

OUR CONCEPTION OF THE LIBERATORY STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Notes of a Speech delivered by I.B. Tabata, President, Unity Movement of South Africa, at a meeting held in New York, October, 1965

To-night I want to give you a brief picture of the nature of the struggle in South Africa. Since there isn't much time, I shall give you only the broad outlines, the bare bones of the situation, in the hope that you will fill in the living flesh and blood of the movement. The idea is to give you a framework that will enable you to piece together the bits of often confusing information that you glean from the press.

We consider the struggle for liberation in South Africa as an integral part of the struggle of the oppressed and exploited ^{of the world} ~~the world over~~. In this sense it is a struggle against capitalism-imperialism as a world phenomenon. Thus it becomes necessary to explain to you the political concepts, the programme and principles that govern our movement, the Unity Movement of South Africa.

Before the national ^{liberatory} movement in South Africa was launched we considered it essential to examine the socio-economic and political structure of South Africa. This revealed 1) that there ~~xxx~~ were two main problems confronting the oppressed Non-Whites of South Africa. I must explain here that owing to the old policy of divide and rule, the three sections of the Non-Whites, Africans, Coloureds and Indians, were always kept apart.

(a) There is the National (nationality) problem. All the Non-White people of South Africa are denied all political rights. They lack all civic or even human rights.

~~(b) The national struggle for political rights and the struggle for land~~

(b) The African people are denied the right to acquire land. The vast majority of the population are landless African peasants.

2) The national struggle for political rights and the struggle for land coincide at the base, since the rightless and the landless are the same people, i.e. they belong to the same nationality group, the Non-Whites of South Africa.

3) Both these problems are dynamically linked together. The deprivation of political rights is used to keep the people landless, without means of subsistence, which in turn is an instrument for the most dire economic exploitation.

Without political rights, all sections of the Non-Whites are by legislation discriminated against, ~~gives~~ have inferior educational facilities, inferior jobs, inferior wages, inferior social status, and are segregated like ~~lepers~~ lepers in the land of their birth. The ^{African} workers, in addition, are driven out of the urban areas; the peasants are enclosed in arid, overcrowded "Reserves" (less than 13% of the land total) and from there are forced out by starvation to work for a pittance in the mines, the white farms and industry. Their lot is forced labour, a wage-slavery that is in some respects worse than chattel-slavery. A bought slave represented so much capital invested, while the life of a wage-slave is worth no more than the piece of paper he is forced to carry, the pass that bears his name and identity marks.

4) The problem of liberation in South Africa, as we saw it, was how to bring the two streams together: the national struggle and the agrarian struggle into one gigantic stream: how to mobilise the whole oppressed population into an irresistible fighting force to throw off the yoke of oppression; how to formulate a programme that would express the aspirations of all sections of the oppressed and work out a policy that would lead them to liberation.

5) This problem was resolved with the formulation of the Ten-Point Programme of the Unity Movement for full democratic rights, with the accompanying policy which strongly reinforces our programme, the policy of Non-collaboration with the oppressor, i.e. a refusal by the Non-Whites to operate the segregatory machinery for their own oppression.

The programme, which we defined as a minimum programme, was a demand for full democratic rights for all men and women of South Africa, irrespective of colour, race or creed. It included also a demand for land for the peasantry.

This programme, ~~unlike~~, in the given conditions of South Africa, was a revolutionary programme. Both these demands could not be fulfilled within the ~~given~~ existing South African socio-economic framework. To achieve them involved a complete re-organisation of the whole structure of society, economic, social and political.

6. For the ~~real~~ realisation of this programme it was necessary to create a truly National Movement representing the various strata of the oppressed people of South Africa: the workers, the peasants, the intellectuals, and the very small sector of ~~traders~~ petty traders.

THE ULTRA-LEFTS

7. There were, of course, differences of opinion amongst the so-called revolutionaries on the approach to the question of liberation.

(a) There were those ultra-revolutionaries who, in the name of Marxism, condemned the formation of a National Movement on the grounds that such movements ^{are} by their nature, ~~are~~ reactionary in modern times and that in any case this is a task of the indigenous bourgeoisie who ~~will~~ ^{are} called upon to oppose imperialism.

This line of argument led to absurd results. The Second World War exposed its protagonists in a grotesque manner. In South Africa the party that represented the white petty bourgeoisie and a fraction of the white "indigenous" bourgeoisie was the Nationalist Party (of Dr. Malan, Verwoerd, Vorster and company) all of whom were opponents of British imperialism in South Africa. On the outbreak of the Second World War, this party revolted against participation on the side of British imperialism. The ultra-revolutionaries advocated a united front with these so-called anti-imperialists, until the day when Vorster and company joined forces with Hitlerite fascism. Needless to say, this doomed the ultra-revolutionaries to political oblivion.

DENIAL OF AGRARIAN PROBLEM.

There were those who denied the agrarian and ^{the} national problem in South Africa, arguing that since South Africa is a highly industrialised country, the solution of its problems lay along the same road as the other industrial countries in Europe, England and the United States. The task of the militants therefore was to organise the working class, to lead in a straightforward proletarian socialist revolution. At least this was ~~the~~ ^{1st} theory.

This was a mechanistic approach that did not take cognisance of the political and economic realities of the South African situation. It did not seem to occur to these gentlemen that the white workers, the enfranchised, privileged white workers in South Africa, bear the same relation to the disfranchised black workers ~~as~~ the Roman proletariat bore to the Roman slaves. They threw all their energies into organising racial trade unions. For them trade unionism became the centre of the struggle. Indeed, these Non-White trade unions under their control were never allowed to join the National Movement of the oppressed. This was the policy of the Communist Party of South Africa, which led to reformism and economism. They were rudely ~~shaken~~ shaken from their supheria when Verwoerd (Nationalist Premier), with

the support of all the major white trade unions, passed legislation to smash up all Non-White trade unionism.

BIRTH OF THE ALL-AFRICAN CONVENTION.

The events of 1935-6 cut short inter-group discussions ^{and disputes, and} ~~and~~ political divergences, ~~which~~ were transferred into the ~~fit~~ field of action, ~~and~~ involving ^{-ing} the country as a whole. In that year the herrenvolk parliament confronted the Africans with ~~k~~ its three notorious Slave Bills. (The herrenvolk, ~~are~~ those with a master-race mentality, are familiar to all oppressed people.)

(a) The Native Representation Bill was to deprive the Africans of the last vestiges of political rights, a few African males in the Cape Province having previously been allowed to vote in the white parliamentary elections. Instead ~~they were~~ it created ^a segregated dummy Council - called a Native Representative Council - and three white judas-goats to "represent" the whole Black population in a white Parliament of 153 members.

(b) A fraudulent Land and Trust Bill, depriving the Africans of the right to buy land anywhere in South Africa except in the already overcrowded "Native Reserves" comprising less than 13% of the total land area.

(c) An Urban Areas Bill to control still further the entry of Africans into the towns.

The news of the Slave Bills produced a profound shock that reverberated throughout the country. Every section of the African population was affected. A nation-wide conference of all the existing organisations was called and more than 500 delegates representing over 150 organisations were present, including representatives from the three British Protectorates, Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swasiland. It was the most representative gathering in the history of the African people. Conference unanimously ~~and~~ emphatically rejected the Slave Bills. So successful was the conference that it was decided to establish the Convention as a permanent body which would be the mouthpiece of the African people.

Thus the All-African Convention was born.

Amongst the organisations present at this historic meeting was the African National Congress. Naturally the old leaders of this oldest political organisation occupied prominent positions at this ~~big~~ stage of the Convention and comprised the majority of the Executive. The keynote was unity. The late Dr. Xuma, at that time chairman of the committee that drafted the Constitution of the All-African Convention, solemnly declared:

"Anyone who will endeavour to wreck the principle of unity that gave birth to the All-African Convention will be doing so for personal reasons and will be a traitor to Africa."

Brave words! But within a few years the old leaders, who had been reared in the spirit of docility ~~affection~~ by their liberal mentors, were to swallow their words. Alarmed by the potentialities of an organisation they themselves had helped to create, they tried to destroy it, and on failing to do this, they deserted it. By 1941, the leaders of the Congress pulled all their branches out of the federal body, the All-African Convention. It was essential for them to resuscitate Congress as a rival body.

UNITY OF ALL THE OPPRESSED

By this time, however, the young militants who had caught the spirit of the ^{profound} political ferment that pervaded Europe and the East during the two world wars, were able to challenge the old leaders and defend the Convention. It provided them with a platform from which to address the population, a population ready to listen to them. They saw the Convention as a most important step in the political development of the African people, a type of organisation capable of mobilizing the whole African population for the struggles ahead. It was the first step towards that wider unity of all the oppressed, Africans, Coloureds and Indians, which was given organisational form with the creation of what was then called the Non-European Unity Movement, a name chosen precisely to emphasise the common interests and goals of all the oppressed and in rejection of the racialism fostered by the ruling class. This was in 1943.

It was during this period that the programme and policy of the Movement were elaborated as a prime necessity for the proper conduct of ~~the~~ what we saw as a protracted struggle. These were based on our assessment of the socio-economic and political ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ situation in South Africa. It was from the start an anti-imperialist, anti-^{neo}colonialist struggle. From this we have never deviated.

BATTLE OF IDEAS.

It was during this period that a clear line of demarcation emerged between the collaborators and the Unity Movement, between those who upheld the old ideas of reformism implying the acceptance of the inferiority of the Black man, and those who stood for full equality, the rejection of trusteeship and all the machinery of segregation, and who advocated an independent struggle free from the tutelage of the white liberal bourgeoisie.

As the battle of ideas took place in full view of the population in many meetings both in town and in the rural areas, and as the people were called upon not only to dispute with the reformists but to put the Unity programme and policy into action, they began to absorb the ideas, which became part and parcel of their thinking. The policy of non-collaboration above all taught the people to identify their enemy at home. To our surprise the African peasantry used non-collaboration as a measuring-rod not only to assess their own leaders but also to identify their allies as well as their enemies on the international scene. They began to ~~form~~ formulate the policy in their own language. To them everyone who ~~lived~~ battered on their flesh and blood belonged to the enemy class, with whom there could be no collaboration. This rule was applied in assessing foreign powers as well. It was enough for them to know that the owners of the gold mines ~~had~~ ^{that} sucked them dry were North American and British financiers. You must understand that it was the landless peasantry that constituted the cheap black labour for the mines. Though they knew nothing about socialism, it was enough for them to know that the socialist States had no investments in South Africa and therefore were not their exploiters but were their potential friends.

Thus were the bare-bones of a historical period presented and its ideological battles, the struggles of the people, the achievements ~~of~~ and the set-backs, and the betrayals ^{by} of the collaborators baldly summarized.

It remains for the records - incomplete as they are - contained in conference reports, political documents and statements, some of them ~~summarized~~ ^{written and} chronicled by Tabata, and a few out of the ~~many~~ ^{countless} speeches preserved by almost by accident - as during the five years of his ban - to supply some further idea of the flesh and blood of this preliminary but none the less vital stage of the liberatory struggle of the oppressed in South Africa.
