

In the doom-laden Liberal election of 1970 his majority went down to 550 – though even that was 200 more than Jeremy Thorpe's. His efforts on behalf of abortion reform were not, however, solely responsible for that. Even more controversial in the Rugby-playing Borders had been Steel's opposition, in his capacity as president of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, to the Springboks tour of 1969-70. To go to the main Rugby ground, Galashiels, in his own constituency and protest, if silently, against the South Africans being allowed to play took political nerve and moral courage of a high order. Even today Steel still calls it 'the most difficult decision I've had to make' and the fact that he made up his mind the way he did, no doubt, explains why even people like Peter Hain were to be found in his corner during the recent leadership contest.

Hain was a valuable backer for Steel to have, if only because the new leader's personal style of politics has not generally commended itself to the Liberal Party's more noisy and vociferous 'radical' elements. Partly, it may be no more than a question of his tone of voice: those who want to 'bust the system' do not normally look to reason and persuasion to do the job for them. But the difference goes beyond that. From the start of his career in politics – indeed before it was even properly launched – Steel has always seemed to accept that the Liberal Party may have to settle for a role as an 'influence' rather than as a political force in its own right. As long ago as 1963, when he was merely a 24-year-old assistant secretary to the Scot-

tish Liberal Party, he was to be found writing:

I am always alarmed when I read of candidates and others in responsible positions arguing that the party should adopt yet more candidates and fight on an even broader front in order to return a Liberal government at the next election. To my mind this is an invitation to mass suicide.

Seven years later, after five years as an MP, he was still striking the same note. Claiming that Liberals ought to be prepared to make local arrangements with liberal-minded candidates of other parties (he specifically mentioned Ben Whitaker in Hampstead and Nigel Fisher in Surbiton) he went on expressly to reject

any idea that we can simply plod on as before, spending the next ten years building back to a dozen or 15 MPs, only to face near-annihilation on a sudden small swing of the pendulum.

And, of course, this time two years ago it was Steel, in an official party broadcast, who first floated the Liberal 'coalition' notion. Despite the hubbub it caused, he remains unrepentant in his belief that if his advice had been followed the October 1974 election need not have been the disappointment for the Liberal Party that it was.

He could be right, certainly his has always been the voice of reason – talking sense (as Adlai Stevenson also tried to do) not just to the Liberal Party but to the country at large. But political leaders, at least in the past, have tended to require different, and less detached, gifts. Even Adlai Stevenson, after all, never actually won the presidency of the United States.

William Chislett

Spain's Dubious Matador

Already Spain's new Premier, Adolfo Suarez, is being spoken of as a younger version of Carlos Arias, the country's outgoing Prime Minister. More articulate and far more handsome than Arias, Suarez's dark matador looks are aptly suited to the bullfighting role he takes on in the country's hot political arena.

Suarez at 43 is Spain's youngest-ever Premier, relatively unknown and politically inexperienced. Arias's *faena* in post-Franco Spain for seven months was a disaster and his moment of truth came when King Juan Carlos summoned him to the royal Oriente palace to tell him that he now accepted his resignation, offered some time ago. The conflict between the King and Arias was an open secret. The King would have liked to appoint a more liberal man than Suarez, probably his Foreign Minister, Jose Maria Areilza; but the choice given him by the Council of the Realm, responsible for drawing up a list of three candidates, made this impossible. The council, bastion of Francoism, was prepared to see Arias go, but not what he stood for.

While villagers in Cebros, Suarez's birthplace in the province of Avila, held a

fiesta to mark the occasion of 'local boy makes good', the opposition, bewildered and confused, predictably condemned him as being incapable of dismantling the structure of the dictatorship. Socialists decided to give Suarez the benefit of the doubt and reserve judgment until his first government gets into action. The Spanish Communist Party condemned him outright. Marcelino Camacho, the leader of the workers' commissions, the underground trade union movement, put his finger on the main criticism when he said that the appointment of Suarez was probably an attempt to disguise the old regime under a younger face. Camacho made his remark after being fined £1,600 for addressing an unauthorised workers' meeting in a Madrid church.

The state-controlled television has already started to use the same technique on Suarez that it is using on the King, putting across their youthful family images. After all, the combined age of Suarez and the 38-year-old King is two years less than the age at which Franco died last November. Suarez is a dark horse. As minister of the fascist National Movement under Arias his credentials for calling himself a democrat –

which he did earlier this year – are hard to accept. The Spanish press made great play of his defence of recognising some political parties, when a Bill to legalise them was approved by the Cortes a month ago. But as the penal code still declares all parties illegal the reform is a sham. Suarez was portrayed as Daniel going into the Cortes lions' den – or 'bunker' as the entrenched Right is popularly called. Significantly, Suarez did not use the word political party in his speech, but stuck to the Francoist terminology of 'association'.

Suarez himself founded a political association in 1974, the Union of the Spanish People, allowed within the framework of the Movement. If he intends to base his government's programme on that association's programme then Camacho's remark is prophetic. The association believes in continuity, respect for the present constitution ('open to the necessary reforms') and the use of the armed forces to maintain law and order. No wonder he is regarded as a younger Arias. Suarez was only nine when the civil war ended, unlike Arias, who at 30 was busy earning himself a reputation as a military prosecutor at the time of the reprisals after the Nationalists' capture of Malaga – his nickname 'the butcher of Malaga' derives from this period. Even so, Suarez's ideology is rooted in the war and recently he beat Franco's playboy son-in-law, the Marquis of Villaverde, in the election for a vacancy in the ruling body of the Movement.

Suarez says he accepts the necessity of a left-wing opposition. The opposition is fed up with being told that it is needed while being clobbered for meeting, fined without trial, imprisoned and maltreated by the police. The same day that Suarez was chosen by the Council of the Realm as one of the three candidates, the police broke up an act of homage to a fascist turned social democrat. Opposition leaders gathered in Madrid's Eurobuilding with government permission to commemorate the first anniversary of the death of Dionisio Ridruejo, the Falangist poet who became a social democrat. Suddenly an official from the Interior Ministry arrived to say the meeting was now banned. Ridruejo's crime was to have deserted the Francoist cause and he was persecuted for his betrayal, dying penniless even though he wrote the Falangist hymn *Face to the Sun*. Not even his memory could be venerated and the meeting was given five minutes to disperse.

This is the climate in which Suarez takes over. More people have been charged with political offences in the first six months of this year than in the same period last year. People like Francisco Romero Marin, a member of the Communist Party's executive committee, have been in Madrid's Carabanchel prison awaiting trial since April 1974. Others like Luis Lucio Lobato have spent 24 years in prison for illegal association. And an amnesty is nowhere in sight. Suarez's nomination is a victory for the 'reformists' of the Right, rather than the hard-line 'bunker'. But the difference between Suarez's idea of reform and the opposition's is the difference between Francoism with a facelift and democracy as we know it.

Madrid