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The
Natal Witness

Violent protest

17 OCT. 1989

A second protest march through the streets of the city ended in violence on Saturday morning, with shop windows being smashed, passersby threatened and hawkers' stalls overturned. It may be true that a small group of youths was responsible for the disturbances and also, as a Cosatu spokesman pointed out, that the violence is a reflection of the tension which exists in the townships surrounding Pietermaritzburg. Nevertheless, the organisers of protests cannot, and should not, attempt to distance themselves from the consequences of their marches.

In the current political climate, there is a huge responsibility on all concerned to act with the utmost restraint. The police, whose handling of protest action is under the closest scrutiny, now find themselves in an invidious position where they are damned if they do and damned if they don't. It is to the credit of the local security forces that in both city marches they have acted with restraint. At the same time, law abiding citizens and traders have a right to expect protection from the police. Those who have suffered damage to property have reason to feel aggrieved.

From another point of view, march organisers must be aware that each and every incident will be seized upon by organs such as the SABC and milked for propaganda purposes. Ultimately, it is in the interests of the marchers themselves to regulate their own behaviour fastidiously if the arguments they wish to make are not lost in a welter of stone-throwing, window-smashing and tear gas.

South Africa

by Ken Owe

NATAL WITNESS 1989

Strange things are happening

THINGS are happening in this troubled land that I did not expect to see in my lifetime. Already the more nimble-minded political animals — people like Harry Schwarz and Professor Farima Meer — are adjusting to a new climate. For the slow-witted, a cold wind blows.

Private conversations with old friends in the higher echelons of the National Party have convinced me that President de Klerk is in earnest. His vision may be flawed, and his methods dubious, but he plans to bring the people of South Africa to the conference table. He will work to that end.

The ANC, which can draw on the resources of the Western intelligence agencies for information that is denied to other South Africans, came to that conclusion some time ago. It has staked out a negotiating position which, it confesses, is intended to capture the high ground before negotiations begin.

Other strange and exciting things are happening. Little more than a week ago I sat in a hall in Lenasia listening to the most extraordinary speech by Fatima Meer, in which she warned a predominantly left-wing audience that the "liberatory struggle" had drifted from its democratic roots.

She accused it of a "vulgar Trotskyism" which preached irreconciliable conflict, branding some people as collaborators. I took this to be a reference to Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi and Inkatha, and indeed, within moments she was warning of the deeply felt resentment of both Buthelezi and his followers at being defined out of the freedom struggle.

She spoke of the secrecy of the liberation movements, the manipulation spawned by that secrecy, the pernicious effect of foreign funding, and the deep divisions between generations. Pointing to Mozambique and Angola, she warned of the danger of similar warfare between rival black groups after liberation.

Her speech, interestingly, followed publication of an article in the intellectual socialist magazine, *Work in Progress*, in which socialist Daryl Glaser indulged in a similar *mea culpa*. He confessed that the left had long perceived South African liberalism as its enemy, "to be fought at all costs".

He observed that the "revisionist history" which had emerged in such a flood from the English universities from the early Seventies onward was aimed at debunking liberal historiography. Now (perhaps the new "line" has come from Gorbachev?) he calls for partial conciliation with liberals.

Take a bow

I shall take a bow, thank you very much, for spotting early in the Seventies what was happening in the history departments, and setting up a howl of protest which lasted until about a fortnight ago. It will take honest graduate students a decade of hard work to go through all the work of the revisionists to separate the history from the propaganda; but at least they know now that any "history" book of the past two decades may well be adulterated by rubbish. They have been warned.

However, to return to the point, the release of political prisoners is a preliminary move in a process which has a long way to go, and which will throw up surprises — sometimes very nasty surprises — for everybody who has given his life, in one way or another, to the fight against apartheid.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, for example, calls himself and his clerical side-kicks, the Rev. Frank Chikane and the Rev. Allan Boesak, "facilitators", not negotiators (and if a sustained display of sibilant menace can be called facilitative, he is right). Their role ends when the negotiations begin.

Ample precedent

The Rev. Boesak has ample precedent in the Dutch Reformed Church for a switch to a political career, but for an archbishop to descend from the opulent heights of Bishopscourt to the back benches of the commons would be most unusual. If negotiations occur, Archbishop Tutu may well find himself exiled to spiritual fields.

The same dilemma (if indeed it is a dilemma) confronts Frederick van Zyl Slabbert, Idasa, the protesting mums of the Black Sash, Wynand Malan, and perhaps most of the Democratic Party. Some of South Africa's finest, and most-repeated, speeches about freedom, and some of the best posters, are dating very quickly as the government tries to meet the legitimate preconditions for talks.

Harry Schwarz, displaying as usual the quickest analytical mind in South African politics, has already observed, in effect, that it would be wicked to put obstacles in President de Klerk's way if, indeed, he is trying to get negotiations started. But the prospect is threatening.

The first precondition for sensible negotiations, surely, is permit-free political activity in order to identify the legitimate representatives of the various factions of a divided society. A negotiated settlement reached without the participation of the Conservative Party would plainly sow the seeds of an Ulster-type civil war; a settlement that excluded Inkatha, or Chief Sebe, or Bantu Holomisa, or the communists, would hardly be better.

In fact, behind Mrs Meer's plea for a new conciliation with blacks, I detect the evil smell of the necklace. As the political system is freed up, so the pressures for conformity from status-threatened leaders will rise. The ANC wants to be the sole negotiator for liberation and it is ready — as it has often been said — to kill people in order to achieve its ends.

Undermined

Anyway, as Mrs Meer says, the democratic traditions of "liberatory" politics have been undermined by the years of banishment and conspiracy. In the place of openness, there is secrecy, manipulation and hidden foreign money; in the place of debate, there is a dreadful Trotskyite demand for conformity (best seen on the campuses); and in the place of a healthy diversity, there is a witch-hunting search for "collaborators" and "sell-outs".

The real spirit of liberation politics, briefly displayed when government control of the townships broke down in 1985-86, is a ferocious uniformity, enforced by terror. Mrs Meer, living in Natal where a pitless war rages between Inkatha and the UDF, understands the danger.

The white opponents of apartheid, a drowsy bunch in the main, show little awareness of the important — and very courageous — endeavour on which Mrs Meer has now embarked to prepare the wider community for a new society. Unless they wake up, and soon, they will find themselves left behind, the new South Africa will be formed without them.

As matters stand, the Democratic Party is still mouthing platitudes about freedom, but half its members don't believe that liberal stuff anyway, and half its leaders want to be virtuous facilitators like Archbishop Tutu.

This is a pity, because the only useful role open to the DP in the next (critical) five years is intellectual: to offer liberal solutions to the many dilemmas that will arise as the representatives of two failed ideologies, apartheid and socialism, grope their way towards each other.

Only liberalism can secure both liberty and progress, while accommodating the diversity of South Africa. But the liberals have had the stuffing knocked out of them by the bully-boys, Nationalists on one side and socialists on the other, for 40 years. They don't have much courage or conviction left.

• *Ken Owen is the editor of Business Day, 11 Diagonal Street, Johannesburg.*

17 OCTOBER 1989

NIC's reverse-racism

DAILY NEWS

SIR — In their carefully-drafted letter Messrs Mewa Ramgobin, George Sewpersadh, Jerry Coovadia, Farouk Meer and others take affectionate issue with Archbishop Denis Hurley and other Christians for having objected to the communist flag flown recently in Durban (The Daily News, October 5).

I agree entirely that the Communist Party of South Africa should never have been banned. Indeed, any banning or deprivation of any right without fair trial is quite immoral. The Natal Indian Congress, which publicly condemns banning, which the Nationalist Government imposes often upon people with whom it disagrees, did precisely that when they persuaded Mr Rajiv Gandhi's Government to impose banning orders upon me and others with whom the Natal Indian Congress disagrees.

So much for the universally declared human right of freedom of movement to which the Natal Indian Congress claims to adhere!

Interesting in their letter is the sly attempt by them, all senior personnel of the Natal Indian Congress, to inject subtle anti-white and anti-Christian sentiment by reference to the whites having travelled with "the gun and the Bible".

Those who trot out this outworn shibboleth seem to forget that while the white people of Europe were still killing each other long before the great colonial conquests by Europeans, others had been doing that for centuries already.

The Aryans of Caucasia conquered and colonised the then Dravidian-controlled India. The Dravidians, too, came from outside (historians are not agreed from where) and colonised the country, ousting from their erstwhile possession the Bhils, the Adivasis, the Todas and other indigenous inhabitants of India.

Then the massacres and the raping and the razing perpetrated by Genghis Khan and his hordes who never carried the Bible! Not even the Old Testament to which Muslims subscribe. The last of the Moghuls, the drug-addict Aurunzeb, who murdered vast numbers of Hindus and vandalised numerous Hindu temples of antiquity never carried a Bible.

The Muslim conquerors of India were not Europeans. The Ngunis who pushed the Khoikhoi and the Khoi-San further south and also into mountain fastnesses and into the arid areas actually preceded the whites into South Africa.

The fact that those who support communism are fully entitled freely to propound their views does not entitle anyone to indulge in reverse-racism in any shape or form.

Those who now control the Natal Indian Congress retain the racial tag in line with Verwoerdian rules. In fact, there are less than a handful of Indians in South Africa. The overwhelming majority are, in political terms, South Africans. Indeed, if they insist on being Indians (which is a term descriptive of nationality) then they deny themselves the right of citizenship.

Finally, the founder of the Natal Indian Congress, Mahatma Gandhi, insisted that "there is no religion higher than truth". Truth therefore demands a correction of the claim by your correspondents that their Congress has always been non-racial. The fact is that a major criticism of Mahatma Gandhi's work through the Natal Indian Congress was that he espoused the cause only of Asians from India, ignoring the plight of the black tribes of Natal and the Transvaal with whom he did not come into contact.

Indeed, until 1945, the Natal Indian Congress never espoused non-racialism which, to their credit, those who took control then did do. Nevertheless, the Congress Movement in South Africa was never a non-racial organisation but a sort of loose federation of strictly racially structured political organisations.

The Natal Indian Congress remains one such, as its name exemplifies.

PAT POOVALINGAM
Durban

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Ambassador's ANC reply played down

DAILY NEWS

17 OCTOBER 1989

Foreign Service

LONDON: The South African Embassy here has moved to play down a televised statement from the Ambassador, Mr Rae Killen, which appeared to indicate that the Government was prepared for unconditional negotiations with the ANC.

The Ambassador's answers to a question on talks with the ANC was "quoted in isolation" and gave a "wrong impression", according to a press release from the Embassy yesterday afternoon.

The statement said that if "the thrust of the interview had been accurately conveyed to viewers, the point made by Ambassador Killen would have emerged clearly".

The point he was making, according to the Embassy, was "that commitment to peaceful change and a desire to negotiate in good faith were essential prerequisites for all parties to begin talks on a new dispensation in South Africa".

Mr Killen had been asked on an early-morning BBC news programme whether Pretoria was prepared to meet the ANC. He said: "Not only with the ANC but with leaders of all communities in South Africa."

Would the proposed, wide-ranging talks with black leaders include the ANC?

"Yes, indeed," Mr Killen replied. "If they are able to come to the conference table, if they are prepared to negotiate with South Africa."

Pressed on whether there were any pre-conditions to the talks, Mr Killen said: "Not at the moment, no."

The Embassy statement, released late on Monday afternoon, said: "The Ambassador's answer to the question of whether the South African Government would talk unconditionally to the ANC was quoted in isolation later in the same programme.

"This does not reflect the more detailed exposé which the Ambassador gave on the question of negotiation and conveys a wrong impression of official policy towards the ANC."

The statement concludes by saying: "The Embassy accepts, after having spoken to the BBC, that the misunderstanding arose from a contextual omission and that the programme should have given the necessary perspective to the Ambassador's statement."