

SOUTH AFRICA 1952.

[1952-83]

The year 1952 will long be remembered as one of the most eventful, perhaps the most fateful, years in the history of race relations in multi-racial South Africa. Heralded as the year which would witness the most stupendous celebrations in commemoration of the Tercentenary of the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck to plant western civilization at the southernmost tip of Africa the beginning of the year saw the approach of horse-drawn coaches from all parts of the country converging on Cape Town, the Mother City, where the Celebrations were expected to reach their climax on April 6, 1952. The slogan of the Celebrations was "WE BUILD A NATION", but the non-whites were quick to point out that they could not share in what some described as a 'Festival of Hate', commemorating ~~the growth of~~ the growth of white nationhood through the destruction of black nationhood, culminating in the adoption of the racist policy of apartheid espoused by the Malan Government.

Early in 1952 the African National Congress, the premier political organisation of the African people, founded in 1912, called upon the Prime Minister, Dr D.F. Malan, to abandon the policy of racial discrimination which had become so intolerable to the African people and other non-white groups that, ~~fasting~~ ~~fasting~~ immediate action, they were prepared to embark upon a ~~campagn~~ campaign of non-violent civil disobedience in defiance of the 'unjust' laws based upon discrimination on grounds of race or colour. Dr Malan in reply re-affirmed the intention of the Government to adhere to the policy of apartheid which he declared was based upon 'permanent, not man-made differences', leaving the African National Congress no alternative but to proceed with its plans for the 'Campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws!'

Before this Campaign got under way, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of South Africa, the highest court in the country, handed down its long-awaited decision on the validity of the Separate Representation of Voters' Act, a law whose object was to remove the Coloureds (persons of mixed descent) from the common voters' roll and to place them on a separate roll to elect a limited number of whites to represent them separately in Parliament, as was done with African voters in 1936. On March 20, 1952, the Supreme Court by a unanimous verdict declared that law invalid on the ground that it was passed without observing the two-thirds majority rule laid down in the South African Constitution, a rule which contrary to popular opinion, and in particular to the views of the Malan Government on the subject, still in the view of the Supreme Court, formed part of the law of the land. This decision precipitated a first-class constitutional crisis, for the Malan



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Government, refusing to accept a position in which, as it was phrased by some of its followers, 'five appointed men' could set at nought a law passed by 'the elected representatives of the people in Parliament' proceeded to pass a law creating a new Court--the High Court of Parliament which would consist of the members of Parliament and which would be empowered to review the decisions of the Supreme Court on constitutional issues, including the decision of March 20, 1952. In due course this High Court of Parliament, excluding the members of the Opposition Parties who had decided to boycott its activities, went through the motions of upsetting the decision of the Supreme Court, only to find the latter body at a later date declaring the High Court of Parliament Act itself null and void and of no legal effect. At this stage the Malan Government bowed to the decision of the Supreme Court, and left the Coloured Voters on the common roll, but threatened to make an issue of this matter at the forthcoming General Election to be held in May, 1953.

In the meantime <sup>on June 26, 1952</sup> the African National Congress ~~xxx~~ launched its non-violent civil disobedience and invited all groups to join its crusade against the policy of racial discrimination in South Africa. The response to the campaign is best described in the words of 22 leading European leaders of thought who after watching the movement for some time wrote:

"This movement is no sudden impulse. It bears all the signs of careful thought and planning over many months by men who are acknowledged leaders among Africans and Indians and have organised it with a full appreciation of all it implies. The movement has met with very remarkable response both from the mass of the people and from those to whom it appeals for voluntary personal support and for substantial courage and sacrifice".

The Government's reply to the non-violent campaign was the jailing of thousands of men and women, the arrest of all the topflight leaders of the movement, the banning of meetings in African areas, rural and urban, the ~~use~~ of the police force and the increasing use of armed force to quell ~~xxxxxxx~~ riots not connected with Campaign but which resulted in the loss of both black and white lives, the use of smear tactics by characterising the campaign as 'communist-inspired' or 'anti-white'. In spite of these moves the campaign went from strength to strength. The last quarter of the year saw it develop into an inter-racial movement when some Europeans, including the son of a former Governor-General of the Union (Sir Patrick Duncan) come forward to identify themselves with this struggle for freedom. In the closing days of the year the United Nations appointed a Commission of Three, in conformity with a resolution adopted by the General Assembly, to examine and report upon the race conflict in South Africa ~~resulting~~ from the apartheid policy of the government of the Union of South Africa.



In sum, South Africa ends the year as a country in which race relations have deteriorated to a marked extent, in which the sense of insecurity of the different racial groups ~~has been heightened~~ and the tensions between them have been heightened rather than reduced. Moreover the spotlight of world publicity has been focussed upon the Union of South Africa to a greater extent than ever before. The policy of apartheid and its implications not only for the inhabitants of the Union but for the continent of Africa as a whole have given rise to widespread concern. The observer, noting the intransigence of those who have it in their power to make or mar the future of this fair land, is left wondering what the year 1953 holds in store for South Africa.