

opprobrium, and the Dutch would naturally want to be freed from this taint and embarrassment.

Professor Jakes Gerwel, rector of the University of the Western Cape (which — with ethnic beginnings as a “coloured” institution set up by the apartheid government — has, under him, become a main force for non-racial democracy, said the broken cultural ties had been a matter of debate at the university particularly because UWC had a large Afrikaans-speaking component.

The very idea that renewed links should cover only white Afrikaners and the Dutch he dismissed as “cultural narcissism” which lay at the root of apartheid. “This is why we appreciated it when the Dutch government and nation suspended that relationship, even if we were to suffer at the University of the Western Cape.”

He pointed out that his university was alone in having a formal resolution on the academic boycott, supporting it. The document, ratified in 1987, admitted to being in an “ambivalent position” in the debate on academic exchanges; and only supported exchanges if such scholars showed solidarity with the university’s commitment to the struggle for a non-racial democracy.

Professor Gerwel said that, within this framework, some Dutch universities, such as Utrecht (which previously had links with more conservative South African universities) had established links with his university; which meant links with the alternative South Africa.

He noted that the Dutch had been in the forefront of the boycott movement and, now that things were changing, it was hoped that resumed contacts would not be within the “old” white framework. The Germans did not merely have cultural relations with people of German extraction in South Africa. There was no reason why the Dutch should pick out one group for attention.

On the position of the Nederlands language, he said it was naturally interesting for the Dutch people to retain a relationship with Afrikaans which was so similar to Nederlands. But the Dutch had no global aspirations for their language based on a “moederland” concept; there was no language imperialism. The language was a living one, in a sense a polyglot, and not desperate for allies.

Gerwel says Nederlands should not be seen in the “moederland” sense. The true moederland of Afrikaans is other South African languages. ●

*DONALD WOODS, former Editor of the East London DAILY DISPATCH went into exile after being banned by Justice Minister Jimmy Kruger. From his home in Britain he continued his campaign against apartheid, winning acclaim for his book Cry Freedom on the life of Steve Biko. There is, he says, no contradiction in being both a friend of the ANC and an*

# UNREPENTANT LIBERAL

**T**HIS year I was honoured with an invitation by the African National Congress to address its Freedom Day event in London, and made the point that I was doing so both as a friend of the ANC and as an unrepentant liberal.

I see no contradiction in being both. Though not a member of the ANC I have long admired its most positive elements — durability down the years as vanguard of the decades-long campaign against apartheid; commitment to non-racial multi-party democracy and generous outreach to whites — unlike those who preach the “one-settler-one bullet” line. And as I see these positive elements of democratic policy increasingly enshrined in ANC policy I become more inclined to contemplate voting ANC once South Africa becomes a proper democracy.

We liberals have long regretted the fact that whites in the ANC tended to be predominantly communists, though this probably happened by our own default. The communists at least were the first whites to stand up and cast their lot with the ANC on the African nationalists’ own terms, which is why old campaigners like Joe Slovo have a credibility among many blacks that could never easily be matched by that of other whites.

Communist countries, too, were among the first on the international scene to help the ANC, though thanks mainly to Nigeria the non-communist countries of Africa have been steadfast throughout in this regard.

As a liberal I regret that the Western democracies took so long to render practical humanitarian aid, though as a liberal, I am glad that countries like Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Holland in particular over the long haul, contributed far more to the ANC than the Soviets and their satellites ever did. And I am glad, too, that it was a Western country, the United States, that finally applied the most significant economic pressure to end apartheid.

In the long run communist aid was always niggardly — never enough to make a real difference — whereas Western aid was decisive. In financial terms alone Sweden contributed something like nine times more to the ANC than the Soviets and Eastern bloc ever did.

Possibly because of these considerations and possibly because of the calmer realisations that tend to surface once the crisis point of a resistance movement is passed, we are hearing less these days of “the white liberals” in a pejorative sense, and this is to be welcomed.

Although I have had strong disagreements down the years with liberal friends such as Helen Suzman and the late Alan Paton over the issue of economic sanctions, it would be a gross denial of justice to downplay the massive contribution made by these two giants of the anti-apartheid campaign.

## Paton blew the whistle on apartheid

Alan Paton was to me and, I believe, to many others, the most important influence in liberal terms to whites not only in South Africa but all over the world. Through his masterpiece “Cry, the Beloved Country” he blew the whistle on apartheid with a lasting blast never matched in the international arena. That one book alone had a permanent effect which persevered to contribute its weight to the crescendo of international repugnance that finally caused the United States and the European Community to pull the economic plug on apartheid to an extent which will probably only be fully realised when historical researches of the period are complete.

Politics never was Alan Paton’s prime concern. He was first and foremost, like Abraham Lincoln, a very great writer of English prose. His second novel, “Too late the Phalarope”, was in a structural

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and literary sense an even greater work than “Cry, the Beloved Country”. But it was the latter that clicked abroad and shook apartheid to its foundations as much as “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” had doomed slavery. Each of these two books proved to be a moral time bomb that ticked away until the prime political powers got the general electoral message.

Helen Suzman’s greatest achievements were in the day-after-day, month-after-month, year-after-year hammering away at the human injustices of the apartheid system, with parliamentary skill, with courage, but above all with persistence and constancy.

In both cases, Paton’s and Suzman’s, the bulk of their achievement was in upholding liberal values, as other South Africans have done in varying degrees and with varying emphases, and in the honour roll of the great white liberals (an irony, since all abhorred racial categorisation) must be included such names as Edgar Brooks, Peter Brown, Patrick Duncan, Randolph Vigne and many others of lesser fame but no less commitment to liberal values.

What are these values?

They are dedication to democracy, promotion of individual liberty, insistence on juridical fairness, social concern and generosity of political outlook.

They imply implacable hostility to tyranny, whether of the Right or Left, and a rejection of all enforced conformity that stunts legitimate individual development.

It goes therefore without further statement that liberals oppose racism and fascism.

What perhaps needs to be restated is liberal rejection of unbridled capitalism on the one hand and unbridled socialism on the other.

Most liberal societies, as in most European democracies, are agreed that capitalism can flourish healthily without being given unrestricted licence to indulge greed and exploitation, such tendencies being kept in check by anti-monopolist and other industrial and commercial legislation.

Most liberal societies agree also on the need for a minimum measure of social democracy. Indeed, it was liberals who introduced the concept of the pension in

Britain and to the world. Today, however, advanced liberal societies accept also that no citizen should go without medical treatment, health care or education because of economic disadvantage, and this is a welcome legacy of social democracy.

Communism is something else.

Initially motivated by a theory of concern for the human condition, communism soon contradicted this concern by attacking the very basis of human development — free will. The notion that a small handful of people know better than the masses what is good for those masses is inherently tyrannical, as well as antithetical to the liberal belief that with complete freedom of and access to information human beings generally will ultimately act in their best interests, and are best motivated when best informed.

How communists could manifest concern for, say, the victims of apartheid, while condoning the enslavement of millions in the Soviet Union and other countries, was clear evidence that tunnel vision through the narrowest of Marxist analyses led only to political and moral blindness.

And the evidence of the past few decades illustrates also that economic redistribution of few resources, without the generation of new resources, leads inexorably to the spreading of misery and poverty.

**We whites should learn to know our place and, as democrats, to throw our support behind the democratically chosen and democratically motivated leaders of the black majority.**

Those who preach doctrinaire socialism as an answer to South Africa’s problems are misleading their followers as certainly as those who preach doctrinaire capitalism. South Africa is going to need a judicious blend of the best of both systems backed by an informed and motivated electorate, and massive state intervention in the economy will be an absolute necessity, as in Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, with special reference to housing and education.

And the best framework for these things to happen will be that of a liberal democracy.

That, in essence, is why I am an unrepentant liberal — because liberal values have generally proved to provide the best balance of solutions for the most people.

Given the imperfections of human nature, democracy is an imperfect system — but as Winston Churchill said, all others are worse. Democracy on its own cannot solve problems — but it is the only moral prerequisite to the process of possible solutions. There are no short cuts through it and no nation can progress without it. Nor can democracy be diluted. To work properly it has to be total. You cannot, for example, have a one-party democracy, a contradiction in terms since democracy precludes any prohibition or circumscription of legitimate political formations.

But another reason why I am a liberal is because of the outstanding example of liberals in South Africa who opposed tyranny when it was dangerous to do so, and when the “white liberals” as members of a privileged class had nothing to gain and all to lose.

As a white liberal South African journalist, finally, I am also proud to be associated with the many white liberal South African journalists down the years who stuck their necks out despite threats to their lives and families, who published the facts without fear or prejudice to friend or foe, and whose tradition of integrity is being maintained today by an impressive batch of younger journalists typified by those of the *Weekly Mail* and *Vrye Weekblad* who are more concerned about printing the truth than about treading on sensitive political toes.

The time has long been overdue in South Africa when we whites should learn to know our place, and as democrats to throw our support behind the democratically chosen and democratically motivated leaders of the black majority.

But in the process let us not forget the best of the liberal traditions bequeathed to us, because they also constitute the best contribution we can make to the new South Africa. ●