

Rubin
Archive

10th October 1962

Dear Peter,

I write to tell you that I had a very useful discussion yesterday with the ICFTU in Brussels about the conference which has been suggested. I put to them your preliminary reactions and it seems clear that they too agree substantially with your views. For this reason it would seem wise not to have one single conference which receives publicity but to arrange a series of discussions with various groups of likeminded people. The purpose of the gathering is to see just what can be done to build a united African trade union movement in South Africa. As you will realise, this involves a number of problems: not only are there SACTU and FOFATUSA in the field, but also there are the views of the TUC and their allied groups to be taken into account.

Having regard to the object set out above it is suggested that over a period, preferably from about 3rd to 21st January, a number of discussions be arranged between one or more representatives of the ICFTU, who will come to Swaziland or Basutoland whichever is the more convenient, and people engaged in trade union work or who have a serious intention of doing trade union work. Swaziland seems to be the better prospect as it is easier to get into and immediately there comes to mind the Usuthu Mission who I am sure would be prepared to make their school buildings available for such a conference during their school holiday in January. I have a direct entree to them if you are not able to arrange things. There are some people who for obvious reasons the ICFTU would have to approach directly, such as the TUC and people like Heppel with whom they have been in direct contact.

They recognise that it would be unfortunate, for instance, to have FOFATUSA people present if SACTU leaders could be induced to attend. A schedule would therefore have to be drawn up in terms of which various days would be allocated to various groups which need not necessarily be homogeneous provided they are not antipathetic to one another, for instance if Liberals were coming from Capetown there could be no reason why Thomas Ngwenya could not come with them.

ICFTU would I think be interested in helping trade union development in a number of diverse ways. I think the one thing to get clear is that they are completely determined to go ahead with the South Africa project and will make money available for the correct propositions. They understand that it may not be possible to postulate a complete plan for the development of a co-ordinated trade union movement immediately and they recognise that different methods may have to be adopted for different groups. As you know, I have always felt that SACTU should be taken over and this is a task which we might well be able to undertake provided we had

/ the monies

the monies to do it. Ernie I know shares my views. The Progresses also indicated some interest in trade union work and as I understood it they had some talks with the TUC. Steps should be taken to find out who amongst their number would be interested in this project.

Broadly speaking, then, the proposition is that either through our agency or by direct invitation likeminded groups of people should be invited to a venue as arranged to discuss with the ICFTU a programme for building a co-ordinated trade union movement. The people to be invited should be those who are doing trade union work or have a firm intention of doing trade union work. The ICFTU will pay the expenses at Usuthu or such other venue as can be arranged together with the travelling expenses of people to be asked and, I am sure, any secretarial expenses which may arise. While the ICFTU want to do the job properly, for obvious reasons they would wish to keep expenditure within reasonable bounds, and that is why the use of Usuthu in the first instance is most appropriate as I am sure that the cost of having people there would be small as compared with the cost of using hotels, also they are likely to be more sympathetic. Secondly the use of cars rather than trains would also cut down cost to quite a considerable extent.

I don't need to tell you the difficulties of financing this sort of thing, and the ICFTU would like to know if possible by the end of the month the suggested venue, and a rough estimate which should be on the right side of what monies will be needed for pay^{ment} for board and travel and other incidental expenses. They would obviously be prepared to pay for travel for initial consultation as well.

The only group which is likely to be hostile to these discussions is SACTU, and I think that consideration should be given as to whether it is the right tactics to ask them first or last. On balance it seems important that they should be asked first if it can be ensured that they do not sabotage the rest of it by communicating with the police and so on.

Also it seems important that there should be some continuity of organisation and that the ICFTU personnel should have the benefit of a local resident secretary who will know the arrangements and keep the wheels turning. Ernie might be free to do this job. I have mentioned that members of the ICFTU will be present: one person will be present all the time and others may be present for part of the time. Others who are present would include people who are interested in setting up educational facilities such as the ICFTU have at Kampala.

This whole move I think offers new hope for the South African situation and I know that, whatever advantage ~~the political~~ party is likely to achieve from participating in it, we would want to see these discussions have a very fruitful result.

I am sending copies of this letter to Ernie and to Neville and I hope that you will not find the job of getting this information too irksome.

Yours sincerely,

John Lang