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INSTITUTE COUNCIL MEETINGS 1960

FIFTY YEARS OF UNION - POLITICAL REVIEW

by

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My assignment is: "POLITICAL REVIEW - FIFTY YEARS OF UNION".

I hope I shall succeed in dealing with the subject with objectivity and with an understandable emphasis on the African viewpoint and interpretation of political events in the "FIFTY YEARS OF UNION".

The Jubilee Anniversary of the founding of the Union of South Africa will be observed some time in the current year. Its significance justifies the attention people are already giving to it. It should be an occasion for all of the people of the land to join in a unifying celebration that will inspire greater love and loyalty to our country.

For some it may be so, but not for others, especially the oppressed non-whites who were left out of the compact of Union and given a place of inferiority in their fatherland. So to some, it will be an occasion for thanksgiving and to others one for mourning and, I trust, one also for taking fresh resolve to strive to get the Union on the democratic path it missed at its founding, and whose people, until that is so, will continue to say with increasing vigour and determination:

"We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people."

To some, especially the freedom-lovers, this Jubilee Anniversary will be a painful reminder that, unfortunately, the one-sided pact of Union was formed with the full concurrence of the British Government of the day. We fear that the British Government of to-day, in effect, still supports fully what was done at Union. Her voting at the United Nations

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on the racial issue in South Africa gives support to our fears. In her eagerness to placate the "Boers" and other white interests, Great Britain made the non-whites a subject people under white rule in the new State with no prospect of ever being accorded full democratic rights on the same basis as their fellow white citizens.

The white leadership in the country saw the new State as a force that would supply white South Africa with such single centralised machinery of government that would be strong enough to guarantee the whites an effective control over "Natives", and thus facilitate their exploitation of the black man, for the white man's benefit. In addition to this, some Afrikaner leaders saw the creation of Union as a first step to a self-government that would end with the Union becoming completely independent of Great Britain. This has come so true that the Union of South Africa is on the eve of becoming an Afrikaner dominated republic.

Many Afrikaners must feel indebted to General Hertzog for his two-stream policy which started a schism in the white community of South Africa. It was this schism which promoted the ascendancy of Afrikanerdom. This also revealed the formation of Union to have been an uneasy pact of two dominant white elements with divergent outlooks and aspirations.

Well might some cynic say that the Act of Union was a triumph of the spirit of disunity and domination, and not of unity and friendly tolerance.

Since Union, we have witnessed the ascendancy of the spirit of Afrikanerdom which is a most domineering paternalism working on the axiom, "no equality between white and black in church or state." Such a spirit will always hurt the pride of a people to whom it is directed, even if they are held in serfdom. This spirit is inherent in the theory and practice of Apartheid. It makes white South Africa under the leadership of Afrikanerdom most intolerant of non-whites and violently opposed to their claim for being accommodated in the body-politic of South Africa on the basis of human rights and fundamental freedoms as formulated and declared by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

The policy of Apartheid in particular is diametrically opposed to the aspirations of the non-whites. This has so sharpened the issues in the Union as to eliminate as a factor of any consequence the advocates of the middle-of-the-road policy. Apostles of liberalism often advocate such a course. The formation of the Union of South Africa saw the beginning of the defeat of liberalism as expressed by so-called Cape liberals of the day. Because of its paternalism, many non-whites will not regret the

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demise of such liberalism. The issues of the struggle for freedom and democracy by non-whites are now so clear cut as to admit of no confusing assistance from our friends of the liberal paternalistic outlook who often advocate a timeless gradualism.

This has sometimes provoked the cry, "oh, save us from our friends". This is generally said not out of ill-will, but as a hint to friends not to embarrass fighters for freedom as they face an uncompromising Nationalism of the Nationalist Party brand. Such a stand strains black-white relations almost to breaking point.

This situation is not eased by the paternalistic presentation of Apartheid in the new dressing of "separate development" by the sweet-tongued Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, Mr. De Wet Nel.

Nothing short of abandonment of the policy of segregation and its more virulent form, Apartheid, will ease the situation. Inherent in both is discrimination against non-whites on grounds of colour and race.

Threats to use the army to help the civil authorities to crush the alleged non-white uprisings only help to inflame the situation. They result in the undermining of the genuine efforts of the liberation struggle movement to prosecute a non-violent struggle in an effort to convince white South Africa of the strong desire of the people for freedom and democracy.

Let us face it, the basic cause of strained black-white relations is the refusal of white South Africa to give non-whites full democratic rights. Defenceless and voteless as we have been and still are, we have suffered economically and socially. The vote is the key to equal opportunities in a democratic country.

When something is done ostensibly to meet the demands of the non-whites it often proves to be an evasion of the issue and a delaying tactic. This was the view of progressive African leaders on the Representation of Natives Act of 1936. The Native Representative Council it provided proved to be a dummy forum and a toy telephone.

Its uselessness was laid bare by the action of its African members who boycotted its sessions continually and for three years in succession until it was abolished by the Nationalist Party Government about 1950.

No serious-minded African grieved over its abolition.

The Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1958 is another evasive piece of legislation that provides a mongrel-like form of local

government which has no semblance to democracy. It is the worst caricature imaginable of our traditional form of government.

But worse still, it uses our chiefs as administrative tools to carry out the will of the Bantu Administration Department and as instruments to destroy those whom de Wet Nel calls "wolves and jackals", clearly those who are opponents of Apartheid.

Apartheid in the Bantustan scheme of things purports to resuscitate the status of the institution of chieftainship which was dying a silent death under the pressure of industrialisation, but still enjoyed the respect of some tribesmen who still referred to the chief as "our chief".

Now it will die unmourned and unsung, as people are increasingly coming to regard the chief as a government stooge, a government man, not their man, their persecutor, and not a father who punishes to discipline for the good of the tribe.

The Bantustan plans give the impression of providing Africans with an opportunity of "developing along their own lines" when in practice it is developing along the lines devised by the architects of Apartheid in the Nationalist Party.

The expression "develop along your own lines" can give the impression that in Bantustans Africans have the right of self-government and self-determination. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It is pertinent to observe and underline this: the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1958 is, for Africans, a culmination of a process that has its genesis in the Act of Union itself.

The Act denied Africans in the Union, save to some extent those of the Cape, franchise rights. The ascendancy of the oppressive spirit among white South Africans that denied non-whites political rights showed itself in:

a juggling with the Cape African vote to a point of emasculating it to virtual nothingness;

an ineffectual representation of Africans in Parliament by white representatives as provided for in the Representation of Natives Act of 1936;

the destruction of the last vestige of a token representation for Africans in Parliament and in other local bodies and the destruction of the very right to vote, ineffectual though it was.

All this was done through the promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 which purports to provide Africans with a more effective link with the Government than any ever devised before.

What we want is a link with the sovereign body in the land, parliament, not only with the Government whose dictatorial ruthlessness can only be moderated by Parliament and the ballot box. A Government is supposed to be subordinate to Parliament save in dictatorship countries.

Why leave the voteless and therefore defenceless Africans at the mercy and whim of a tyrannical government?

The Coloured People.

Previous governments seemed to act on the basis that the Coloured people were an appendage of the white community, but not the present Nationalist Party Government.

The "South Africa Act of 1909" - Act of Union - greatly curtailed the political rights and status of Coloured people. But worse came when Coloured voters were put on a separate roll, like Cape Africans, to vote for a given small number of whites to represent them in Parliament.

The political emasculation of the Coloured people is being completed by the establishment of a Department for Coloured Affairs as is the case with Africans.

For non-whites the creation of Union did not only deny them the right to vote but at Union and thereafter systematically deprived them of what meagre rights they had acquired during colonial days.

What the Union has meant to Non-Whites, more so Africans

The non-whites must be excused if they see nothing but bad in the compact of union, especially in the political sphere which is my assignment.

In the fifty years of union we have lost all rights politically and have suffered most grievously, more especially during the twelve years of Nationalist Party rule, mainly because we do not enjoy democratic rights.

The right of non-whites to hold land in freehold is virtually gone; communities, some of them living in freehold land of their own have been removed or threatened with a removal to eliminate the so-called "black spots" to satisfy white farmers of the respective areas; conditions are created which make us acquire Bantu Education against our will, we are

left no option; we are forced to come under the jurisdiction of an undemocratic and tyrannical Bantustan; our right of association and movement has been greatly limited; access to courts is being interfered with and limited through administrative despotism; we suffer daily from humiliating discrimination and indignities perpetrated on us by the exercise of white supremacy by white South Africa.

We have lost and suffered all this and more, mainly because we have no political power. White South Africa has suffered to some extent. Since our life impinges on all sectors of life in South Africa, what is done to non-whites sooner or later affects some members of the white community.

Mass arrests for offences under pass laws must interfere with smooth working in a factory or in a household. Influx control regulations and job reservation are interfering with rights of employers. Many such examples could be cited.

How can we celebrate suffering and humiliation?

The Reaction of the People to Discrimination and Repression

The discrimination exercised by white South Africa at the formation of Union provoked the African leaders of the day to form a national political organisation to fight for and to defend the rights of the people. This resulted in the formation of the African National Congress in January 1912.

In the main, the story of the freedom struggle of the repressed non-whites in the Union, especially Africans, is woven around the African National Congress. To give some idea of the people's reaction to oppression one cannot do better than tell the story of the struggle efforts of the African National Congress.

One acknowledges fully the good work done by worker's organisations like the ICU (Industrial and Commercial Workers Union). The African National Congress co-operates with some worker's organisations. Some organisations for the other non-white groups such as the Natal Indian Congress were a carry over from former British colonies that formed the Union of South Africa.

The desire among some African leaders to form a united opposition to the General Hertzog Native Bills (the Representation of Natives Bill, the Native Land and Trust Bill) in 1935 led to the formation of a national ad hoc organisation, the All-African Convention.

The main objective of the African National Congress from its inception to our day has been to unite the African people into a strong political body, the African National Congress, and to act as their mouth-piece.

The intensification of oppression and the deaf ear turned by white South Africa to the pleadings of the people for the amelioration of their sufferings led the African National Congress to adopt a militant programme of action on the basis of non-violence. This was about 1945. It sought and obtained the co-operation of other non-white groups on a national level. The militant programme brought in sharply the demand for franchise rights on the basis of adult suffrage for all with no discrimination on grounds of colour, race or creed. Later, about 1953, co-operation came to include white groups who shared without qualification the Congress objectives of securing for all oppressed people freedom and democracy, on a basis of equality, friendship and mutual trust. The liberation struggle has entered a stage in which efforts are being made to form a united freedom front with groups with whom we may be only in broad agreement so long as they fully or partially share our objectives.

The desire to see the vote extended to people of all racial groups has led the African National Congress to advocate a nationalism that embraces all in the country provided they give undivided allegiance to the land of their birth or adoption as the case may be in Africa.

This is the happy development Africans have come to.

The freedom struggle is becoming a mass movement so fighters for freedom can greet the Jubilee Anniversary with this satisfaction.

What is the reply of the government to the forward march of the people's struggle for freedom?

Successive Governments of the country, especially the Government of the day, the Nationalist Party Government, have armed the state with drastic security laws that are accompanied by severe sanctions. The Nationalist Party Government is already using these powers most drastically and with little respect for the rule of law.

The reply of the people on the whole is a refusal to be intimidated and in a growing mood to show "a courage that rises with danger".

Let us look forward to the future with the hope and belief that the centenary anniversary of the Union of South Africa will find our country already a free non-racial democracy.

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In the meantime let us each and all work with courage and patience for the consummation of our hope - freedom and democracy for all - at the earliest time possible.

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