

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE CONFERENCE

OF THE ALL AFRICAN CONVENTION MEETING AT

BLOEMFONTEIN on the 17th - 18th December, 1951.

Once again at the end of yet another year the ALL AFRICAN CONVENTION meets in Conference here at Bloemfontein - once again we invite public attention to the fact that we are the true Parliament of South Africa. We are the builders of the true South African Nation - a Nation free from race prejudice and hatred, free from hunger and poverty - a young, virile, fearless Nation "conceived in Liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

We meet here to-day under the most distressing and disconcerting circumstances, when the Herrenvolk are sparing neither efforts nor funds to commemorate their subjugation and humiliation of us during the past 300 years. The orgy is euphemistically called "The Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Celebrations." It has been more accurately described as the "Jan van Riebeeck Festival of Hate." At every street corner we meet persons, whose only claim to a knowledge of South African History is the colour of their skins, brazenly prating about how the white man brought civilisation, peace and happiness to the Black man in this country. To add insult to injury the Non-Europeans are being invited to participate in the celebration of their own enslavement.

It was only two years ago that our ears were plagued with similar lies on the occasion of the Voortrekker Centenary Celebrations. It would seem that the ruling class is frightened by the efforts of the Non-Europeans to free themselves and needs must use every available opportunity to make festivals designed to pump Dutch Courage into the waning spirits of the Herrenvolk. It is high time that the Non-Europeans exposed the historical lies that are being bruited about by the Herrenvolk and their agents. I therefore make no apology for devoting the greater part of this address to a historical analysis with a view to putting South African history in its correct perspective.

Herrenvolk historians represent South African history as the story of the growth of a trading station into a Colony and then into an independent and self-governing dominion. This conception of South African history is so grossly inadequate as to amount to a distortion of the facts. It completely ignores the existence of the vast indigenous Non-white majority of the population for whom South Africa was never a trading station but was always a home and for whom talk of having achieved independence and self-government is a sheer mockery.

The assinine refusal to recognise the political existence of the Non-whites is typical of the Herrenvolk of South Africa and has given rise to the policy of Segregation or Apartheid. Having failed to effect the physical extinction of the Africans, as they did the Abatwa (or what they call the Bush-men), the Europeans in South Africa are bent on pursuing a policy of political annihilation. The only time the African is acknowledged to exist is when he has to labour or to perform menial tasks for the white man boss. As soon as his services are not required he must be kept out of sight and out of mind in a poverty-stricken and disease-ridden urban or rural location, there to waste away and die.

South African history may more adequately be described as the story of the military conquest and dispossession, of the social ostracism and the political and economic enslavement of the indigenous African inhabitants of this country by European invaders. The most significant thing about South African history is that a handful of whites occupy 80% of the land and for the last 300 years have been and still are sitting on the backs of millions of starving, illiterate Blacks without let or hindrance. That is, in fact, what the Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Celebrations commemorate. It will be worth-while briefly to expand the definition of South African history which I have given above.

THE MILITARY CONQUEST AND DISPOSSESSION.

It must be remembered that when the Europeans first came to this country.....

country had neither land nor cattle nor wives. However, they lost no time in getting all these from the people they contemptuously called the Hottentots. Nor were they particular as to the methods they employed to their ends. Their first act in setting foot on our land was to dispossess the inhabitants at Table Bay. Theft, looting and murder became rampant. In after days we were to hear much of the thieving propensities of the indigenous peoples of South Africa. Cattle-stealing was given as the reason for the wars between them and the Whites, wars that led to the dispossession of their land. But the peculiar thing is that you never hear of a single ship-load of cattle - not even a single cow - that was ever landed on our shores. The question is: where did these cattle come from that the indigenous peoples were stealing from the Whites?

Having got a foothold in Table Bay, the boers pushed gradually eastward, wiping out the Abatwa (called by them the Bushmen), who, being a hunting people, were not in well-organised communities to afford effective resistance. Step by step the invaders pushed back the more formidable and well-organised tribes of what they called the Hottentots, whom they could not conquer. These people, retreated, but their central power was not broken. Sections of the weaker tribes were conquered and these were armed and used against the more powerful. It was a protracted struggle.

In the region of the Fish River the Boers encountered the still more determined resistance of the Bantu. In the clash that followed, the Boers were driven back and were forced to live with the Africans as neighbours and equals. If the Cape had not been taken over by the British the Boers would either have been absorbed, subjugated or exterminated by the Blacks.

To illustrate my point two examples will suffice. I consider this necessary, for I know that even some Non-Europeans themselves may raise their eyebrows at this statement, so great has been the insidious effect of the Great Lie masquerading as history.

At the turn of the century, Klaas Stuurman, who had been overcome by the Boers and armed with the express purpose of assisting them against the Ama-Xhosa, broke away with 150 of his men fully armed and settled near Ndhlambe, whom he regarded as an ally. A force of 300 Boers were sent against him. For the first time the Boers were matched with equal arms and though he had only a force of half the strength, Stuurman completely routed the Boers on June 27th, 1799. The effect of this defeat was felt throughout the colony. Many of the previously defeated tribes began to rally and the slaves, too became restive. The British, while blaming the Dutch for bringing the trouble on themselves, considered it necessary to come to their rescue. The leadership was taken over by the British, who organised all their resources: the British regiments, the Dutch commandoes, the missionaries and their proteges i.e. the remnants of broken tribes. Ndhlambe joined Stuurman and together they fought the combined forces of the invaders. The issue ended in a stalemate. Needless to say, the British were later to achieve their ends by more subtle methods.

The second illustration of my point belongs to the period of the Voortrekkers. The first two Trek parties, led by Van Rensburg and Trichardt, came to grief. Van Rensburg's people were wiped out in the lower Limpopo valley, while Trichardt retreated to Delagoa Bay, where he and his survivors were shipped to Natal. Later, Potgieter, Cilliers and the Liebenbergs with their parties crossed the Orange River to the North. On the way the Liebenbergs were wiped out by the Matabele on the north bank of the Vaal. Potgieter and his party narrowly escaped the same fate. In a clash with the Matabele he lost all his cattle and food and was left with only his oxen-less waggons on the barren veld. Thus stranded, he was faced with certain extinction. But from this fate he was saved by a peculiar circumstance. The Barolong, at the instigation of the Wesleyan missionary, Archbell, who had been planted in their midst, came to the rescue. For the days the rescue parties worked to bring the Boers with their women and children and their waggons into Thaba Nchu, where they received succour from the Baralong. Those were the days when White and Black fought as man to man and when the Blacks, moved by a spirit of humanity, could succour the men women and children of a defeated White tribe.

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It is to the British rather than the Boers that the Whites owe their dominant position in South Africa to-day. The British overcame the Blacks because they adopted the policy of "divide and rule" and pitted one section of the non-Whites against the other. As a contemporary missionary expressed it, referring to a dark page in the early history of the Xhosas: "We used Gaika as long as he served us. When he failed to conquer Ndhlabi, we did so ourselves and then took Gaika's country." A remarkable feature of the frontier wars was the courage and resilience of the Non-Whites in face of superior arms. I would like also to emphasise the fact that the Bantu and the so-called "Hottentots" often fought as allies against the White invader. Those Africans who are wont to speak disparagingly of the "Hottentots" would do well to remember this.

This section is not complete without reference to the direct and indirect role played by the missionaries in the conquest and subjugation of the non-whites. If they were not urging the "Hottentots" to assist the whites against the Bantu, they were disarming the Bantu and telling them of the advantages of surrendering themselves and their lands to the White rulers in the name of the Bible. It does the missionaries less than justice to say, as most white South Africans do, that they were meddling and worked against the true interests of White South Africa. The reverse is the case.

The basic aim of all these wars against the indigenous peoples of South Africa was the seizure of land and the dispossession of the people. Three stages in this process of land-grabbing can be observed. At first the motive was to use the land at the coastal belt to grow crops to supply ships passing to and from the East. Cattle were also necessary for meat supplies. In the second stage, as the Whites penetrated to the East and the interior, more and more land was required for animal husbandry, the rearing of cattle and sheep. The export of hides, skins and wool steadily increased, making the White farmers wealthy. In the third period, beginning with the discovery of diamonds and gold, the prime motive of conquest and land-grabbing was the dispossession of the Africans in order to provide a vast supply of cheap labour. By the end of the 19th century the British had completed the conquest of the peoples of South Africa.

It is not for us here to go into the rivalry between Boer and Briton. The fact is, the Boers proceeded to stake a claim in the conquered land (which into the bargain contained the precious stones) and to declare themselves independent of the British. Thus the lion and the ox came into collision. Throughout the Boer War many of our people helped the British. But having once defeated the Boers, the British sat at a round table with their erstwhile foes and drew up a peace treaty, while their Black allies were now thrust outside like enemies. The strangest thing about this Boer War is that the vanquished reaped such rich rewards for their defeat. The Boers had been ruined by the war and the British conquerors now paid millions of pounds in reparations to the vanquished Boers. They gave them sixteen and a half million pounds in order to rehabilitate them; in addition to this they subsequently subsidized the farmers to the tune of millions of pounds. And not only that, they reinstated the Boers and gave them political power over the Blacks. Thus in 1910, by the Act of Union, Boer and Briton sat in Parliament to the exclusion of all Non-Europeans. The stage was now fully set for the next step in the dispossession of the peoples of South Africa.

POLITICAL. AND ECONOMIC ENSLAVEMENT:

From the time in 1672 that Jan van Riebeeck "bought" on credit but never paid for, or in short, stole the land of those they called "Hottentots" from that time up to the present day the White ruler has never had respect for the proprietary rights of the Black man and thinks nothing of depriving him thereof on the slightest pretext. The present day expropriation of Non-Whites in town and country is in the traditional style of the Herrenvolk these last 300 years.

As with land so with cattle. The black man's cattle have always been an irresistible temptation to the White man since the day in Table Bay when Jan van Riebeeck looked covetously at the cattle of the so-called "Hottentot." The method of acquisition adopted by the colonists was vividly described at first hand by Dr. Philip in 1832. Describing the evils of the Commando system (which has been provocatively revived by the Malan Government) he said:

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"The pretence (the pretext) is the predatory habits of the caffres, stealing the cattle of the colonists. Any lying Boer has only to go to a military post and say he has lost so many cattle. A commando is immediately got up. No affidavit is required, no proof as to the number said to be stolen..... The first caffre cattle the commando comes upon the spoor of, the cattle are seized... If the caffres resist they are shot dead upon the spot, as if they were dogs. On such evidence they have been declared to be a nation of thieves robbed of their cattle, their only means of support, and from time to time of their country." Later all pretence of a claim of right was cast to the winds and plain rapine was let loose among the unfortunate Africans. Even a lieutenant Governor Stockenstrom at that time was moved to protest that the Government policy was "worse than Commandos", which at least professed to recover stolen property. This, on the contrary, allowed thefts and murder by men who (as was said) never lost nor possessed a cow or a shilling."

It is true that to-day the more civilised type of robbery called culling is employed, but the effect is the same. "If the caffres resist they are shot dead upon the spot as if they were dogs". Thus was it testified in the early 19th century. To-day the massacre of Witzienshoek is in the direct line of succession to the Commando tradition of last century.

We have said that military conquest was followed by political and economic enslavement. Let us indicate the nature of the so-called "progress" that the Herrenvolk intend so proudly to celebrate, by giving in brief outline the many laws that have been passed against the Non-Europeans since the Act of Union. They are a monument to the thoroughness with which the Herrenvolk set about their task.

- Remember that the Act of Union itself, in 1910, took away from all Non-Europeans the right to sit in Parliament. The following year, 1911 - they passed the Native Labour Regulation Act. This inaugurated the migratory labour system for the mines. The same year, 1911 - The Mines and Works Act. This instituted the Colour Bar on the Mines, confining the Africans to unskilled operations.
- 1913 - The Land Act, forbidding Africans to buy land except in the Reserves and also forbidding squatters on White farms. I don't need to describe to you the devastation that this Act caused amongst the Africans. Note that there was a lull in legislation during the first World War, as there was to be during the second. Non-Europeans were required in the war effort.
- 1918 - The Factories Act. This was the extension of the mines' Colour Bar to cover industry.
- 1922 - The Apprenticeship Act. This had the effect of excluding Non-European youth from apprenticeship into skilled trades.
- 1923 - The Urban Areas Act. This meant the control and regimentation of Black workers in the towns. This Act has been amended again and again with a view to tightening the regulations.
- 1924 - Industrial Conciliation Act. With this Act the Non-European unions were ousted from the trade union body politic. African trade unions became illegal. In the same year,
- 1924 - The "Civilised Labour Policy" was instituted. This rehabilitated the Poor Whites by ousting the Non-Europeans from semi-skilled and unskilled labour. In the same year,
- 1924 - Wage Acts gave State protection to the living standards of all White Workers only.
- 1925 - Native Taxation and Development Act. In other words, the Poll Tax drove the Africans from the land to work in the mines, on the White farms and in the towns.
- 1932 - Native Labour Contract Act. This is the old Masters and Servant Act, amended many times since the 18th Century and now brought up to date.
- 1934 - and subsequent years - The Workmen's compensation Act and others are passed providing inferior or no compensation for injured Africans, the removal of unemployment benefits, and so on.
- 1936 - The notorious Hertzog Acts, meant to "settle the Native Question once and for all;" The Native Representation Act, the Native Trust and Land Act, and in the following year the Amendment to the Urban Areas Act.

So on and on. With the passing of the Hertzog Bills in 1936, the Herrenvolk thought it could turn safely to deal with the other sections of the Non-Europeans. In the 1940s, after a short lull owing to the war, in which the services of the Non-Europeans had been enlisted, the rulers intensified their efforts.

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Now we have the Pegging Act for the more complete segregation of the Indians, limiting their trading rights, restricting their right to buy land, and relegating them to bazaars and ghettos. For the Coloured there was the C.A.C. and the C.A.D. the counterparts of the Native Representative Council and the Native Affairs Department. For the Africans, too, there was more to come. The Rehabilitation Scheme was launched, which to this day is bringing untold misery on the people.

Then in quick succession there followed the Population Registration Act, which introduces a pass system for all Non-Europeans - for it is they who will suffer under the Act; then the Group Areas Act, which will legalise expropriation and drive the Non-Europeans out of the towns into separate racial pens, leaving all the big towns and the best residential areas to the Europeans. To get a picture of what the effects of this law may be, one has only to take a look at the Orange Free State, which has been from time immemorial a "group area". The whole of the Free State, except for a tiny strip, the Reserve in Thaba Nchu, is a White Group area. The vast farms, the best in South Africa, and all the towns belong to the Whites. No Non-European has a right to live or buy property there. He can only occupy a house in a location with the permission of the authorities and not by right of birth. This, then, is the meaning of "group areas" at its best. The present Act would turn the whole of the Union of South Africa into a vast Orange Free State, into a system of racial pens known as Group Areas.

The last session of Parliament has seen the passing of the Bantu Authorities Act, which seeks to atomise the African into separate tribal units - a gross anachronism in an industrial age; then an Act to prohibit African builders from performing skilled work in towns. We may add here that there is much talk among "honourable" members of the Cabinet about "protecting" the White skilled and semi-skilled workers from competition from Coloured workers. So we may expect a Bill in the near future, restricting them also to building only in their "group areas." Finally, there is the Coloured Disfranchisement Act, which throws the Coloured people, lock, stock and barrel out of the body politic and takes from them^{the} last vestige of citizenship.

As if this piling of Act upon Act for the political and economic enslavement of the Non-Europeans were not enough, they must needs add the final insult with their Immorality Acts and Mixed Marriages Acts. Having deprived a whole people of every human right, how easy it is to subject them to such humiliation. And these men, ladies and gentlemen, who fill the statute book with such laws, call themselves the representatives of the Union of South Africa. These are the legislators of our country! This monumental achievement is what the Herrenvolk hope to bequeath to their children and their children's children.

This, then, is the sum of the "progress" that they are going to celebrate, the "progress" of 300 years. It is the triumphant conquest and dispossession of the peoples of South Africa. It is the seizure of the land that once belonged to the peoples of South Africa. It is the seizure of all political power in their own hands to the exclusion of all Non-Europeans - a power that can be, and is, used for the economic strangulation of the dispossessed. It is the humiliation, degradation and deprivation in every sphere of a whole people. This is what they are going to celebrate! And this is what they are calling upon the Non-Europeans to join in celebrating. Only knaves, only the shameless, the soul-less, the spineless and the politically degenerate amongst us will offer themselves for service in these Herrenvolk celebrations.

WE BUILD A NATION.

For us the issues are clear. We pose the tasks that lie before the liberatory movement, tasks that are crying out to be solved. Let us assess, too, the small but valuable achievements we have already made. From the outset we have to admit that our progress on the road of freedom has been all too slow. We must emphasise that this is not the time for complacent self-congratulation. It is the time for **critical** self-examination. When we look at the avalanche of legislation that is engulfing us, when we perceive the galloping poverty that is overtaking us, we are moved to exclaim: "Where are the men and women of Africa?" Take a look at the state of our organisations. Can we truly say that they are representative of the mass of people? Are they not tiny, puny, starveling organisations when measured by the size of the African population? It is time that every single delegate in this hall vowed to himself: "I shall not rest until the majority in my district are drawn into the fold of the people's organisation." Then can we say that we are ready to shoulder the tasks that lie before us. It is our immediate and most urgent task to gear up the machinery of our struggle.

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This does not mean to say that we have not registered some small but significant gains and I shall briefly refer to two of them. In the first place we have succeeded in placing the struggle on a principled basis - the 10 - Point Programme. In the past our people's organisations have suffered because the people had no measuring rod whereby they could distinguish between those who were really fighting for their freedom and those who merely paid lip service to the struggle while they were actually the oppressors' henchmen. The leaders indulged in all sorts of opportunistic adventures and the people just followed blindly and without question. It is amazing to think that it is only at the end of 300 years of oppression that the Non-Europeans are discovering the real nature of their struggle and are evolving a fighting programme of principles.

The second significant gain of the liberatory movement is the fact that more and more intellectuals are taking an active part in discussing our principles. It has been well said that the study of politics flourishes most when an active participation in public affairs has been the common lot of the educated classes. The Non-European liberatory movement has now reached that stage. Ten years ago Non-European intellectuals regarded politics as the exclusive affair of white gentlemen and black cranks (or crooks?), so they had no inclination to dabble in it. This was, of course an attitude of mind deliberately fostered by the ruling class in order to abort the national liberatory movement or else to retard its growth. The educated classes were encouraged to take a pride in their lily-white profession and not allow themselves to be tainted by "dirty" politics. But that outlook has now fallen on evil days. The Non-White intellectuals, particularly the teachers, have joined in the struggle. There has been a sharp conflict of ideas and a furious battle is raging within the teachers' associations. This conflict has happily been placed on a proper ideological plane and the issues have been reduced to a fight between reactionaries and the progressives. We are quite confident that the progressives will win the day.

With greater numbers of Non-White intellectuals entering the political arena we have to be careful to see that the struggle is waged along principled lines. We have to be careful, for instance, that the National Liberatory struggle does not become, as some liberals scornfully allege that it is, "an emotional affinity between Africans based on colour." Our struggle is not based on emotion and colour but on reason and principle. We fight for the freedom of one section as against another but for the freedom of the whole nation. And by the nation we mean, as the N.E.U.M. has so aptly put it in its Declaration To The People of South Africa, "the people who were born in South Africa and who have no other country but South Africa as their mother-land. They may have been born with a black skin or with a brown one, a yellow one or a white one; they may be male or female; they may be young, middle-aged or of an advanced age; they may be short or tall, fat or lean; they may be long-headed or round-headed, straight-haired or curly haired; they may have long noses or broad noses; they may speak Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, English or Afrikaans, Hindu, Urdu or Swahili, Arabic or Jewish; they may be Christians, Mohammedans, Buddhists, or of any other faith. So long as they are born of a mother and belong to the human species, so long as they are not lunatics or incurable criminals, they all have an equal title to be citizens of South Africa, members of the nation with the same rights, privileges and duties..."

As we, the chosen leaders of the millions of our people meet in Conference to-day let us put aside all pettiness and vainglory; let us make a careful study of the problems that face us and arrive at suitable solutions in a spirit of high seriousness as becomes men and women fighting for the great cause of human freedom and happiness. Let Bloemfontein to-day be as a beacon of light beckoning to the millions of non-Whites toiling in the dark valley of the shadow of death. Let us leave no doubt in the minds of the Herrenvolk that neither imprisonment nor fines, neither whippings nor spare diets, nor indeed any of the wicked agencies devised by a ruling class to crush the spirit of the oppressed, will ever deter us from pursuing the path which we have pledged ourselves to follow the path of liberation. And let us leave this place w armed with the will to fight with undaunted courage for land and liberty.

"Say not the struggle nought availeth,
The labour and wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
As things have been they remain.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back through creeks and inlets making
Comes, silent, flooding in, the main!"

Yes! if we persist in our course the main will indeed come flooding in.

In conclusion let us quote once again from the Declaration To The People Of South Africa:

"The Herrenvolk are waging war upon the Non-Europeans, and if we want to survive as free human beings we have to win this war. We can win it only if we are prepared to fight, to bear sacrifices and submit to discipline in the national cause. Even without arms, with the only weapon at our disposal - Non-Collaboration - we can win.

"But in order to achieve victory,

We have got to build the Nation.

We have got to build the Unity of the Nation.

We have got to put the Quislings beyond the pale of the Nation.

We have got to mobilise every capable man and woman into active local organisations.

We have got to bring the organised workers, the trade Unions, into the national organisations.

We have got to co-ordinate the work of town and country."

Thus does the N.E.U.M. to which we are affiliated pinpoint the path of liberation, and who of us will say he has not been offered an opportunity to make his or her individual contribution to the struggle ahead.

It is for the purpose of working out ways and means to carry out this great task that we have met here to-day.
