

PC14/5144/34



30 June 1987

Dear Dave

Oh dear, oh dear! Fooled again! I really thought I'd met someone who was capable of differentiating the myth of the mighty Congress struggles of the 1950s from reality, which was the failure of the Congresses, or any other movement, to inspire the mass of black South Africans with confidence in their leadership, and so to rally behind them in an assault on Afrikaner Nationalist rule. What I shall be intrigued to find out is whether you were indeed such a person, and have since changed your view, or whether you were not and pretended to be, or, as discredibly, are such a person and have written that LP/COP paper in bad faith.

It simply perpetuates that sadly misleading myth while pretending 'to dispute strongly the mythology', a tiny and insignificant one, if it exists at all, which you allege surrounds LP participation in the Congress of the People. I found the piece as a whole very distasteful and cannot bring myself to catalogue all the points of disagreement I have with you. What I must say is this:

(1) You state that 'the decision of the LP to take no part whatsoever in the Congress of the People was unquestionably one of the most damaging the Party ever took.' I only became active in the Party in 1956-7, and in the seven or eight years that followed I don't think our non-participation at Kliptown was much, if ever, raised in arguments between the LP and the Congress Alliance or its constituent bodies. It would be interesting to read through *New Age*, *Fighting Talk*, *Liberation* to see if there is any evidence that our non-participation 'was perceived as a lack of commitment to the liberation struggle waged by the Congresses'. My recollection is that the Congress Alliance was so strongly attacked over Kliptown by the Africanists on the one hand (who, as you know coined 'charterists' as a term of opprobrium) and the Unity Movement on the other, that the LP's attitude was scarcely an issue. Furthermore, you must surely be aware that much Congress Alliance bitterness against the LP was a reaction to the charge made by some LP members that it was the Congresses that did not 'accept black leadership', but allowed undue white, and specifically CP, control. Yet you say that we were 'irreparably damaged by what was perceived as... a refusal to accept black leadership.' I'm afraid you've got it very mixed up.

(2) It would be a telling exercise to count the number of times you use the word 'fear', in relation to LP attitudes to the invitation to participate. To ram the point home you use Wollheim's phrase 'frankly frightened' in the title of the paper. You seem to have, or to wish to be seen to have, a very obvious *animus* in your treatment of the LP role. This vitiates any real value the piece might have as a study of these events. What you have done is to extract from the documents Peter Brown made available to you (on my introduction, God help me!) anything you can find which will discredit those you quote, and hence the Party

