

Dear Dave

FRANKLY FRIGHTENED: THE LP AND THE COP

12 August 1987

Oh dear, oh dear! I really thought I'd met someone who was capable of differentiating the myth of the mighty Congress struggles of the 1950s from reality. The reality 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 I completely misunderstood your position. I am sure you could not have written that LP/COP paper in bad faith.

It simply perpetuates that sadly misleading myth of the mighty Congress of the People giving birth to the sacred Freedom Charter, while paradoxically setting out '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. It also judges the role of the Liberal Party with amazing unfairness:

(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 all wrong.

(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 wish to display a very obvious *animus* in your treatment of the LP role. This vitiates what value the piece might have as a study of these events. What you seem to have done is to extract from the documents Peter Brown made available to you anything you could find to discredit most of those you quote, and hence the Party itself. Why?

My main disappointment in the paper, however, is in its acceptance of the Kliptown myth and hence its support for the status of the Freedom Charter as Holy Writ. The Freedom Charter must be judged on its content and not on its claim to have been somehow disorged from the hearts of the people, which was not, I'm afraid, at all the case.

Your comments would be appreciated. Perhaps we could talk about the paper when you are in England again.

Yours ever

Randolph

Dani Ewen 03