

# BREYTENBACH AND NUSAS

The Breytenbach trial claimed many victims. Breytenbach himself, of course. That a man of his talents and gift for communication should disappear into the silence of the gaol for nine years, taking with him there, and through the rest of his life, the unhappy memories of his trial, hardly bears thinking about.

And the people who gave evidence for the State? How are they going to feel for the rest of their lives? They will certainly never be the same again. Of those who spoke, either during or after the trial, only Jenny Curtis comes through it all as a person with her integrity intact. Her statement on her release from 65 days of the terrors of solitary confinement was the one sane thing to come out of the whole crazy and tragic episode. She laid the blame for the Breytenbach debacle where it squarely belongs . . . at the doors of a system which can drive sensitive and concerned and idealistic people to think in terms of violent acts, quite foreign to their temperaments, acts which their convictions, in normal circumstances, would not even allow them to contemplate.

Breytenbach and those who were involved with him in his trial are, ultimately, victims of this system. We hope it won't claim other victims, notably NUSAS. To whatever

extent the outgoing president of NUSAS, Karel Tip, was involved in the Breytenbach talking-shop (for, let's face it, his "Okhela" movement never got further than talking, and it seems unlikely that it ever would have) it is quite certain that NUSAS itself was not. Tip's involvement, while president of NUSAS, was an act of the greatest irresponsibility on his part but there can be no suggestion that he, or anyone else, became associated with "Okhela" with the knowledge of NUSAS. Yet, we have no doubt, this will be just the kind of impression that government and right-wing United Party supporters will try to spread. Nothing would please them better than to see the end of NUSAS.

As on most things, we take a different view. We hope NUSAS survives these latest shocks. For in the growing polarisation which threatens South Africa, NUSAS remains one of the few White-based bodies which has a real understanding of what the true elements of a just society ought to be. With Angola in upheaval, and every sign that the Republic's involvement there will prove to have been a gross and dangerous miscalculation, the call to come into the laager will grow more insistent. Then more than ever, White South Africa will need people who will refuse to be panicked into conformity. □

# MAHATMA GANDHI MEMORIAL LECTURE

Given by Peter Brown at Phoenix, October 19th, 1975

If I may start off with a platitude I am honoured to have been asked to speak on this occasion.

I am honoured, firstly, because I regard the Mahatma as the greatest man of our time; secondly, because of Manilal, the memory of whose warmth, and steadfastness and quiet strength, remains as a support and encouragement to many of us even after all these years; thirdly, because here the Gandhi family still works to keep alive the ideas for which those two great men stood.

Although I regard the Mahatma as the greatest man of our time I wonder whether, during that long life of struggle of

his, he didn't suffer despair? Was he not sometimes tempted to abandon the course on which he had set out?

Was he not, perhaps, tempted to give up his philosophy of non-violence, and turn to violence?

Or was he tempted, when everything seemed hopeless, to retire? To give it all up? To go back to the comparatively quiet life of the lawyer, perhaps making the occasional public statement, but not really doing anything much more than that?

Did he ever perhaps think of "using" the system he was opposing to try to achieve his own aims? Did he, in a dark

moment, feel tempted to think that even that same system might, in the end, produce a solution to the problems of his country which wouldn't be so bad after all?

I mention these temptations because, if the Mahatma was faced by them, and I think he would have been inhuman if he had not been, he resisted them. And I mention them because they are the kind of temptations with which we who live in our society have to contend.

Take, first, the question of violence. I can understand very well that there should be people who decide that there is no way of changing our system but by violence. There is no disputing the fact that we are governed by an unrepresentative regime which maintains itself by force. Is it surprising that people who are forced to live apart from their families by law, who are unable to get the kind of education they would like, or allowed to do the work they want to do, who are forced by law to live in one place and work in another, and must pay to get from the one place to the other—is it surprising that such people should feel their humanity violated every day and that they should begin to think that it would be better to bring the whole thing crashing down than go on living this life?

Admittedly, this is a subjective reaction, the reaction of a person on whom the laws of our society press down unbearably. But is not my rejection of violence subjective too? Apartheid violates only parts of my life. I extract certain benefits from the present situation. I enjoy privileges and security of a kind, and, although I want change, I would like to see as much stability as possible maintained while it takes place.

These are subjective reasons for rejecting violent change. I also have temperamental objections to change by violence, but I also have what I hope are objective reasons for rejecting it. In the first place because I do not think that violence really does solve problems. The legacies of bitterness and hatred it leaves behind, if it is used within a single community, live on for generations, and longer.

Secondly, once you start using violence you have to allocate uniforms. Otherwise you end up killing people on your own side. In India and Ireland the uniforms are religious, in our country I have no doubt that the uniform would be skin colour—and what prospect would there be of achieving the common society I want, once that stage had been reached?

What about the temptation to retire? To give it all up? To wait for somebody else to make the changes? I know of plenty of people who have chosen this course but the fact of the matter is that, in a country, like ours, if you are opposed to the existing regime, you can't retire and still retain your integrity as a man.

What about semi-retirement? Going on saying the right things occasionally, but not living them out? Hypocrisy is something we like to think only the other person suffers from, but in fact it touches all of us. If non-racialism and the common society are going to have any chance of winning general acceptance here it will only be partly because those of us who believe in them say the right things on occasions such as this. Mostly it will be because we live

out the full consequences of our beliefs in our everyday life. This is a very, very tough assignment. The temptations to let this occasion for standing up for those beliefs pass, or that incident go unchallenged, are enormous. It is easy to propound high principles from a public platform, much more difficult to practise them when nobody is looking.

What about "using" the system?

There are many people who believe as much in the common society as I do who have decided, either for reasons of their personal situation, or for tactical reasons, to try to use the apparatus of apartheid to effect change towards the things we all want. I don't decry this effort at all, although it isn't my line. All I want to say is that it carries temptations of its own. The first is to begin to think that the institutions of apartheid are more important than they are; the second is to begin to think that they are more effective levers for change than they really are. The price of working through the apparatus of apartheid to destroy it is eternal vigilance. Each step taken has to be examined to make sure that it is leading where one wants to go, and is not in fact doing the other man's job for him.

What of the temptation to accept apartheid, to persuade oneself that it may not be so bad after all, that perhaps something good may come out of it in the end? Well, there are people who have fallen for this temptation, although I'm glad to say I don't know any of them personally. It is 27 years since the Nationalists came to power. Apartheid, they told us, was going to solve everything—through separation. In pursuit of this miraculous goal a myriad of laws have been passed. Of those which have had to do with race I can't think of one which has solved anything. One could go on tabulating them forever, but I'll only mention a few.

The Bantu Education Act, which was going to make all African children happy, educating them in their mother-tongues. It was, of course, not Africans who decided that this was the education that was going to make them happy, but the theorists of apartheid. Twenty-five years later every important homeland government has rejected mother-tongue instruction in its schools.

The Separate Universities Act, which was to make Black students happy (and, one suspects, compliant) by removing them from mixed Universities and putting them in their own. Student contact created friction, that was the theory. Today the gap between Black and White students is as great as it has ever been and SASO, the Black Students' Organisation, rejects government policy as totally as anyone has ever done.

The Group Areas Act—who has it made happy or secure?

The people of Madadeni? I can remember when Madadeni was still called Duck Ponds. At that time there were suburbs of Newcastle,—Lennoxton and Fairleigh,—where facilities were by no means all they could have been, but where African people lived in freehold or as tenants, right in the town. They were sent to Madadeni. I can remember the wattle-and-daub homes of Charlestown coming down before the bulldozers, their occupants' possessions being

loaded on to the trucks, and the people being carted off to Madadeni, 30 miles away, there to be housed in tents and wooden-slatted shacks. All over Northern Natal there were relatively independent Black communities which ended up in Madadeni. Having been sent to live where they didn't want to be, there to do work they probably don't like, is it surprising that higher bus fares should finally have broken these people's patience? Between Newcastle and Madadeni, separated by the Group Areas Act, tension has never been higher.

What of the Terrorism Act, latest and worst of a series of laws whose unsavoury ancestry stretches back through the 180-days Act to the 90-days Act to the Public Safety Act of over 20 years ago. Presumably the Public Safety Act and its successors were designed to ensure the safety of the public. When that Act was passed I doubt if there were a couple of dozen people in South Africa who believed that

change would come by violence. Now I would hate to estimate the number.

Apartheid is a total failure. If it is not to end in total disaster then an alternative must be put which can win the support of all our people. This must be a society in which there is complete political, economic and social equality for all. Anything else will leave those who do not enjoy full rights frustrated and resentful, and rightly so. The attainment of this ideal society may seem a long way off but it is vital that those of us who believe in it should stand up now and proclaim it, not sanctimoniously, but without reservation.

This is the kind of society in which the Mahatma believed. Our admiration for him, our warm regard and affection for Manilal, our knowledge that Mrs Gandhi and her family still stand fast here by what those two great men stood for, compels us to work on for that ideal, however distant its realisation may seem to be. □

# DEVALUATION

by Trevor Bell

The basic reason for the recent South African devaluation was the sharp decrease in the price of gold which has occurred this year. After reaching a record level of nearly \$200 per fine ounce at the end of 1974, it fell dramatically to \$159 by the end of August, and then, following the International Monetary Fund's gold agreement, it declined at an accelerating pace to about \$134 at the time of the devaluation. Until this fall in the price of gold the South African economy had remained in an exceptionally healthy state. The depressed state of many other countries was due largely to the higher price of oil. South Africa however was much less affected, not only because of her lesser dependence on oil for fuel, but also because the higher price of oil, by intensifying inflation and creating great uncertainty in the minds of investors throughout the world, increased the demand for and hence the price of gold. The rising gold price more than offset the impact of the higher price of oil so that for a while South Africa was in effect a net beneficiary of the oil crisis. This happy phase however, has come to an end due largely to renewed confidence in the U.S. dollar, which has produced a relative decrease in the demand for gold and hence in its price.

The immediate and most obvious manifestation of the lower gold price was a substantial deficit in the balance of payments, which clearly called for some fairly drastic action if the country's gold and foreign exchange reserves were not to fall below their already dangerous level. In the event the authorities chose to devalue the Rand. The objective of a devaluation is to remove or reduce a deficit in the balance

of payments. It is meant to do this by raising the price of imported goods and lowering the price to foreigners of South African produced goods. For instance, before devaluation the rate of exchange with the U.S.\$ was \$1,40 to the Rand and afterwards \$1,15 to the Rand so that the Rand was worth 17,9% fewer dollars, that is, was devalued by 17,9%. It is hoped that as a result of this the volume of exports and hence our earnings of foreign currencies will increase and that the volume of our imports will decrease; and also that any outflow of capital which had been taking place in anticipation of devaluation would be reversed.

There are of course alternative methods of dealing with a balance of payments deficit. The appropriate choice of policy measures depends largely on what one believes about the causes of the problem and how long they are likely to persist. If it was expected to be short-lived then one would want to avoid a devaluation since this measure is not easily reversible once the need for corrective action is past. Instead, it might then be best for the country to tide over the difficulties partly by using direct controls on imports and foreign exchange, partly by applying a more restrictive monetary and fiscal policy, and partly by using some of its previously accumulated gold and foreign exchange reserves to finance the deficit. Import controls have certain advantages in that their effect in reducing imports is certain, they work quickly, and they may be applied selectively, with the decrease in imports being concentrated on those goods least necessary for the maintenance of a high level of production and employment.