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THE POLITICAL SITUATION.

The issues of the Parliamentary election which is now upon us are apt to be obscured by the great crisis through which we are passing. The war is of such great importance to this country and to the Empire that other questions are driven into the background and even hidden out of sight. There is a danger that we may lose all perspective, and stultify our politics by forgetting other important matters. And yet it is obvious that the Government—the South African Party—is not seeking a mandate to carry on the war; it is asking for authority to rule the country in the way in which it has done it for the past five years.

Few expect that the war will last until another election is brought upon us by the Constitution; and, if peace is declared before then, it is not likely that the Government will resign unless it is defeated in Parliament. Our external policy, however engrossing, is not the whole of our national life, and it ought not to be allowed to prejudice the rest. And so the question arises: What is the present political situation? What are our needs for the future?

Unfortunately, there is no party which can claim the whole-hearted allegiance of the good citizen who loves his country. Why?

There are four parties: the South African Party, the Unionist Party, the Nationalist Party and the Labour Party.

The Government of the country has been in the hands of the South African Party during the whole of the brief history of the Union, and the record does not quieten all misgivings. The leaders of the party, we believe, have acted honestly and have endeavoured to consolidate the new nation, but they have not risen to all their opportunities; and while they have acted up to their lights, their lights have at times been dim.

Various stages of social development co-exist in this country; our problems cannot be solved without a penetrating insight into all these complex currents of society, and an imagination sympathetic both to the primitive life of the native and to the struggling hopes

and aspirations of our more civilised life. That insight and that imagination the Government have not shown.

The knowledge and initiative of the Government in our domestic affairs have been limited in the main to the interests of the class from which it has hitherto drawn its chief support—that class is not the South African Nation but the farming community. In the labour crises of 1913 and 1914 the Government was beyond its depth. At the outset it failed to realise that the interests of the country were concerned in the struggle between classes; its first concern was that the fight between master and man should not develop into a breach of the peace; and when the struggle broke the bounds thus set for it, the Government found no better remedy than exasperated and unconstitutional violence. The Government meant well but it had no vision.

Again, the Government attempted to deal with the Native Question—perhaps our most pressing domestic problem. It proposed to exclude the native from the ownership of land in white areas and to enlarge the native territory; but it has carried only the first part of this scheme, and it has transferred the burden of satisfying the just claim of the native to that favourite device of the politically incompetent in South Africa—a Commission. The scheme as a whole may not have been unjust, but to give effect only to the first part is to add materially to the grievances of the black man. Here also the Government's action has been largely controlled by the interests of its supporters.

In other matters too the Government has not led the country. Its attempts to reform—indeed to institute—university education have been vacillating and weak. It has given way to every breath of criticism. It has re-drafted its schemes more than once, and failed to produce a satisfactory plan, even after recourse to a Select Committee and a Commission.

In the terrible crisis of the European War in 1914 General Botha and his Cabinet responded nobly to the call of duty, and through their efforts our country has taken its place as a loyal State within the British Empire. But however strongly we may support the external policy of the Government, and however high our appreciation of General Botha as a soldier and a

man may be, we cannot accord our full confidence to the South African Party in the control of the internal politics of our country.

Shortly before Union, the Progressives of the Cape and the Transvaal constituted themselves into a Unionist Party, and they have acted as the official Opposition in the united Parliament. In the main, when they have opposed the Government the Government has been right, and they have not acted as an adequate check on its weaknesses. The party dissipated its energies in combating the efforts of the Government to carry out the provisions of the South Africa Act with regard to the Dutch language, and it failed to voice the public indignation regarding the deportations. Its political use of the Imperial flag has not so much consolidated loyal sentiments as exasperated the Dutch people. The country as a whole has proved its loyalty, but the Unionist Party has had little share in creating that attitude. The Unionist Party is composed of men who claim to understand the industrial life with whose conditions the farmer is apt to be out of touch; but on no occasion has it incited the Government to deal with these problems in an enlightened spirit. The utterances of the leaders of this party suggest that the prejudices of the class, from which they come, prevent them from taking the point of view of the nation as a whole even more thoroughly than would total ignorance.

The Nationalist Party is a Cave of Adullam. In it are to be found men whose aspirations for national progress are not satisfied by the jingoism and capitalism of the Unionists, nor by the opportunism and political indolence of the South African Party. But there are others. By these healing wounds have been re-opened and personal ambition has been confused with the national good. The party has no definite programme, no clear ideas, and is supported very largely by vague feelings of discontent and fear. Its leaders show no conception of the elementary principles of government, and have not disdained to take advantage for party ends of the ignorance and the rancour of the worst elements in the community. This party has no right to our confidence.

The last of the four parties is the Labour Party. It has two advantages over its competitors. On the one hand it has a more definite idea of the wrongs which it seeks to remedy; and on the other hand its programme is clearer and more detailed. Its nominal policy on the whole is conceived broadly and from a national standpoint, and this must be counted to it for righteousness. But in its practice it has been sectional; and the attitude of the bulk of the rank and file is shortsighted and onesided. In effect, the party places the interests of the white labourer in the forefront; and even though the community were divided into white labourers and capitalists the party would still merit the charge of being sectional. It would not be taking the point of view of the State. In addition, the anti-native attitude of its strongest portion and its indifference to the farming community distinguish its voice from that of the people.

The first outstanding need of our time is for a definite national policy. What are the principles of such a policy?

1. The policy must be based upon a sound conception of our national existence. Imperialism or Nationalism: One Stream or Two Streams—these are false issues. South Africa is a nation and part of the Empire; its political life must be one stream and that stream must include the two currents. There must be a whole-hearted acknowledgment of the dependence of our country upon its connections with the rest of the Empire, and a readiness to carry the burdens as well as to share in the privileges of our position. If we enjoy the liberties of a component part of this free Empire we dare not ask whether South Africa or the Empire is to be placed first. The two stand or fall together. The issues of our Imperial politics are never between the interests of this country and of the whole; but between short and long sighted views of both. The idea of pressing unduly any immediate advantage to ourselves apart from the Empire leaves out of account those forces and relationships between South Africa and the world at large, which in the end would recoil on our heads and degrade our position.

Similarly, the general ideal which must guide us in the relations of the various elements in our community is clear. On the one hand, no section of the

people, whether bound together by ties of class interest, of blood, or of language, should presume that it is the nation as a whole. It does wrongly if it throws contempt upon any other portion and preaches seclusion of strife. The European races in the community ought not to be kept asunder. On the other hand, there must be room in our state for all the traditions to which we are heir. We must be able to appropriate and claim as our own all that is inspiring in the past of either of the two great European races. And it is a just demand that neither should be favoured by the Government to the disadvantage of the other. This, however, ought not to be party politics. The law of our land makes no distinction between Dutch and English, and the administration is gradually realising the same principle. The virility of the race consciousness depends very little upon the legislature; it is ingrained in the habits and customs of the peoples themselves. It is natural and right that it should embody itself in institutions, and the freedom of our political life is true and real only when these tendencies are allowed full scope; but their proper field is the spontaneous and spiritual life of the people.

2. The burden of taxation should not be thrown on any one section of the community. Indirect taxation is notoriously unjust, and the chief excuse for it is the ease with which it is imposed and the difficulty with which its effects are identified. But it has helped to raise the cost of living, and it bears hardly on the poorer classes of the community. Moreover, it places us at a great disadvantage in international trade. No system of direct taxation in this country can be simple. An income tax will reach those who gain their living by industry, commerce or the professions; a land tax will reach the farmer and the landowner. Both are necessary and any scheme which omits either is unbalanced and unfair.

3. Our native policy must be neither unjust nor sentimental. The native must not be treated as a weak member of the European community. Provision must be made for his development along lines fitting to his customs and outlook. The point of the utmost practical importance is that the present congestion should be relieved by a genuine extension of the native

areas. The greed of the white man will offer the most strenuous resistance to this, but the resistance must be overcome and the cupidity restrained.

4. Our educational systems must be unified and extended. The facilities at present existing require great supplement; more schools are needed and much more generous financial support. Free and compulsory education is an ideal, but the schools and teachers which it implies are still lacking. The indifference of the state to coloured and native education is appalling. The training of teachers and university students is on too low a grade; reform in this matter is imperative. The recent institution of industrial, technical and commercial education must be greatly extended if we are to develop our human and material resources. Finally, our system of education must be conceived as one whole and its various branches co-ordinated. The circumstances of our country make it inevitable that a proper system of education is expensive, and we must be prepared to face the fact.

5. Industrial development in this country has begun and is bound to continue. We are at a stage through which older countries have passed many years ago. They did not realise the nature of the changes which were taking place then, and their ignorance has left them a legacy of poverty, of slumdom, of human wastage and unrest. If we are to profit by their experience we must be animated at this early stage by the conceptions of social justice which are now tardily springing up in them. We must prepare for industrial life and not let it come upon us unawares.

The first need is for information, and the Statistical Bureau must be made efficient.

The second need is to recognise that the days of industrial anarchy or individualism are over. The trade union has a necessary function in our industrial life; it is the guardian of the worker's rights, and, with all its defects, makes for social righteousness. The State must realise this as well as the private employer. In its own undertakings the State must be a model employer and must view all its relations with its employees from that standpoint.

6. The social problem is much more pressing in certain parts of the country than in others, and there are places in which its gravity can hardly be

exaggerated. The question is not a simple one. The position of the poor white is bad and threatens to become worse. Drunkenness is every day growing a greater danger both to the white man and to the black. In the larger centres of population we are developing slums. And the native is being debased by contact with the viler side of our civilisation.

The remedy for these things is not easy. Experience shows that the cesspools of social life cannot be cleansed so long as the sources which feed them are unrestricted. We must destroy the conditions and prevent men from falling into this moral morass.

The migration from the country into the town is beginning and is swelling the poor white class. To check this, greater development of our agricultural resources is needed. Large estates held for speculative purposes must be broken up and further facilities provided for easy settlement upon the land. This means taxation and education.

The worst aspect of the liquor traffic—the facility with which the native obtains drink—demands the co-ordination of our liquor laws and a much more resolute enforcement of them. The gravity of the situation requires that the power to control the liquor traffic be placed directly in the hands of the individual communities within the Union.

The rapid growth of our urban areas has made public intervention necessary. Slum property must be condemned; and if private enterprise is insufficient for the task, the municipalities concerned must be required by law to provide adequate housing for the poorer classes. The opposition of many private interests must not be allowed to prevent the proper segregation of natives on mines, and the provision of decent accommodation for them and, if need be, for their families.

In this outline we have not attempted to cover all the ground, but we have said sufficient to indicate the attitude on which the political progress of our country depends. It is a policy which conserves all that is of value in our political life, and yet, recognising our responsibilities and our dangers, endeavours to develop the possibilities of our nation to the fullest.

Such a policy has not yet been made the programme of any great political party in this country. No doubt there are men in sympathy with it in all the parties, but they do not co-operate and are tied to their present separate organisations. We need a new party—a party which, in opposition or in power, will keep this ideal clearly before it, which will resist all sectional influences, which will be blind to no injustice, and which will fearlessly resist the selfishness of unsocial vested interest and the conservatism of ignorance. This party as yet has no leaders, no organisation, no rank and file. But there are men who can lead it in our community, an organisation can be formed, and there are men who will follow. Such a party, if it be built up, can be supported only if the instincts of the nation are sound; and any of our politicians who may rally to its cause will have need of a profound faith in the people. The forces of reaction, ignorance and sloth are strong, and it requires much effort to overturn anything old, but we believe that some day such a party and such a policy will be realised.

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