

the oppressed minorities, the Indian and Coloured people, and by an increasing number of White democrats".

It is a matter of proud record that among our first gallant fighters and martyrs of our revolution to engage the enemy forces of Smith and Vorster during the historic Wankie Campaigns was Basil February (Paul Petersen), a comrade from the Coloured community.

THE FREEDOM OF OUR PEOPLE IS INDIVISIBLE!

FORWARD TO A PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT!

What I Did Was Right



This is an extract from the historic speech made by Comrade Bram Fischer to the racist Pretoria Supreme Court on 28th March, 1966, in defence of our freedom struggle to which he had devoted his life.

"I am on trial for my political beliefs and for the conduct to which those beliefs drove me. Whatever labels may be attached to the fifteen charges brought against me, they all arise from my having been a member of the Communist Party and from my activities as a member. I engaged upon those activities because I believed that, in the dangerous circumstances which have been created in South Africa, it was my duty to do so.

"When a man is on trial for his political beliefs and actions, two courses are open to him. He can either confess to his transgressions and plead for mercy or he can justify his beliefs and explain why he acted as he did. Were I to ask forgiveness today I would betray my cause. That course is not open to me. I believe that what I did was right...

"My belief, moreover, is one reason why I have pleaded not guilty to all the charges brought against me. Though I shall deny a number of important allegations made, this Court is aware of the fact that there is much in the State case which has not been contested. Yet, if I am to explain my motives and my actions as clearly as I am able, then this Court was entitled to have had before it the witnesses who testified in chief and under cross-examination against me. Some of these, I believe, were fine and loyal persons who have now turned traitors to their cause and to their country because of the methods used against them by the State - vicious and inhuman methods. Their evidence may, therefore, in important respects be unreliable.

"There is another and more compelling reason for my plea and why I persist in it. I accept the general rule that for the protection of a society laws should be obeyed. But when laws themselves become immoral and require the citizen to take part in an organised system of oppression - if only by his silence or apathy - then I believe that a higher duty arises. This compels one to refuse to recognise such laws. The laws under which I am being prosecuted were enacted by a wholly unrepresentative body, a body in which three-quarters of the people of this country have no voice whatever. These laws were enacted, not to prevent the spread of communism, but for the purpose of silencing the opposition of the large majority of our citizens to a Government intent upon depriving them, solely on account of their colour, of the most elementary human rights: of the right to freedom and happiness, the right to live together with their families wherever they might choose, to earn their livelihoods to the best of their abilities, to rear and educate their children in a civilised fashion, to take part in the administration of their country and obtain a fair share of the wealth

they produce; in short, to live as human beings...

"I hold and have for many years held the view that politics can only be properly understood and that our immediate political problems can only be satisfactorily solved without violence and civil war by the application of that scientific system of political knowledge known as Marxism...

"When I consider what it was that moved me to join the Communist Party, I have to cast my mind back for more than a quarter of a century to try and ascertain what precisely my motives at that time were... In my mind there remain two clear reasons... The one is the glaring injustice which exists and has existed for a long time in South African society, the other, a gradual realisation as I became more and more deeply involved with the Congress Movement of those years, that is, the movement for freedom and equal human rights for all, that it was always members of the Communist Party who seemed prepared, regardless of cost, to sacrifice most; to give of the best, to face the greatest dangers, in the struggle against poverty and discrimination...

"Though nearly forty years have passed, I can remember vividly the experience which brought home to me exactly what this 'White' attitude is and also how artificial and unreal it is. Like many young Afrikaners I grew up on a farm. Between the ages of eight and twelve my daily companions were two young Africans of my own age. I can still remember their names. For four years we were, when I was not at school, always in each other's company. We roamed the farm together, we hunted and played together, we modelled clay oxen and swam. And never can I remember that the colour of our skins affected our fun, or our quarrels or our close friendship in any way.

"Then my family moved to town and I moved back to the normal White South African mode of life where the only relationship with Africans was that of master to servant. I finished my schooling and went to University. There one of my first interests became a study of the theory of segregation, then beginning to blossom. This seemed to me to provide the solution to South Africa's problems and I became an earnest believer in it. A year later to help in a small way to put this theory into practice, because I do not believe that theory and practice can or should be separated, I joined the Bloemfontein Joint Council of Europeans and Africans, a body devoted largely to trying to induce various authorities to provide proper (and separate) amenities for Africans. I arrived for my first meeting with other newcomers. I found myself being

introduced to leading members of the African community. I found I had to shake hands with them. This, I found required an enormous effort of will on my part. Could I really, as a White adult touch the hand of a Black man in friendship?

"That night I spent many hours in thought trying to account for my strange revulsion when I remembered I had never had any such feelings towards my boyhood friends. What became abundantly clear was that it was I and not the Black man who had changed; that despite my growing interest in him, I had developed an antagonism for which I could find no rational basis whatsoever...

"The result of all this was that and in succeeding years when some of us ran literacy classes in the old Waaihoek location at Bloemfontein, I came to understand that colour prejudice was a wholly irrational phenomenon and that true human friendship could extend across the colour bar once the initial prejudice was overcome. And that I think was lesson No. 1 on my way to the Communist Party which has always refused to accept any colour bar and has always stood firm on the belief itself 2,000 years old, of the eventual brotherhood of all men.

"The other reason for my attraction to the Communist Party, the willingness to sacrifice, was a matter of personal observation... The Communist Party had already for two decades stood avowedly and unconditionally for political rights for non-Whites and its White members were, save for a handful of courageous individuals, the only Whites who showed complete disregard for the hatred which this attitude attracted from their fellow White South Africans. These members, I found, were Whites who could have taken full advantage of all the privileges open to them and their families because of their colour, who could have obtained lucrative employment and social position, but who, instead, were prepared for the sake of their consciences, to perform the most menial and unpopular work at little or sometimes no remuneration... But apart from the example of the White members, it was always the communists of all races who were at all times prepared to give of their time and their energy and such means as they had, to help those in need and those most deeply affected by discrimination;... who helped with night schools and feeding schemes, who assisted trade unions fighting desperately to preserve standards of living and who threw themselves into the work of the national movements. It was African communists who constantly risked arrest or the loss of their jobs or even their homes in locations, in order to gain or retain some rights..."