

Author : Albert Lutuli

## **44th National Conference "Special Presidential Message" by Chief Lutuli**

17 December 1955

### **I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:**

It is proper and fitting that my friend and close colleague in Congress, Professor Z. K. Matthews, having acted for me the whole of this year as President-General on account of my illness throughout this year, should speak to Congress and to the world, through the medium of the Presidential Address.

I embraced with great joy and eagerness the privilege extended to me by the National Executive to speak to conference through a special Presidential Message, if I felt that my health permitted my doing so. I am indeed very happy to be able to do so.

I would be untrue to the deepest human feelings if I did not, on behalf of my family and myself, commence my message by expressing our deepest thanks to the Almighty for bringing about my miraculous recovery. I would like to closely associate in these thanks to the Almighty the staff of McCord Zulu Hospital who were willing and devoted instruments in God's hands in bringing about this recovery. Our feelings - my family and myself - would not be adequately expressed if I did not say that we were deeply touched by the concern and sympathy in my ill-health and the welfare of my family shown by many, many people in our land and abroad during those difficult times. It was this concern and sympathy which helped my family, especially my wife, to bear with such great fortitude the burden of my illness.

### **II. MY MESSAGE: THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS IN RECENT YEARS: ESPECIALLY THE LAST SEVEN YEARS.**

The chief burden of my message is to make a brief appraisal - not flinching from even an agonising critical appraisal - of the reaction of the African people in general and the African National Congress in particular to the political situation in the Union of South Africa, as it has affected Africans in recent years.

It is a matter of common consent that the African National Congress has been unusually active in recent years: WHAT IS THE BACKGROUND TO THIS ACTIVITY? Any appraisal of Congress activity and the general reaction of the African people to this activity must be preceded by a brief, if only cursory reply, to this question - "What is the background to our present Congress activity?"

### **III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AND BACKGROUND TO PRESENT-DAY CONGRESS ACTIVITY.**

In my judgement this period in the national history of the African people will go down as one of the most outstanding periods in the all-round political awakening of the African people, despite the almost insurmountable obstacles put in their way by the White rulers of South Africa, who have selfishly created barriers to African progress and advancement in South Africa in order to promote their own selfish interests.

One of the most significant features in the development of our struggle is that the African National Congress in recent years, after much internal questioning and discussion, adopted a militant Programme of Action in 1949. This Programme was a direct outcome of a conviction that had been growing among the people that the White people in South Africa had no intention of extending democratic rights to the Non-Whites. The discriminatory laws that disgrace the statute books of successive White governments from colonial days to the present day are proof enough of the White man's hostility to the progress of Africans and the Non-White people in general. The Act of Union itself put the Non-Whites outside the orbit of enjoying citizenship rights in a supposedly democratic, civilised and Christian country. Time and space will not permit the enumeration of such diabolic discriminatory laws. But can anyone even with only a cursory knowledge of the position of things as affecting the African truly blame them under such circumstances for having lost confidence in the declared, but as yet unexecuted, good intentions of the White governments that have in succession ruled South Africa? It is under numerous bitter experiences and disappointments with White rule that Africans under the leadership of the African National Congress, came to realise after their further betrayal in 1936 that the only correct course to take was no longer merely to struggle for the amelioration of economic and social disabilities here and there, under which they suffered, but to attack the whole citadel of White supremacy and domination, protected by a network of discriminatory laws designed to keep the African people and the non-Europeans in general in a state of perpetual servitude.

Congress, in alliance with her allies in the liberatory movement: the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured Peoples' Organisation and latterly the South African Congress of Democrats, has consistently directed her resources and energies in resisting tyranny and oppression. On June 26, 1950 Congress together with her allies called upon the people of South Africa to observe this as a day of Mourning and Prayer, as a protest against injustice by White Governments to non-Europeans. In June 26, 1952, the great Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign which was to have a great impact on the world and South African politics was launched. Since then all along the line Congress has sought to develop in the hearts of the people a spirit of defiance of anything that degrades human dignity and arbitrarily sets limits to the development of any person's mental, physical and spiritual faculties to their utmost. Still on that historic day, June 26, 1955, in response to a clarion call issued by our Congress movement to the people of South Africa, black and white, the Congress of the People, met at Kliptown and unanimously adopted the Freedom Charter as the basis for our struggle now and in the future. The Charter is now placed before you for consideration and ratification.

One is happy to record that during this period the African National Congress has emerged as the universally accepted leader of the liberatory movement in South Africa. In co-operation

with other progressive groups, it is building slowly but surely a solid united front against oppression. No one can deny that in the last seven years Congress has played no mean part in mobilising all progressive forces regardless of race or class, into a growing, formidable army, which in due course will cleanse South Africa of all traces of domination, racialism, and exploitation. The initial success which has attended the efforts of Congress in building up a solid opposition to apartheid has driven terror into the selfish hearts of the White rulers of South Africa, hence the shameful ruthlessness of the Nationalist Party Government in its attempts to stem the rising tide of freedom forces about to engulf and destroy this evil thing "Baasskap Apartheid."

#### IV. SOME URGENT PROBLEMS IN THE PRESENT SITUATION OF CONGRESS.

We would be less than human if we would not have made grievous mistakes in our Congress under the Militant Programme of Action which was adopted in 1949. As intelligent people we should take cognisance of our failures and shortcomings - and God knows they are legion - and try to make them "stepping stones to success."

What are some of these problems and shortcomings? Here again time and space can only allow a fleeting mention of only a few.

1. We have been busily engaged in a laudable effort to establish a spirit of defiance of unjust laws and treatment along non-violent lines and in getting Africans to see that no one is really worthy of Freedom until he is prepared to pay the supreme sacrifice for its attainment and defence. We have, unquestionably, met with a measure of success in both our objectives since we can truthfully claim that Congress followers have shown marvellous restraint in the face of police provocation. We can also claim that we have established an inner core of bitter-enders in fighting oppression - "the faithful few" of whom we can say, as said Sir Winston Churchill to defenders of Britain in the Battle of Britain during the World War II: "Never have so many owed so much to so few." But for all this we cannot claim to have prosecuted our campaigns with anything bearing semblance to military efficiency and technique. We cannot say that the Africans are accepting fast enough the gospel of "SERVICE AND SACRIFICE FOR THE GENERAL AND LARGE GOOD WITHOUT EXPECTING A PERSONAL (AND AT THAT IMMEDIATE) REWARD"; they have not accepted fully the basic truth enshrined in the saying "NO CROSS, NO CROWN."

It is time we took stock of methods of planning and prosecuting our campaigns. I would suggest that the incoming National Executive should be charged with the task of making a study of general organisational machinery with special reference to its fitness for our present situation.

#### 2. CLARITY IN THE IDEOLOGICAL FIELD.

Faced as we are with the battle for FREEDOM it seems a wise stand to say that the African National Congress should not dissipate its energies by indulging in internal ideological feuds - a fight on "isms" . It is not practical and logical, however, to expect Congress to be colourless ideologically. She must in some way define or redefine her stand and outlook as regards, for

example, her interpretation of AFRICAN NATIONALISM which she made the philosophic basis of our struggle for Freedom. Fighters for Freedom in Africa, it is fair to infer, were to be mobilised under its banner. It is also fair to infer that the African National Congress, having accepted the fact of the multiracial nature of the country, envisaged an ALL INCLUSIVE AFRICAN NATIONALISM which, resting on the principle of "FREEDOM FOR ALL" in a country, UNITY OF ALL in a country, embraced all people under African Nationalism regardless of their racial and geographical origin who resided in Africa and paid their undivided loyalty and allegiance. Congress should not be ashamed to tell the African people that it is opposed to TRIBALISM but for obvious practical considerations it must gradually lead Africans from these narrow tribal loyalties to the wider loyalty of the BROTHERHOOD OF MAN throughout the world.

### 3. STRENGTHENING OF DISCIPLINARY CONTROL.

There does seem to be laxity in the machinery of Congress, resulting in lack of sound disciplinary behaviour in some Congress levels. Manifestations of such behaviour at any Congress level anywhere must create confusion and uncertainty in the ranks of Congress, especially among the masses and to say nothing about its most disastrous effect in lowering the dignity of Congress in the eyes of the world. This observation leads me to close this aspect of my "agonising reappraisal" of Congress activity by repeating what I suggested earlier, namely, that it might pay Congress handsome dividends in efficiency and dignity if from time to time it took stock of its workings and its machinery.

### V. WHAT OF THE FUTURE.

Let me close my message by drawing you away from our failures and disappointments to a vision of a GLORIOUS FUTURE that awaits us: A SOUTH AFRICA WHERE ALL PEOPLE SHALL BE TRULY FREE. OUR CAUSE IS JUST and we have the DIVINE assurance that right must triumph over wrong - and apartheid is an evil policy and the methods by which the Nationalist Government seeks to get a following among the people are base and false. They are based on submission through coercion and not through acceptance by love - the only sure basis for any lasting acceptance. They are based on acceptance of apartheid by an appeal to the baser instincts of man: selfishness and greed: personal aggrandisement.

Let us march together to FREEDOM saying: "The road to Freedom may be long and thorny but because our Cause is just, the glorious end - Freedom - is ours."

Let us truly pledge to work together in love of Freedom for all in our lifetime - not just freedom for "EUROPEANS ONLY" - and as we march pledge to struggle together for FREEDOM. Let us draw inspiration from the Freedom Charter - THE PEOPLE SHALL GOVERN.

AFRIKA! MAYIBUYE!  
INKULULEKO NGESIKHATHI SETHU!

Yours in the cause of Freedom.

