

CT
Year 1
Bashee
River
Murders

The last time I was here was when we held a meeting in to protest against the banning of Peter Hjul. On that same evening Randolph Vigne received his banning order. We also had another anxiety on our minds - for the first time a newspaper of repute, reporting the hearings of the Paarl Commission, came out and identified Liberals, by means of a headline, with the murders of Bashee River. The name of the Liberal Party was also mentioned, in an oblique way, so that while no direct accusation was made, the smear was left. We reacted so strongly that Mr. Justice Snyman protested that Mr Advocate Steyn had been wounded at the very root of his honour. The judge was not in the least concerned that we had been wounded at the very root of honour, and in a much graver way.

Mr. Justice Snyman has now made a kind of retraction. He says the Liberal Party was not implicated "as such" in the Bashee River murders. As far as we are concerned he can keep his retraction

Judge Snyman ought to answer an important question in the public interest. He says that white persons were concerned with the violence in the Transkei. He says - I quote - "Some of them have been described by witnesses as members of the Liberal Party. Some were described merely as liberals". BUT WHO WERE THEY? I am astonished at this. The judge tells us what witnesses say - but not one scrap of evidence has been adduced to show that these witnesses spoke a word of truth. This is what I can only call astonishing behaviour.

Mr. de Wet Nel has acted similarly. He also has evidence

but it is not in the public interest to say what it is. One can hardly credit such a situation. A leading Minister has evidence relating to murder, but he cannot reveal it. Many people conclude - and many say that they conclude - that whatever evidence the Minister has, it would not bear testing in a Court of Law.

We as Liberals must defend ourselves. The days have passed when the civil liberties of all are defended by all. A leading newspaper can smear us in a bold headline, and yet give little prominence to any reply. A judge can say there was evidence, and never test that evidence to see if it was true or false. A Minister can say there is evidence relating to murder, and regret that he cannot reveal it. A member of Parliament can make charges against the Liberal Party "as such", and take good care not to repeat these

charges outside the House.

If I am ever a Member of Parliament, I give my word never to make a charge inside the House that I am afraid to repeat outside, even if that charge is against Mr. de Wet Nel, that is if he is still living in South Africa.

These are signs of the times. You can say pretty hot things about the Black Sash, Nusas, the Progressives, the Universities of Cape Town and Wits, and get away with it. You can say pretty well what you like about anybody provided you are on the side of power. These people who say these things - and here I exclude the judge and the prosecutor for sound reasons - would not have the

courage to say them if they were not on the side of power. What is more, many of these same people, if there was a marked shift in power, would be the first to come to the Hjul's and the Vignes and the Ngubanes, and say, you are right, what can we do to help you? And some of them would be impudent enough to add, we knew you were right all the time.

If I am ever a member of a Government, I give you my word it will be the government of a State in which those who have power will have no greater civil liberty than those who have no power at all.

While I am speaking about power, let me say one more thing. Some opponents of the Government lose heart because everything seems

~~the~~

to go right for the Nationalists. This is a pure illusion maintained by power. Things are not going right. Things aren't going right when Dr. Donges include& one-and-a-half million coloured people and half-a-million Indian people with three million white people, and talks of five million hearts beating as one. Ten years ago Dr. Donges' Party wanted all the Indians sent back to India. Why should all our hearts now beat as one? As we gather here, the Indian citizens of Johannesburg are being squeezed out of the heart of that great city, and forced into the veld twenty miles away. Indian traders in Durban are facing the same calamity. Here in Cape Town Coloured people are being forced out of homes in which they have lived for generations. Both Coloured and Indian people live in the

shadow of the Group Areas Act and Job Reservation and Population Registration. Why should they suddenly want to stand shoulder to shoulder with the makers of these cruel laws? Why should Dr. Donges utter such an absurdity? Is it because he feels so certain and secure? Why should Mr. Fouche think that Africans will suddenly want to defend our common country? Why in God's name should they want to fight for the Urban Areas Act and Job Reservation and the Removal of freehold rights in hundreds of South African areas?

Let me tell Dr. Donges one thing, that there are tens of thousands of Coloured and Indian people who have no intention of being used as tools against the African population. I can imagine with what contempt the Nationalists of old would have regarded an

Afrikaner who allowed himself to be used as a tool for maintaining Afrikaners in a subordinate position. And that is what Dr. Donges wants to use Coloured and Indian people for, is it not? Hasn't he made it clear that they must fight for the traditional way of life? You know, lots of people think I'm a fool, and sometimes I also think I'm a fool, but when I listen to Dr. Donges, I don't feel such a fool after all.

On an occasion such as this, ~~one~~ one must take stock. We have been in existence for ten years. When we began, we knew we had set out on an unpopular and perhaps dangerous course. We knew that we were dealing ~~with~~ a Government for whom such things as freedom of ^p~~s~~peech and assembly and association were nonsense. Habeas corpus

is now nonsense too. And the reservation of penal action to the Courts. Well, we've run into the dangers that we foresaw. It takes courage to set out on a dangerous course, but it takes even more courage to continue on it when the actual dangers are met. One gets tired and frustrated, and sometimes ostracism and political loneliness are harder to endure than one foresaw. Did one go wrong? Was it perhaps wrong or foolish to condemn tremendous schemes of national reconstruction like the Group Areas Act and Bantu Authorities? Was it perhaps wrong to organise people and make them more militant, only to find that the more militant they became, the more ruthlessly they were punished for their militancy? Are we not perhaps living in a crisis of law and order, and shouldn't we support the

forces of law and order until the crisis has passed? And lastly, isn't Apartheid perhaps good after all, not absolutely good, but the best you can get in an imperfect world? Isn't it true, perhaps, that races just can't live together, and that the best thing to do is for them to live separately?

If I, ~~was~~ your National President, as a man who is, as Angus Wilson once described him, a private man pushed into public life, can make it again clear why we founded the Liberal Party, and can reaffirm our beliefs and principles and policies, then I am glad to do so. Let me talk to you just a few minutes as a writer rather than a politician, and talk~~d~~ to you about plucking the flower safely^t

from the nettle danger. They talk about the diversity of the Cape Flora, but the nettle danger is all I see growing around here. And I can't promise to pluck the flower safely from it. What you have to do is to pluck some kind of life from it, some kind of meaning for yourselves and your children. Ten years ago we thought that the only way to do it was to work for a non-racial society; people said it was impossible, and we said Apartheid was even more impossible. We still say so. We see no future for Apartheid at all. We see an illusion of a future, but that's only because the Government has power. We see, not only ourselves in this country, and people like-minded, but we ^{a/so} see the whole world turning against Apartheid with a

massiveness of revulsion that has not been equalled before now. We knew it would be more immediately comfortable to believe in Apartheid, but we knew that at that moment of surrender it would be our reason and our integrity that surrendered. If Vigne and Hjul and Ngubane had surrendered to a belief in Apartheid, they could be sitting pretty, writing text-books for Bantu Education. Sobukwe wouldn't be out on Robben Island, and Mandela wouldn't be in gaol for five years, and Luthuli would be getting a big job ⁱⁿ ~~for~~ Zulustan. Our National Chairman could be having a fine time playing polo all over the world - at least parts of the world - and would be just as popular as Danie Craven. I myself would get a splendid job in the Publications Board, and you'd hear me every night on the SABC, talking

on such topics "Who Says our News is Slanted?", and "Who Wants these forty-eight playwrights, anyway?", and "The Greatness of Portugal". And in my bravest moments you'd hear me on the subject "The English Press is not 100% Bad".

All these things could happen if we were allied with power. But what a petty blind arrogant local power it is. Dr. Verwoerd's foreign policy is in ashes, and he himself admits that he would embarrass the nations of the West by visiting them. I don't blame Eric Louw for this. He merely took a ~~presently existing~~ bad policy and made it look worse. There's one thing that Dr. Verwoerd and Eric Louw have never understood, that you can't have a foreign policy with Apartheid in it. You can't have relations with people

abroad when you reject their brothers at home. Eric Louw has had only one debating argument in his whole life, and that is, you say I'm bad, and now I'll prove you're bad too.

I am astonished when I read and hear of all the reasons for our dangerous isolation. It was once due to agitators and Communists. Then the Liberals, and to a lesser extent the Progressives were blamed. Then the PAC and Poqo took the centre of the stage, and that gave Mr. Vorster his new and colossal powers. Now the searchlight has switched back to the ANC. I am most astonished when the United Party is blamed for our isolation. But of course one expects the Black Sash, NUSAS, and the English Press to have their turns. Even that impeccable organisation, the Rotary Club, has been

hearts, and long only to destroy it. That is the cardinal fact.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the crisis of South Africa today is not one of law and order. It is said to be, because thus many lovers of law and order are seduced, and give their moral support to the regime. The crisis of today is fundamentally the crisis of Apartheid, and of Apartheid in its worst aspect, namely baasskap. It takes courage to say so in these times, but that is what we have to do. Dr. Donges is appealing to Coloured and Indian people to support white supremacy, for the sake of a few scraps.

Is Apartheid in its other aspect, namely Separate Development, worth dying for? It certainly is not. There is one charge that Apartheid has never been able to meet, and that is, how can a

thing be good if it can be achieved only by cruel laws? How else can one describe the Group Areas Act? And Job Reservation? And the Urban Areas Law? And the Removal of the Black Spots? We are told that such steps bring peace, but how can they bring peace when they leave people with such a memory of hurt and injustice? Is this the way to bring about harmony? People die, but do their children forget such a dispossession? Did Afrikaner children forget? I have noted that South African supporters of Apartheid abroad are excellent in their speeches, and resentful and often angry in the face of questions. The reason is simple - the speech deals with Separate Development, but the questions deal with baasskap.

Let us not be tempted by the laager. I promise you this,

that once you go into it, you will never come out again.

No, the values enshrined in our policies on May 9, 1953, were right beyond all doubt. In those liberties we believe now as strongly as we believed then. That Apartheid will come to an end, no sensible~~man~~ can have a doubt. The Afrikaner Nationalist always believed that his passion was stronger than economics. The passion of liberated Africa will prove the same.

I do not doubt that at Paarl Judge Snyman looked into the pit. He saw Paarl, partly in the conventional white way, of agitators, plotters, and Communists, but he also looked into the abyss and saw it as a crisis of race relations. He saw a vision that, let me be quite honest, had been seen by others before. But he was right in

what he saw. Unless race relations are improved, our future is dark. I ask Judge Snyman, how does he think race relations can be improved so long as black men are regarded as chattels, so long as Mrs. Maph-eele can be thrown out of Paarl and separated from her husband, so long as Ministers take offence because a woman invokes her rights under the law? I tell him, and the Liberal Party tells him, that there is no hope whatsoever of any improvement in race relations so long as there are these cruel laws. Our way is dangerous because all life is dangerous. The way of Apartheid, call it baasskap or separate development, is the way of certain death. Hofmeyr was ten times the politician I am, but he expressed this truth in very unpolitical language. He said it was a choice between faith and fear. It

still is.

This faith we have expressed in our policies, which are as sensible a blueprint for the future as a Party could produce. It is not only a universal suffrage which we regard as the inevitable future; it is a drastic revisal of our whole system of possession and privilege.

I agree with our National Chairman that ~~our~~ task is not easy. It is to continue the work we have begun, to win support for a non-racial society in which there is opportunity for all, and from which the grossest economic disparities will be removed.

Our policies, and our sanity, may be needed sooner than we believe possible today.

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