge into one another. The board is also aware, however, that there are some tensions between liberal and radical viewpoints: we hope that the journal will reflect these in an honest and fruitful manner. Any valid political attitude needs to be constantly evolving in order to meet a changing situation and at the same time constantly in touch with the past and with its own underlying values. It is to this complex task of adjustment and confirmation that REALITY hopes, now as in the past, to contribute. □

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## THE INWARD POLICY

**There has been some significant evidence lately of the prevailing preoccupations of Afrikaner Nationalism. The continuing influence of the Broederbond in Nationalist policy; the reunion of nationalist ex-detainees and political prisoners; the ceremonial re-burial of skeletons found at concentration camp sites — these things (each associated with the Prime Minister himself) reveal that even after 24 years of supreme power in South Africa, Nationalism turns inward for the sources of its energy, and still finds at its centre the bitterness of defeat. The Broederbond probably controls through its members by far the largest slice of political and economic patronage in the country; yet it remains secret, in the doubtless disingenuous but revealing words of a member, because it fears victimisation.**

A conception of oneself as perpetually injured can indeed be a source of strength and power. We remember Philoctetes in the Greek legend, cursed with a wound that would never heal, whose arrows therefore were granted unerring accuracy. And the call to the blood of a mythically threatened Volk in South Africa has never yet failed.

However it cannot be possible for people in the position of conquerors to continue permanently justifying their cruelties and oppressions, even to themselves, with the sort of desperate and persecuted excuses appropriate only to suffering victims. The truth must assert itself; in the conventional phrase, those who cannot learn from history have to repeat it; and the shadow of a similar future reunion of ex-Robben-Island prisoners must surely have hung over the Pretoria celebrations. And perhaps one day there will be ceremonies in the graveyards of Limehill and Dimbaza.

#### "WHAT IS BEST"

'Take what is best from the past' — the history of the Afrikaners, especially the history of their defeats, contains great courage, dignity, and heroism. We hold no brief for

what Mr. Vorster and his friends thought they were defending in the 40's, but from their distresses no doubt could have emerged the values of integrity, comradeship, generosity, loyalty — or even the humane good sense of Byron's Johnson, sold into slavery but recognising that

our disasters

may teach us better to behave when masters.

But paranoid fear and bitterness seem to be all that has significantly remained.

Afrikanerdom may survive a long time hugging its injuries to itself; but it must be a diminishing survival. The gradual rejection of the Afrikaans language by the Coloured people, formerly a numerous group of its most lively and enterprising users, is already an impoverishment. Philoctetes could indeed go on existing with his wound and his bow — but the wound smelt so bad that his companions could allow him to exist, and no more, isolated from all human contact on a barren island. □