

Malan's Cauldron Boils

(This is the third in the series of articles, by our South African correspondent, whose aim is to convey to the readers of *The Economic Weekly* some understanding of the confused situation in South Africa today. The first and second articles in this series appeared in *The Economic Weekly*, May 17 and May 31, 1952—Ed.)

I HAD intended this to be a dispassionate series of articles aimed at conveying, to Indian readers, a sufficient knowledge of the background of South Africa to enable them to understand the strange happenings in that country. But now events have caught up with me—the crisis whose background I was to describe is now upon us. It has been precipitated by the orders given by the Minister of Justice, Charles Robbert Swart, to half-a-dozen trade union officials to quit their unions.

This, by itself, would have been provocative enough, but, as if to salt the wound, the orders were followed up by the forcible breaking up by the police, of a gathering of garment workers called in Johannesburg to protest against the ban. It is hard to think of any more stupid course that the Nationalist government or their agents could have taken. The meeting, held on the steps of Johannesburg's City Hall, had been addressed by a Labour and a United Party M.P. Solly Sachs. The Garment Workers' banned general secretary was speaking, with representatives of the Torch Commando and the Springbok Legion of Ex-Servicemen waiting their turn, when a group of policemen pushed their way through the crowd and arrested Sachs. The Coloured workers, through whose ranks they led the unprotesting Sachs, hurled insults and small missiles at the police—and, in South Africa, for a non-European to hurl anything at a white policeman is almost a capital offence! Having hustled Sachs into the City Hall, the police turned and made a baton charge. They then retreated once more and, after the meeting had been resumed, made a second charge, this time heavily reinforced'

There is no doubt that their quarry were the Coloured women who had dared to defy them, but in the resulting turmoil many white women (including the wife of the Labour M.P.) got hit on the head as well as did white men who
An ex-officer of

the British Indian Army wrote to the Johannesburg *Star* expressing his consternation at the provocation of the police behaviour. Why did they intrude on the meeting at all, when it would have been perfectly easy to arrest Sachs before or after? Why the baton charge on a peaceful meeting, even supposing the police had been provoked? And why no provision for the wounded when the charges were over?

The Nationalists have been surprised and shocked by the response to their new onslaught. In the past, it has been difficult to work up much indignation, amongst the white South Africans, against atrocities committed against the non-whites, but the present series of acts—first, the removal of the Cape Coloured franchise, then the creation of the farcical "High Court of Parliament" to upset the decision of the Appellate Division which itself upset the Franchise Act, and now the interference with the trade unions—has seen the white town-dwellers more indignant and more united than they have ever been before (except, perhaps, for the period of the Nationalist pro-Nazi campaign during the early years of the war). The Government has achieved in a few weeks what years of diligent labour have failed to achieve—the unity of the trade union movement, which had been decimated by political disputes. Even the white Mine Workers' Union, which had fallen into the clutches of the Nationalists, has now been challenged by the emergence of an anti-Nationalist group, while the Bank Officials have convened a national conference which even the conservative craft unions have agreed to attend.

Instead of splitting the opposition by the use of Communist and colour bogeys, the Nationalists now find themselves confronted by a united front of the United and Labour Parties and the Torch Commando, with a new accession of strength from the trade unions.

and-file which is probably more militant than the leadership. The conservative *Star* says in an editorial, "South Africa today is reaping^ and will continue to reap in increasing measure, the fury of the whirlwind sown by this Government when they forced through the infamous provisions which disfigure their Suppression of Communism Act". That is strong language, but not too strong to express the feelings of many white South Africans today.

From the flank, the Government is being subjected to another attack. The traditionally pro-English province of Natal is seeking secession from a Union which can no longer guarantee the right of national minorities. Whereas, five or six years ago, the whites of Durban appeared to be making common cause with the Nationalists of the Orange Free State against the very-faintly-liberal policies of General Smuts, they have now expressed their immutable antipathy to the Nationalists, now ensconced in power. Smuts had enacted the Asiatic (Land Tenure) Act which, whilst aimed at residential and business segregation of the Indian community, also allowed them to elect three white representatives to Parliament—a right which the Nationalists soon took away.

Will all this serve to dilute the anti-Indianism of the English of Natal? It is difficult to see how it can fail to do so, for the latter can hardly fight the Nationalists and the Indians at the same time. But if the Unity campaign of the Non-Europeans flares into activity? Dadoo and others are already defying the Governmental restrictions on their movements and activities and will undoubtedly find themselves in court—and prison—before very long. Will the United Party and Torch Commando protest on their behalf too? This is the crucial question on which may depend the overthrow of the Nationalists and the peaceful development of the country. For its answer we shall
.not have to wait very long