

**"WE ARE NOT WITHOUT POWER . . ."** writes Chief A. J. Lutuli, exiled President-General of the A.N.C. This article is the report which he submitted to the Natal People's Conference on September 6th, 1959, organised jointly by the Congresses.

# THE AFRICAN WOMEN'S DEMONSTRATION IN NATAL

By A. J. LUTULI

**S**INCE the middle of June, 1959 to date, August 31st, 1959, Natal has been witnessing widespread demonstrations throughout the Province. The demonstrations have been largely by women and have no precedent, at least, in Natal.

The political scene in Natal is very much alive and explosive as a result of these demonstrations. They are a natural reaction of an oppressed people to the growing suffering and misery they have long endured under White rule. The patience and trust of the people is reaching breaking point.

Our justified concern for the negative features that have accompanied most of these demonstrations should not cloud our assessment of their positive value, namely:

- (1) that the demonstrations have been largely spontaneous and are an index of the people's growing sensitivity to oppression and of the presence of a potential leadership among women at local level; they show how far and fast the Congress spirit of resisting oppression instead of passively accepting the status quo has permeated individual souls and is percolating to the masses.
- (2) that the liberation movement is fast assuming the desired character of being a *mass movement*.
- (3) that the women are increasingly becoming an important factor in the Liberation Movement and this we welcome since women have special gifts and attitudes that make them valuable assets in the struggle.

The demonstrations to the extent that they took a peaceful presentation of grievances to competent authorities is most welcome and should be encouraged as a first struggle-step, especially for politically immature

people and novices in the struggle.

Men should take a leaf from the women in this regard. Protest demonstrations coupled with demands to the authorities are the only so-called Constitutional action and channel of struggle non-Europeans have. It cannot win us freedom. But it can be valuable in forging a unity of the people at local level and in helping to throw up a leadership from latent local talent. It is a form of practical public education and of assisting to inform the world of the disabilities of the non-whites. The Zulus have it: "INGANE ENGAKHALIYO IFELA EMBELEKWENI," (a child that does not cry may die unnoticed carried by its mother on her back).

### THE CONGRESS METHOD OF STRUGGLE

Congress has adopted the policy of using extra-parliamentary methods of struggle but strictly on the basis of non-violence. This policy has been adopted *deliberately*, following a profound study and experience of the South African situation. We believe that as conditions are in this country it is possible for the people by the use of overwhelming peaceful pressure to win all their demands for freedom. We are aware of the fact that people as a result of desperation at the terrible conditions under which they live and sometimes owing to deliberate provocative acts by the authorities may spontaneously resort to violence. But our task is to educate our people on the efficacy of Congress methods of struggle. We do not preach the use of non-violent methods for the benefit of our enemies but for the benefit of our own people and for the ultimate benefit of our multi-racial society. Under our conditions in South Africa violent struggle would probably leave a legacy of bitterness which would render it difficult to establish a firm and stable multi-racial democracy in the future. One point does deserve mention. By and large even where demonstrations in the past two months have contained a violent element it has not been directed against any persons or sections of the community but rather with institutions that appeared associated with policies that caused the people's suffering. It was fundamentally an attack on local or national government policies. I must emphasize however that demonstrator's must forthwith desist from violence, whether they be Congress members or not. Violent methods of struggle are inimical to the best interests of the struggle and are not a practical proposition in any case in our situation.

### THE BIGGEST NEEDS OF THE HOUR

- (1) Unity of the people and the formation of broad struggle fronts.
- (2) A working knowledge of the policy and objectives of the African National Congress.
- (3) A determination to win, cost what it may.
- (4) To possess a progressive sense of values.

### SOME LESSONS AND CHALLENGES POSED BY THE DEMONSTRATIONS

- (1) That political struggles do not always assume an atmosphere of careful planning and orderliness; often they are spontaneous and as such often untidy and tempestuous.

- (2) That the duty of the leadership is to discern the positive aspects of the struggle and give direction along lines that will lead to greater unity and strength and to discourage constructively evidences of action and attitudes that are patently unwise and detrimental to the cause, such as violence or sectionalism.
- (3) That it is unwise to allow the enthusiasm of the people to make them undertake actions that are beyond their strength at any given stage.
- (4) That human reactions do not always follow a set logical pattern especially when it is brought about by the strains and stresses of life. The tendency is to vent one's feelings directly on objects or persons one thinks are the cause or are associated with the cause of one's suffering. Leaders should be on the look out for situations likely to cause such reactions.
- (5) That a systematic and consistent appeal should be made to the public for financial support to help meet the overwhelming needs of the struggle such as:
  - (a) Engaging fulltime, paid workers. The work is too vast to be carried out effectively and efficiently by part-time or voluntary workers. Voluntary workers should be there but only as a supplement to full-time paid workers.
  - (b) Production of educational material to help politicise the people. Ignorance of Congress policy results in confusion and conflict.

## WHY ARE THE WOMEN ALONE IN THESE DEMONSTRATIONS?

It is not uncommon for women to goad their menfolk to action by deriding them or by taking the initiative in acting.

Men should positively and constructively meet this women's challenge. But more to the point about women is that it is they, especially in African homes, who bear the brunt of facing daily the poverty of the home, since it falls on women to prepare food for the family and to see that children are clothed.

Why should Government circles be surprised to find African women in these demonstrations, concerning themselves with such issues as low wages, influx control regulations, increased taxation? Women are hit hard by poverty arising out of these. Men's silence and inaction to protest against these grievances is shaming us, men. Men are supposed to be the traditional protectors and fenders for their family's welfare. What about it, African men?

## A REPLY TO SOME OFFICIAL CHARGES

It is idle for Government spokesmen to indulge in blaming the leaders of the Liberation Movement, especially the African National Congress leaders and workers as instigators of the present African women's demonstrations and the disturbances that have accompanied them.

The duty of the Government is to take steps to remove the causes of the grievances. The women have given them fully and clearly.

The African National Congress has no intention of abandoning its leadership of the African people in their struggle for freedom and

democracy. In a situation created by the present demonstrations of women it cannot be indifferent to these demonstrations. That is why the A.N.C. and its allies have come in to attempt to give guidance and direction to all Africans concerned with the demonstrations. To do otherwise the A.N.C. would be acting most irresponsibly.

The policy of maintaining White supremacy is incompatible with the official assertion that what the Government does is eminently in the interest of the African.

- (a) The pass system, in its wide ramifications, ensures the white Government full control over the Africans with the most tragic results to his welfare and progress:
  - (i) thousands of Africans a year are in some ways victims of the pass system.
  - (ii) influx control regulations deny him a free opportunity of seeking for work in urban areas. It canalises African labour to centres of cheap labour on the mines and farms.
- (b) How can underpaying African workers, to the point where 70% of them live below breadline, be in the African's interest?
- (c) A Bantustan system that:
  - ii (i) will throw 60% to 70% of the peasants off the land without providing them with any new sources of employment,
  - i (ii) will re-allocate land to peasant farmers with no prospect of a peasant making a gross income of over £120 a year at the very most,
  - (iii) will render millions of Africans in white areas, towns and farms, stateless and rightless,
  - (iv) will fraudulently put forward a so-called partition of South Africa that nobody wants,
  - i (v) institutes a system of tribal rule that makes African Chiefs, contrary to tradition, autocrats and virtually nothing more than instruments of their people's oppression.

In honesty, can it be said that such a Bantustan is in our interest?

What is wrong in principle cannot be right in practice! So all apartheid laws based as they are on the maxim: "Separate and unequal" in favour of the whites can never be in the interest of the non-whites.

**WE ARE NOT WITHOUT POWER TO MAKE THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA A PLACE WHERE SUCH FRAUDS AS THE APARTHEID LAWS SHALL NOT BE.**

We may have no rights to bring about the desired South Africa through the ballot box but if we marshal our buying power and labour power, we may induce white South Africa to mend its ways. AFRICANS: Sons and daughters of Africa, so long as there are such laws in the statute books of the Union, with much suffering and misery flowing from their operation, I invite you all to join the African National Congress and struggle for your Liberation. I pledge myself to be with you in the fight until Freedom is won.

Long live the African National Congress!  
Afrika! Mayibuye!