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## LIBERAL OPINION

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## AN INTRODUCTION

At its recent National Congress, held in Durban in early July this year, the Liberal Party of South Africa decided to produce a regular commentary on South African and African affairs. Here is the first issue. It is being sent to South African and oversea newspapers, to the representatives of foreign governments, to the United Nations, to senior members of the Liberal Party itself and to any individuals or organizations, in South Africa or oversea, who would like to receive it. The venture is being modestly launched but it is the editors' hope that they may be able to improve the quality of the production shortly, as well as to increase the frequency with which the journal is to appear.

For the benefit of those who receive this publication, but who are

unfamiliar with the Liberal Party and what it stands for, part of this first edition will be taken up with a brief recapitulation of the Party's history and a statement of its beliefs.

### Discussion Groups

The Liberal Party of South Africa was established in 1953, soon after the Nationalist Government had won its second General Election. It grew out of a "Liberal Association" which had itself been formed from a number of inter-racial discussion groups scattered around South Africa. It was founded by a small body of people representing all the different groups which make up South Africa's multi-racial population, who saw the Nationalist victory leading South Africa inevitably and disastrously to complete racial irreconcilability. The Liberal Party was pledged, from the beginning, to end all race discrimination in South Africa - in contrast to the Nationalist Party, whose policy was to extend it, and the United Party, whose policy was to preserve the status quo.

### Only Acceptable Policy

Eight years later, when Dr. Verwoerd walked out of the Prime Ministers' Conference, he publicly stated that there was only one political party in South Africa which offered a policy which would satisfy his fellow Commonwealth Prime Ministers - and that was the Liberal Party. He was quite right. The Liberal Party is the only South African political party which subscribes to the Uni-

versal Declaration of Human Rights. It is the only one pledged to do away with all statutory and conventional colour bars and to secure equal rights and opportunities for all South Africans in every field where freedom is at present limited.

The Liberal Party has grown steadily during its short life and in the process the composition of its membership has slowly changed. In the early days this membership was probably predominantly white, but over the years, while all membership has grown, it is its African membership which has grown particularly.

#### Extra-Parliamentary Role

Liberal Party activities are not confined to the conventional electoral field. The Party recognizes for itself an "extra-Parliamentary" as well as a "Parliamentary" political role. It is pledged to non-violence. It accepts that boycotts, strikes and other such peaceful, extra-Parliamentary methods are a valid form of political opposition in a country in which the vast majority of people are prevented from exercising normal democratic pressures through the vote.

The principles of the Liberal Party are quite straight-forward. It believes in respect for the integrity of the individual citizen, in the maintenance of the Rule of Law, in a democratic system of government and in the entrenchment in a rigid Bill of Rights of those fundamental human rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Party offers policies worked out in detail together by South Africans of all races. It stands for universal suffrage on a common roll, for an integrated school system, and for a comprehensive social welfare programme on the British model.

The Party's first aim is to do away with the Colour Bar but it recognizes that merely to remove existing barriers will not solve all South Africa's problems. Great differences in living standards and land-ownership will be only two of the legacies of years of white privilege which will still remain when the Colour Bar has gone. Economic status will still largely follow colour lines. The potential revolution latent in this situation will only be forestalled by radical policies aimed at redressing the balance of land-ownership and raising substantially the wages of semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The Liberal Party has a radical land-policy, based primarily on individual ownership, which would secure a substantial redistribution of land and increased productivity. It has a programme for a staged increase in wages, geared to the capacity of industry to absorb such increases, which would lift

workers above the breadline in the shortest time possible.

Anyone who has made even a superficial examination of present trends and developments in Africa knows that there is only a limited future on the continent for any society based on white privilege or white supremacy. Therefore there is only a limited future for apartheid. The question is: what will take its place? There are surely only three possible answers to this question? When apartheid goes it will be replaced either by extreme black racialism (the legitimate offspring of extreme white racialism), or by a communist totalitarianism, or by a non-racial democracy.

As far as the Liberals are concerned, there is no choice here. Only the third alternative is worth contemplating and the Liberal Party regards it as its task to see that that is the direction South Africa takes. It will only succeed in this task if it can convince enough South Africans of all kinds that the Liberal solution is the best solution for South Africa and by demonstrating in its own ranks that non-racialism can really work.

#### Non-Racialism at Work

As far as concerns demonstrating that non-racialism can work, the Liberal Party believes that it has already done so. Since 1953, from branch level to National level, its members have shown conclusively that, even in South Africa's highly-charged racial atmosphere, it is possible - and easy - for people to work together unconscious of their colour. And who are these members? They are a true cross-section of South Africa, not only of all races and religions, but of every possible background - lawyers and lecturers, journalists and artisans, doctors and students, businessmen and factory workers, farmers and farm labourers, chiefs and tribesmen.

How will the Liberal Party persuade opponents of apartheid that its way is the best way out of the South African impasse? The Republican Referendum of late 1960 showed that white voters alone will never out-vote Dr. Verwoerd. The failure of the stay-at-home strike in late May showed that peaceful demonstrations of that sort, carried out by non-white South Africans alone, will not shake him either. But together South Africans of all groups can build a non-racial opposition against which the Nationalist Government cannot possibly stand and which will ensure for South Africa a shared and stable non-racial future. This is the opposition the Liberal Party is building.

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