

SPEECH OF J. T. GUMEDE, PRESIDENT OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS, AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS AGAINST IMPERIALISM, BRUSSELS, FEBRUARY 10-15 1927¹

[Josiah T. Gumede, President of the African National Congress, attended the International Congress against Imperialism as representative of the ANC. The South African delegation also included J.A. LaGuma, a Coloured leader and member of the Communist Party, and D. Colrairie of the South African Congress of Trade Unions.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the delegate of the Indian National Congress, in his report on the Conference, noted with pleasure that the three delegates worked together and jointly drafted the resolution on South Africa which was adopted by the Congress. "In these days of race hatred in South Africa and the ill-treatment of Indians," he wrote, "it was pleasing to hear the representative of the white workers giving expression to the most advanced opinions on the equality of races and of workers of all races."]

I am glad to be here as I am one of the representatives of South Africa which has been painted white on the map as if imperialism does not operate there. As one who comes from there, I have to relate a very sad story to you of what is happening to the proletariat of South Africa, white and black. I will take the trade unions of Europeans in South Africa. They do not work together with us. Race prejudice in Africa is even more violent than in America. There is a fear in South Africa that if the natives increase and are not taken in hand they will lift themselves up and very soon claim the government of the country and rule their country because of their numbers. Therefore they have got to be kept down to be "hewers of wood and drawers of water" only, and I can assure you it is done properly too.

South Africa is my country in which I was born, the country of my forefathers. I regret to tell you this evening that we have no place to lay our heads. All the land was taken from us in the name of the Crown of Great Britain and the people were driven away from their ancestral homes which were turned into farms. That is where it is painted white on the map; that is where imperialism does exist. During the days of the opening of Kimberley mines when they wanted labour very badly, they induced the natives, because they had no money and did not value it, to go and work for them for rifles. This they did, and they went to Kimberley in large numbers. They got guns - and afterwards they were disarmed and no compensation was given to them. One of the powerful chiefs did not understand the position at all. He did not know how it was possible that the guns should be handed to the government after the people had worked for them and had them given to them. He did not go when called by the messenger of the Government, and so a force was sent after him. He ran away and was brought back. His land was taken away and cut up into farms. He was sent to Robben Island, near Cape Town and then to Pietermaritzburg. He was kept there in misery until he died. That is imperialism.

You will remember the Zulu war. I am a Zulu, and it is a very painful story to relate. There was no occasion for that war. It was only because Zulu power was considered by

¹ From *South African Worker*, Johannesburg, April 1, 1927; reprinted from *Abantu Batho*.

the Europeans a menace to the colonies, so all sorts of stories were sent to Great Britain to make the British people turn against the Zulus. The result was that a big imperial force went to South Africa and crushed them down. Was it really war? See a little boy with his stick in the street and then you go with guns and rifles to war with him. We never went to war with anybody. We were murdered. Where we are we need your assistance. We live in hopeless suppression. We have been robbed of our lands, and we are miserable. We could relate pitiful stories every night when we think how we are slaves in our own country. You say you destroyed slavery. No, you did not - we want an emancipator. We do not know where he is. We are driven from pillar to post. On the farms the squatters are working for a piece of land where they could plant and graze their few cattle. What exploitation! Cattle diseases were introduced into South Africa which wiped out our cattle. We think this was done deliberately to force us to go down the mines. These people on the farms work from four in the morning till seven at night for next to nothing. Some are paid as much as five shillings a month, some ten shillings. This is how these people now live on their ancestral lands.

Those in the mines - what do they get? They get two shillings a day. They have to go down the bowels of the earth to bring up gold to enrich the capitalist, but the capitalist gives them two shillings a day and puts them in dirty compounds. That is the position there.

Go into the towns, and what do you find? Some of them are working for 10 shillings or 15 shillings a month and what is their housing? It is a small place outside. In some exceptional cases they get two or three pounds a month.

Then there is the abominable recruiting. Recruiters tell our people nice stories of what they will get and when they get to the mines and plantations they are disappointed. Some of these poor fellows are taken from their native territories to die of fever and phthisis. They were taken away by recruiters with good promises to die in unhealthy places.

Numbers of our men have been removed from government and public works to make room for poor Europeans. Where do these poor Europeans come from? Large numbers of black people are unemployed. The poor Negro in South Africa is living under very hard conditions. He has been deprived of all human rights.

Now there is the Colour Bar Act of 1926, prohibiting the black man to do any skilled work, for the Negroes must be crushed and kept down. This Colour Act is operating. Even those who are working on machinery are taken off of it, and those who drove engines may no longer drive them. That is the state of affairs. How did all these things arise? When Great Britain occupied South Africa the Union Jack was pointed out as meaning justice, liberty, freedom and fair play. We find it means just the opposite. Now there is the coming segregation. The Colour Bar Act has made poor whites in South Africa, for those who are working with natives are prohibited from doing so. They were thrown out and became poorer and poorer and are doing native work. By the Natives Land Act of 1913 our people were allowed 40,000,000 acres of land in South Africa which comprise the reserves and farms that were bought by natives when land was sold

without restriction. There are five and a half million natives and only one and half million whites. The whites have 260,000,000 acres in their possession. What injustice!

You remember what I told you about this Zulu war. They told us the land was for the Zulus, but it is not so. It has been cut up into farms for Europeans only. We would remind the whole of Europe that they are responsible for these conditions. Remember the alliance of Berlin, when Europe agreed to divide Africa into spheres of influence; remember the promises which were made. That is the imperialism which is governing Africa today. I appeal to you, comrades. If it is your lot to save humanity, to take these things seriously. I am glad to say that in South Africa there are Communists. I am not a Communist, but we find that the Communist Party are the only people who are with us in spirit and we are watching them. I appeal to you, comrades, to realise that the position before you in this Congress means great responsibility. There are two forces working today, imperialism and a workers' republic in Russia. We hear little of it. We hear much against it. I would point out that I wish to learn more and more of it.² We shall have to put these two on a scale and see which would be the best to ally with.

The following is the text of the resolution proposed jointly by the three South African delegates and adopted by the Conference:

We, the undersigned delegates from the Union of South Africa, respectfully submit to this first International Conference of Workers and Oppressed Peoples in all Imperialist Countries and Colonies the following resolution on behalf of all workers and oppressed people in South Africa, irrespective of race, colour or creed.

We demand:

1. The right of self-determination, by the complete overthrow of capitalist and imperialist domination.
2. The right of establishing full educational facilities for the development of all peoples.
3. The abolition of all oppressive taxation.
4. The abolition of all indentured labour.
5. The right of all classes of workers to organise themselves into trade union organisations for their economic and social emancipation.
6. Free speech and assembly to be the unfettered right of all workers and peoples irrespective of colour or creed, and further, that no embargo be placed against

² Mr. Gumede visited the Soviet Union after the Brussels Congress.

any leader or representative of workers and the people travelling the country in the interests of the rights demanded in the preceding clauses.

That in order to combat the present phase of world exploitation by capitalism and imperialism in colonies and semi-colonies and semi-colonial countries, which same is responsible for the lowering of the economic and social conditions of the workers in the home countries with their huge army of unemployed competing for an existence, we call upon all the workers of South Africa irrespective of colour to strive for closer unity and working class solidarity.

Realising that the unity of all workers irrespective of race, colour or creed is essential to the successful issue of the fight against exploitation and imperialism, this Congress calls upon the workers of South Africa, both white and black, to strive for that mutual understanding that will bring about working class unity and solidarity in their own interests and those of all other workers and oppressed peoples of the world.

Long live the solidarity of the working class and oppressed peoples!

Down with exploitation and imperialism!

D. Colraine
J.A. La Guma
J.Gumede
South African Delegates