

THE PROGRESSIVE PARTY

DR. ZACH DE BEER, M.P.,

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THE Progressive Party of South Africa was launched at a conference in Johannesburg last November. The founders included 11 Members of Parliament who had broken away from the Opposition United Party the previous August over colour policies. The conference announced a programme of principles considerably more liberal than that of the United Party's, but not quite as liberal as that of the Liberal Party's. The main aim of the new Party is to call a halt to the race war in South Africa and to offer a policy for the peaceful and prosperous co-existence of the different racial groups: 9,751,000 Africans, 3,067,000 Europeans, 1,405,000 Coloureds and 450,000 Asians.

The Party has appointed a commission of experts to examine proposals for a "rigid" constitution to take the place of the present "flexible" one, which the Party believes is unsuited to a multi-racial country like South Africa. A "rigid" constitution, it is claimed, would protect group rights, probably through a reformed Senate (Upper House), in which representatives of the respective racial groups would exercise powers roughly equivalent to a veto right. The right to vote on the common roll, at present denied to all non-whites, will be granted to non-whites with a certain educational qualification (as yet unspecified). All those who have been on the common voters' roll (and this includes the white electorate and some thousands of Coloureds and Africans) will remain on the roll, but all future registrations, whether of whites or non-whites, will be subject to the prescribed qualification. Alternative arrangements may be made for non-common roll voters—this group will include the mass of non-whites.

The November conference voted for the repeal of a number of corner-stone apartheid laws: among them, the Population Register Act, which seeks to label every citizen racially; the Group Areas Act, which provides for the racial rezoning of the

entire country, and hits particularly the Indian community; the Immorality Act, which prohibits sexual relations between whites and non-whites; and the Extension of University Education Act, which bars non-whites from the open universities and relegates them to tribal or "bush" colleges.

Some of the most important conference resolutions dealt with economic issues. These resolutions urged the abolition of the 'pass laws' and influx control, the relaxation of industrial colours bars, and the granting of trade union rights to skilled and semi-skilled non-whites, and to unskilled non-whites under government supervision.

In a question-answer interview, Dr. Zach. de Beer, M.P., Chairman of the National Executive Committee of the Progressive Party, provides further details on important aspects of his Party's policy:

1. **Time, you will agree, is important to the Progressive Party. If its M.P.s lose their seats at the 1963 General Election, the Party may have failed in its mission. It can succeed only if the United Party disintegrates further and releases from its grip more M.P.s and more followers. What processes, in your opinion, are at work encouraging this disintegration?**

It seems to me that the United Party has placed itself in a hopeless position. On the one hand, it must attempt to propound an alternative to Nationalist policies. On the other hand, its decisions at the Bloemfontein congress last August represent an attempt to outbid the Nationalists for the vote of the reactionary white man who wants "to keep the kaffir in his place." The Progressive Party is now preaching the only real alternative to Nationalism, while the Nationalists remain the reactionary party par excellence. It is difficult to see how the U.P. can avoid being ground between the upper and nether millstones. I prefer not to attempt precise prophecy: I do say, however, that in any foreseeable circumstances the Progressive Party's position appears more favourable for the future than that of either the Nationalists or the United Party.

2. **The Progressive Party hopes to achieve its aims by persuasion. What are the chances, though, of a prejudiced white electorate responding to intellectual arguments? In those parts of Africa**

where the whites are most securely entrenched, the white authority has been coerced, not persuaded, into making concessions. Why should the position in South Africa, where the whites are the most firmly entrenched of all, be any different? Under what circumstances would the Progressive Party condone unconstitutional action to rid the country of the Nationalist Government?

Of course, there is a danger that the whites in South Africa may refuse to admit non-whites to citizenship until they are forced to do so. It is precisely to avert this danger that we have come into being. A racial clash must be avoided in South Africa and can be avoided by the adoption of our policies. It should be remembered that the white population here is, by African standards, enormous; and this means that the whites, being in a position to negotiate from strength, have less reason to fear the inevitable emancipation of the African than have our counterparts elsewhere. To persuade the white population to do this and save itself before it is too late is one of the primary tasks of the Progressive Party. As for any unconstitutional action, we shall have no part in it.

3. One of the ways in which the Progressive Party wants to switch the emphasis from 'race' to 'civilisation' is by opening the common voters' roll to 'civilised' non-whites. Although the required educational qualification has not been announced yet, relatively few non-whites will pass as 'civilised.' Is this 'civilisation' test, therefore, not simply a 'race' test in disguise? The criticism of the qualified franchise is that it is a device to convert the non-white 'upper class' into an ally of the white ruling class by allowing it to enjoy some of the latter's privileges. What is your comment on this?

We believe that constitutional government demands institutions which can be successfully operated only by civilised people. Therefore, we propose a civilisation barrier, which is not a race barrier, since any citizen of any race can cross it. Our aim is not to align sections of our population against other sections, but to emphasize the common interests that bind all South Africans together and so build effective co-operation in the interests of all.

4. **The Progressive Party urges the abolition of the 'pass laws' and influx control. Does it profess this seriously? Some quarters hold the view that direction of labour is the basis of South Africa's cheap labour economy, and that its removal would transform this economy. Does the Progressive Party comprehend the implications of the proposal?**

We are perfectly serious in our intentions. It is a gross overstatement to say that directed labour is the basis of our labour structure; since influx control was not imposed until 1937; it was not imposed in Port Elizabeth until 1952; it has at all times been necessary to apply influx control in such a way as to keep as nearly as possible in step with the demands of the economy, which have thus always been the ultimate directing factor.

After widespread consultation with people of experience, we are convinced that the heavens will not fall when 'pass laws' and influx control are abolished. We are thus entirely prepared to face up to the implications of our policy.

5. **To press the point: the mines and farms enjoy privileged labour treatment because the wages they pay are not on a competitive level with the wages paid by commerce and industry. Where would the mines and farms get their labour if free migration to the towns was permitted?**

Our policy specifically states that the special position of the mines and of certain sections of agriculture must be taken into account where one seeks to discourage migrant labour. We have said, too, that the raising of the productivity and earning power of agricultural labour must accompany the abolition of influx control. Finally, realistic assessment of this problem requires an accurate valuation of wages in kind and other benefits which mining and agricultural workers receive. As a general proposition, we must strive towards the state of affairs where, taking everything into account, these industries can compete with other employers.

One final word on influx control. Our cities seem to believe that Africans come to the towns in response to some almost mystical call. They do not. They come because there is insufficient work elsewhere and they believe they can get work in the towns. This means that improvement of labour

conditions in the reserves and rural areas will of itself tend to stem the flow to the towns; and that once the labour market in the towns is saturated, the attractive force will cease to exert itself.

- 6. It appears that the Progressive Party favours the relaxation of the industrial colour bar. The emergence of a skilled African labour force would transform South Africa. White employers would benefit vastly from such a change, but would white workers vote for it?**

The rate at which the industrial colour bar can be relaxed depends on certain technical considerations in respect of some of which we propose an inquiry. Clearly, it is possible to frighten white workers with a prospect of skilled Africans competing for their jobs. All the real evidence, however, goes to show that this development, if judiciously carried out, will actually raise rather than lower the standards of white workers. It is the task of the Progressives, and of all enlightened people, to strive for wide acceptance of this prospect by workers involved.

- 7. Forgive my pursuing the matter: elsewhere in Africa—in the Federation, for example—white employers have maintained that the slogan of white trade unionists, ‘the rate for the job’, is merely a smug way of effectively preventing African advancement. These white employers want their black employees to become as skilled as their white employees, but they do not want to pay them the same wages. White trade unionists claim that this is proof that African advancement will result in the bread being taken out of their mouths. Why should the white worker in South Africa accept the policies of the Progressive Party in this respect, when he has the Nationalist Party promising special protection for the white working class?**

Again, my practical political experience has taught me how effective Nationalist propaganda can be. Yet I believe it can be successfully combated by a determined opposition based on real economic facts and prepared to face the implications. The ‘rate for the job’ can only be described in the terms referred to above if the valuation of the particular job is an artificial one. Where the job is properly valued, this principle

protects the worker regardless of race; and in the long run it is in the interests of employers, too, to pay wages which accord with the real value of the job done.

8. **The Progressive Party envisages a 'greater South Africa,' embracing possibly the three British High Commission Territories (Bechuanaland, Swaziland, Basutoland) and also Southern Rhodesia. They would be semi-autonomous provinces within a new federal community. Is this a mild form of imperialism, or does it contain practical benefits? And, incidentally, does it mean that you expect the Federation to be dismantled?**

The greater South Africa will have the obvious benefits of more diverse resources, a larger domestic market and greater national strength. It proposes the unification of territories and populations which share common interests and attitudes. It would be quite improper for us to express any views on the future of the Federation other than to extend our best wishes for its success, and very foolish for us to try to determine at this moment which of our neighbours might wish to join in the greater South Africa of the future.

9. **You personally have been quoted as supporting the formation of the South African Foundation, an organization of business men seeking to restore South Africa's reputation abroad. A spokesman of the African National Congress has condemned the Foundation as a move to whitewash apartheid, under the stimulus of the profit motive. Are the aims of the Progressive Party reconcilable with those of the Foundation?**

In welcoming the S.A. Foundation, I said specifically that I expect it to be wise enough not to try to whitewash Government policies which cannot be whitewashed. Provided the Foundation confines itself to the task of informing overseas investors of the innate soundness of South Africa's economy and of correcting false information which is current abroad, it is difficult to see how any South African can object to its formation.

10. **The Chairman of the Progressive Party, Mr. H. G. Lawrence, M.P., has condemned the proposed**

overseas boycott as a means of exerting pressure on the Nationalist Government. How valid is the view that peaceful pressures, like boycotts, are preferable to an ultimate, violent explosion?

I do not believe that any boycott is likely to have the effect of preventing the 'ultimate violent explosion' to which you refer. I believe that boycotts will, to the extent that they may be effective, harm the economy of South Africa and, in particular, cause suffering among the poorest of the people. To the extent that they have any political effect, I think, they will merely tend to consolidate opinion behind the Government. I associate myself entirely with Mr. Lawrence's remarks.

- 11. The Progressive Party attaches considerable importance to federalism. Federalism, surely, is of value only if an individual province or unit is homogeneous. In the existing provinces of the Union exactly the same racial problems are encountered. What then is the relevancy of federalism?**

There is much truth in the statement that federalism is chiefly of value where the units are homogeneous. That is why a simple geographical federation is not enough in South Africa; and why we believe it is essential to have something in the nature of a 'racial federation,' in which each racial group (and these are fairly homogenous) will be able to protect itself much as the state protects itself in other federations.

In addition, however, there are powerful arguments in favour of geographical federalism in South Africa. First, the decentralization of legislative and executive power in appropriate matters tends to be conducive to greater freedom and efficiency. Second, while the Cape and the Transvaal are heterogeneous communities, Natal and the Free State at least do have fairly clearly-marked local characteristics. Third, if territories at present outside the Union do consider joining us, it is probable that they will be more ready to take the plunge if they are permitted to retain substantial local autonomy. Finally, if the Nationalists do achieve anything substantial in the economic and constitutional development of the major African areas, these will become units which naturally lend themselves to a federal arrangement for the very reason of their homogeneity. Our plans therefore provide for substantial division of powers both on a racial and on a geographical basis.