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ANZ-SVA

FOLLOWING is the full text of H.E. Mzee Jomo Kenyatta's historic call to battle as a mark of solidarity with the struggling peoples of South Africa on the occasion of the observance of JUNE 26 - SOUTH AFRICA FREEDOM DAY:

MESSAGE OF SOLIDARITY

"Today June the 26th symbolises the unremitting struggle for freedom in South Africa. The people of Kenya in common with those the world over who are dedicated to the liquidation of colonialism and racial oppression, observe this Day as a mark of solidarity with our oppressed brothers and sisters of South Africa.

"We have designated this Day as 'Day of Protest' against the racist regime of South Africa. In defiance of world opinion, international protest and human rights the South African regime continues on a dangerous course of persecution on racial grounds and criminal atrocities against the defenceless civilian population.

"While the South African regime is making desperate efforts to maintain the evils of apartheid the forces of struggle, liberation and human conscience are gaining ground everyday. June 26 heralds the approaching hour of reckoning.

"We ask the Freedom Fighters to mobilise their forces to defeat the racist regime of South Africa. We ask all African countries to fight tooth and nail for the emancipation of the whole of Africa. We ask every country which stands for freedom, justice and human rights to pledge unconditional support for the liberation efforts of the Organisation for African Unity.

"The importance of June 26 inevitably reminds us of the Sharpeville massacre. That incident stands for our intensified struggle against racial and colonial oppression. That is a day of dedication, of sacrifice and solemnity in the service of Africa and all that it stands for.

"NO MATTER HOW LONG THE STRUGGLE AND HOW GREAT THE SACRIFICES DEMAND, REST ASSURED IN THE HOPE THAT SOUTH AFRICA WILL BE RESTORED TO INDEPENDENCE AND DEMOCRACY. THE REVOLUTIONARY UPSURGE OF THE AFRICANS IN SOUTH AFRICA CANNOT BE MUZZLED BY DRACONIAN LAWS AND FASCIST POLICE TECHNIQUES."

The U.N. Special Committee on Apartheid, after meeting in Stockholm and London, has called for total sanctions against the fascist S. African Republic. There is nothing new in this for even the U.N. General Assembly has called for economic sanctions against South Africa. What is different is that the call for sanctions is combined with a call to Member States of the U.N. to actively support Freedom Fighters in Southern Africa. This includes the supply of arms and other forms of material support.

It now remains for Member States to give practical effect to this recommendation of the Special Committee. We need not detail here how large and urgent the need is; the world knows the odds we are up against; the world knows the scale of the S.A. military budget; the world knows the extent of S.A.'s military preparations; the world knows the support which NATO gives to its Portuguese ally; the world knows the arms deals, clandestine and open, undertaken by several imperialist powers with S. Africa. This and much more the world knows.

Equally well-known is the poverty suffered by the oppressed people of S.A. as a result of centuries of colonial exploitation. This poverty and the denial of political power which is the cause of it impelled our people to fight back by peaceful means for justice and freedom. Every appeal of ours, every demonstration, every strike was answered by the racists with brute force. Our non-violent attempts to bring about a change met with a violent response. Until at last, we had no choice but to meet violence with violence. This is the background to the war of liberation launched by the combined forces of ZAFU and the ANC in August last year. This is a war of the liberation of our country and will be fought by the oppressed people of S.A. led by the ANC. But we need all the help we can get. We need money, we need arms and ammunition, we need transport and communication equipment, we need clothing, we need medicines and drugs. All this and more we ask of the world.

Many resolutions have been passed by the General Assembly, by the Secretariat, by the various special committees of the U.N., condemning racism in Southern Africa and calling for action to destroy it. We are appreciative of these activities of the U.N. and we applaud those countries which have already in one way or another taken action against fascism in Southern Africa. Above all we thank those countries which assist us more directly in terms of money, material and facilities for the prosecution of the liberation war. But more, much more needs to be done. The U.N. has passed a Resolution recently and now the Special Committee on Apartheid has called on Member States to assist the liberation struggle more directly.

Our requirements are great, our need urgent. **THE TIME FOR ASSISTANCE IS NOW.**

JUNE 26TH IN LUSAKA
AN OCCASION TO REMEMBER

Last week the walls of the main Hall at the College of Further Education in Lusaka echoed to roars of "Afrika", "Amandla", "Maatla", "Puza".

The occasion was the commemoration of June 26th, South Africa Freedom Day, and a capacity crowd packed the hall to remember June 26th and to express their solidarity with the Liberation Struggle. Even before the evening's proceedings opened the Hall was already full and latecomers had to stand or squat on the floor.

The gathering was opened by our Chief Representative in Lusaka, Comrade Tennyson Makiwane, who acted as Master of Ceremonies throughout the evening. After a brief welcome in which he emphasised the significance of this particular June 26th which followed on the launching of the armed struggle in August 1967, he called upon the June 26th CHOIR to sing the National Anthem. They were joined by many in the audience who sang to the tune of Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika in English.

This was followed by the main address delivered by Comrade Tom Nkobi, our Representative in Lusaka. He delivered a lengthy speech covering the background to colonialism in Southern Africa, the heroic struggles of our people against White invasion, the brutality of the oppressive White minority regime, the massive international support we had received, and then went on to outline briefly the reason why June 26th was of such tremendous significance for the S.A. Liberation Movement. He detailed some instances of police brutality, shooting and killing of unarmed Africans from 1919 onward and pointed out that the armed struggle was made inevitable by the violence of the fascist-racist State.

Comrade Nkobi, in pointing out international solidarity with our struggle, paid homage to the people of Africa, to the Organisation of African Unity, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the World Campaign for the Release of Political Prisoners, the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation, the World Federation of Trade Unions, the Women's International Democratic Federation, the World Federation of Democratic Youth, the Tri-continental Organisation of Solidarity of the Peoples' of Africa, Asia and Latin America, the International Organisation of Journalists, and numerous other organisations. It was of significance that all these organisations have adopted June 26th as a Day of Solidarity with the struggle for Freedom in South Africa.

Comrade Nkobi then went on to detail some of the events in the South African struggle which had been launched on June 26th beginning with June 26th, 1950 when a National Stoppage of work was organised in protest against the shooting of 18 Africans who were participating in a peaceful May Day Strike. He drew attention to the growing alliance between the African, Coloured and Indian people together with progressive Whites/...

Whites which was sealed at the Great Congress of the People in 1955 when the Historic Freedom Charter was adopted.

Comrade Nkobi then outlined the present phase of the struggle in which the Liberation war was already under way and the alliance between ZAPU and the ANC had been cemented in the heat of battle. He concluded by a call to all friends and supporters throughout the world to rally behind the struggle for liberation led by the African National Congress in South Africa and read out a pledge which was loudly supported.

Fraternal greetings were then read by the Representative of ZAPU, Comrade Silundika, then delivered an impromptu and most inspiring speech. Comrade Silundika began by saying he hoped this was the last time when he would speak purely as a representative of ZAPU; that in future if the ANC spoke it would speak for all and vice versa. This expression of unity was loudly acclaimed. Comrade Silundika then went on to speak of the origins of the ANC in 1912 as the first political organisation and how many leaders in Africa had learnt of struggle in South Africa under the banner of the ANC before spreading out. He remarked on the National Anthem, Nkosi Sikelela iAfrika, which had now been adopted by several independent African countries. Comrade Silundika then discussed the nature of guerrilla warfare in which Freedom Fighters led an apparently abnormal life; but, he pointed out, we have no choice, for history had imposed the struggle on our generation and we had to do what must be done whatever the cost. Amidst loud cheering he expressed the hope that future June 26th celebrations would be held on the other side of the river. Changing to the vernacular he characterised the ZAPU-ANC alliance as having been "cemented by blood". The audience agreed entirely when Comrade Silundika pointed out that we were not fighting for the boundaries artificially created by the white man; our purpose was to destroy those boundaries in the cause of unity. Following on this he pointed out that there could be no independence celebration in Zimbabwe alone; his logic being that no part of Africa could be truly free so long as the enemy was present on any part of it. This was widely cheered.

The next speaker was Comrade de Melo of the MPLA who re-affirmed fraternal sympathy and support for the oppressed and exploited people of South Africa. He also strongly commented on the opening up of the front of armed struggle in Zimbabwe. He pointed out that the best support the people of Angola could offer the people of South Africa was through the guerrilla war they were waging; and, vice versa, the best support the people of South Africa could render to their fellow-oppressed in Southern Africa was by challenging the enemy militarily and pinning down his forces in yet another region of the sub-continent. This was loudly cheered. Comrade de Melo reminded all that we faced a common enemy - the fascist regimes of South Africa, Rhodesia and Portugal backed by international imperialism and therefore we were, in fact, all fighting one and the same war. He then extended this to include the world-wide struggle for freedom, justice and a better life and pointed out that there was strong identification not only with the anti-colonialist and anti-neo-colonialist struggles going on in Africa, but even with those in distant Asia and Latin America.

Comrade/...

Comrade de Melo went on to say:-

"We in Angola, you in South Africa, we in Southern Africa, we in Africa are part of the ever-expanding world revolution."

To wild cheering Comrade de Melo rightly concluded:-

"The duty of every true revolutionary is to make revolution. Let us, comrades, turn our energies to making the revolution."

He was followed by Comrade Pahomo of SWAPO who first of all delivered a very level headed expression of solidarity and acclaimed the ZAPU-ANC alliance. He spoke of the guerrilla struggle in Namibia and hoped that there would gradually develop an even larger unity of the oppressed in Southern Africa - this was cheered. He then spoke of his distaste for "White man's names" and said that they were thinking of changing the name SWAPO to NAPO. To the amusement of all he then went on to apologise lengthily to the Europeans in the Hall that he meant them no harm when he constantly referred to the Whites as oppressors. He pointed out that the Southern African struggle was against racism and for non-racialism.

Comrade Pahomo was followed by His Excellency President Kaunda's Personal Representative to Liberation Organisations, Comrade Mikuka Nkoloso. Comrade Nkoloso delivered a most militant and emotional speech in which he called on all sections especially the women and the youth to fight, and if necessary, die for liberation. He reminded the audience that many more would die yet before freedom was achieved and expressed the thought that these deaths must be regarded as bridges towards our goal. Comrade Nkoloso offered every assistance to Freedom Fighters and made it very clear that President Kaunda, the Government and people of Zambia were solidly behind the Freedom Struggle. He identified himself totally with the South African liberation fight.

The speeches being over the audience was entertained by some excellent, spirited singing from the June 26th Choir which comprised men, women and children. They sang four songs, viz:

In Johannesburg On Freedom Day,
Ilizwe Liya Shukuma (The World In Crisis),
Emaxandekeni (A Place Of Insecurity),
Give a Thought To Africa.

The singing was absolutely magnificent and won great admiration from the audience. One member of the audience even donated some money for an encore. In the course of the singing the ZAPU Choir (Zimbabwe Choir) came on to the stage and gave a most enthusiastic programme of singing and dancing, to the great enjoyment of the audience.

The singing/...

The singing was followed by two films:

Vukani Mawethu (A Call To Our People To Rise),
Let My People Go.

Viewing these films the audience gained an excellent insight into the Apartheid system and the fascist brutality of its defenders notably the police. There were several cries of "shame" and jeering at the actions of the police. Both films portrayed vividly the poverty that racist oppression begets in South Africa, the disease, the hunger, the ugliness of Ghetto townships, and the inhumanity of the Pass System. In the latter film some of the people's leaders appeared and were enthusiastically recognised by members of the audience.

Without doubt it was a most successful remembrance of June 26th which few in the audience would ever forget. The fact that such a large audience filled the hall is testimony to the support our struggle has won as a result of the launching of the People's War in 1967. All that now remains is, in Comrade Silundika's words, to celebrate June 26th on the other side of the river!

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LIST OF ADDITIONAL
JUNE 26TH MESSAGES OF SOLIDARITY
FROM INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND EMINENT FIGURES

J.S.S.R. Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee; World Peace Council;
International Union of Students; Pan-African Students Movement;
Afro-Asian Solidarity Association of Ceylon; Carlos Octavio Belo -
African Students fighting against Portuguese Colonialism;
Romesh Chandra, Secretary-General, World Council of Peace;
Isabelle Blume, coordinating President of the World Council of Peace;
Pan-African Youth Movement; The Canadian Union of Students;
Hemel Hempstead Local and Constituent Labour Parties;
The Prime Minister of Jamaica; The Steelworkers of Canada;
Tricontinental, the organ of the Organisation of Solidarity of the
Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America;
The Executive Committee of the Club of the Friends of UNESCO in
Madrid; The World Assembly of Youth; All India Congress Committee
(S. Nijalingappa);
Chief Minister, Government of Jammu and Kashmir (G.M. Sadiq);
All India Youth Federation (Sarda Mitra, President);
Deputy Prime Minister of India (Morarji Desai); Indian Council for
Africa (Asoka Metha); Chief Minister, Bihar (Bhola Paswan Shastri);
Communist Party of India (C. Rajeshwar Rao);
Indian Association for Afro-Asian Solidarity; All India Peace
Council; Dublin Council of Trade Unions; The Radical Students
Alliance, London; Mozambique Liberation Front (Eduardo Mondlane);
South West Africa Peoples Organisation (SWAPO) (Peter Katjivivi,
Representative, London.

* * * *

INTERNATIONAL D. & A. FUND NEWS

Political Prisoners In Human Rights Year

The United Nations has declared 1968 to be Human Rights Year. This then is a time during which we should work with ever-increasing vigour and devotion on behalf of thousands of persons in Southern Africa, who, on political grounds, are imprisoned, restricted, detained, banned, house arrested. Many of them are undergoing long prison sentences, often under conditions of great hardship. These are the men and women who, because of their courageous defence of human rights in face of calculated and cruel persecution, have striven against Apartheid and the tyranny of white minority rule.

The World Campaign for the Release of South African Political Prisoners under the sponsorship of the International Defence and Aid Fund represents a coming together of two such campaigns. In October, 1963, during the Rivonia Trial, when Nelson Mandela and seven others were in jeopardy of their lives, the United Nations passed a resolution calling for the abandonment of political trials in South Africa and the release of all political prisoners. In November, 1963, a World Campaign Committee was formally established under the aegis of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Great Britain, and with the blessing of the Liberation Movement, to organise an international campaign in support of this resolution.

World-Wide Petition

A petition was circulated throughout the world and more than 100,000 individual signatures were collected as well as support from organisations representing 256,000,000 people. It was generally recognised that the work of the Campaign was, at least in part responsible for the fact that there were no death sentences in the Rivonia trial. Subsequently, support was organised for the accused in all the major political trials which took place in South Africa.

In 1966, Dennis Brutus, who had spent 16 months on Robben Island and one year afterwards under house arrest, came to Great Britain and, within the framework of the International Defence and Aid Fund began a similar campaign with special emphasis on prison conditions. In April, 1967, the two campaigns merged at the request of World Campaign. Since then work in support of those inside jail and those on trial has continued as a combined operation under the aegis of the International Defence and Aid Fund.

South West Africa Trial

Recently the activity of the Campaign has centred round the South West African "terrorism" trial when in spite of world opinion and United Nations resolutions asserting that the trial was illegal, 20 men were sentenced to life imprisonment and 9 to 20 years. However, the fact that again there were no death sentences was, we believe, another triumph for international opinion.

In December/...

In December 1964, the Campaign suggested to the United Nations that an International Commission should be set up to investigate conditions inside South African prisons. Should this Commission be refused entry into South Africa, it was further suggested that evidence be taken from former political prisoners now living in exile.

United Nations Hears Prisoners' Testimony

This came to fruition in 1967 when, for the first time, an ad hoc United Nations Committee visited London, Dar-Es-Salaam and Lusaka. This body heard evidence of torture experienced by men and women whose minds and bodies had been maimed in jails and police stations while they were held incommunicado by the South African security police. A massive report was issued by the Committee, setting out in detail the cruel torture to which so many South African political prisoners were subjected.

On the basis of this report the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations unanimously condemned "torture and ill-treatment of prisoners in South African prisons" and called on South Africa to conform to the minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners. It recommended that the General Assembly call on South Africa to repeal, amend and replace "discriminatory laws" and to release political prisoners. It asked the Assembly to condemn the acts of Governments which maintain diplomatic and other relations with South Africa, and to call for breaking off such relations.

Red Cross Report

The International Red Cross has made two visits to South African prisons. It was not until 2½ years after the first visit that the Red Cross Report was made public by the South African government, together with its comments and rebuttals. This Report was only issued, we believe, as a result of pressure resulting from our campaign exposing prison conditions.

Shortly after the release of the Red Cross Report, we issued an important publication - "South African Prisons and the Red Cross Investigations". This exposed the South African government's violation of its own prison conditions and received wide publicity throughout the world.

Since then conditions have improved to some extent for political prisoners, but one of the major complaints, that of insufficient and unpalatable food for Non-Whites, continues to give cause for concern.

In 1967 it became necessary to extend our work to Rhodesia because of the violation of democratic rights under the state of emergency following U.D.I. Earlier this year five men were executed and 45 reprieved, but there are still 60 men awaiting execution. 22 of the 60 are members of the Zimbabwe African People's Union and the African National Congress of South Africa recently sentenced to death under the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act enacted by the illegal Smith regime, where the death penalty is the only possible sentence for those found in possession of "weapons of war".

What You/...

What You Can Do

In Human Rights Year, therefore, we ask you to work for:

1. the implementation of the October 1963 resolution of the General Assembly, calling for the release of all South African political prisoners and the abandonment of political trials.
2. the implementation of the United Nations resolutions declaring the South West Africa trial illegal and demanding the release of the prisoners and their return to South West Africa.
3. the grading of all political prisoners into A category.
4. the granting of remission of sentence to political prisoners.
5. an end to colour discrimination in prison, especially with regard to food and clothing:
6. regular twice-yearly visits of the Red Cross to all political prisoners and particularly to those detained under the "terrorism" Act:
7. the release of those under house arrest, in banishment or in "transit" camps and an end to all orders banning or restricting the opponents of Apartheid:
8. the treatment of African Freedom Fighters as prisoners of war in terms of the Red Cross Geneva Convention of 1949.

International pressure has met with success in the past. We have no doubt that, provided it is sufficiently strong and determined, it can do the same again.

We ask you to do the following:

Write to:

The Secretary General at the United Nations on all these points, asking him to forward the letter to the appropriate United Nations section.

The International Commission of Jurists Geneva, on points 1,2,4, 7, and 8.

The/...

The International Red Cross, Geneva, on points 3,4,5,6, and 8.

All copies of letters written should be sent to the World Campaign for the Release of South African Political Prisoners, 2 Amen Court, London E.C.4.

Additional copies of this pamphlet and further information can be obtained by writing to the address below.

The work of the World Campaign is financed by the International Defence and Aid Fund.

Contributions to continue our work are urgently needed.

Please send them to:

International Defence and Aid Fund, 2 Amen Court,
London E.C.4.

President: The Reverend Canon L. J. Collins.

Published by:

World Campaign for the Release of South African Political
Prisoners, 2 Amen Court, London, E.C.4.

SAN-ROC NEWS

OPEN LETTER ON:

Participation Of Racial South African
Organisations International Gymnastic Events:
Rome, June 1968.

Dear Sir,

The South African Non-Racial Open Committee would be pleased to know if your national Gymnastic Association is prepared to protest at the meeting of the International Gymnastic Federation (F.I.G.) and to demand the total exclusion of South Africa from international gymnastic events until racialism is removed from the bodies and organisations for gymnasts in South Africa.

In 1967 a strong effort was made to exclude South Africa at the time of the Congress of the F.I.G. in Dortmund, and this was only defeated by a narrow margin.

Since this time, there has been even clearer evidence of the racial discrimination existing in all South African sports organisations. It was this evidence that led to South Africa being excluded from the 1968 Mexico Olympic Games.

In South/...

In South Africa the position has become worse: non-White gymnasts are not allowed to join the organisations of the national gymnastic Union, and are not permitted to take part in events organised by the national union. Thus they are completely excluded from the national body which is supposed to represent the country.

On behalf of the sportsmen in South Africa who are opposed to racial discrimination, and particularly those who wish to take part in the national organisation of gymnastics, we urgently request you to demand the expulsion of South Africa from the International Gymnastic Federation.

Dennis Brutus
President SAN-ROC

Olympic Games Participation for All
Without Racial Discrimination

* * * *

UN SANCTIONS AND RHODESIA
- by Ndab'ezitha

On May 29th the Security Council of the United Nations took a resolution of immense significance for the liberation of Rhodesia from the unlawful hands of Smith and Co. Indeed, this resolution could seriously affect the whole of Southern Africa.

After much hesitation Britain finally took measures which, short of force Africa had advocated from the start of the rebellion - namely comprehensive economic sanctions mandatory on all U.N. Members. Time alone will tell whether or not this is the right action taken at the right time. We have our misgivings. Of course, we can still be proved wrong - if the two major sanctions - breakers are tackled. These are South Africa and Portugal.

It seems though that this new move is a step towards a UN confrontation with the unholy alliance over Rhodesia. No sooner had the Security Council acted than Vorster's cabinet began holding crisis talks in Cape Town to discuss the implications of this latest move (Sunday Tribune June, 2nd 1968).

Significantly enough, the Security Council passed this resolution unanimously. This rare event in UN politics is a major diplomatic setback for Vorster. It means that even those UN members with a heavy economic stake in South Africa have signalled a change of attitude towards her.

One of the cornerstones of South African foreign policy is to involve the outside world in the maintenance of apartheid by offering lucrative investment opportunities and trade. The price the world pays for this is simple enough. Pretoria says: to protect your investments you must protect our apartheid policy. Now this new resolution shows that this black
mail/...

mail may not work forever. Moreover, it threatens another major feature of South African policy - namely surrounding the Republic with bugger - territories who in a showdown become the first line of battle. This is what Rhodesia is right now. But if she goes, then South Africa stands exposed and unprotected.

This is exactly the ultimate effect of this resolution. By calling on all Africa - to give "moral and material assistance" to those Rhodesians struggling to topple the rebel regime, the UN is putting Vorster right on the spot. He must openly comply with this call. If he does, this will mean the end of the policy of "normal" relations with Salisbury. If however, he chooses to defy the UN, he will now focus international wrath on South Africa's role in an issue which she herself regards as a "domestic" rumble between Whatehall and Salisbury.

At this stage of the struggle, it would be over-optimistic, to put it mildly, to expect South Africa to comply and give this "moral and material assistance". What she will do is try to manoeuvre to sabotage this resolution without appearing to do so.

Her sabotage efforts will result in increased efforts by all the progressive forces in the UN for action against her. This will mean a real showdown, and possibly her withdrawal in a buff from the world today.

Whatever happens, South Africa is steadily but surely being forced into making very painful choices. Failure to give massive aid the beleaguered rebels will expose a credibility gap in Vorster's "outward-looking" policy. No doubt, the Verkramptes will be beside themselves with glee if this happens. On the other hand, Vorster's continued abetting of the rebels will intensify world pressures on the Republic. This is Vorster's unenviable dilemma.

This resolution also puts Britain on the spot. Laudable thought her voting was, more remains to be done by her in particular. She can act without doing undue harm to her interests in this area. For example, by effectively denying travel facilities to the rebels and their sympathizers, by threatening to ban from British soil all aircraft which pick up men and goods from Rhodesia (we are thinking especially of the South African and Portuguese), she would not only restore her dwindling prestige but also act in her own long-term interest. Such moves, small though they may seem, would be of immense psychological value. Both the South Africans and the Rhodesians have a morbid fear of international ostracism. Delude~~d~~ into regarding themselves as centres of Western civilisation (whatever this is), they see such ostracism as cruel punishment and rejection. Hence the hub-bub over the Olympic Games and the Crawford passport incident.

In short, the new resolution - if strictly implemented - will be a major milestone on the rocky road to liberation. But their united vote, the major powers have shown the way. By their united and resolute action, they will speed up the liberation process, and reduce tension keeping international peace and security is their self-imposed duty enshrined in the UN Charter, and bloodshed in Southern Africa.

Part II

ROBBERS IN ROBES

The Legal Cloak Over Apartheid

We described in the previous article how the imperial British government gambled for unity between the two White minority groups in South Africa, at the expense of African rights - and lost. The resulting Act of Union in 1910 founded a State whose bastion was White privilege and whose purpose was colonial exploitation. But people did not let this pass without protest. If the first decade of the century saw the end of primary resistance to White rule, it also saw the beginning of national struggle with the foundation of African political associations. Out of the confusion of compromise, betrayal and despair was born the spearhead of African aspirations - the African National Congress.

Union: The People Fight Back

Protest by African politicians first took the form, in the late 19th century, of petitions to Queen Victoria. The British government had repeatedly stated that it stood as surety for the well-being of South Africa's indigenous people. The dismay of Africans however over the continual raising of their qualifications for the Cape vote, and the betrayal of the Peace Treaty in 1902, was completely disregarded. In the four provinces embryonic organisations fought separately against the universal process of social uprooting and political oppression, and produced leaders whose first movements of protest were to seek the still dominant imperial government to stand by her professed obligations.

Significantly, it was the pass laws that gave the first radical impetus to this process. The Transvaal African Congress sent a petition to London in 1906 and claimed as British subjects their rights to liberty, freedom and equality. Their petition, describing the pass-laws as "repugnant, unnecessary, undesirable and un-British" was ignored.

Similarly, the Natal Indian Congress fought against laws which sought to control their freedom of movement. When the Transvaal extended her pass laws to "Asiatics", Mahatma Gandhi went in protest to London, where he received a promise that the law would be withdrawn. But with the granting of self-government to the Transvaal, the British government refused to intervene. Lord Elgin, the Colonial Secretary, shrugged off responsibility with the statement: "a self-governing State has the right to go to the devil in its own way". Later Gandhi was to organise passive resistance against the carrying of passes.

In addition, the Transvaal and Natal Africans (whose organisation, the Natal African Congress, was founded by Martin Luthuli of Tugela) sent ceaseless petitions over the growing harshness and unfairness of the criminal law - Africans were forbidden to walk on the pavements, and suffered heavy penalties for deeds that were virtually excused to White offenders. These led to the passing of a motion in the British parliament in March 1906 instructing the government to safeguard the interests of "voiceless natives". The open disregard shown for this made a mockery of the dignified and just requests of the African people.

such acts/...

Such acts as these and the growing realisation of the ruthless nature of White overlordship served as a spur for the development of a united front. With the National Convention (see previous article) barred to any African voice, the various associations rallied together to press their claims. The editors of three African newspapers, Walter Rubusana, John Tengo Jabavu and John Dube headed the African Conference which, while approving of the idea of national unity, protested against its being founded on a colour bar. When their protests were ignored by the National Convention, Rubusana led a delegation to London, bearing a mandate from all South Africa's Coloured people. W.P. Schreiner, a leading politician amongst the Cape liberals, joined them to present an independent appeal to the British Parliament. In response to this important and representative delegation, the Colonial Secretary replied that "the question must be settled in South Africa itself". Schreiner was refused even a proper hearing. Consequently the Act of Union was pushed through parliament with the minimum of opposition, and the British government signed away in one fateful move her responsibility towards the African people. In South Africa, the first Union Cabinet lost no time in starting to write the long scroll of oppressive, racist legislation by entrenching the industrial colour bar (see next issue), and laying the ground for the thorough implementation of apartheid. Disregarding suggestions put forward by the African Conference, the new Cabinet showed its true colours to the world by appointing as the first African parliamentary representatives four men notorious for their indifference to the people's interests.

Shocked by the enormity of this betrayal and alerted by the way in which a united White South Africa immediately set about its business of exploitation, African organisations searched for a leader. Not only was political unity needed to override tribal differences; new methods of struggle had to be found. At the critical moment a young South African, Pixley ka Izaka Seme, returned from studying law in America and England. Appalled by the grim conditions of African life, he responded to the cry for a national leadership. He called together a meeting of other African lawyers, and from their discussions arose the decision to convene a national conference of chiefs and political leaders from all over the country. Accordingly in January, 1912, the people's representatives gathered together from the furthest boundaries of the Union (there were even delegates from the three Protectorates) to its geographical centre, Bloemfontein. It was an historic occasion when, for the first time, the Anthem Nkosi Sikelela Afrika was sung to herald the opening of an African national gathering.

Tribal chiefs, city-dwellers, journalists, politicians - Africans of all classes and backgrounds - listened together to Seme's appeal:

"Gentlemen, we have gathered here to discuss a scheme which my colleagues and I have decided to place before you. We have discovered that in the land of their birth Africans are treated as hewers of wood and drawers of water. The White people have formed what is known as the Union of South Africa; this is a union in which we have no voice in the making of laws and no part in the administration. We have called you, therefore, to this conference, so that we can together find ways and

means/...

means of forming our own national union for the purpose of creating national unity and defending our rights and privileges.'

The proposal met with profound excitement and a universal acceptance which set on foot the African National Congress, the first truly national party in South Africa - two years before Hertzog's National Party was founded, and twenty years before any comparable organisation in the rest of colonial Africa. The A.N.C. is thus the oldest continuing modern political organisation in Africa.

The early structure of the A.N.C. was a careful fusion of British and American parliamentary models. The paramount chief of Basutoland, Letsie II, became honorary leader of the Upper House, while the leading African statesmen formed the executive. Seme (Treasurer-General), Rubusana and Dube (President-General) were joined by Solomon Plaatje as Secretary-General and Thomas Napikela, Speaker of the Conference. The first leaders were all men of considerable experience, not all highly educated, but determined to advance the cause of the African people in whatever way they could. The first programme was one of redressing African grievances by constitutional means and to agitate for the removal of the colour bar. Secondly, plans were laid for the instigation of African educational institutions, and the advancement of material welfare. This alliance of chiefs, urban workers, and professional men was concerned with the totality of African interests. Congress was nothing less than an African parliament.

One of the outstanding early achievements was the founding of a national newspaper, Abantu-Batho, which welded together a number of minor publications. It was published in three Bantu languages and English, and became one of the first instruments for developing national consciousness.

Although the A.N.C. still organised the occasional petition at this period, the focus of struggle had changed. Within its first few years, Congress attempted to secure African land rights by forming the African Farmers' Association. Its programme was interrupted however, by the major challenge of the Land Act, 1913, which was designed as an instrument to rob the peasant of his birthright (to be discussed in a subsequent article). As it faced up to the continuing entrenchment of white privilege, and to the task of fostering national unity amongst the people, the A.N.C. grew both in size and stature. White South Africa - to its cost - at first ignored the founding of the A.N.C. As the framework of apartheid was hammered out over the years, however, both white groups came to recognise Congress as the leading organisation dedicated to the struggle for African rights.

Until it was outlawed in 1960, the A.N.C. provided a basis for a radical attack on unjust laws. It was founded in response to the radical oppression of the African people, and to Britain's abrogation of her professed principles. The "Slegs Vir Blankes" Act of Union gave the final impetus that led to the formation of a national organisation. The first active phase of the African National Congress, was, consequently, a struggle for justice against South Africa's constitution and the ensuing laws.