

# LIBERATION

A Journal of Democratic Discussion

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No. 23, February, 1957

One Shilling

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## AZIKHWELWA!

LESSONS OF THE BUS BOYCOTT

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EDITORIAL:

## **AZIKHWELWA!**

"If they want a showdown they will get it. The Government will not give way, no matter whether the boycott lasts a month or six months."

— The Minister of Transport, Mr. Ben Schoeman.  
(Rand Daily Mail, 6.2.1957)

**T**HE PUTCO bus company, suddenly and without warning, jumped up its fares by twenty-five per cent. on the Alexandra route at the beginning of 1957. Similar increases were demanded on the Sophiatown-Western Native Township route, on the Pretoria and other services.

Standholders', Congress and other organisations in Alexandra, within a couple of days, called a mass meeting. The people were furious. They took up the cry "Azikhwelwa!" — We shall not board the buses! They have been walking ever since. By the time this article was written (February 11) the average Alexandra worker walking twenty miles a day on a five-day week (but many work six days) had marched over 500 miles: half-way to Cape Town.

The spirit of the Alexandrans was infectious. Soon Sophiatown was walking, and most of Western Native Township. Eastwood and Lady Selborne in Pretoria stopped using PUTCO buses. And Germiston, and Edenvale.

Then, a wonderful thing happened. The tens of thousands of bus users living in the Municipal shanty-towns of Moroka and Jabavu were not affected by fare-increases in their PUTCO buses. But at a great mass

meeting — despite the opposition of the local advisory board under the chairmanship of Dr. Ray Phillips — they decided unanimously to boycott their bus service and to walk seven or eight miles a day to Nancefield station. This was a fine, unselfish gesture: to show their sympathy and support with others who were walking. It showed a social consciousness and public spirit which would be hard to equal anywhere in the world.

Week after week, through the blazing heat and the tempestuous summer rainstorms, the boycotters have kept on walking.

## AN ARMY OF HEROES

It is perhaps hard to think of the men and women of Alexandra and the other boycotters as heroes. They do not march forth in lines and columns and battalions. They have no brass bands to keep them cheerfully in step, no uniforms to make a brave show. The endless and motley procession straggles endlessly along Louis Botha Avenue. In the evening, the people are very tired. Many are women, and many are not young any more. They have done a hard day's work, and it will be dark before they reach home.

Weariness and heat and rain and the hard pavements and the bus company are not the only enemies of the bus boycotters. Ever since Minister Ben Schoeman came back from Europe, they have had a bigger enemy to face. He was barely off the plane, he could not have studied the facts, when he announced that the Government "would not be intimidated", and he was going to "break the boycott". From that time the people found that the whole machinery of the State was directed against them.

Peaceful boycott meetings, at Lady Selborne and Moroka, have been dispersed — the former with a murderous ferocity. Daily the walkers on their long march are stopped by the police and nagged for passes and tax receipts and even searched. Minister Schoeman calls on employers to cut their pay if they are late, or sack them if they show signs of fatigue. The many sympathetic motorists who stop by the roadside to pick up those who are "weary and heavy laden" are forced to stop, day after day, give their names and addresses, produce their driver's licences, assure the police that they are not plying for hire. Egged on by Schoeman the Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Industry and the Johannesburg City Council join forces in a united front against the boycotters to tell them they have no real grievance, their wages are enough, they are being intimidated by scheming politicians, they should get back on the buses "by next Wednesday."

That was quite a few Wednesdays ago, but the boycotters have continued undeterred. They continue their long, long trek, hardly lifting their eyes to look at the empty green buses with a few PUTCO employees, masquerading as passengers, that occasionally pass up and down the road.

There is something about this quiet, unyielding determination that should compel the admiration and respect of even the most unsympathetic.

There are no pickets to be seen — a fact that makes nonsense of all the Nat.-inspired talk about "intimidation". The people are as one — they have said "Azikhwelwa", and they won't get on those buses till the fares go back to fourpence.

You can't look at this long line of people making their way every morning and evening without being aware of a sense of purpose. Workmen with their jackets over their arms, older men with walking-sticks, pretty young factory girls, women with babies on their backs or big bundles of washing on their heads, thousands of cyclists, often struggling with their firms' heavy delivery-bikes up the killing Orange Grove hill — these are no ordinary people on their way to work. They are true heroes of our times.

## TWOPENCE A DAY

For it is more than the twopence a day which has stirred these tens of thousands of people into action. Many could perhaps afford to pay another two pence (though, if you count two or three bus users in the family, an extra £7.10s. a year is no small sum to any non-European family.) But even those who could afford to pay are walking or taking taxis because of their overriding sense of unity and duty towards the great majority who can't afford it.

The indignation of the people at the fare-increases was the last drop that filled their cup of bitterness to overflowing. It was a hateful and unwarranted new imposition — and there was a simple, legal way of hitting back and expressing their protest: not to use the buses.

Yet, behind that protest and implicit in it, perhaps not consciously in the minds of the boycotters but real and vital enough for all that, are all sorts of other protests.

Their protest against the wretched wages paid to Non-European workers in South Africa, the miserable two or three pounds a week that fail to cover the barest needs of life, so that hunger and sickness are their constant companions.

Their protest against the hateful segregation-apartheid system enforced against Non-Europeans not only by the Nationalist but also by their predecessors in the Government for very many years: the system that makes the poorest workers travel furthest to work;

Their protest against unrepresentative government, that denies the non-White person any say in the laws that rule the country, the city and the township, a government that offers no constitutional methods of redress; that bans, banishes and arrests beloved and respected leaders when they dare to voice their people's claims and aspirations.

When Government propagandists repeat that the boycott is "not purely economic", that it has "political motives" and so on, they mean to insinu-

ate that the boycotters are not really worried about the twopence, that they have another sinister motive — to carry out a "test of strength against the Government. Now all that is a lot of drivel. The extra twopence is a desperately important matter to the people, otherwise they wouldn't have walked for one day, never mind six weeks. That is a measure of their poverty: and that is what the Government doesn't want to admit. The twopence is the central issue in this boycott — a statement that could very simply be proved by restoring the fares to the level of December, 1956.

## **POLITICS AND ECONOMICS**

But that the boycott itself is an event of deep political significance is a fact which it is idle and unnecessary to deny. It is no service to South Africa to keep repeating that the bus boycott is "purely economic". As if it had no connection with all the pent-up resentment of the African people at their treatment by the Nationalist Government and its police; at the pass laws and their extension to women; at Bantu Education; at Group Areas and mass removals; at the sort of society that condemns Africans in Africa to only the hardest and worst paid types of employment, forces them to live at distances that mean twenty miles a day travelling to and from work, and expects them to pay the bill.

All that is "politics" — and it is absurd to try to discuss the bus boycott apart from that background as it is to expect the African National Congress, as the leading African organisation, to refrain from participating in this struggle, or pointing out its lessons to the people.

It is because they sense and know these factors that people, not only in Moroka and Jabavu, but as far away as Port Elizabeth, feel called upon to show their sympathy and support in a practical way.

It is a coincidence, but it is no accident, that workers in far-away Barcelona and Madrid, have chosen the same method of a boycott of public transport to demonstrate their protest against low wages and soaring costs of living. Living under a Fascist dictatorship, forbidden the rights of voting for Parliament, forming trade unions, or striking, they have protested in this way, no doubt, because they reasoned that people cannot be punished for not riding in trains and buses for which they have to pay fares.

Of course, they hadn't heard of Mr. Schoeman.

## **THE MIND OF A RACIALIST**

It is not very difficult to follow the train of thought of Mr. Schoeman and his colleagues in the Union Cabinet. He didn't need to know the details of the bus-users' case. He didn't have to study comparative figures of wages and cost-of-living for urban Africans. All he needed to know was that the African people were taking united action in support of a demand — any demand. That was enough for him.

For Mr. Schoeman's "philosophy" is very simple. He made it perfectly clear during the Assembly debate on the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act, when he was Minister of Labour. Put into plain language, it could be quite fairly stated something like this:

"Africans must not be allowed to gain anything by their own efforts and organisation. Anything like that will be a menace to White supremacy. Their trade unions must be bled to death. Their boycotts must be broken. Any action by Africans, legal or illegal, means a "showdown". 'They ask for higher wages, lower fares? Give them batons and bullets.'"

Once you can see into Schoeman's mind his actions are easy to interpret. A dispute between a bus company and its passengers is seen as a sort of rising, a "showdown", a "trial of strength." The African passengers are seen as "the enemy"; their leaders are "thugs and Communist agitators."

It is precisely this outlook which determines the attitude of the Government to any and every movement towards the advancement of the non-White people. If they boycott the buses they are Communists; if they strike for higher wages they are criminals; if they ask for the vote they commit high treason.

For this psychotic fear and hatred of the people is not confined to Mr. Schoeman. It reflects the official outlook and policy of the Nationalist Party. The Nationalist Government has no respect for the great majority of the people over whom it rules and whose humble and obedient servant, in terms of democratic theory, it is supposed to be. Their minds live in the past. Ignoring the extraordinary industrial and urban development of the sub-continent over the past half-century they imagine themselves as defenders of a voortrekker laër, with the impi's chanting battle-songs outside.

## THE 1957 SPIRIT

There can be no return to the past in which these men are living. These are not the tribal warriors of the Nationalist imagination, these men and women who march with such steadfastness and discipline, stoutly resisting every provocation to violence. They are the children of a modern industrial society. They work hard from seventy-thirty till five in factories, and not all Dr. Verwoerd's Bantu schools can close their minds to the lessons of modern life which their work teaches them. Like people in similar conditions the world over they are reaching out irresistibly for those rewards and compensations that alone can make the strain and stress of urban life and labour tolerable: a decent standard of life, leisure and culture, education and opportunities for the rising generation, a say in making the laws and moulding the country's way of life.

Everywhere the old aristocracy and feudal classes resisted these demands — and everywhere they failed. They will fail in South Africa as well. They will fail, and they are failing, because they are out of step with the invariable laws of social development and human progress.

For nine years the Nationalists have done their utmost to stamp out the spirit of the African people. They have tried every known form of repression. They have outlawed movements, newspapers and ideas. They have deported and excommunicated leaders, arrested and imprisoned them. They have launched ever new repressive laws, accompanied by unprecedented police violence. Dawn raids on people's homes, spying on individuals, opening their letters, eavesdropping on their conversations and all the other ugly manifestations of the police state have become commonplaces in South Africa.

At the end of those nine years, at the beginning of 1957, with all the chief alleged "agitators" arrested and facing charges of High Treason in the Johannesburg Drill Hall, the spirit of the people is higher than ever before. It has expressed itself already in the mighty united movement of something like a hundred thousand people behind the slogan "Azikhwelwa!" If the successful conference of factory delegates convened recently in Johannesburg is any indication, the 1957 spirit is about to express itself in a still more formidable movement for a general increase in wages.

## WE CAN'T AFFORD IT

This spirit can never be quelled by the big stick methods of the Nationalists. All they can and do accomplish is to make the struggle fiercer and more bitter, and to impose an ever-mounting burden of unnecessary and wasteful expenditure on the country's economy. The bus boycott would surely have been settled quickly but for Schoeman's provocative intervention. PUTCO, losing nearly £20,000 a week, would probably soon have come to terms, with the help of the employers' associations and the City Council, who prior to meeting the Minister were quite favourably disposed. But, as usual, the Government instead of facilitating a settlement was out to sabotage any such thing. In the same way the N.A.D. is always anxious to run to the scene of an industrial dispute in order to prevent any direct negotiation between the employers and the union. In the same way, on the broader scene, the Nationalists will do whatever they can to deter European organisations from participating in the multi-racial discussions proposed by the African Ministers' conference last year and already approved by A.N.C., Liberal and Labour Parties and others.

All this has cost and is costing the country dearly, not only in such imponderables as inter-group tension and ill-will, but also in terms of hard cash — the towering costs of the evergrowing machinery of repression, the man-hours lost through illness, fatigue and undernourishment, the rapidly declining world confidence in the stability and soundness of the Union from an economic point of view.

South Africa cannot afford the Nationalist Government. That is the real message the bus boycotts have for us. The sooner all of us, of all races, understand that vital message the sooner we shall get down to the essential task of planning in mutual consultation and agreement, a new way of life acceptable to all the people. A way of life that will open the door to freedom and prosperity for our country, and enable South Africa to take its rightful place as a respected member of the family of nations.

# THE REICHSTAG FIRE

By L. BERNSTEIN

● *THE FIRST OF TWO ARTICLES  
RECALLING AN IMPORTANT  
CHAPTER OF MODERN HISTORY.*

**I**t is the period of the "desperate thirties." Throughout the world, the most bitter economic crisis of all time creeps like a blight, unseating governments, overturning thrones, bankrupting financiers and closing the doors of factories. Hunger and starvation stalk the streets of the world's capitals. Unemployed men and women in millions tread the pavements, hopelessly looking for work that is not there.

Nowhere is the crisis deeper than in Germany. By the beginnings of the thirties, three million workers are unemployed. Weekly wages have fallen from an average of 45 marks the year before to 37 marks. But the

"The mechanism for the creation of divisions in the working class . . . ceases to function; the working class moves in the direction of Communism, and the capitalist rule approaches the emergency stage of military dictatorship . . . The only safeguard from this acute stage is if the division and holding back of the working class . . . is carried out by other and more direct means. In this lie the positive opportunities and tasks of National Socialism."

Statement by the Union of Germany Industry, August 1932.

end is not in sight. By 1931, the number of workless has risen to six million, and average wages have dropped by another 10 marks; by 1932, nine million, and the numbers of the unemployed growing every day, swelled by uncounted thousands of shopkeepers and peasants forced into bankruptcy.

It is a period of desperation; in every strata of society there is a feeling that changes must be made; things can not go on they way they are. Desperate times seek desperate remedies. It is the most desperate time in the era of capitalism.



And then suddenly, throughout the world, the message booms from the German state radio. "The Reichstag is in flames!" It is the night of February 27th, 1933. A bitter winter's night in the midst of a bitter crisis; and in the centre of Berlin, the vast ornate palace which housed the national Parliament is burning to the ground.

Other buildings at other times have burnt. For a day it is news, and then forgotten. But this was no ordinary fire. This was a fire which stood out like a beacon in the history of Europe, marking the end of one age and the beginning of another — the beginning of fascist Germany.

While the fire still burns, police cars, filled with detachments of Nazi storm troopers, scour the country systematically, working from the black-lists kept at the Secret Police headquarters. By morning, police headquarters in every city are filled with hundreds of Communists, Social Democrats, trade unionists and pacifists, dragged from their beds. There are none of the great Communist or Social Democratic daily papers on sale in the streets; the printing works and offices have been seized during the night by Gestapo (Geheime Staatspolizei) men. During the hours of night, new laws have been issued by decree. Freedom of the press, of assembly, and association has been abolished; "privacy of correspondence, of the post, telegraph and telephone is suspended; house searchings, and the confiscation or restriction of the rights of property are permissible." Treason, arson, causing explosions or causing damage to railways have become punishable by death. It has become a crime to "oppose any orders issued by the State authorities or officials" in the carrying out of these decrees, and a crime "to incite to opposition to the public danger."

By morning, the press, radio and posters throughout Berlin proclaim the statements issued during the night by Ministers of the state: "The Communists have set fire to the Reichstag! Insurrection and civil war were to follow! The Communists intended to violate your wives and murder your children! The Communists intended to poison the water in the wells and the food in the restaurants and canteens!" These words are quoted verbatim from "The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror" published in 1933 by the World Committee for the victims of German fascism. They no longer ring as loud and inflammatory as they did twenty-three years ago. They have been repeated since then too often to clear the way for a vicious attack on democratic rights. Twenty years later, South Africa's Minister of Justice, C. R. Swart repeated almost the whole gamut — arson, murder, poison in the waterwells — to pave the way for the Public Safety (Martial Law) Act, and the Suppression of Communism Act.

But in Hitler Germany, overnight, the burning of the Reichstag and the cry of "Communist conspiracy" signalled the ending of the German Democratic Republic, and the beginning of the age of the Hitler dictatorship.

To understand the night of the Reichstag fire, it is necessary to go back. German Nazism, like South African, was not born complete and finished in that single night. It had crept up, insidiously, over several years, whittling away now one liberty, now another. In the years since the end of World War I, the Social Democratic Party, a reformist, working class

party of the British Labour Party type, had held the reins of government power. In Social Democratic fashion it had introduced many social reforms to improve the lot of the German working class. But, in Social Democratic fashion, it had left the class structure of German society untouched. Within the framework of the democratic republic, the old feudal aristocracy, the Junker class, remained, biding their time, in full possession of the feudal estates whence derived their power. Within the democratic framework, the old Prussian military caste, offshoot of the landed aristocracy, remained, still in the seats of military power. And within the "welfare state", the old millionaire representatives of the great monopolies and trusts of industry and finance, remained, biding their time, secure in their fortresses, their empires of money and machines.

For a time, Social Democracy governed; perhaps it would be right to say it was allowed to govern, under the stern eye of the old ruling class. And for a time it governed satisfactorily for the watching vultures. When a young army sergeant, Adolf Hitler started a brownshirted semi-military political gang, and even attempted an abortive military putsch, old ruling class and Social Democrats could afford to brush it aside as a sort of lunatic fringe around the happy "welfare state" compromise. But in 1929, the first sharp signs of the new crisis in Germany's economy began to show. And new, radical currents began to rise strongly amongst the working class. The Communist Party was growing rapidly, beginning to challenge Social Democracy for leadership of the working class, putting forward ideas of a radical transformation of society as the only means to avert the coming crisis. It was time for the ruling class to act.

It acted in typical, reactionary style. From the coffers of the millionaire trusts and armaments kings and industrialists, money began to pour into the treasury of Hitler's National Socialist (Nazi) Party. The reason for the choice is clear. Here, under the leadership of this wild, fanatic and unrestrained demagogue, could be gathered all the most vicious racialist currents of German opinion, to smash through the growing inter-racial solidarity of the German working class. Here under cover of specious slogans of "nationalism" could be gathered the thousands of petty traders, farmers and professionals, uprooted from their property status by the crisis, but fighting desperately to maintain their "superiority" to the socialist and communist inspired proletariat. Here, under cover of specious slogans of "socialism" could be gathered all those declassed and brutalised elements of the working class — called appropriately by the Germans "lumpen proletarians" — who could be turned against their own class, cannon-fodder for the capitalist detachments of the rising class war.

Hitler's party rose on the crest of a golden wave. As the money poured in, the Nazi storm detachments formed in strength — detachments of armed gangsters who carried the political battles against communism into the fields of gangsterism, breaking up meetings, wrecking party offices, assaulting and beating party members, and inciting bitter racialism against all minority sections, especially Jews. But it was not the Nazi Party alone that paved the way for Hitler's victory. The path was opened for him by all the forces of German reaction, aided in suicidal fashion by the leaders of Social Democracy.

In 1929, all the right-wing parties manoeuvred together to force the Social Democrats — the largest single party — from the coalition cabinet. Chancellor Brüning of the right wing took over the reins. With a dogged and persistent belief in the theory of supporting the "lesser evil", Social Democracy supported the new Government, for the alternative — so it was argued — was a government of open fascism. If Hitler buried the corpse of German democracy, Brüning dug the grave. Using Article 48 of the old constitution inherited from the Social Democrats, Brüning issued sweeping decrees without reference to the Reichstag. Strikes and anti-fascist demonstrations were banned; the working class defence organisation, Red Front, was banned while the Nazi storm troopers operated openly; unemployment relief and pensions were cut, and rent control abolished. Under this tutelage, the Nazi Party grew.

But the German working class stood firm. In the 1930 elections, though the Nazis scored a great advance to poll 6,400,000 votes, they won them at the expense of all the old parties of the right, whose support declined sharply. The Social Democrat vote declined — though they emerged still as the largest single party — but many of the lost votes went to the Communist Party whose vote rose by 600,000. Brüning continued in office. But already the right wing was beginning to raise the cry of "Hitler for Chancellor!" While the Communist Party raised the slogan of a working class united front against fascism, the Social Democratic leadership turned its back on unity with the Communists, following the forlorn path of "the lesser evil."

In April 1932, Field Marshal Von Hindenburg was elected President for the second time, with Social Democrat support under the slogan "A vote for Hindenburg is a blow at Hitler." The Communist candidate, Ernest Thälmann won almost five million votes. During the year, as the Government moved steadily further to the right — Brüning giving way to Papen, and Papen to General Schleicher — the working class rallied more strongly around the Communist party and its policy of a united working class struggle against fascism. Support for the Nazi Party declined, even as the cries amongst the ruling class for "Hitler as Chancellor" grew stronger and stronger. In the November election, the Nazi Party vote dropped by 2 million. The Communist vote rose by another million since April, to reach a new high-water mark of 6 million. It was a moment of desperation for the ruling class; and from it grew its most desperate answer.

With the Nazis further off than before from electoral victory, again the Social Democratic leaders persisted in turning their backs on Communist proposals for unity, and supporting the "lesser evil" against Hitler. Under the "lesser evil" Government of Schleicher, the Nazi Party decided the time had come to act. Outside the Communist headquarters in Berlin, the Karl Liebknecht House, a provocative Nazi demonstration was staged on the night of January 23rd, 1933. A tremendous counter demonstration by the workers of Berlin supported by the Communists and many rank and file Social Democrats challenged the Nazis in the streets. General Schleicher intervened, ordering out the entire police force to protect the Nazi demonstration from the anger of Berlin's workers. Clearly, in the streets of Berlin, the Nazis and the working class were moving towards a decisive

clash. And clearly too, as the election results had shown, the Nazis were a declining force. Reaction prepared to rescue Hitler before it was too late. Schleicher prepared for the proclamation of a military dictatorship.

But before Schleicher could act, the policy of the "lesser evil" finally paid off. On January 20th, 1933, Field Marshal Von Hindenburg, elected President with Social Democrat support, played the final card in the ruling class plot to preserve its power from the workers' challenge. Ignoring the electoral rebuff the Nazis had received, he appointed Adolf Hitler as new chancellor of the Reich, head of the German government.

Note well the date, January 30th. And on the night of February 27th, the news rangs out: "The Reichstag is in flames." And when the sun rose the following morning, the working class which had administered a severe setback to Hitlerism in the November elections, was already under heavy police attack, its organisations crippled, its press silenced, its leaders and activists in handcuffs.

It should be unnecessary to ask: Who did burn the Reichstag? The facts point to the Nazis as clearly as a pikestaff. But the story cannot be left here. For the Reichstag fire was not the end of the challenge to fascism. In the trial which was to follow, held under the spotlight of world attention, a single Bulgarian Communist turned the allegation of arson back on the Nazi accusers and placed the government squarely in the dock. The fight against Nazism shifted to the courts, and Dimitrov drove Hitlerism to the pillory of world opinion.

But that episode of the Fire Trial must wait till next month.

## **TROUBLE WITH LIBERATION**

Your LIBERATION is late this issue. Sorry, but all the articles were taken by the Special Police in the raids of December 5. And some of our writers were in jail.

A timely article by the banned ex-Secretary of the African National Congress, now on trial for treason.

# **BOYCOTT AS A POLITICAL WEAPON**

By **WALTER SISULU**

**B**oycott has been used as an effective political weapon in different countries ever since it came into use as a recognised method of struggle against the Irish Land Act of 1880.

There are outstanding examples from all over the world of the effectiveness of boycott in political struggle: the boycott of the Duma in Russia during the struggle against the Czarist regime; the boycott against the British Legislative Council in India by the Indian Congress. And we in this country are in a particularly good position to understand fully how effective the boycott weapon can be, both as an economic and political weapon. It is still one of the few methods of struggle which are not illegal in South Africa today.

Since the end of the last war, we have seen outstanding examples of successful boycotts: the Alexandra bus boycott of 1944; the Western Native Township Tram boycott; the Port Elizabeth bus boycott; the Cape Town bus boycott; the unique Evaton bus boycott which continued for more than a year, and finally brought down the bus owners to their knees. No less remarkable is the bus boycott on the Rand and Pretoria at the time of writing this article. The fact that people can walk for twenty miles a day, week in, week out, in a 100% effective boycott, organised in less than two weeks; and in such diverse areas as Sophiatown, and W.N.T. in less than two days — this is a tribute to the determination of the people in utilising this form of struggle.

Tens of thousands of Africans have participated in these boycotts, and even more compelling is the fact that 20,000 Africans in the Moroka-Jabavu areas have carried on a boycott in sympathy, in support of their brothers who are struggling against higher fares.

In these boycotts our experience is that each time they have raised the political consciousness of the people, brought about a greater solidarity and unity among the masses. In this way they have raised the peoples' organisations to a higher level, demonstrating the correctness of the action.

However, inevitably people with limited democratic rights and few means of expressing their grievances begin to think of boycotts as a means to demand political rights. And it is our main concern in this article to discuss boycott as a political rather than a purely economic weapon.

## WHEN TO BOYCOTT?

There has been controversy over the correctness of the timing of various boycotts against existing institutions and Parliamentary bodies. Such controversies existed in the left movements in Europe, in Germany, Austria, Hungary, and to a lesser extent in England; the issue being whether or not it is correct for members of progressive parties to participate in parliamentary elections and other reactionary institutions. In our own country this controversy has existed for more than ten years. This is a question on which we must have a clear decision. Taking the history of these countries, learning from their experience, we may be able to understand our own problem more easily. For although conditions differ from one country to another, yet the principle is much the same.

During and after the war the national liberatory movement took a greater interest in the boycott weapon; the Unity Movement, the Communist Party of South Africa, and the African National Congress all decided at different times on the boycott of the different political institutions, such as parliament, Advisory Boards and Bungas. Even during this period the issue was a highly controversial one within the organisations concerned. It was during this period that the political consciousness of the people began to emerge, and the militant spirit of the masses was felt. It was also a period of industrial development, of historic strikes and protests of the people; the Squatters movement of 1944-43; the Mine Strike of 1946 in which many Africans were killed. All these things raised the greatest indignation among the people. This was, therefore, correctly regarded as the best time to build the national movements and to force the powers by mass action instead of by petitions or deputations. This also made people naturally regard government institutions with contempt.

It was also argued that people did not distinguish clearly between their own organisations and reactionary bodies; and that there was a need of making people adopt an attitude of contempt to the Advisory Boards and Councils, and to understand their functions and limitations. To work within these bodies and at the same time to condemn them unreservedly would have led to confusion. Therefore the best approach seemed to be an active boycott of such institutions.

There were, however, some who chose the weapon of boycott because it seemed an "easy" course, one which would not expose either the people or their leaders to any hardships. This school of thought is found even today

amongst those who shout the loudest and become more militant when they talk of boycott. They see no other suitable form of struggle save boycott. That explains also why some of those who favour boycott are so strongly opposed to any other form of struggle, under the pretext that the people are not yet trained and ready.

Since the decision of the A.N.C. in 1949, this issue has come up for discussion at almost every conference. There are differences of approach. As far as the Unity Movement is concerned, anyone who participates in any of the elections of various political institutions are collaborators of the government; that whoever so participates, even when fighting for the destruction of such institutions, betrays the struggle. It sounds very militant, of course, to talk about positive boycott, about collaborationists and non-collaborationists. This tendency is confined not only to the non-European Unity Movement, but has penetrated the ranks of the A.N.C.

This surely is being dogmatic. It is a serious political mistake of confusing the tactics with the principle; which means that the decision to boycott is not subject to any changes.

Let us examine the arguments advanced by both sides, those who believe that boycott is the best possible weapon with which to oppose these inferior political institutions, and those who believe that boycott is not necessarily the best or only method.

#### MILITANT OR EXTREME?

From the first point of view, the argument is advanced that these institutions were created to serve the interests of the oppressors and to deceive the oppressed and fool them into believing that they have some political rights. It is argued that the effect of this is to retard the progress of the oppressed people. That to participate, therefore, in these institutions amounts to collaborating with the oppressors, confusing and bluffing the masses; and that the correct thing to do is to have nothing at all to do with these institutions at any time, under any circumstances.

This, indeed, sounds very militant and uncompromising, and it is this approach which raises a tactic into a principle. On the other hand, it is argued that boycotting of these institutions may not necessarily be the best and correct method to fight against their existence. But on the contrary, participation in these institutions may at certain times be the most effective and correct method of exposing them and struggling for more effective representation.

This approach clearly recognises the fact that these institutions exist not because of our wishes, nor are they due to our making; that the people may participate in them for various reasons, and that the correct thing to do is to educate the masses about the purpose of these institutions, thus making them have no confidence in them as such. This approach recognises the fact that the principle is not the boycott of the institutions, but the principle is the rejection of differential political institutions.

## CONDITIONS CHANGE

The failure on the part of many people to realise the seriousness of elevating a tactic of struggle into a fundamental principle could do irreparable harm to the movement. Take, for instance, this decision to boycott taken several years ago. Does it follow that because it was correct then it is correct today? Have conditions not changed at all since the decision was taken? They certainly have. Many forms of struggle which were legal then are illegal today. Organisations and leaders have been banned. Almost all forms of protest have been outlawed. Holding meetings has become almost impossible. Surely the wisdom of leadership lies in knowing what tactics to apply at a given time, dictated to leadership by the prevailing conditions. The correctness of such tactics must be judged from their effect on the movement. The primary thing is that such tactics raise the standards of the organisation higher and higher. Once we differentiate between the principle and the tactic, in other words, in this case to know that the boycott is a tactic and the rejection of reactionary political institutions is the principle, then the fight against such institutions can include participation in them with a view to rendering important the system that gives rise to them.

The A.N.C. resolution for the boycotting of these institutions also made provision for the establishment of the Council of Action, whose function was to decide upon the institution to be boycotted. It was realised that it was not sufficient to say that we boycott these institutions, when people may not be ready for it. There are people even within the A.N.C. who do not realise that boycott is a tactic and only one of the methods to be used for the struggle for national independence and against white domination and discriminatory laws. The fact, some of them argued at the Queenstown National Conference in 1953 that they regarded the decision to boycott not just as a tactic.

They were wrong, and Congress should rediscuss the whole matter now with a view to reviewing the unclear and unsatisfactory 1949 resolution, which no longer reflects a greatly changed situation.



In his first two articles in this series, Mr. Mbeki sketched the historical and economic background against which the Transkei Bunga (the Transkeian General Council) the so-called Transkei "Parliament" composed of Chiefs, Government nominees and some elected representatives, dating from the last century — voted itself out of existence in favour of Dr. Verwoerd's Bantu Authorities plan. It did so after considering the report of the "Recess Committee", which was guided by the Native Affairs Department. He proceeds to examine the real motives behind the Verwoerd Plan.

# THE TRANSKEI TRAGEDY

*A STUDY IN THE BANTU AUTHORITIES ACT.*

By GOVAN MBEKI

## III NATIONAL GRAVE-DIGGERS

The emergence of new independent African states to the north has made the mouths of South African capitalists water. They plan to underseil the East and the West in this new potential market with shoddy goods produced under sweated labour conditions. Factories in or near the Reserves, where the only industrial law that applies is the slave-like "Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act" would suit this purpose well. But to carry out this purpose it is important that Africans should be found to co-operate.

The Chief has been selected as the chief collaborator in this plan. Let us see what the apartheid gossellers offer him under the Bantu Authorities Act. The main bait is "political development" under the "wise and helpful guidance" of a State department supervised by the learned Doctors Verwoerd and Eiselen.

### FUNCTIONS OF "BANTU AUTHORITIES"

To be in a position to assess the true nature of the "powers" which the chief, or any unscrupulous person who is elevated to the position of chief, is to wield under the tutelage of Dr. Verwoerd and his army of Native Affairs officials, we must study the list of functions for the Bantu Auth-

ority. The departmental Memorandum which is the basis of the Recess Committee's Report submitted at a special session of the Transkei General Council on 23rd and 24th November 1955, states that in addition to some of the functions mentioned below "the Minister would have the power to assign to any authority any other function." This is the list:

- (1) Land administration,
- (2) General Administration of own affairs,
- (3) Measures to combat soil erosion,
- (4) Organising Bantu Farmers' Association,
- (5) Eradication of weeds,
- (6) Education (School Boards and teacher-training),
- (7) Secondary and Major Scholarships,
- (8) Licensing and allocation of sites,
- (9) Co-operative Credit Societies,
- (10) Bantu Athletics and Sports.

To carry out these functions the Government creates a machinery which purports to be the fulfilment of the African peoples' aspirations. As Mr. C. B. Young, Under-Secretary for Native Affairs puts it: "It is the desire of every race to govern itself or to participate in such government". (Note that it is the **RACE** as distinct from the "nation" for which the Nationalists are providing.) The Nationalist project, for purposes of distracting the minds of the people from their main problems of food, landlessness, pass laws, etc., their own warped moral standards by which they judge political, economic, social and even their religious standards according to the manner in which they measure up to their theory of the Nationalist racial superman.

The Bantu Authority, though for different ends, is promised powers, despotic powers, over his tribal group, similar to those which the Nationalist "superman", Dr. Verwoerd, is seeking to exercise over the entire African people. The Nationalists are even in this ideological sphere extending the practice of master and servant. There must be black man to do the "dakka werk" under the supervision of the Nationalist white baas. The same practice of baas boys as is encouraged on the mines to extract maximum production from tired mine workers by using Africans themselves to prod their fellowmen so that even though exhausted almost beyond endurance they should still strain to dig out an extra fraction of an ounce of gold. To achieve this the mine management has exploited man's vanity for power, however illusory such power. Underground, a white "baas" supervises a number of African "baasboys" who goad the workers to produce.

The Nationalists are adopting similar tactics to implement their Bantu Authorities plan. They want the chiefs to play the role of "Baas boys" so that they break up resistance to oppression amongst their people. Lest the chiefs should be unwilling to co-operate fully, provision is made in the plan for the elevation of unscrupulous individuals to the rank of chiefs. Behind the "baas boy chiefs" will be the Native Commissioners to ensure that they carry out the Nationalist policy.

It should not, however, be imagined that the Nationalists regard the co-operation of the chiefs by itself, as sufficient to ensure the smooth working of the Bantu Authorities plan. The Under-Secretary realises that the people may not accept the scheme and so hurries to assure them in advance:

"Under the Bantu Authorities which you constitute you will be able to lead the people in a true sense. You will be able to tell them, not ask them, what to do. That is an important point."

Indeed it is an important point; for here the Nationalist Government establishes the fact that it will resort to force to back the chiefs as they are directed to compel their people to accept all the oppressive and degrading slave laws which are based on the theory of the white man's racial superiority.

## COMPULSION

The Bantu Authorities are to be saddled with the responsibility of carrying out a land policy which the people have opposed so strongly that the Government with all its show of strength through armed police has failed to achieve. The Chiefs, as Bantu Authorities; must now, at the instigation of the Native Commissioner, remove families from one area to another under the "Land Rehabilitation scheme" and pay them inadequate compensation for their demolished huts; they now must compel the people to cull their stock; they must dispossess some who have had arable allotments in the name of soil conservation; they must screen the landless and confine them in labour camps from which the capitalist industrial requirements of cheap labour can be met; they must compel the people to provide forced labour to construct roads, and to eradicate noxious weeds. These and a multiplicity of other tasks which the Native Affairs Department has on its own failed to achieve in the past, are to be applied by the Chiefs under the supervision of Native Affairs officials. To do this work the Nationalists compensate the stooges for the unpopular work they are going to do. Titles that appeal to their vanity; instead of being called Chiefs they will now be known as Bantu Authorities who will be able to tell their people — "not ask them, what to do."

In Paragraph 1(c) of the Recess Committee Report the Committee recommends that the principle of resorting to force to compel a horse that is unwilling to drink be embodied in the Proclamation that is to set up Bantu Authorities in the Transkei. The section which empowers the Minister of Native Affairs to fix a date by which "the establishment shall be completed" reads:

"That if, despite the fixing of a date by the Honourable the Minister, any location or area has not established a Community Authority he may, if in his opinion, the circumstances warrant it, resort to compulsion in the matter."

So revolting is this paragraph that Mr. M. S. Morai (Mount Fletcher) moved that the words "resort to compulsion in the matter" be deleted as

the people "would not like it if such a situation should arise." He was seconded by Mr. K. G. Jojo who as a result earned himself not only discouraging but disparaging remarks from the Chair. These served as a warning to the rest of the members not to oppose any of the recommendations of the Recess Committee. Taking up the line from the chairman's tough remarks Mr. C. W. Monakali adopted a conciliatory approach and in supporting the Recess Committee's recommendation gave as a justification for the insertion of the compulsion clause the reason: "The Bunga itself has accepted the principle because it realised it is the policy of the Government and it has got to be carried out." Mr. T. Ntintili also, in support was not to be outshone by Mr. Monakali in advocating force. Impatient at any delay that would be brought about by the deletion of the compulsion clause he impulsively asks: "How long will we sit there wasting time until everybody else is persuaded of his own accord to have the whole system applied?"

In countries which came under Hitler in Europe some selfish Jews became members of Nazi-inspired "Judenrats" (Jewish Councils) which were supposed to look after the interests of the Jews. Members of these Councils carried out Hitler's fascist policy of Jewish extermination. A Jewish writer sums up the nature and effects of such collaboration thus:

"There were the careless and cynical who hoped to gain favour for themselves in the eyes of the fascists by their over-zealous subservience to racialist doctrines. For a mere pittance of personal exemption they were quite willing to sacrifice tens of thousands of their own flesh and blood to Hitler's butchers. No Germans could have surpassed in keenness these members of the Judenrat who thought to earn merit by complying with all the demands and executing all the decrees of the Gestapo . . . Though they betrayed their persecuted people they too were crushed in turn by Nazi hestiality. As long as they were of some use to the regime they were kept alive and even in relative comfort. No sooner did their usefulness cease and they shared the fate of their betrayed brothers . . . In Auschwitz and Maidenek the dehumanised scum of the Jewish people volunteered to supervise their own people's march to the gas chambers and death. In the end they were also made to join the queue."

In priestlike style, the Chairman of the Recess Committee, Mr. E. W. Pearce, the would-be mentor of Bantu Authorities, summing up the debate on the compulsion clause says "Mr. Chairman, I appeal to my old friend from Mt. Fletcher to withdraw his amendment". Continuing this appeal to his "old friend from Mt. Fletcher", Mr. Pearce states: "We are trying to build a big structure; we have reached the foundations — the part of the building which must be the strongest. While we are trying to build this foundation somebody comes along and wants to insert a charge of dynamite in that foundation and, what is more, Mr. Chairman, he comes along to those who are building and says: 'Will you light the fuse?'"

Anticipating the effect which this passionate appeal may have had on his "old friend" he concluded "Mr. Chairman, I hope sincerely that the mover of the amendment will withdraw it."

After the honey-bird had thus spoken Mr. M. S. Morai the "old Friend from Mt. Fletcher" rose and said:

"When I first read those words (referring to the compulsion clause) I was not aware of all the facts that have been exposed . . . I therefore withdraw my amendment".

The Chairman: "Does your seconder agree?"

Councillor K. G. Jojo who probably had learnt from experience as every herd boy has known that a honey bird is not always the beneficent guide that leads to a beehive, but sometimes, while it still sings its usual sweet song, it leads its follower to a lurking poisonous snake, said: "I am withdrawing half-heartedly. I am quarrelling with the word "compulsion" but in any case I agree to withdrawing".

Pressing for an unconditional surrender the Chairman retorted "I am asking if you agree to the withdrawal of the proposal". Councillor K. G. Jojo: "I agree, Sir, although I do not like that word "compulsion"."

Like the foamy wave that seals the surface of the sea after the last part of a sinking ship disappears into the deep, that last remark by Councillor Jojo ended any further opposition and Councillors competed with one another in a vulgar display of servility as each ended up his speech before resuming his seat with "I thank you sir."

*(Mr. Mbeki's concluding article in this series will be published in our next issue.)*

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