

FORWARD FROM APRIL 14.

LESSONS OF THE "STAY-AWAY"

IT is characteristic of a certain type of people, usually middle-class, in and around any progressive movement, that they suffer violent swings of mood, up and down, like a child on a see-saw. When something successful happens, like a victorious bus-boycott, demonstration or strike, their optimism knows no bounds. They then become ardent revolutionaries, criticise the leaders for being too conservative and imagine that final victory is just around the corner. On the other hand, if something goes wrong these people are plunged into the deepest despair. The leadership is criticised for being adventuristic. All faith in the people is abandoned. Every sort of wild story or malicious gossop put about by government agents is eagerly swallowed. These people then become quite useless to the movement for a while, or even get out of it altogether.

More mature and well-balanced people will not behave in this way. They do not get carried away by minor successes. And when some plan fails to come off, or some battle is lost, they do not despair. They have implicit faith in the people, and their final victory over oppression and injustice. They know that each setback can be turned into a victory if we analyse its lessons properly and turn them to account.

It is in this light that we should look back upon the events of National Protest Week and the three-day "Stay at Home" that had to be called off after the first day because of the disappointing response. What went wrong? How shall we put it right? These are the questions that really matter. But first we should be clear in our minds what actually happened

"TOTAL FAILURE?"

Enemies of the Congress movement are gloating over what they call the "total failure" of the stay-at-home protest. They try to exaggerate the failure, to make capital out of it in attempts to break Congress, or to divide the movement, or to confuse members and make a bid to take over. The response was poor and disappointing. But it definitely was not a total failure.

Thousands of workers responded loyally to the call. Many in the Transvaal, Natal and the Eastern Cape did not present themselves at work on Monday, 14th April. In Johannesburg, particularly in the Western Areas

by DAN TLOOME

and even in remote parts of the Transvaal like Louis Trichardt and Pietersburg. in small towns like Balfour, and even on some farms, workers downed tools and demanded £1 a day. Indian and other shopkeepers closed down.

Quite apart from the response, the Protest Week campaign had another important effect. From the day of the National Workers' Conference on March 16 up to election day on April 16, it was not Strijdom and Graaff who captured the attention of the people of this country and the outside world, or the "election issues" which have nothing to do with the real issues facing the country, but merely which Party is the best one to preserve White minority rule. Instead, in the newspapers, in the ordinary talk of the people, and even on the political platform, the Congress movement held the centre of the stage, and the demands of the masses of the people for human rights, equality and decent wages.

Yet the response was poor, we must face it. Otherwise the leadership would not have found it necessary to call a halt after the first day — and let it be said that the calling off was a wise and courageous step which averted grave consequences including the isolation of the most advanced workers and bitter, perhaps violent, splits among the people themselves, which would have played into the hands of the Government.

POOR RESPONSE

What every progressive must be asking himself is: Why did the people not respond to the call of the National Workers' Conference, as they have responded to previous calls, especially during 1957? Why was the Stay-at-home not a success? Did the Congress movement wrongly assess the situation and the mood of the people — and why? Or is it possible that the leadership misjudged the feeling of the people and their possible deep intention in the outcome of the election and the victory of the United Party?

It is certain that the failure was NOT because people do not support the demands for increased wages, against passes and apartheid. Those demands are still there — and the people will continue to struggle to win them. Nor was it because people had decided to listen to the Nationalist Party or the United Party, both of whom had advised that the people should take no notice of their leaders. The plain facts which should be conceded are that people were to some extent confused and discouraged by the tremendous barrage of intimidation and propaganda from politicians, both Nat and U.P., from policemen and bosses, from press and radio, from

every sort of stooge of the ruling classes, ranging from sell-outs within the A.N.C. itself and the trade union movement, as well as from the full-time-paid provocateurs.

What of the duration? It is possible that the three days duration of the stay-at-home weighed heavily in the minds of the working people, who must have thought of the three days loss of pay and possible victimisations resulting in endorsements out of their areas through the Influx control system. What of the timing? Much as every clear thinking politician thought it was an appropriate time to focus the attention of the country and the world on the lot of our voteless South Africans, to the ordinary layman, who has carried the burden of the oppressive apartheid measures of the Nationalist Government since their inception into power, the propaganda afloat at the time that, to stay away from work during the election period would in effect enhance the chances of the Nationalist party winning the election, had much meaning and captured his imagination.

Above all, there is the question of **ORGANISATION** to be taken into account. It is quite obvious that the type of machinery created to conduct the campaign did not conform to the usual closely knit, disciplined mass-organisation, which is an essential factor in conducting any political campaign. In this connection, it has to be observed that, immediately a blanket ban on meetings of more than ten persons was imposed by the Government, most of the branches of the movement lost contact with the people, as the majority of them had always relied on mass meetings to convey any message to the people, and had never given serious consideration to the M. Plan form of organisation. Moreover, one cannot discount the fact that, right up to the eve of the campaign, the A.N.C. was weakened and distracted by its troubles and splits in the two strongest Provinces: Transvaal and Cape. The crises took up an enormous amount of time and energy, and hampered proper mass work.

Moreover, for mass industrial action to succeed it is important that trade union and factory organisation should exist. When the "£--a-Day" campaign was launched by the Congress movement, one of its main aims was to recruit 20,000 new members for trade unions. But this task was never seriously tackled. A.N.C. branches still do not fully understand the importance of trade unions and factory committees as vitally necessary for the freedom struggle.

THE WRONG SLOGAN

It must be conceded that the slogan: **DEFEAT THE NATS** was wrong and misleading. It is highly probable that, taken on its face value, the slogan led a considerable section of the people to believe that the Congresses were in favour of the United Party coming into power, as a party capable of solving our problems in South Africa. Yet, taken more profoundly, it is clear that the use of the slogan was intended to place emphasis on the ruthlessness of the present ruling party, and to focus attention of the country to the impoverishment and the relentless and incessant persecution imposed upon the vast majority of South Africans in the name of Apartheid.

In essence, there is no fundamental difference between the United Party and the Nats. Both stand for a rigid policy of white domination and racial segregation. Both are pledged to perpetuate the exploitation of Non-European cheap labour, by means of the hated pass laws.

Not unmindful of these factors, Chief Lutuli and other Congress leaders, in their various statements of policy made it clear that the main purpose of the protest was NOT to influence the white electorate into voting for either the Nationalist Party or the United Party, but to show South Africa and the world the real aspirations of the majority of the people, who are excluded from the right to vote, and to express their DEMANDS FOR:

- increased wages and a national minimum wage of £1 a day
- the ending of the pass laws for men and women
- the ending of the apartheid measures.

THE STRUGGLE GOES ON

Let us have no illusions but that the enemies of the united front of oppressed nationalities, which has been built up over so many years with so much effort and sacrifice, will join together now in a concerted attempt to smash Congress and the Congress movement. But, notwithstanding these attempts, the struggle will go on. Indeed, it has just begun afresh, and with the issues sharper than before. The police repression of April 14th and 15th, the new mass arrests, the bans on meetings now three months old — none of these things have solved or could solve any single one of our problems.

The poverty remains, the unendurable oppression of the pass laws and apartheid continues to harass the people. Life has become more miserable than ever before.

It must be recognised that the struggle of an oppressed people has its victories and its setbacks. And if we are really to turn defeat into victory — as we can and must do, then we must not only know how to make calls go forward to victory. We should also know when we have suffered a temporary defeat, and should have the wisdom and the steadfastness of faith in our people and our cause to analyse and master the reasons, correct our mistakes and shortcomings, regroup and consolidate our forces and go on to fresh advances and victories.

Provided we master the political and organisational lessons of April, of the events which led up to and culminated in National Protest Week, it will go down in history not as a defeat but as a great turning point in our work, leading to greater determination, sounder organisation and a deepened understanding in the movement as a whole.

One thing is certain: the people may suffer temporary disappointments and setbacks, but the future belongs to their movement and what it stands for. The trend of world, African and home events makes us confident that white domination is but a passing stage of madness, and that we shall indeed see freedom in our lifetime.



by

WALTER SISULU

AT SABRA's annual conference this year at Stellenbosch, it was decided to convene a meeting at which Non-European leaders will be invited. This decision has aroused great interest — far more than it merits. There is hardly a newspaper that has not commented on it, and each week there is something in the papers. Almost all have applauded the decision, speaking of it with excitement and hope.

Why has this plan aroused such interest and claimed so much attention?

THE PURPOSE OF SABRA

First, we must know a little more of the character and role of SABRA in the life of our country. We do not intend to deal in any detail with its policy and programme, but rather to touch only on the important points that will throw light on their 'mixed meeting' proposal and its reception.

SABRA was founded in 1948 by leading Afrikaner Nationalist intellectuals. Foundation members included not only the leading Cabinet Ministers, Nationalist M.P.'s, Senators, D.R.C. leaders, and members of the former O.B., but also leading members of the Broederbond, the secret organisation known as the real ruling-circle within the party and government.

Under these circumstances it is natural that SABRA should wield considerable influence on both the Nationalist Party and the government, bound together by the fundamental principles of apartheid. Dr. Verwoerd, one of the party's leading theoreticians and a member of SABRA until his recent resignation, puts it this way:

"Firstly, mention should be made of the fundamental principle on which everything is based. This is that the policy of separate development is the policy of the country today. The quintessence of the matter is that while the European enjoys all his rights and privileges in one part of the country, namely in what we call white South Africa, the native has similar rights and privileges, but can in turn only exercise them within the native areas, i.e. in the reserves — whether tribal territory or areas subsequently purchased. That is what he must look on as his home — and at least the home of his rights."