

THE CLARION CALL - A CALL TO UNITY

(Issued by the Executive Committee of the All-African Convention at its meeting held on the 27th-28th December 1943)

"When a man finds that he has taken the wrong road and is heading for an abyss, he turns and tries to find the right road. The same happens in the life of a people. Eight years ago, we, the African people, found ourselves on a new road. True, we did not choose this road: we were pushed on to it. But now, after travelling this road for eight years, we find that we are heading for the abyss, so we have to turn back and look for a way out. Now is not the time to start with recriminations as to who was responsible, whether it was the failure of the leadership or the apathy of the masses. It is of far greater importance for us to realise our mistakes, to learn from them and to find a way out.

At that time some people might have believed that the policy of segregation decided upon by the White man would eventually benefit us, because nothing, they thought, could be worse than the rut in which we were then. They were taken in by the White man's catch-phrase: "Developing on our own lines." They believed that once the White man had eliminated us from any say in the affairs of the country, and therefore had no need to fear us, he would give us land and liberty to lead our own lives as we please.

For eight years we have been "developing on our own lines." For eight years we have been fooling around with dummies, with meaningless mock elections and mock-councils. AND HAVE WE GOT MORE LAND TODAY, MORE JOBS FOR OUR THOUSANDS OF YOUNG MEN? ARE WE BETTER OFF? Not even the White man would say so. Even he has to admit that our position has catastrophically deteriorated. But we do not need to look for his testimonies. No longer can anyone conceal the crying plight of our people. Soil erosion is devouring the last bit of land left to us-not to live on, but to die on. Our people are starving. The White man calls it by the fancy name of "malnutrition." This may sound better in his ears. But it is our babies and children who are dying before they have a chance to grow up. It is our cattle which the White man has always begrudged us and which today are no longer cattle but only the shadow of cattle. Whether in the towns, or in the Reserves, our poverty and misery are beyond description. While we have to pay double for everything we buy, the earnings of the people have not increased and the tax-burden has not been lightened.

Of what use is it to us when a few far-sighted Whites are worried over our terrible plight, because "the Native", as they say, "is the backbone of our economy and we must not waste our greatest asset"? Of what use is it to us when

they admit that "the Non-Europeans are treated worse than slaves. Under the old Cape slave laws we could not ill-nourish a slave or allow him to become a public burden. In Africa today the Native was allowed to become a source of danger and infection-for economic purposes."

Of what use is it to us that these few ask the question whether they should "allow the Native to go on carrying us on his back without allowing him food to keep him from falling down from exhaustion? The hopeless inefficiency of driving the willing horse without giving him a mouthful of oats, must prove that we none of us think about the sane development of, our country ..."?

Of what use is it to us if all they think of is to give some oats to the willing horse so as to keep him in harness? Of what use is it to us when the S.A. Medical Association devotes a special number to the Transkei territories describing the horrible conditions under which our people live, presenting a picture a "slowly degenerating Native community where half of their children never w up and a third die before they reach the age of three years"?

Of what use is it to us if this empty talk leaves us without the land to duce or the means to buy the milk, the meat and the mealies that can save babies and the grown-ups from sickness and premature death? Of what is it to remind us that we need more doctors, clinics, maternity hospitals, if White man makes laws that our young sons and daughters must not be doctors, but only labourers in the mines and on the farms, and servants in the towns?

For eight years we have been learning the true meaning of this policy of developing on our own lines." And now everyone is convinced that it leads to ruin. Those who advocated "giving it a trial" are just as convinced of the pernicious results as those who expected real segregation into a Black man's country and a White man's country. Now we all know that this 'development on our own lines' is just another name for our enslavement by the White man. Now we all know that eight years ago we were cheated with promises of land and misled by "developing on our own lines."

Then came the war and we were called upon to help to defend our country. The same White rulers who have decided that we are not a part of the S. A. Community, who decided that we should only be servants and not citizens, a call to us to march together and defeat Fascism, the enemy of freedom, defeat Hitlerism, the creed of race superiority. We dropped our misgivings and answered the call in our usual spirit of self-forgetfulness.

Again great promises were given us. The poll tax system was to be investigated and the gaoling of defaulters was to be stopped. The pass system, which was later to be abolished altogether, was to be relaxed immediately on the Rand. Our Trade Unions were to be recognised by law, and the same laws that protect the

White workers were to apply to our workers. These promises were made by Prime Minister, General Smuts, by the Minister for Native Affairs, I Reitz, by the Minister of Labour, the Hon. Madeley, and other responsible ministers of the Crown. The Prime Minister and the Secretary for Affairs, Mr. Smit, publicly acknowledged that the segregation policy had failed and they promised a new deal for the Africans. That was a time of great promises by the Rulers and of great hopes by the Non-Europeans.

But again we were bound to be disappointed more bitterly than before.

As soon as the enemy was thrown out of Africa, all talk of these promises ceased altogether; but even before then, it became obvious that they were empty promises never to be fulfilled. Tens of thousands of our people are still being are still being imprisoned for their inability to pay the heavy tax, or even for failing to produce the receipt. The pass system is today as vicious, tyrannical and humiliating as it ever was. Thousands upon thousands have been rounded up in the Rand alone. General Smuts no longer says that segregation has failed. The new minister for Native Affairs denies that it ever was the government's intention to do away with the pass system. The African trade unions are still illegal and the government has decided not to recognise them. African workers were shot in Pretoria when they ventured to strike because they were denied their rightful wages. African workers have been imprisoned for protesting against intolerable quarters, food, wages. This, then, is our reward for loyalty to the country, for our great war effort, for our sacrifices in blood-the blood of our sons.

Where can we find redress? Where can we find relief? Not in appeals to our Rulers, not in appeals to the government. Some African leaders have been making such appeals in the Native Representative Council for the last six years in the most "modest, respectful, statesmanlike" manner. But nobody takes any notice of their appeals and the resolutions of the dummy Council.

From time to time the few Whites representing the six and a half million Africans in Parliament also make a few fine speeches and appeals which are simply ignored by the government and parliament of the White man and for the White man. These fruitless speeches and appeals are useful only to the Rulers in that they give the appearance of voicing our grievances, and our being represented. Even more important than this, they are useful because they lull us to sleep. We get promises, commissions of enquiry, inter-departmental commissions, wage commissions, and it all ends with white-washing the culprits and condemning the victims.

We ask for bread and we get stones. We ask for relief and get commissions It is no use appealing to the government, because it is not our government but the government of the White man. It is no use appealing to parliament because it is

not our parliament but the parliament of the White man. It is no use appealing to the law courts, because the law is made by the Whiteman against us.

These eight years of the segregation policy have proved to us that we have travelled along the wrong road, a road that is leading us to an abyss. These eight years have proved to us that "development on our own lines" is a fraud and that the representation is a fraud. These eight years have proved to us that if we continue along this road we shall perish, as many slaves have perished before.

We cannot resign ourselves to slavery and death. Therefore there is only one way open for us: to fight for our rights as citizens of our country. Therein lies our freedom and our future. These eight years, and especially the years of the war, have proved to us that we are not the only ones to discover the road to freedom, that everywhere the people have to fight for their rights and for their freedom. We have also learned that not only we, but the Colour people and the Indian people in South Africa have travelled the same wrong road, although separately. The White man wants this country for himself, with all the Non-Europeans as servants and slaves. The same policy that applied to us in 1935 is now being applied to the Indian and the Coloured people. But they are not repeating our mistakes and they are fighting back. The Coloured people are uniting behind what they call the Anti-C.A.D. movement, a kind Federal organisation like our All African Convention. The Indian people also uniting behind their federal organisation, the S .A. Indian Congress.

It should be obvious that if all these Non-European peoples are struggling to obtain the same thing - the rights of full citizenship, it would be foolish of them to stand separately, while they have a better chance of success if they join forces. It is very pleasing to note that both organisations, the Coloured the Indian, have already appreciated this need for unity. They have adopted resolutions empowering their executives to enter into negotiations for a unification of all Non-European peoples in the struggle against segregation, a struggle for full citizenship rights. We, on our part, welcome these decisions of our co-sufferers in South Africa and we recommend to the coming conference of the A.A.C. the adoption of the Unity resolution. This is the first step towards new road.

But there are other tasks facing us at the Convention. The war is nearing its end and the military outcome is a foregone conclusion - a victory for the United Nations. Still, this does not mean that Hitlerism, the creed of race superiority, is defeated. The people will have to see that they are not robbed of the fruits of victory, as they were after the last war. Freedom will not be presented to us on a platter. We shall have to fight for it. The White rulers of South Africa, especially, with views so similar to Hitler's race theories, will not voluntarily give us our freedom and our rights. From the pronouncements of the Prime Minister after the General Election, we can see two things. He wants to unite all White people

for a final settlement of the relations between Black and White, meaning, of course, all Non-Europeans. He also looks to the North for a Pan-African Empire as South Africa's fruits of victory. He thinks of much more than the Protectorates, but they are surely figuring in plans.

We need only to recollect that this was the Hertzog plan for completing segregation and making South Africa safe for the White man, to realise the danger for us and our brothers in the Protectorates contained in these plans of the government, the danger to all Non-Europeans in South Africa. We must therefore decide on our answer. The representatives of the Coloured people, the Indian people and of the Protectorates, should be present at the Convention for the deliberations on this important question.

When the war is over, a Peace Conference will deal with the various claims of the oppressed peoples to self-determination and freedom. Not only the oppressed peoples of Europe, but also of Asia and Africa, will present their claims. The government of South Africa, which represents only the White people, cannot speak for us. They have rejected our constitutional claim to citizenship and representation, so that we cannot entrust our claims and our future to them. The eight million Non-Europeans of South Africa have a right to be heard at the tribunal of Nations, at the Peace Conference. Nobody can present our case but ourselves.

Thus the Convention will be called upon to make the following decisions:

- (1) The rejection, after the experience of eight years, of the policy of trusteeship and segregation.
- (2) The turning from the old road of passivity to the new road of leadership.
- (3) The demand for full citizenship rights and representation.
- (4) The realisation that the striving for freedom of all the oppressed people in South Africa, the Africans, the Coloured, and the Indians, is identical in aim and methods.
- (5) To give effect to the widespread demand for the unity of all Non-Europeans in South Africa. The representatives of the other two groups have been invited by the Executive as guests to the Convention.
- (6) A conference of the three groups should be convened immediately after the Convention in Bloemfontein, in order to save time and expense.
- (7) The decision on the Protectorates to be reaffirmed and made known.

(8) The question of the form of representation to the coming Peace Conference to be decided upon.

From the foregoing it is clear how important the coming Convention is for our people, for all the oppressed people and for South Africa as a whole.

It may mark a turning point in our history.

This time the leaders must not fail their people. This time there should be determination, resolution and unanimity. There is no place for personal bickering, for intrigues, for personal aggrandisement. We must sink our differences for the sake of the great task in front of us. The Convention must become the mouthpiece of the Africans, not only in name, but in deed and action. It must give the lead for which the people call.

But it is also necessary to realise that the people must play their part in making the Convention a success. No leadership can be successful without the support and enthusiasm of the people. Our appeal therefore goes out to the people to rally round the Convention, their Convention, and make the Conference of 1943 a memorable one in the history of our people in South Africa.