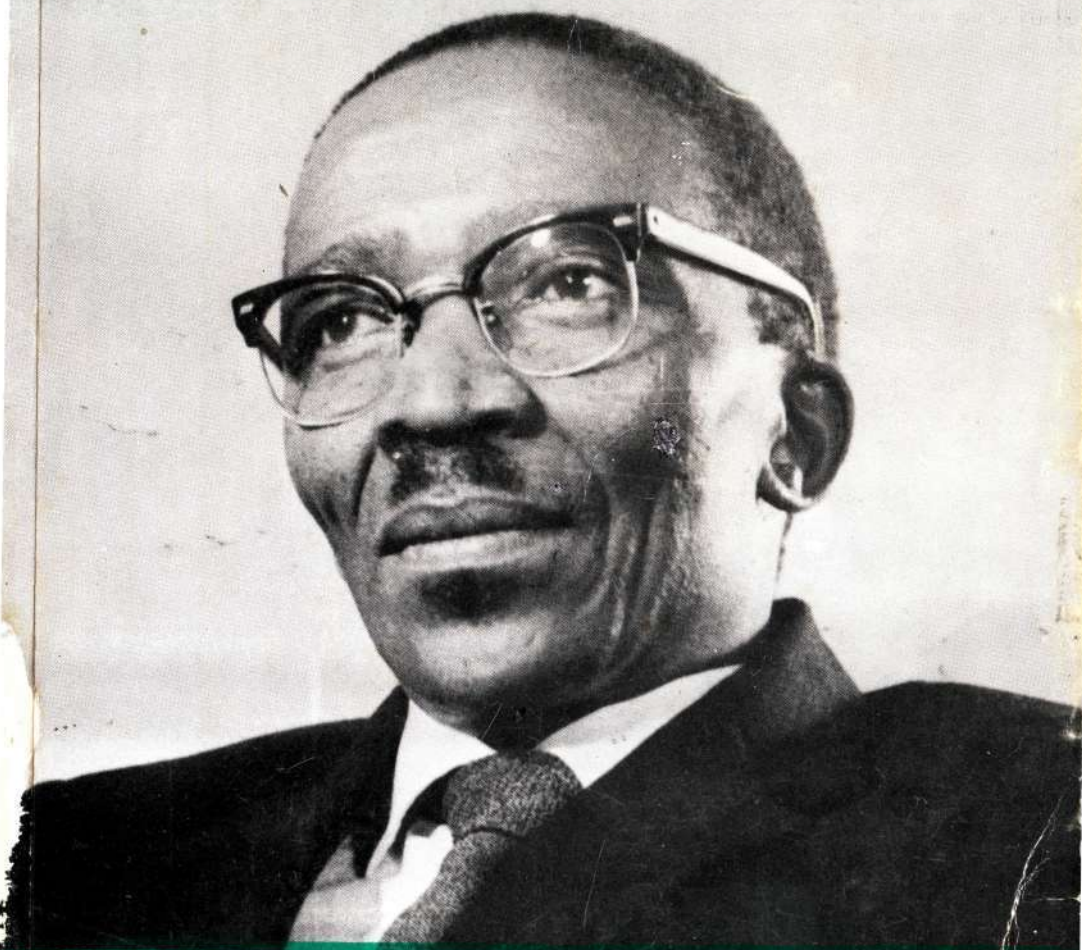


THE AWAKENING OF A PEOPLE



I. B. Tabata

The Awakening of a People

by I. B. Tabata

with an introduction

by D. Taylor

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Introduction

When *The Awakening of A People* was first published in 1950, it was intended for the clarification of the real issues facing the Black masses of South Africa and serve as a guide to action. It was circulated almost entirely within the country itself. Now today the eyes of the world are focussed on South Africa. Many people want to know what the Black people are fighting for, i.e. what is the exact goal of their struggles. They want to know what are the respective political positions of the various organisations engaged in the struggle. This book answers these and other questions, and in the light of the past illuminates the present-day activities of these various organisations. It provides a key to their political positions and the direction they must of necessity take. For those basic political positions remain unchanged.

There is in existence – but banned in South Africa – a considerable body of literature, books, pamphlets, speeches, polemics, that was created in the course of the early campaigns of the liberatory movement in South Africa from the early forties to the sixties; for the battle of ideas was at the same time a focal point amongst the intellectuals. Tabata was one of a militant vanguard that entered the national struggle of the Blacks at a time when the upheavals preceding the second inter-imperialist world war were quickening liberatory ideas amongst the oppressed of many countries.

It is clear from the way this militant vanguard posed the fundamental tasks and problems of the struggle, the necessity for the people first to understand the exact nature of South African society and the forces of oppression, that they grasped the dynamic of an unfolding revolutionary process in South Africa. It is manifest in their clearly defined policy and programme, in their rejection of inferiority and the whole machinery of segregation (apartheid) elaborated in a system of laws against the Blacks. Their programme for full democratic rights for all men and women, irrespective of race, colour or creed, was accurately defined as a minimum Ten-Point Programme and included the all-important demand of land for the peasantry.

The Awakening of a People at once records in detail and epitomises the outlook and activities of the militant vanguard and its impact on the people, marking a turning-point in the history of the struggle by setting it on an independent road. It analyses new concepts and methods of struggle; how they rejected reliance on any section of the ruling-class to “help” the oppressed Blacks; how they based their plan of action on the recognition that in South Africa, a capitalist society, the basic struggle is a class struggle where oppressor and oppressed are in irreconcilable conflict. They exposed racialism, not only between the Blacks and the small white aristocracy of labour but also between Africans, Coloureds and Indians, as a function of class exploitation. The struggle of all the Blacks (they argued) was not to be spent in protesting against this or that racial law, or seeking concessions from the Government. No one section could liberate itself at the expense of another. The struggle is for the overthrow of the whole exploitive system that holds them

all in chains. Above all — at the very core of their argument — unity is essential to the waging of what must be a protracted struggle against oppressors who practice every device of “divide and rule”.

Now Tabata views the formation of The All-African Convention as a most important step in the political development of the Blacks. When the Africans, the majority section of the Blacks, had been confronted in 1936 with three Slave Bills devised by a Fusion Government of Hertzog-Smuts to deprive them of the very last vestige of political rights, they came together for the first time in their history, uniting all African organisations in a fighting body totally rejecting the Bills. The oldest organisation, the African National Congress, was also a member. Its conservative leaders, however, who were strongly attached by tradition to the white liberal bourgeoisie, were persuaded to compromise with the Government and virtually betrayed the decisions of a united people by agreeing to “give the Acts a trial”. They had proceeded to run dummy (segregated) elections under the fraudulent “Native Representation Act” whereby three white judas-goats (as they were called) represented the African masses in a whites-only parliament of 150.

One of the first tasks of the militant vanguard had been the regeneration of the All-African Convention. Assessing its political potential, Tabata writes: “This form of organisation, uniting a whole people, cleared the way for a national outlook, the logical outcome of this particular stage of development.” And such an outlook “constitutes the first stage of a threat to white domination.” His book records how in 1943 the All-African Convention issued a call for a still wider unity, the unity of all sections of the Blacks. Together with the National Anti-C.A.D. a progressive organisation federating many Coloured groups throughout South Africa, the Convention laid the foundations of the Non-European Unity Movement, now known as the Unity Movement of South Africa. The name had been chosen to signify the unity of the Blacks, amongst whom racial barriers had been assiduously fostered. But the Movement specifically declared itself to be anti-segregationist, not anti-white. Its very programme and policy implied total rejection of racialism. The Preliminary Unity Conference was held in December, 1943. The All-in National Conference, January 1945, was attended by delegates from 150 organisations representing all sections of the Blacks. But the African National Congress, whose conservative leaders had withdrawn all their branches from the Convention, refused to join this unity. So did the main bodies of the South African Indian Congress, dominated as it was by the merchant class, whose stated policy was one of compromise with the Smuts Government.

The Unity Movement, on the basis of its Ten-Point Programme for full democratic rights for all and its policy of non-collaboration with the oppressors, i.e. rejection of all segregated institutions for an inferior race, proceeded to launch campaigns in the cities, the rural areas and amongst the African peasantry in the Reserves. The organisers found a keen response from the peasantry on the burning question of landlessness and village committees were formed in their determination to resist the enforcement of a new fraud imposed on them by pro-Government chiefs, namely the Rehabilitation Scheme. Likewise round the campaign for the boycott of dummy elections under the “Native Representation Act” they posed the basic problem of the struggle for full democratic rights. And again,

addressing a group of young urban workers and intellectuals, members of the Society of Young Africa affiliated to the Convention, on *The Agrarian Problem: Landlessness as a Means of Exploitation*, Tabata stated: "Two main problems lie before us . . . They are the agrarian problem and the national problem. The one is intimately related to the other and their solution is likewise linked." He put it to them that the problems of the workers could not be solved independently of that of the landless peasants; and the peasants had to learn too, that their struggle was linked to that of the workers. Thus the Convention and the Unity Movement, by putting into action this fundamental political line and employing the revolutionary slogan: "Land and Liberty", gradually activated sectors of the peasantry, the workers and the intellectuals, thus increasing their awareness of the tasks demanded by their objective situation.

Twenty years later (1963) Tabata was to sum up this particular stage of political development of the Blacks in a Memorandum presented on behalf of the All-African Convention and the Unity Movement to the Liberation Committee of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

"The struggle as conceived by the All-African Convention and the Unity Movement in 1943 compelled them to insist on the maximum unity of all the organisations representing the different layers of society. From the outset they foresaw that in the given South African conditions it would not be possible for a herrenvolk Government peacefully to grant the demands of the oppressed people. . . . It is a question of a fundamental struggle against a whole system of oppression. The whole of South African society has to be reorganised from top to bottom, i.e. politically, economically, socially. It is these aims that dictate our whole approach to the vital question of UNITY; our approach to the form of organisation that is necessary and our insistence on the independence of the struggle."

The Memorandum stated further: "The question of unity has been the cardinal point in the Movement in South Africa for twenty years, especially as the struggle began to grow in intensity."

Here he refers to the battle for unity that emerged as the result of two different outlooks and therefore two opposing policies between the older conservative leaders controlling the African National Congress and the leaders of the Unity Movement. As has often been said, there is nothing the rulers fear so much as the unity of all the oppressed and they had agents to hand to disrupt, if not to destroy, the Unity Movement, the success of whose policies amongst the Blacks alarmed both sections of the ruling class, i.e. the English-speaking representatives of imperialist interests in South Africa controlling the gold mines and much of industry on the one hand, and on the other the Nationalist Afrikaners, descendants of the Boers. It was in 1948 that the white electorate voted into power this fascist wing, the Nationalists, who ruthlessly applied extreme apartheid measures for the regimentation of all Black labour and created a complex political situation where, in the late fifties, the liberal bourgeoisie together with the Communist Party of South Africa, embroiled a section of the Blacks in their vain attempt to unseat the Nationalists. Thus were the oppressed betrayed "by becoming involved in a conflict not their own." But this is to anticipate events. At the moment we are concerned with the

tactic to disrupt the growth of Unity Movement ideas on the basis of which the oppressed had begun to take action.

What better tactic than to set up a counter unity? Once more "divide and rule" There is a particularly interesting chapter in *The Awakening Of A People* analysing the role of the Communist Party of South Africa in wooing Congress leaders to form now one ad hoc unity and now another. Later they were to set up a Congress Alliance, which included also the leaders of the South African Indian Congress, a small Coloured group, a white liberal group and members of the C.P. itself. Both Congress leaderships represented the ambitions of an incipient Black petit-bourgeoisie. Thus it was inevitable for them to pursue an opportunist political line of collaboration with a section of the ruling class. As we have said, it was an old tradition for the leaders of the African National Congress to adhere to the liberal bourgeoisie.

It can be said that *The Awakening Of A People*, which analyses the two divergent policies, took shape in the very midst of the struggle of the Unity Movement on two fronts: against the Government and against the line of political opportunism. Tabata was deeply concerned with the education of the youth, and indeed the discussions he had had with his young kinsman, Nelson Mandela, at that time a member of the Congress Youth League, on the very subject of the necessity for a principled basis for organisational unity (See *Letter to Mandela*, 1948) — obviously prompted Tabata to expand the formulation of the problems involved, into a book. The youth were clamouring for action but were dangerously ignorant of the past — and present — role of the conservative opportunist leaders, to whom the ruling-class press gave full publicity. In the pamphlet: "Boycott as Weapon of Struggle" Tabata challenged the young intellectuals: "Make your choice: with the Government, against the people, or with the people against the Government." The former is the logic of blindly following the path of political opportunism — "the canker that has claimed the greatest toll of all our organisations up to the present day," as he said also to Mandela.

Subsequently, in a letter to George Padmore, then in England and an associate of the young Kwame Nkrumah, he further explained his purpose in writing *The Awakening Of A People*: "I had also to bear in mind the *continuity* of the struggle . . . I would like to feel that the coming generation will have before them a tradition of principled struggle which they in turn will uphold . . . In clarifying the past, the book is concerned with the present and the future conduct of the struggle." The continuity of the struggle, the absolute necessity for a principled unity, the betrayals of political opportunism that (as he has said) in South Africa set back the struggle for decades and continues as actively outside to the present day — these are fundamental questions as provocative and urgent now as they were when *The Awakening Of A People* was written. Already in South Africa the book opened the eyes of many to the real political situation, proving to be a veritable arsenal of ideas, carried throughout the country. By 1960 so stubborn was the resistance of the African peasantry in the Reserves in spite of the most vicious measures to suppress the Movement, the surrounding of villages by police and army forces, mass arrests, the burning of crops and homes, that the Government declared martial law and to this day rules the Bantustans — so-called "homelands" — through puppet chiefs and violence. In 1962, in a period of mounting

crisis and still more repressive measures, the Unity Movement took a further step by establishing the African People's Democratic Union Of Southern Africa (A.P.D.U.S.A.). In his presidential address to the first national conference Tabata made clear the revolutionary perspective of the Movement in the following statement: "The democratic demands and aspirations of the oppressed workers and peasants shall be paramount in the orientation of the A.P.D.U.S.A. in both its short-term and its long-term objectives."

Now it was always the practice at the national conferences of the Convention and the Unity Movement to view the struggle of the oppressed in South Africa in its international setting, as an integral part of a historical process taking place not only in Africa but on a world scale in every continent, the global struggle between two social systems: capitalism-imperialism in decay and socialism that is still struggling to be born. Rooted as Tabata is in the concepts of historical materialism, this approach illuminates every speech and all of his many articles throughout ten years of exile with all the frustrations inevitable in a period of neo-colonialism in Africa. From a speech he gave in London (1966) on: "Rhodesia: A New Stage in the Struggle in Southern Africa", we quote two statements: "Smith has set in motion a train of events the scope and power of which he has no conception . . . We are witnessing a process of a continuous unfolding of revolution on a continental scale. Indeed this process is taking place throughout the world, in the continents of Asia, Latin America and in Africa. The imperialists know this and must do everything in their power to counter it. . ." Secondly, his argument aims to establish "the prime importance of South Africa in the imperialist plans on the one hand, i.e. as a bastion of imperialism, and on the other hand the prime importance of a South African revolution in the plans of the progressive forces in Africa."

And now in two of his recent articles: *Industrial Unrest In South Africa*, and: *Imperialism and the Liberation Movements in Africa*, Tabata is acutely aware that as a new phase in the objective situation is opening up in Southern Africa, a revolutionary upsurge, it is imperative for the leaders to ask themselves "in what direction their policies will lead the masses". It is equally imperative for the people to recognise which leaders stand for true democracy for the oppressed and not neo-colonialism. First he saw imperialism making a bid to take over control and contain liberation movements from Guinea Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, to Rhodesia, Namibia, South Africa, "either directly or through client states." It has a devious strategy to effect this, and a call for "unity" is being much bandied about, in order to exclude those movements that are too much "to the left" . . . "We in the Unity Movement of South Africa," he writes, "recognise this tactic from experience . . . The question is not asked: On what political basis shall this unity be built? . . . It is precisely this dangerous weapon of unprincipled unity that imperialism plans to use against the struggles of the oppressed in Southern Africa."

And again, in the pamphlet: "Industrial Unrest In Southern Africa" he makes the same political challenge as in his last public speech in South Africa to the national conference of the A.P.D.U.S.A. The oppressed workers and peasants cannot attain their rights under the leadership of a bourgeoisie. "The only safe-

guard against neo-colonialism and counter-revolution is a continuous revolution leading to a successful proletarian revolution that will abolish exploitation of man by man." "Such a struggle," he continues, "poses problems of the greatest magnitude . . . The problem of power is posed by the events themselves." And this involves the problem of leadership. "Without a leadership that has a clearly defined ideology — a socialist outlook — it will not be possible to achieve the desired revolution in South Africa." This is the logic of the basic political position of the A.P.D.U.S.A. and the Unity Movement of South Africa.

Explanatory Note

This book is re-published as it was originally in 1950 except for terms which were in common usage then, but which, with the development of political consciousness, are now rejected by the Blacks in South Africa.

The name: Non-European Unity Movement (N.E.U.M.) was historically conditioned. It stressed the community of interests, the common oppression and the common goal of all the oppressed, namely, Africans, Coloureds and Indians. It aimed to counter the deep-seated racialism fostered amongst the Blacks themselves by the policy of divide-and-rule. It was the first attempt to find a collective term to embrace all of them.

The Organisation is now known simply as The Unity Movement of South Africa.

Now the term "European" used by the Whites of South Africa to designate themselves was designed to buttress racialism. The Africans were first called "kafirs"; the Coloured people were called "Hotnots" and the Indians, "coolies". In the same way in the United States the slaves had been called "niggers", then "negroes". Later, the rulers in South Africa used the term "natives", with a small letter, then "Natives". But this had presented a problem to the Dutch Boers who called themselves "Europeans". To call "Natives" Africans would be admitting the legitimacy of their claim to the land. The Dutch Boers had assumed the name *Afrikaners*, to assert *their* claim, and to separate themselves from the English-speaking Whites. But the term "Afrikaner" is the Afrikaans word for "African", the name by which the Black African calls himself. In order to escape this untenable linguistic predicament, the Boers, now in power, solemnly legislated the word "Bantu" into the language to designate an African — a grotesque usage. For there is no such thing as "a Bantu", meaning one person. "Bantu" is used with reference to a family of languages in Africa. The herrenvolk of South Africa resort to anything and everything to avoid calling a people by the name of the country to which they belong and which is theirs as of right.

CHAPTER 1

What is the All-African Convention?

What is the All-African Convention? This is a question that is frequently asked today. It is a question that will be increasingly asked in the future. For in the struggles that lie ahead of us the Convention is destined to play a decisive role. It is important, therefore, to know what the All-African Convention really is and what it stands for.

Now there are two ways in which this question could be answered. One is simply to state what the Constitution of the Convention is and to give its resolutions. But this in our opinion would be to answer the question superficially. To approach the problem in this manner would be to give a picture of something bloodless, static and lifeless, and in point of fact it would not be true and accurate. What we want is a dynamic approach depicting a living body in a state of motion, capable of adjusting itself to the play of forces around it and in turn interacting with them. The better way, therefore, is to see the Convention as one more step in the political development of a people. We must survey it in its proper perspective, against its historical background and in its social setting.

The All-African Convention is an organisation which gives expression to the aspirations of a people, a people who occupy a particular position in a given society. What, then is the nature of that society? It is a complex social structure in which the ordinary class divisions (which are easily observable as the pattern of society in Europe) are complicated and obscured by multi-racial distinctions, constituting a veritable maze of conflicting interests, both real and apparent.

The White Bloc

There is what is known as the European (White) Bloc within which a small but powerful group has concentrated into its hands all the state power – the legislative, executive and administrative powers, with their concomitants, the law-courts, the police and military forces. This power it uses for the purpose of forcibly maintaining its dominant position and keeping all other sections in a subordinate position. It arrogates to itself all the rights and privileges of citizenship, which should belong to all. By every means in its power it bolsters up the myth of itself as the master-race, a herrenvolk, the idea being that the progenitors of the rulers of this country, in some mystic past, must have issued from the divine lips of Brahma, whilst the black masses originated from the grosser portions of his anatomy.

This, then, is the first line of demarcation which the rulers of South Africa make: the white herrenvolk on the one side and all the Blacks on the other. But within the dominant section there are further divisions. There is the class division between worker and employer (which actually is obscured by the racial division

between White and Black). Then there is the three-cornered conflict between the farmer, the industrialist and the all-powerful mine magnate. There is further the artificial division between the bearded descendants of the Voortrekkers (Boers) and the smooth-tongued Englishmen, which results on occasion in a windy storm-in-the-tea-cup and is whipped up for political purposes. It is a device used by party politicians for cadging votes, but, no matter which of the herrenvolk parties gets into power, it carries out the same policy as its predecessor, be it United Party or Nationalist Party, since one and all are agreed on the fundamental policy of racial oppression against the Blacks (i.e. Africans, Coloureds, Indians).

This fact exposes the complete artificiality of the division between English and Dutch. While this division had some justification in the historical past, today it has no basis in fact. For both sections are co-partners in the rape, in the conquest and in the plunder of South Africa. Both share in equal measure the vast dividends of the "Christian Trusteeship Proprietary Co., Ltd." Both guard its interests with fanatic zeal; both pursue ever more efficient methods for the exploitation of the Black man in the endeavour to maintain the source of limitless profits. The real proprietors of this company are the financiers, the mine-magnates, the industrialists and the big farmers. In this Board of Executives of the Christian Trusteeship Company, any distinction between Afrikaner (formerly Dutch-Boer) and Englishmen would be an absurdity. As for the White worker, he becomes a junior beneficiary of the Company, receiving a small portion of the dividends.

This fact explains the peculiar position and outlook of the White worker in South Africa. Like his counterpart in ancient history, the Roman proletarian, he lives at the expense of voiceless, rightless labour. In ancient Rome, the proletarian, though he was the lowest and poorest of its citizens, scorned manual labour as being beneath his dignity and lived off the crumbs of the rich slave-owner's table. He, too, batted on slave labour. Similarly the White worker in South Africa today scorns manual labour as fit only for Black hands to perform. He rejects anything less than the white-collar job, which he guards as his exclusive prerogative by the divine right of his birth and for which he receives a wage out of all proportion to its value. This is possible because the White worker's bill of wages is subsidised from that of the Black worker. In other words, the White worker lives on the back of the voteless, oppressed Black masses. That is why the White worker takes his place on the side of the White boss and so enthusiastically supports the plans of the herrenvolk. That is why he is so willing to join the White bloc.

There is no doubt that some emotionalism attends the superficial division between the sections of the herrenvolk bloc, but, while it is useful to party politicians, it has no real significance in itself. It is significant as a social phenomenon only when one realises that it is an excrecence of that wider and more sinister racialism of White against Black, a racialism that has become pathological.

In order to prevent the Black man from sharing in the fruits of the civilisation which he himself creates, in order to exclude him from sharing in the profits of their "Christian Trusteeship Pty. Co. Ltd.," the herrenvolk had to release a flood of racialism which sealed the White Bloc as against the Black masses. They had to raise the great bogey of "the threat to White security," "the danger to the Western way of life," "the menace of the Black hordes," "the swamping of

Christian civilisation by the Black barbarians," "the threat to European civilisation," etc. In this way the racial antagonism of White against Black split South African society violently in two, a division overshadowing and obscuring all others, even that of classes.

While at first this racialism was fostered in the economic interests of the White employers, and while it was intended to facilitate the keeping of the Blacks in a subordinate position, so that they would be an every-ready source of cheap labour to feed the triple demands of the industrial machine, the gold-mines and the white farms, it gained so much momentum in the course of time, that now it exists on its own. It "grows by what it feeds on" till it has become a monster, a Frankenstein, threatening to consume society itself.

Divisions Among the Oppressed

Let us now consider the position on the other side of the line of demarcation, i.e., those whom the herrenvolk has designated as the Non-European.

It is a curious thing that though all the members of this group suffer from the same fundamental disabilities, though they have been cast out from the body politic and are excluded from the privileges of citizenship, yet they find it possible to regard themselves as different and separate entities. Though their only rights and privileges are to serve their masters in different capacities, to starve in different degrees and to die at different rates, yet they find it possible to nurse their separate sores, to guard their dire "privileges" as if these were their exclusive possession and a source of pride from which the others must be jealously shut out. Each group finds some reason or other for considering itself superior to the others — be it pure blood or mixed blood. In olden days, those slaves who worked in the kitchen looked down on those who merely worked in the stables, because they themselves were in more intimate contact with master and mistress, young master and young mistress; the slaves in the stables in turn despised the mere slaves in the fields, because they groomed the master's favourite steeds. Each one would preen himself for favours received: the slave in the kitchen for the master's cast-off dinner-jacket, the slave in the stable for the old riding-breeches, the slave in the field for his faded pantaloons.

It eminently suits the master to foster these artificial differences and supposed superiorities. The curious thing is that he has always found no more willing assistants in the game of divide and rule than the slaves themselves, who guard the rigid barriers with an almost religious zeal. The master sets the fashion in ideas and attitudes. He is supercilious towards his "inferiors" and the slave in turn looks down his nose at those whom he considers to be his inferiors. It is indeed strange that the slave is acutely aware of the minutest details in the preferential treatment meted out by the master to the various groups, but he is blind to the most obvious fact that determines his very existence. He is blind to the very thing which binds all the groups together — a common misery, humiliation, destitution. In a word, common slavery.

This might seem the more strange when we consider that in all other respects some of the slaves rank amongst the most intelligent of men. But it is strange only if we fail to realise the crushing power of that most insidious and most paralysing intellectual disease — slave mentality.

Racialism

We have observed that the herrenvolk divided South African society into two main divisions along the colour line: the White bloc on the one side and the Black masses on the other. Now the economic system of South Africa is the same as that in the so-called democracies of Europe. That means that in this country, too, the fundamental divisions are class divisions and these are dictated by the irreconcilable clash of interests between employer and worker, between the haves and the have-nots.

The real cleavage is one of class, not one of colour. But in the particular historical conditions attending colonial exploitation, the herrenvolk found it possible, and in fact extremely convenient, to utilise Colour differences to cover over and obscure the fundamental dividing-line, that of class. In the particular climatic conditions, too, the foreigner was able to settle in sufficiently large numbers to occupy all the state positions and hold all the lucrative posts, thus shutting out the indigenous peoples from all such posts and limiting them to the performance of menial tasks. Furthermore, in the historic conditions attendant upon conquest by military force, where the invader was White and the indigenous population was Black, the emotional tensions of conquest were carried over into the subsequent period, the period of industrial development and the economic exploitation of the dispossessed Black masses. Normally, such industrial development is accompanied by a sharpening of the class-delimitations. The worker becomes increasingly aware that his interests are diametrically opposed to the interests of the bosses and he seeks his true allies without consideration of race or colour. He evolves the means of defending himself against the class-enemy.

But in the conditions pertaining in South Africa, the clear-cut class divisions have been obscured. The herrenvolk have elaborated a means of reinforcing economic exploitation with all the vicious machinery of racial oppression. The result has been that the workers have found it difficult to know who are their allies and who are their real enemies.

We have said that the herrenvolk deliberately released a flood of racialism against the Blacks in order to maintain their dominant position, and to keep the Blacks in a state of perpetual subjugation. The paradox of the situation is this, that while racialism was let loose for the precise purpose of their oppression, the Blacks themselves have become thoroughly permeated with it, and use it against one another. Each section clings tenaciously to its superficial differences and supposed superiorities over the other. For what purpose? Whose interest does it serve? All the fulminations, and all the tongue twistings of the intellectuals who try to justify the racial divisions, cannot alter the fact that this poisonous racialism plays right into the hands of the rulers, and serves to perpetuate the enslavement of all Blacks.

The situation would be monstrously absurd if it were not so tragic. Here we have the spectacle of a whole people whose humiliation and serfdom have been maintained by a simple trick of dividing them amongst themselves. They who have been deprived of their land, stripped of all human rights, reduced to a position of helotry in the land of their fathers, the only land they know, have taken the weapon devised for their destruction and with their own hands have turned it against themselves.

South African Society, then, can be seen as a complex structure with multi-racial antagonisms. It is rent with the clash of conflicting class and sectional interests. It is riddled with a destructive racialism. Over and above all there is the blight of herren-volkism (ideas of the master-race) which vitiates and warps all society. It is against the background of a veritable social and political maze that the All-African Convention must be viewed. Its ideas, its policy and programme have to be evaluated on the basis of the nature of this society and the ideas current in it. We must follow its development in such a society and assess the impact which it in turn makes upon society. At the same time we have to realise that the All-African Convention is a product of its period. It has sprung out of the experiences of the people and reflects the degree of their development.

CHAPTER 2

Forerunners

We have already said that the All-African Convention should be viewed as one further step in the political development of the African people. In order to appreciate this step more fully, let us briefly review the forerunners of the All-African Convention. (A.A.C.)

The end of the last century brought to a close one phase of the struggle of the African people. It had been a struggle waged in military form against conquest by what was then the invader. It had been a struggle in defence of land. The beginning of the twentieth century opened up a new phase of struggle — a political form of struggle. The people had been conquered; the land had been taken; the Europeans had come to settle and had become part of the population of South Africa. They had become the rulers of the country. They imposed their own laws, their way of living, their mode of production of the means of subsistence. In fact, they organised the whole system of society in accordance with their own mode of existence. The African became willy-nilly a part of this system. It was to him an entirely new system in which he had to find his bearings. His whole mode of living was radically altered. The new system imposed upon him entirely new ways of earning a livelihood; money-economy replaced barter; labour on white farms, in mines and towns replaced the tending of cattle and the tilling of his own fields. Individual ownership even of land replaced communal ownership. The attitudes and relationship between man and man, between family and family were altered. It was now each man for himself. In short, the impact of the new system undermined the whole social structure of the Africans and broke up the tribal organisation and relationships.

The African had to learn new relationships and new concepts. Plunged into this new setting he had to evolve new ways and forms of struggle — the political struggle. The first manifestation of the new form of struggle was the formation of the earliest African political organisations such as “Imbumba ya Manyama” (or “Imbumba ye-Zizwe”) and “The South African Native Convention” (or “Ingqungqu-thela ye-Zizwe”), and others in the Northern provinces. These were not organisations in the modern sense of the word. Each seems to have been more a grouping of people round a particular man, a personality who attracted a following. The outstanding feature of the organisations — as their names suggest — was that they were of a federal nature, federating tribes and not organisations. The tribal system — be it remembered — was by this time already shaken to its foundations. At this stage the “natural” head of the tribe, the chief, could no longer be the rallying point in the new form of struggle. Some individuals had acquired education and were conscious of the need to organise all the people. But, in spite of the disintegrating forces, the people still tenaciously clung to the tribal divisions. Any

organisation tended to be based on tribes, hence the first political groupings were in the nature of federations of tribes.

But these, in the nature of things, could not last. Tribal antagonisms soon asserted themselves and split the organisations. At the same time the tribal organisation itself was being further disrupted by the developing industrial forces in the new society. Under such conditions the breaking up of this form of political organisation was inevitable. The normal progress of the African under the new civilisation rendered those organisations outmoded.

The Birth of the African National Congress

The insufficiency of land and the consequent hardship and starvation had forced large numbers of Africans to find work in the mines, where they stayed for a longer or shorter period. Still larger numbers migrated to the white farms and into the towns. Uprooted from the soil, many of these never returned and a new generation grew up which knew nothing of the old tribal way of life and had no contact with it. This was the experience, not of one tribe or another tribe, but of a whole people. And this precipitation into new modes of living dictated new modes of thought. Common experiences, common hardships and suffering led to the dawning of a new consciousness, the realisation that all of them, irrespective of what tribe they came from, shared a common oppression.

With the Act of Union in 1910 (between British and Boers) the whole Black population became political outcasts and helots in the land of their birth, and their economic servitude was thereby ensured. African leaders from the four Provinces had come together and sent a deputation to England. They had great faith in the justice of the Parliament of the Great White Queen. They came back empty-handed; they had been told that it was a domestic matter between themselves and the Government in South Africa.

It was in this setting that in 1912 the African National Congress was born. It was the first important organisation to be built on the model of European organisations, with an individual basis of membership. It was, moreover, to unite all Africans in the four Provinces of the Union. It was a progressive step, i.e., Congress was progressive as compared with the past. It ushered in a new outlook more in keeping with the times and therefore deserved the support of all progressives. But, though in form the Congress had broken with the past, this did not mean that it had completely shed the tribalist outlook. It could not be otherwise. For an organisation is the product of its time. It must be borne in mind that there is always a time-lag between new conditions of existence and the ideas which spring out of them. Attitudes and ideas formed as a result of generations — or even centuries — of a particular mode of existence, tend to persist with great tenacity long after the material basis for them has been removed. Nevertheless, with respect to the past, the formation of the African National Congress was a progressive step. It represented a step forward from the tribal organisations.

The following year (1913) the disastrous Land Act turned the eyes of the people to the new political organisation, the African National Congress. The Act prohibited the farmers from keeping what were known as “squatters”. This meant that thousands of African families had either to sell their stock to the farmers and hire themselves out as labourers or clear out with their stocks. Now they had lived as

squatters on European land for generations; they knew no other means of livelihood besides tilling the land. Their wealth was in their cattle and some had fairly large stocks, for cattle was never sold. In point of fact, this ruthless Land Act gave them no choice of action. If they kept their stock they would have to find land in which to settle. But under the old Republican law in the Free State and the Transvaal, Africans were not allowed to buy land. In the Reserves, where they had a nominal right to buy, there was already so much overcrowding that there was not enough land even for those who were officially "settled" there.

The white farmers, realising that the Africans had nowhere to go, ruthlessly exploited the situation and offered scandalously low prices for the cattle. At first the Africans refused to sell. With a desperate hope they began to move with their stock, each one hoping that the next farmer would permit him to stay on the old terms. In vain. A great exodus began. Thousands of Africans with their numerous stock filled the roads of the Transvaal and the Free State. As if the rulers had enlisted the very elements to ensure the catastrophic effects of their plans, the bitter cold and rain of the winter months decimated their flocks. For miles on end the roads were strewn with dead and dying cattle, sheep and goats. Old men and women and babes in arms succumbed to the privations of that pitiless journey in search of a home. They were not allowed to turn off from the highways, not even to bury their dead. It is a grim picture which Sol Plaatje, an eye-witness, has movingly described in his book, *Native Life in South Africa*. There was nothing left for this harried, homeless people but to let the farmers confiscate their remaining cattle for a song and hire themselves out as labourers. Thus did the Africans have a bitter foretaste of things to come in this, the first Act passed after the Union of the four provinces — the amalgamation of British Imperialism with Dutch Feudalism.

What did Congress do in face of the 1913 Land Act? It met and decided to send a deputation to England to ask the British Government to intervene on behalf of the African people as loyal subjects of the British crown. As before, the deputation proved utterly futile. They were told to go back and plead their cause before the local tyrants. With sublime faith the leaders turned to the local liberals, for were these liberals not the sacred link with the Great White Queen? They pleaded for their assistance, despite the fact that it was the liberals who made the passing of the Land Act possible. In fact it was that arch-liberal, Sauer himself, who had piloted the Bill through Parliament.

The very next year, 1914, the first World War broke out. It was known as "the war to end wars", "the war of liberation". The Africans saw no sign of liberation in their own country. On the contrary, they saw themselves being stripped bare of even the meagre political rights they had had and now denied even the right to buy land. And still, in spite of past experiences, they argued that if they showed their loyalty, perhaps Britain would reward them with some meagre measure of liberation. They joined up. Many died on the fields of France, others were swallowed by the bottomless sea in the sinking of the ship "Mendi". All this sacrifice — for what?

Birth of the I.C.U.

While this gesture of loyalty was being made, the African National Congress was

growing rapidly. All over the country the people were agitated. Oppression was marching steadily on. The African was now realising the twofold nature of his oppression: he was not only oppressed as a member of the conquered race but he was also exploited as a worker. He had to find means of defending himself against his employers. In 1919 the I.C.U. (The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union) was born. A strike for increased wages at the Cape Town docks, involving 8,000 workers, was successfully carried out. This gave them encouragement, for they had discovered that by coming together they had forged an effective weapon of self defence. The I.C.U. grew by leaps and bounds, spreading to the north, so that by 1926 it could boast of a membership of more than 100,000. The movement stirred the imagination of the people and inspired tremendous enthusiasm and devotion. Without precisely defining its organisational form or its political tasks, it made an appeal to the Africans to join it as members of an oppressed nationality. In this respect it was encroaching on what the African National Congress had hitherto regarded as its special field. A violent competition set in between the two organisations. The I.C.U. claiming to attend both to the immediate daily problems of industrial dispute and at the same time to the wider political issues, eclipsed the older organisation. Moreover, it was young and virile; it embarked on strikes, many of which were successful. The Government resorted to violence and there were clashes with the police

It was in January 1919, in Cape Town, that the I.C.U. had been founded. In April, one of its organisers was arrested in Bloemfontein. In July, 1920, the Africans held their first Labour Convention in Bloemfontein. In October of the same year Masabalala was arrested in Port Elizabeth for demanding higher wages. His followers asked for his release, and when it was refused they marched to the jail, whereupon the police opened fire on the crowd, killing 23 people and injuring many others. All these events show that there was a ferment among the people and that their discontent was making them bold. In the previous year, the African National Congress had persuaded the people to burn their passes in Johannesburg.

In turn, the Government under Smuts dealt ruthless blows. In 1921 there was the notorious Bullhoek incident when machine guns were used to mow down defenceless people congregated near Queenstown. Then in 1922 came the Bondelswart massacre. These shootings, together with the still further extension of repressive legislation, the Urban Areas Act (1923), the Colour Bar Act, the Native Administration Act, added fuel to the fire. ('Native' refers to Africans, the great majority of the Blacks).

Among the nameless thousands who rallied all over the country at the call of the I.C.U. many gave their lives. In their struggles we are reminded of the heroism of their forbears in the battles of nearly a hundred years before. At that time, wave after wave of men armed only with assegai and shield had braved the onslaughts of the enemy's cannon. And now, alas, the battle was again an unequal one. The African workers found themselves up against not only their immediate employers but a whole state, with a well-organised State machinery. Against them was ranged a well-constituted Government backed by British Imperialism which had behind it a long history of colonial oppression and exploitation, and which was well-versed

in the art of combining force with the deception of the people.

But the African workers were inexperienced in the industrial struggle. They had just recently realised the double nature of their oppression, racial as well as economic. They were only then painfully evolving a means of self-defence against exploitation. They had no clear idea of the form of organisation itself and much less had they clarity on their political objective. In a word, they were politically and theoretically unarmed. The African people had to pay very dearly for their knowledge.

The I.C.U. reached its peak towards the end of the twenties and thereafter began rapidly to decline. The organisation broke into splinters each with its rival leader. Without apportioning blame to this or that leader, however much their behaviour hastened the process of disintegration, it is necessary to realise that the I.C.U. carried within itself the germ of its own decay. There is no doubt that the bureaucratic methods of the leadership crippled the organisation. A whole army of opportunists and careerists played havoc with the movement. Nevertheless, we must not lose sight of the fact that the very nature of the I.C.U. led to its decline.

The I.C.U. was meant to be a trade union, but the African people did not know what a trade union should look like. All they knew was that it was an organisation of workers and so they set out to organise all the African workers. But as the whole African population was oppressed, they made an appeal to everybody to come into a single, loosely-constructed, all-embracing union. Industrial workers, farm labourers and domestic servants, etc., were all included without distinction. The I.C.U. held out great promises and hopes for all. As a measure of the impression it made on the minds of the people, we may cite the fact that in the remote parts of the country some farm labourers trekked from the White farms in search of the mythical land which they believed the I.C.U. would be able to give them. The I.C.U. could not possibly fulfil these hopes. While it held itself up as a champion of the workers' cause, at the same time it made its appeal to the Africans as an oppressed race, and in this sense it became neither fish nor fowl. It was neither a trade union nor a political organisation. The African had to learn that the weapon he had forged belonged to the day of the advent of capitalism, the days preceding trade unionism in Europe. He would have to find modern weapons to fight his modern enemy. Today, he has forged such weapons, as the African trade unions in Johannesburg testify. These unions are organised on the same lines as any other trade union in the world. The I.C.U. failed, as it had to do. The normal development of the people in the process of adjusting themselves to modern conditions had to usher it off the stage.

But our characterisation of the I.C.U. must not be taken to mean that trade unions must not participate in politics. On the contrary, it is our firm belief that the main reason why the African trade unions today are moribund is precisely that they have persistently held aloof from the political struggle of the oppressed peoples of South Africa.

African Trade Unions

The present-day African trade unions are the natural successors to the I.C.U. They represent the present stage of the development of the African people who have now

become fully conversant with the relationships in the industrial set-up. They have become part and parcel of the capitalist system and share its outlook and modes of thinking. The first African trade unions were formed in the late twenties (c.1927) when the I.C.U. was at its peak. We may observe here how in the process of development one thing grows out of another and exists alongside it. There is no abrupt transition from one to the other, no gap of time between one and another. It is more true to say that out of the womb of one thing (or one system) is born the other which will one day replace it.

The desire of the African workers to defend themselves against exploitation had given rise to a clumsy, undefined, all-embracing structure, the I.C.U. This attempt corresponded to the undefined nature of their own position as members of an oppressed people (mainly landless peasantry) harnessed to the industrial machine of the new society. Yet willy-nilly, the very nature of the industrial forces, with the relationships involved, directed them to the necessity of forming an organisation for the purpose of defending themselves against their employers. They were concerned with their day-to-day problems as workers: with their conditions of work, their hours of labour, their wages. These are the specific tasks of a Trade Union. And as the conditions in each industry, trade or craft are different, each one requires special attention. Thus each trade or industry requires a separate organisation. This specialised type of organisation had to replace the I.C.U. with its amorphous structure. In this way the Trade Union movement was a progressive step as compared with the I.C.U.

Politics and the Trade Union Movement

The realisation by the African people that they were doubly oppressed — as workers and as members of an oppressed race — was a fundamental one. And the formation of the I.C.U. had given expression to this basic fact. But up to this day the problem of the dual nature of oppression has not been tackled in the proper way in spite of the fact that the Africans evolved Trade Unions. It is precisely the dual nature of oppression which the Trade Unions today have lost sight of. While the I.C.U. reacted to this quality by making general, national, political demands and failing to come to grips with the specific tasks as between workers and employer, the Trade Unions on the other hand have become preoccupied with their specialised tasks and completely ignored the general political struggles of the African people as a whole.

Yet it is essential to realise that at this stage the political struggle and the trade union struggle are inextricably bound together. Racial oppression is a part of economic exploitation and reinforces it. Stripped of every vestige of political rights, the oppressed people of South Africa cannot fight exploitation in all its forms. Without political power outside the Trade Unions, they are helpless. In fact, political and industrial laws — the Colour Bar Act, the Apprenticeship Act, the Industrial Conciliation Act, the Amendment to the Factory Act — all these tie a rope round the necks of all Blacks.

Furthermore they drive a wedge between the European and the Black workers with the result that they are blinded to their common interests. In other words, without political equality it will never be possible to speak of working-class unity

and without working-class unity it will never be possible to fight exploitation.

Since, therefore, he is denied even the rights of a worker, the very act of forming a Trade Union is for the African a political one, so that he cannot do other than participate in the political struggle. To put it another way, the Trade Union question in South Africa presents itself primarily as a national (political) question and only secondarily as a class question. The second cannot be solved independently of the first.

It is clear from what has been said that the present Trade Union leaders are not capable of measuring up to the tasks facing the Trade Unions amongst the oppressed Blacks today. They have first of all to orientate themselves to the idea that their struggle is part of a national struggle. Even in their approach to the specific problems of low wages, segregation in industry, the "civilised labour" policy, the exclusion of Africans from unemployment benefits, their exclusion from the provisions of the Industrial Conciliation Act, they have to realise that all these are essentially *political* questions. They are the warp and woof of the national struggle of the racially oppressed Blacks.

The present attitude of the Trade Union leaders of divorcing the Trade Unions from politics, dooms the Trade Union movement to futility. It is criminal for them to take up the slogan of the White bureaucrats: "No Politics in the Trade Unions". Such a slogan is designed to render the Blacks defenceless and prostrate before the oppressors. It is tantamount to a renunciation of the Trade Union movement amongst the Blacks. More than that, these henchmen and agents of the ruling-class amongst the Black workers are guilty of the greatest irresponsibility. For they are holding back the national liberatory movement itself. The only way to revitalise this now moribund Trade Union movement is to plant it squarely in the midst of the national struggle for liberation.

Organisations on an Individual Basis

At the beginning of the thirties the two main organisations of the African people, the African National Congress (A.N.C.) and the I.C.U., had declined to such an extent that, by 1935 at the time of the Hertzog Bills, they were each little more than an empty shell. Only the echo of their names remained in the memories of the people in whom they had once stirred such high hopes.

Meantime, however, a certain development had been quietly taking place. The African people had been absorbed into the capitalist system with its particular attitudes and modes of thought. Besides those who were employed on the White farms as labourers, a large number had settled in the towns as unskilled workers in different trades and industries. These constituted the working-class. In the field of education, progress had taken place despite tremendous odds, and an appreciable number obtained employment in the teaching profession and the ministry, while some few had subordinate positions as clerks and interpreters in segregatory institutions, such as the Bunga (rural council) and in location-superintendent offices, etc. Those professions which made it possible for educated Africans to earn an independent livelihood were significantly made inaccessible to them. In each of the various spheres open to them they found themselves up against their immediate exploiters, be it the employer in industry or in the department of education, the

school-manager, the church-governors or the municipal council. Against each of these they found the need to organise and the form of organisation could not but be on an individual basis. For in the system of private enterprise into which the Africans had been absorbed, this was the characteristic form of organisation. It can be said that individualism is the essence of the capitalist outlook.

In this period, then, a number of organisations sprang up all over the country and all of them were on an individual basis or membership. There were political organisations, professional organisations, trade unions and civic bodies, religious organisations, etc. All of them had one purpose, the fight for liberation. Yet each organisation operated in isolation from the rest. In other words, the struggle was unco-ordinated, ineffectual, and resulted in a dissipation of energy. Mutual suspicion and rivalry between the organisations aggravated the position.

CHAPTER 3

The Formation of the All-African Convention

The Background

In 1935, the Union Government confronted the country with what were called the Three "Native" Bills, or, as we knew them, the notorious Hertzog Bills, which were to "settle the Native Question once and for all" — according to the rulers' way of thinking. The need for this drive to "settle the Native Question" did not spring out of the fertile brain of some politician. It had its roots in the economic and political conditions of the country.

It will be remembered that throughout the twenties and early thirties, as a result of the first World War, the whole world had been gripped in the throes of an economic crisis. Europe and Asia had been convulsed by revolutionary upsurge. South Africa as an integral part of the capitalist world had been hit by the depression. The economic structure of the country was shaken and the herrenvolk parties decided to drop their petty squabbles and come together to save the country. The Fusion Government of Smuts and Hertzog came into being. But what, to the herrenvolk, did, "saving the country" mean? It meant intensifying the process of enslaving the Black man, depriving him of the last vestige of his rights and reducing him to the status of a baggage animal whose sole function was to labour and produce wealth for the "master-race". This they proposed to effect through the three "Native Bills" (applied to Africans only).

Before we go further it is necessary to say a word about the significance of this Fusion of the herrenvolk parties, and at the same time to nail down once and for all the myth of the liberal tradition of the Cape. It has become a common practice to contrast the liberal tradition of the Cape with the reactionary attitude of the Northern Provinces — the Boer Republics. In fact the whole political history of the Union in so far as it concerns the whittling down of the rights of the Blacks, is presented as a triumph of the reactionary Boers over the liberal Cape. But nothing could be more false than this ridiculous picture of heroic resistance on the part of the English to the irresistible tide of Afrikanerdom. Whoever starts to assess the situation on this false basis will founder in a sea of confusion. To fail to have a clear idea of the forces at work in society, is to relinquish what should serve as a sheet-anchor in the welter of contradictions which surround us; it is to deprive ourselves of the touchstone whereby we know who our political enemies are, and who are our natural allies. In a word it is to disarm ourselves at the outset of the struggle for liberation.

Ever since the time of Union the Africans throughout South Africa have looked to the White politicians of the Cape to alleviate their distress by granting them some political rights. They have clung tenaciously to the idea that as representatives

of the liberal tradition these politicians were the champions of the rights of the Black man. In support of their belief they have pointed to the "struggles" of the Cape liberals at the time of Union to maintain the vote for the African in the Cape Province. But the truth of the matter is, that at no time were they concerned with the defence of the rights of the Black man, nor were they ever actuated by the principle of the equality of all men.

It was a simple case of political expediency. What they were concerned about was the pro-British majority in Parliament. They needed the Africans' vote for their own defence against the recently conquered enemy, the Boers in the North. It was to be used as a weapon against those who opposed the British flag. And they knew that every African — thanks to the myth of the Great White Queen as their "protector" — would vote British as against Boer. Thus the African vote would ensure a majority in Parliament for the British loyalist representatives against the recalcitrant Boer Republics.

When, however, the big Dutch farmers finally became convinced of the wisdom of remaining within the British Empire because of the juicy crumbs to be obtained from the table of British Imperialism in the form of large subsidies, and when they realised that Britain was prepared to rule South Africa with them as co-partners, then there was no fear of a secessionist movement on the part of the Boers. Then the need for the Cape African vote vanished. Gone was the need for the old Cape liberalism. A political marriage took place between Dutch feudalism and British imperialism and the Fusion Government was formed. Now the united herrenvolk could turn with a single mind to "settling the Native Question once and for all." The first thing that the Fusion Government did was to pass the three "Native" Bills. This they did in 1936 (Native Representation Bill and the Native Trust and Land Bill) and 1937 (The Urban Areas Amendment Bill).

The "Native" Bills

In presenting these Bills the rulers used the method which is becoming very common in South Africa, of designating repressive legislation against the Blacks in terms which imply exactly the opposite of what it is intended to do.

(a) Native Representation Bill

This Bill was actually intended to deprive the African of the last vestige of citizenship and render him a foreigner in the land of his birth. As such he would be completely deprived of the right to buy land.

The Bill provided (1) for the election of three members of the herrenvolk to "represent" the disfranchised African masses in the herrenvolk Parliament of 153 members and (2) for the creation of a so-called "Native Representative Council" which was neither "Native" nor representative, nor was it even a council in the proper sense of the word. It had a White chairman.

Such a drastic step against a people who constituted about four-fifths of the total population, was expected to produce a ferment which might well result in uniting the oppressed, and compel them to lose faith in the good will of the herrenvolk. Some means had to be found to stem this process. It was necessary at all costs to persuade the African to retain his faith in at least some section of

the herrenvolk and his hope that one day his lot would be improved. For once he had lost this faith and relinquished this hope, he would turn his back on the herrenvolk as a whole. He would discover that henceforth he must look to himself and his natural allies: he would learn to place reliance on himself and his fellow-oppressed. He would realise that he must seek strength in his own unity and solidarity with his brothers in oppression.

Here was a chance for the liberals to play an important role which was in keeping with their function in the past. It would invariably be the liberals who would stand for election as the "representatives" of the Africans. Parliament then would provide a platform for these so-called "champions" of the African cause. Every opportunity would be given them for indulging their eloquence in the "defence" of the voiceless masses. From the highest rostrum of the land they would publicly shed crocodile tears on their behalf. And the Press would play its part by giving great prominence to their heart-stirring jeremiads. And on reading these the hungry Africans would have their bellies filled with windy hopes. In truth their faith would be revived in these apostles of Christian trusteeship. The gross fraud and the palpable absurdity of this "representation" becomes all the more apparent when we reflect that it was in every way to the benefit of the rulers themselves; for in effect the Africans were now called upon to elect three extra members to the herrenvolk Parliament, thus still further safeguarding the interests of the rulers.

(b) The Native Trust and Land Bill

This Bill was calculated, not to relieve the dire landlessness of the Africans but to intensify it as a means of forcing them off the land to work on the European farms and in the mines. It deprived them of the right to buy land anywhere except in the already over-crowded Reserves. The emptiness of this nominal right stands revealed when we remember that the vast majority of those who are officially resident in the Reserves haven't a plot to their name because there is no more land to be had. To be sure, the Bill held out the bait of promised land — "released areas" which were to be bought for the people by the Trust Fund. Time was to prove the hollow sham of this promise. The people were to learn that the Trust Fund itself was to be used for their own exploitation and as a means of depriving them still further of the right to buy land, even the released farms.

(c) The Urban Areas Amendment Bill

This Bill was a corollary to the other two and was designed for the complete regimentation of African labour. Having been driven off the land and stripped of all political rights, the African would now be defenceless, without even the rights of a worker. This supplementary Bill proposed to deprive him of the right to sell his labour in the open market to the highest bidder. It created the machinery for directing the stream of African labour according to the demands of the various groups of employers for cheap "Native" labour. Denied free access to the towns the African would be forced on to the white farms and into the mines.

The Calling of Convention, 1935.

This triple onslaught of the Slave Bills stirred the African people throughout the country. Spontaneously there was the urge to come together, but, as we have indicated above, there was not a single organisation capable of rallying the people behind it. There were a number of little organisations – political, trade union, civic, professional, religious and sporting bodies – all existing in isolation. Then, in the face of crisis, a few leaders decided to call on all such organisations to send representatives to a convention to be held in Bloemfontein in December, 1935, and the people rallied to the call, for they realised that the Bills threatened all alike. It was the biggest conference in their history and was a truly representative gathering. There were over 500 delegates present, with representatives from both the towns and the rural areas. Delegates had been sent from the Reserves, from the Transkei and Zululand; from the British Protectorates, Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland.

The meeting was characterised by great enthusiasm and determination. Once more the mood of the people was high. A common danger had brought to their consciousness the need to unite. Under the force of events all petty organisational rivalries were swept aside and all the old leaders came together. Every leader was present and every organisation represented. With a single voice the people manifested their determination to resist the Bills. The keynote of the conference was unity, unity of purpose and unity of struggle. Conference passed a resolution rejecting the Bills and instructed its executive to inform the Government of its decision.

We have said that the idea of coming together in a convention of this nature had been a spontaneous one. It was not invented by any one particular leader. It would be more true to say that it was generated by the stress of events and a common danger. By organising the conference through the already existing channels, namely, the various organisations established through the country, the leaders had lighted upon the only effective means of bringing the people together. So great was the response that those delegates present felt that this bringing together of the existing organisations into a Convention was the very form which unity should take. Conference decided that Convention should meet again in June, 1936.

Events of 1936

In view of the general lack of information about the coming into being of the All-African Convention and also in view of the falsifications which for that very reason are all too common, concerning the manner in which the Convention was formed and the purpose for which it was created, we consider that it is necessary to go into some detail. A reference to the Minutes published at that time will furnish us with a picture of the salient facts.

In accordance with the resolution taken at the first conference, the Convention assembled from the 29th June to the 2nd July, 1936, in the Community Hall, Bloemfontein. In addition to the officials there were 206 delegates present, representing 112 organisations. It was at this Conference that Mr. R.V. Selope Thema, seconded by Mr. P. Ramutla, moved the following resolution:

“that the Convention approves of the principle of the establishment of this body as a permanent organisation of all the African people.”

This resolution was passed and the Executive Committee was instructed to prepare a draft constitution.

At this time the following were the office-bearers: Professor D.D.T. Jabavu, President: Dr. A.B. Xuma, Vice-President: Dr. J.S. Moroka, Treasurer: Mr. H. Selby Msimang, General Secretary: Mr. R.H. Godlo, Recording Secretary: and Professor Z.K. Matthews, Clerk-Draughtsman.

Two days later (1st July) the Executive submitted a draft constitution which was accepted "pending approval by the various African organisations and final ratification by the next Convention in December, 1937". Note that while the delegates present accepted the principle of establishing the Convention as a permanent body and adopted a draft constitution, nevertheless they considered it necessary to receive the consent of the people as a whole, through their various organisations. The adoption of the draft constitution, then, was in the nature of an instruction to the delegates to go back to their respective organisations, put the matter before them, discuss it thoroughly, and bring their decision to the next Conference of Convention, which was to be held in 18 months' time.

While the African people were in the process of evolving this new form of political organisation, which was the logical outcome of the events of 1935 and the enthusiasm thus engendered and manifested in the first meeting of Convention, other events were taking place which were seriously to affect this process of development. The 1935 Conference had instructed the Convention Executive to communicate to the Government its decision to reject the three Bills. The leaders had gone to Cape Town during the 1936 Parliamentary session. There they had held several meetings in private, now consulting which this liberal and now with that member of Parliament; for, as was to be expected, these "champions" of the African cause were ever ready with their advice and assistance. Their efforts at "assisting" the leaders were all the more strenuous in view of the fact that all over the country the African people were declaring their rejection of the Slave Bills in no uncertain voice. Reports had come in to Government quarters to the effect that in the secret meetings held with them even the chiefs on their own had been able to put their finger on the fraud of the so-called Land and Trust Bill. The Government knew and the liberals, too, were fully aware — in fact the whole herrenvolk realised that the decisions made at Bloemfontein did not merely reflect the feelings of those delegates present at Convention, but were the expression of a unanimous rejection by a whole people of the three Slave Bills.

Obviously, in face of this unprecedented unanimity the rulers had to act. The notorious compromise was hatched. The herrenvolk Press proclaimed in the headlines that a compromise had been reached between the Government and the African leaders.

This announcement fell like a bombshell on the African people. They, who only a few months previous had been united in enthusiasm and determination and had reached the stage where they were forging a weapon of resistance, were now thrown into a state of consternation and confusion. The apple of discord had been cast into their midst. And history was to prove how costly this "apple" was to be to a whole people. It had the effect of diverting the Africans from their course and forcing them into a political desert for a decade.

Since those days they have been fooling about with mock elections, mock representation and a dummy Council. For a decade and more they have been learning through bitter experience what is meant by "developing along our own lines". They have been slow in recognising the old trick which the rulers played on them, of throwing a bone to the dogs and getting them to fight amongst themselves while they eat their choice meat undisturbed. The rulers have given a bone in the form of sham representation and dummy councils, while they have their Parliament. The Africans have been busy fighting amongst themselves for positions in these dummy councils and squandering their energies in disputing as to which White man is to plead in their Parliament on behalf of the Black slaves. They have been busy electing three extra members for a herrenvolk Parliament. This is exactly what the rulers wanted.

1937 Conference

In accordance with the resolution taken at the 1936 Conference the Convention met in Bloemfontein, 13th-15th December, 1937. Its first task was to hear reports of delegates from their respective organisations concerning (1) the principle of establishing the All-African Convention as a permanent body; (2) the Draft Constitution which had been decided upon at the previous Conference. The delegates reported that their organisations were in agreement with the principle and accepted the Draft Constitution.

At this stage written reports were read from officials who were unable to attend Conference by reason of their being overseas. First there was a report from Dr. Max Yergan, Secretary for External Relations. We quote from the introductory letter to the report, written from America:

"To the Delegates to the All-African Convention assembled at Bloemfontein, December, 1937.

To My Brothers, Greetings!

It is with the deepest regret that I have had to inform our President of my inability to be present at this meeting of the Convention. I am unable to come, because, among other reasons, the immediate work which I am trying to do in the interest of our entire cause makes it impossible for me to leave America just now. I wish you to know how deeply I have desired all along to be present at this particular meeting, for I recognise the importance of your deliberations and of the action which you have taken following your deliberations. May I, therefore, be permitted to express my views in what I believe to be the best interest of our cause in South Africa.

"I am more than ever convinced that our chief need now, as was true a year ago, is to build a people's movement. By this I mean to make possible the largest amount of united action on the part of our people in South Africa. This means clearly that our task is to continue in our effort to federate existing organisations. This, of course, means that we must find at this moment principles and tasks to be accomplished, around which it will be possible to unite the great mass of the people, including those *in* organisations and *outside* organisations.

"To do this, of course, we must begin first with the existing organisations.

We must let nothing stand in the way of making it possible for the leaders of the various organisations to see the importance and desirability of united action as will be made possible by a federation of the existing organisations. This I believe to be our supreme task at the moment, and I am convinced from my observations here in America and elsewhere, that we must prepare to pay whatever price is required in order to accomplish this particular end of a united people struggling for ends which are common to us all”

Yours faithfully,
 MAX YERGAN,
Secretary for External Relations.”

(See Minutes of the All-African-Convention, December, 1937, pp 35-37)

The next Report came from Dr. A.B. Xuma, who wrote from London. His letter ran as follows:

“Delegates of the All-African Convention
 and Fellow Countrymen,

London, England,
 December 2, 1937.

Greetings,

“You will find before you the Constitution of the All-African Convention for ratification. In the articles of the constitution you will find much that you can criticise with justice.

“I want, however, to emphasise to you that the Constitution will develop in time through your reasonable amendments and suggestions provided they are made in the right spirit and right attitude with a sincere desire to help build the unity of our people. You must realise that this constitution is merely the basic authority for our united action. It calls for a united front, a common objective.

“You do not have unity because you write a beautiful constitution on paper. Unity must be written in your hearts and minds. It must mean unselfish service for your people. It must mean faith in yourselves, faith in your people and their leaders.

“All of us must surrender personal ambition for national unity.

“By speaking with one voice, acting unitedly, we will be serving South Africa as a whole.

“Anyone who will endeavour to wreck the principle of unity that gave birth to the All-African Convention will be doing so for personal reasons and will be a traitor to Africa.

“As your Vice-President and Chairman of the Executive of the All-African Convention, you have always given me your ear and your full co-operation for which I thank you.

“Six thousand miles away, I appeal to you to ratify the Constitution and show the world that you mean to stand together at all costs.

“Besides, you must decide upon a definite practical policy and programme of action upon which all elements can join hands in putting it over.

A.B. Xuma,
*Vice-President A.A.C.,
 Chairman of the Executive of A.A.C.*”

(See Minutes of All-African Convention, 1937. pp 46-47)

The various delegates reported that their organisation accepted the principle of establishing the All-African Convention as a permanent body and approved of the Draft Constitution. As a result of this, the Conference formally adopted the Draft Constitution as the Constitution of the All-African Convention.

We consider it pertinent at this point to quote the Preamble as well as the passage relating to the Composition and Object of the All-African Convention.

Preamble to the Constitution of the A.A.C.

“Whereas it is expedient in view of the situation created by the ‘Native’ Policy of segregation, discrimination and other repressive measures definitely adopted by the Government and Parliament of the Union of South Africa that the African races of South Africa as a national entity and unit should henceforth speak with one voice, meet and act in all matters of national concern.

This Convention resolves that a Central Organisation shall be formed with which all African religious, educational, industrial, economic, political, commercial and social organisations shall be affiliated.

And to give effect to this purpose, the following Constitution shall form the basis of the organisation to be and which is hereby established, namely:

1. *Name:* The name of the organisation shall be the All-African Convention.
2. *Composition:* (a) The Convention shall be composed of accredited organisations and organised bodies duly registered with the General Secretary and which organisations and organised bodies shall be represented by accredited delegates at all meetings of the Convention.
(b) Any duly organised body with a constitution that expresses its objects shall be eligible for registration.
3. *Objects:* (a) To act in unity in developing the political and economic power of the African people. (b) To serve as a medium of expression of the united voice of the African people on all matters affecting their welfare. (c) To formulate and give effect to a national programme for the advancement and protection of the interests of the African people. (d) To assist in rehabilitating dormant and moribund African organisations and bringing together unorganised Africans into societies, communities or bodies affiliated to the All-African Convention.”

(See Minutes of the All-African Convention, December, 1937. pp 18-19)

Minutes of any Conference are not generally inspiring. They are necessarily brief and often dry as dust. But here, even in the scope of a brief report something of the spirit which at this time animated the people comes through. It was in the midst of this atmosphere that the All-African Convention was born and its Constitution formulated. Pre-eminent was the spirit of unity. The letters from Dr. Yergan and Dr. Xuma, quoted above, clearly reflect this and are a sample of the speeches delivered at the 1937 Conference. The people had realised that the determination to resist

as expressed in their resolutions at the first Conference in 1935 – was in itself not enough. The idea of coming together and acting in unity was indeed a tremendous step forward, and the formation of the All-African Convention was the concrete expression of this idea. But this was only the beginning. They had still to

grapple with the problem of carrying the idea to the masses and helping them to understand the full implications of their political and organisational tasks. Having seized upon the idea of unity they had still to get down to the practical problem of welding the various organisations throughout the country into a single unit, not in any way to replace these organisations, but to co-ordinate and centralise their activities. In this way they would be forging an effective machinery with which to wage a sustained struggle.

There was not a speaker at Conference who did not reflect this spirit of unity. One and all were striving to come to grips with the problem of building this new federal organisation, the All-African Convention, into a powerful body. Mr. Selby Mximang, the then General Secretary, in introducing a discussion on organisation read a paper entitled: "Organisation and the Relationship of the A.A.C. with other Organisations." In it he said:

"The problem of organising the All-African Convention is essentially a question of how to strengthen, vitalise and consolidate existing organisations. The Convention depends for its existence on the active participation and co-operation of the various organisations in that it is the central body which provides a common platform for exchange of views and mutual helpfulness in matters national in character. It recognises the right of each organisation to exist and enjoy an undisturbed autonomy, provided that each organisation in turn appreciates and lives up to the ideal that it is part of an organism or a lever in a mechanism where it contributes its vital share to the life of the whole".

This was an eloquent summing-up of the political trend among the Africans at this time. The wave of enthusiasm starting in 1935 had carried them through to this point, and December 1937 can be described as marking the culminating point in the first stage of the development of the All-African Convention. Thereafter, following upon a most propitious beginning, it entered on the seven lean years. In spite of the initial determination of the people to resist the Bills; in spite of the clear resolutions and the finely-conceived Constitution of the Convention; in spite of the brave words and the eloquent speeches of the leaders, the Convention fell into a period of decline. For seven long years the bold ship foundered on the sands of ineffectuality and frustration. Why?

It will be necessary for us to face this question squarely and to analyse the reasons for the turn which events took at this point. We must be able to draw the proper lesson from it. We cannot do this unless we examine the situation without fear or favour. To fail to do so is to expose ourselves to even greater dangers in the future.

This brings us back to the "Compromise" of 1936. Now we maintain that in politics there can be no such thing as a compromise between oppressor and oppressed. There can be a compromise only when the contracting parties meet on a footing of equality. The so-called "Compromise" under the conditions of such gross inequality as between White ruler and Black oppressed, could only be tantamount to a capitulation or a political "sell-out". In such a "compromise" one party must lose all the time while the other, without yielding one jot, gains all at the expense of its victim. The only compromise possible between a wolf and a lamb must be at the

expense of some vital limb. And that is not the end of it. The lamb, thus incapacitated, lies helpless before the inevitable onslaught that must follow. For, with his appetite whetted by the first morsel, the wolf will not be satisfied till he has swallowed the whole of his victim. The African people, having been robbed of the last vestige of their rights through the "Compromise", were left without political defence against further attacks that were to come. It should have been obvious that the taking away of even this vestigeal franchise would facilitate further repressive legislation.

How, then, was it possible for the African leaders to be persuaded that there was anything to be gained from this "Compromise"? How was it possible for them to consider it at all, let alone accept it?

Let us say here that there is no doubt that the "Compromise" *was* accepted. It is true that some leaders today deny that it ever took place and they point to the fact that there are no records of it. We are not now concerned whether this or that particular leader, closeted with this or that liberal, did in fact instruct the liberal to convey his acceptance of the "Compromise" to the Government. What we are concerned with is the sum total of the effect of their political actions.

It is a fact that the leaders of the day went out, in total disregard of the 1935 resolutions, to operate the Acts once they were passed, and participated in the farcical elections. This was not merely a section of the leadership, nor the leadership of this or that organisation. It was all the recognised leaders of that time.

CHAPTER 4

Why the “Compromise”?

What is the explanation of the wholesale reversal on the part of the leaders? It is not enough to say that they “sold out”. This is a too superficial way of stating the matter. And it does not get us anywhere. The real question still remains: why was it possible for a whole leadership to accept the Hertzog Bills? More than this. How was it possible that they could run out on the 1935 decisions of Convention and flout the expressed wishes of the people and yet get away with it, without bringing down on their heads the condemnations of the African people?

To answer these questions is our main concern at this point. Our purpose is not to apportion blame to this or that individual or organisation. We are going into these matters in order to see clearly what the mistake was, its nature and especially its causes. The Africans have paid dearly for these mistakes and it would be an act of irresponsibility to gloss over them. In a struggle which involves the very survival of a people it would be criminal not to pause, take stock, assess the situation and learn from the errors of the past in order to arm ourselves the better for the future.

An analysis of the situation leads us to the fact that the reasons for the “Compromise” are inherent in the past development of the people. It may help us to visualise the political structure as a pyramid where the masses constitute the broad base; above them are the intellectuals, and above that again are the liberals, while the herrenvolk party leaders constitute the apex of the structure. In other words, the failure of the Africans to put up a resistance in 1936 lay in the fact that the real control of the leadership was in the hands of Hertzog-Smuts.

Let us examine the situation under three heads:

- (a) the relationship between the African leaders and the liberals;
- (b) the relationship between the liberals and the rest of the herrenvolk;
- (c) the relationship between the African leaders and the people.

(a) The Liberals and the African Leaders

Ever since the military conquest of South Africa the liberals have played a consistent role in furthering the subjugation of the people. For a very long time this role was never understood by the oppressed. On the contrary, they embraced as their champions and friends these very agents of British imperialism. The explanation of this is to be found in the history of South Africa, in the struggles between Dutch feudalism and English capitalism.

The Dutch represented a backward, outdated and reactionary system of society with its attendant social and economic relationships. They represented a shut-in, circumscribed mode of existence and a primitive mode of production, with a complete lack of a progressive economy capable of expansion leading to a growth of

towns, industry and commerce. In short, they represented the dark forces of the Middle Ages, with the serf or slave tied permanently to the land and denied the possibility of education. The English, on the other hand, had come from a country where capitalism had already been established and they brought with them to South Africa the particular mode of existence and economy as well as the ideas that belong to that system. Historically, they represented the forces of progress as compared with feudalism. The liberal slogans of "freedom" and "equality" were the ideological weapons with which, already in Europe, they had broken the shackles of an outworn economic system, feudalism, and cleared the way for the freedom of capital and the operation of new industrial forces.

In South Africa in the 19th century these two economic systems, Dutch feudalism and English capitalism, were necessarily in opposition. It was a conflict into which the African willy-nilly, was drawn, without realising that he was merely a pawn in the game. In the latter part of the 19th century he invariably supported the English rather than the Dutch. What he did not realise was that the English were actuated by the dictates of purely objective circumstances and not by any subjective feelings of good-will towards him. The new forces of capitalism demanded a difference form of labour from feudalism; it demanded a wage-labourer who would sell his labour instead of a serf or slave who was tied to the land, and a master. This seemed to the African to open up possibilities of freedom and individual enterprise denied to him under feudalism. Capitalism, moreover, with its expanding economy giving rise to the growth of industry and commerce, required a body of literate workers. It was therefore essential in the interests of capitalism to foster education to a certain extent, while to the feudalists an educated serf was anathema since he was a threat to the rigid and static system of feudalism. Here again the representatives of British imperialism appeared to the Africans in a progressive light and in so far as the liberals brought them education they appeared as their friends and the champions of their rights. Here again the Africans confused the objective demands of the capitalist system with a supposed will-to-good on the part of the liberals. They translated the clash between two economic systems as evidence of an inherent difference in attitudes towards the Africans, as an intrinsic difference in moral principles between Dutch and English. They failed to realise that the good things they associated with the liberals had nothing whatever to do with moral principle or the humanitarian will-to-good. Actually the liberals themselves were obeying the dictates of the objective forces of capitalism. And it was this that the Africans failed to understand. In the same way — as we have already indicated — they misunderstood the nature of the old Cape Liberalism, that is, the dictates of political expediency which lay behind the defence of the African vote.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Africans came to place reliance on the liberals. When they heard them expounding liberal sentiments with such zest, they reposed their faith in them. They saw an identity between their own aspirations and the aims of the liberals. In their minds they appeared to be their spokesman. As a result of this mistaken identity, when the Africans began to take their first tentative political steps they looked to the liberals for guidance. They received all their political training from them.

Here lay the roots of the great influence which the liberals had over them and

which operated as an intellectual stranglehold upon the whole educated section of the African people. Here is the very crux of the weakness in all their political activity. The failure to place the liberal where he belonged, namely, to the ruling class, prevented them from severing the umbilical cord which bound them to him, and pursuing an independent course with a single mind, free from the influences of an enemy class.

(b) The Liberals and the Rest of the Herrenvolk

While the African people regard the liberals as their friends, and spokesmen, the liberals, on the other hand, know quite well where they belong, where their interests and therefore their allegiance must lie. They are conscious of their role in society, and what is more the herrenvolk as a whole is fully aware of their function and their usefulness. Although they may not belong officially to any of the herrenvolk parties, they nevertheless play a definite political role. There is a tacit understanding amongst the herrenvolk that when the liberals protest very loudly, their opposition has certain clearly defined limits. It will never endanger the interests of the ruling-class as a whole. Their protestations will be carried out in such a way as will not at any time threaten the fundamental relationship of White trustee and Black ward.

When we want to ascertain where the liberals belong, whether on the side of the oppressor or the oppressed, we have only to ask a simple question: what are their economic interests? For it is this that determines a man's political outlook. All the rulers are agreed on one fundamental point, the exploitation of the Black man as the producer of their wealth. There is a clear dividing line between exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed and the interests of these two camps stand in irreconcilable opposition. The former must seek to oppress in conformity with their economic interests while the latter strive to liberate themselves.

Now on which side of the line do the liberals fall? If their interests are those of the oppressors, i.e. if they benefit from oppression, then they must belong to the opposite camp from the Blacks. They are part and parcel of the herrenvolk. The Government can rest assured that in all their manifold spheres of activity — cultural, educational, humanitarian and political — the sum total of all their activities reinforces the interests of the rulers. The ultimate effect of all their labours is to oil the wheels of exploitation. They are the great Conciliators, whose function is to reconcile the oppressed to their chains. Their task is to coin fine phrases and utter noble sentiments to cover up a grimly exploitive system.

In politics, the demands of a ruling-class are never stated openly. Nevertheless every law is the expression of one or other of their economic demands. But the politicians are always careful to cover it over with fine legal phrases and even professions of good-will. It is only when a law is put into operation that its real intention is brought home to its victims. Even then some of them refuse to believe that its real intention was to oppress; they stubbornly hold on to the idea that the administrators of the law are misinterpreting it. For they cannot reconcile the lofty sentiments expressed during the passing of the law with the relentless experience of its operation. Every time there is a new attack in the form of a repressive

law the people are thrown into confusion, dissension and division amongst themselves. In this way they are rendered helpless and delivered into the hands of the oppressor.

It is in this respect that the liberals perform an indispensable role, without which no government could so easily achieve its purpose. In other words, it is understood by the herrenvolk as a whole that the primary task of the deception of the people falls to the liberals. They know that it is not enough for the government in power to work out its plans for the exploitation of the oppressed. They have to make sure that such plans (or laws) will be made acceptable to the oppressed. This is where the liberals, the agents of the herrenvolk, step in. This is where the long-established link between the liberals and the African intellectuals becomes of paramount importance. Now they reap the fruits of the power and influence they have acquired over the African leaders, for the channels of contact have been well and truly prepared. The chain of connection from the herrenvolk party leaders through the liberals to the African leaders and thence to the people, is complete. This is what we mean when we say that the real control of the leadership of the African people lay in the hands of Hertzog-Smuts. Here is the basis for all so-called compromises. It explains what at first sight seems impossible — that the oppressed should meekly accept their chains. It is here that the full tragedy of the failure of the African leaders to sever the destructive link binding the oppressed to the oppressor becomes fully revealed. For it has acted like a cancer eating into the political body of the Africans and has nullified all their efforts.

(c) African Leaders and the People

Our understanding of how the 1936 "Compromise" took place is further illuminated when we consider the relationship between the African leaders and the masses. At the same time we can better understand the reason why it was possible for the leaders to flout the expressed wishes of the people without incurring their condemnation.

First of all as to the general character of the intellectual, the section from which the leaders invariably stem. They constitute a very small section of the oppressed masses. The social position of the African intellectual is an extremely precarious one. While he suffers the disabilities of his brothers in oppression, he has some few privileges which appear very precious to him. He clings to them all the more tenaciously because of the deprivations and humiliations suffered by his more unfortunate fellow-men. He usually depends on government employment for a livelihood and he is the less likely to risk losing his job since this involves not only loss of livelihood but also loss of social status and those privileges which only just save him from the jackboot of the mine-boss, the rigours of the pass-system and the sjambok of the farmer.

These precarious conditions of his existence have a profound effect on his behaviour and his whole mode of thinking. They tend to make intellectual courage and single-mindedness difficult for him.

Now it is true to say that everywhere in the world the intellectuals as a group occupy an intermediary position between the working-class and the employing class. It is a small group which is incapable of playing an independent role and its

members must attach themselves to either one or other of the two fundamental and opposing classes in society. The contradictions of such a position make them prone to vacillation and indecision. At various periods in history when the conflict between the two classes has reached a crisis, they have always attached themselves to whichever was the stronger force at the time. They can act boldly and decisively only when they are assured of a strong force behind them.

The difficulties and contradictions that face an intellectual in general apply to the African intellectual to a much greater degree. As a member of an oppressed race he is regarded by the ruling-class as an alien (enemy) while at the same time he is separated in many various ways from the rest of the oppressed. His isolation is complete, with all its disastrous implications. When faced with the necessity to act, he first looks round to size up the strength of the masses. He asks himself if it will be safe for him to throw in his lot with them, for he is afraid to burn his boats. He is invariably seized with pessimism because he always underestimates the power of the masses in a crisis.

Altogether, his position is a difficult one. He finds himself between the upper and the nether millstone. On the one hand his "friends" and political mentors, the liberals, look to him to do nothing to upset the "happy race relations" on which they set so much store. On the other hand, the people look to him to be their leader and spokesman. As an educated man he enjoys great prestige amongst them. Being themselves inarticulate as a result of their illiteracy, they regard him as the best man to express their needs and aspirations. At every political crisis he is faced with this problem of dual allegiance, and, unable to resolve this contradiction, he takes the line of least resistance.

Then he is compelled to resort to ambiguity and equivocation in word and deed. We use the word "compelled" advisedly, because as long as he is tied to the enemy class he robs himself of independent thinking and thence of freedom of action. His training under the liberals reinforces these tendencies arising from his precarious position. For it is the very essence of liberalism to extol the virtues of progress by gradualness, sweet reasonableness, restraint, patience and dignity.

Now, because he is an intellectual, he has to rationalise his actions to himself and justify his course to the people in whose eyes he must maintain his prestige. What has since become a classical example will illustrate what we mean. We refer to the situation which arose over the boycott of the election in recent years. By the middle of the forties the people had reached a stage of bitter disillusionment in the Slave Acts of 1936. Day to day experience had brought home to them the full force of these Acts. When, therefore, the All-African Convention in its Statement "Along the New Road", came out with a call to boycott the elections the people rallied to the call because it answered their needs. But a boycott of the election of Members of the Native Representative Council (M.R.C's.) and the White so-called "Native Representatives" in Parliament meant a sharp break with the liberals and their policy. A section of the intellectuals could not countenance this. And the arguments they used against the Boycott are a striking example of the inexorable logic of a false political position; they demonstrate the depths to which one is reduced under the necessity to rationalise one's actions.

This section of the intellectuals, headed by the M.R.C's., argued that the people

were not ready for a boycott and maintained that they had still to be educated to it — and all this in face of the people's emphatic rejection of dummy elections. As the day of the elections approached these intellectuals waxed more and more voluble in a frantic attempt to dissuade the people from their course. They could not openly condemn the boycott movement, since to do so would have meant taking an open stand with the enemy against the people, and thus exposing themselves and incurring a complete loss of prestige. So they resorted to verbal contortions and equivocations in order to sow confusion and thus destroy the boycott movement. They coined the ridiculous phrase: "Boycott candidates" — as if it were possible both to boycott and take part in the elections at one and the same time. It is a meaningless contradiction in terms, but this did not seem to worry the lackeys of liberalism, nor were they concerned with the fact that sooner or later the people would discover the political trick, as long as it enabled them to proceed with the elections.

They put forward the plea that: "We should not overthrow national unity for the emotional satisfaction of boycotting elections." Both the cynicism of this argument, which identifies the grim struggle for liberation with a mere "emotional satisfaction", and the accusation against the people of "overthrowing national unity", demonstrate the sheer intellectual dishonesty to which an intellectual is driven by the logic of his false position. He who sacrifices the unity of the people (under the boycott movement) on the altar of his allegiance to the liberals, dares to accuse the people of his own crime.

Continuing with their equivocations, they prated about "putting up a heroic fight from within the Council", and "sending our best brains and our bravest souls to improve the Council." But all their specious arguments could not alter the fact that as soon as the people participated in the elections they were accepting and operating the machinery of their own oppression. No amount of verbal jugglery could remove the plain fact that to stand for election and to vote for the councillors, was to break the boycott. To crown it all they found it possible to describe this mumbo-jumbo as the acme of political realism and statesmanship. In truth they had learned the language and methods of the liberals very well.

We have said that the reason for the acceptance of the "Compromise" and the failure of the African people to put up a struggle in 1936 lay in the past history of the people. We have shown the link between the African intellectuals and the liberals which prevented them from taking an independent course. But our analysis of the situation is not complete unless we look further into the nature of the relationship between the intellectuals and the people.

The masses, as we have said, looked to the intellectuals to be their leaders and spokesmen. They had long been accustomed to giving their allegiance to this or that particular leader because of his personality and prestige. Even when they joined an organisation they usually did so because their particular heroes were in it. They were never taught to discriminate between organisations according to the principles for which they stood and the policy which they advocated. Consequently the organisations themselves did not find it necessary to define precisely their principles and their policies. This was an inherent weakness the dangers of which only a crisis would fully reveal.

In the absence of clearly-defined principles, the dangers were many and varied. Firstly, it placed no check on the leaders and gave free scope for opportunism, that enemy of principle without which a sustained struggle is impossible, that canker which has infected the political activity of the Africans and taken such heavy toll of our organisations in the past. Secondly, the people themselves, lacking a guiding principle, had no clear directives for action and no touchstone with which to measure and correctly assess the political actions of their leaders.

It is not surprising that it was difficult for the people to have a political measuring-rod when the leaders themselves were untaught and untrained to these necessities. Before the leaders could communicate these qualities to the masses they themselves had to break with the liberals and free themselves from their intellectual stranglehold. For proper leadership presupposes independence of thought and clarity of vision as well as intellectual integrity and moral courage. Under such conditions the people were exposed to pressures from an enemy class, to influences now from one section of the herrenvolk and now from another.

Here, then, can be seen all the elements which made the 1936 "Compromise" possible. We have taken some pains to go into the matter very thoroughly because of the seriousness of its results for a whole people. It cannot be too strongly stressed that on our ability to assess and learn from the mistakes of the past depends our proper conducting of the struggle in the future.

The Compromise

The actual events of the Compromise period of 1936 are briefly told. The publication of the three "Native Bills" had created a stir in the country. In order to allay the fears of the tribal sections of the African population and thus split them off from the general body of protest, the Government held secret meetings of chiefs, showing them maps in which the promised land was marked off. The plan did not work because many of the chiefs discovered that the "promised land" was in fact already occupied by them. Protests spread throughout the length and breadth of the country.

The liberals swelled the volume of protest and none expostulated more loudly than they did. By their loud protestations they drew attention to themselves and succeeded in putting themselves at the head of the agitation. This was the first step in the train of events. When the African leaders arrived in Cape Town with the 1935 Resolutions of the Convention rejecting the Bills, the liberals got busy interviewing Cabinet Ministers and negotiations went on fast and furious. The stage was now set for the next move.

The Compromise was announced in all the herrenvolk Press. But still the liberals carried on with their loud protestations. The Bills went through Parliament. Then immediately after the passing of the Bills, Hertzog made his famous speech in which he warned those elements in the White group who were in the heat of protest, that they were playing with fire. It was a speech delivered from the rostrum of Parliament, but addressed to the country, particularly to the liberals.

Hertzog warned that, without the cooperation of the African people themselves, these Acts would be as dead as if they had never passed through the third reading of Parliament. He knew that for the first time the Parliament of South Africa had

passed drastic measures against the Africans without having any means of enforcing them. He was fully alive to the dangers of the position. There was no law compelling the people to vote if they did not want to. The working of the Acts, particularly the "Native Representation" Act depended on the voluntary co-operation of the people. If they refused to vote, the whole system of fraudulent representation and dummy councils would be killed before it was born. In other words the people could defy this Act without the Government being able to take legal reprisals. It was not simply that the herrenvolk feared that the people would succeed in defeating this particular Act. It was even more than this. The great danger they feared lay in the fact that by thus opposing the Act the Africans would discover that most powerful instrument of resistance, the boycott — a weapon whose use could be extended and effectively applied in all other spheres of political struggle. It was a contingency strenuously to be avoided. It was this dangerous possibility which Hertzog had in mind when he issued his warning to his fellow-herrenvolk.

The liberals now took the cue. As vehemently as they had protested against the Bills, so now did they plead strenuously for the acceptance of the Acts. The great conciliators were in full swing. They coined the phrase: "Half-a-loaf is better than no bread". Their advice was couched in those trite phrases: "Give the Acts a trial", and "Make the best of a bad job". The African leaders, true to the tradition of placing reliance on the liberals, followed them even now. From this time on they turned their backs on the people's decisions made at the 1935 Convention. They went out to take part in the elections instituted by the Acts. Some competed for positions in the Native Representative Council while others vied with one another in their support of the various White "Native Representative" candidates. An election atmosphere was created and whipped up by the herrenvolk press. The leaders worked themselves up to fever-pitch and all their energies were poured into the task of operating the Slave Acts.

Desertion of Convention

This prodigal diversion of energy was a great blow to the All-African Convention — a blow that sent the once bold ship staggering into shallows where it grounded on the rocks of political treachery. Those who should have manned it and guided it into the full sea towards its destination, deserted it. If anyone had set himself the deliberate task of disrupting the unity of the African people which had found its expression in the formation of the Convention, he could not have devised a better way. The apple of discord had been successfully thrown into their midst. When a proposal for a boycott of the "Native Representation" Act was made in June 1936, as the logical follow-up of the 1935 Convention Resolutions, it was thrown out. The leaders now had other ideas. After the style of the liberals they began to argue: Let us give the Acts a trial. Let us make use of what we have in order to get what we want. They proceeded to rationalise their actions. They argued that the people were not sufficiently educated to understand the boycott, and that in any case they were more interested in the promise of land than in the loss of an already depleted franchise, and therefore they would not support a boycott.

This argument is all the more spurious when one recalls the mood of the masses at that time and the eagerness with which they had rallied to the call to resist the

Bills. All that was necessary was for the leaders to get hold of the same maps that the Government had used in an attempt to deceive the masses and with them expose the fraud of the Land Act. Even the chiefs on their own had already pointed out the fraud. This exposure could have been made equally well without the maps, simply by making use of the figures of the proposed amount of promised land and comparing them with the size of the land already occupied by the African people. In this way it would have been easy to show that when the Land Act was put into operation there would be even less land available than there had been before the Act.

This would have been a comparatively easy task because the people themselves were already suspicious. At all events, a proper struggle along these lines would have given the leaders an opportunity of educating the people on the importance of striving for political rights, and of showing them that the land problem could not be solved without first solving the political problem. In other words, the people are suffering from land starvation because they have no political rights.

Instead of following this bold course of action the leaders hid their cowardice behind the alleged ignorance and lack of readiness of the masses. Putting the blame on the masses for their weak-kneed policy is a device that has become all too familiar.

The argument that the people were not educated to the boycott was indeed an absurd one, though its absurdity did not seem to strike these masters of prevarication. For what could have been more strange and foreign to the masses than the whole system of electoral colleges and indirect parliamentary representation, which the leaders proceeded to advocate? But they never argued that the people were not educated to this. On the contrary, they, along with the magistrates and the various Native Commissioners, took it upon themselves to go out and teach the people how to form electoral colleges and how and when to vote. In fact they did this so well that within a short space of time the whole country was caught up in a dummy election fever. It was not the first time that the leaders had misdirected the people.

The truth of the matter is that hitherto the intellectuals have been engaged in a systematic miseducation of the masses. That training which they themselves received from the herrenvolk through the liberals they have been passing on to the people without first submitting it to a critical appraisal as to what is good and what is injurious to the cause of the oppressed. It was natural enough that the people had to be taught new methods of struggle within a system of society which was comparatively new to them. The leaders taught them the paramount importance and the uses of the franchise. This was good. And the people responded wholeheartedly. But then the leaders went on to press for the support of the Bunga system in rural areas and the corresponding bodies, the Advisory Boards, in the urban areas. And it is significant that the people were reluctant to follow them in this. Yet in spite of their reluctance the intellectuals carried on an intensive propaganda for many years in an attempt to popularise the Bunga system and the urban Advisory Boards, all of which had been created for the enslavement of the Africans. When, later, the Native Representative Council, that glorified Bunga, was introduced, it was the intellectuals almost exclusively who had an interest in it and vied for positions in it.

The masses, on the other hand, spontaneously maintained their aloofness. Not being under the direct influence of the liberals and not being confounded by the press and radio propaganda, they always tend to fall back on their elemental reasoning. Their reactions are direct and straightforward. The daily experience of oppression predisposes them to be suspicious of anything originating from the oppressor. While this does not in itself serve as a positive guide to action it nevertheless guides them as to what to avoid. It creates an attitude of mind that makes them less susceptible to propaganda from the enemy class. They view things from a particular angle of vision, i.e. from the point of view of the oppressed only.

In this sense it can be said that, in the matter of the boycott, it is not the masses who need education so much as the leaders. That is why it is so preposterous for the leaders to accuse the people of not being ready for the boycott, when the whole trend of the people's elemental reasoning arising out of their experiences has only one logical outcome, namely the rejection of all government-imposed institutions — in other words, the boycott. In fact it is the people who are waiting for the errant leaders to come home. They are ready, but they have to wait until the leaders retrace their steps and join them in a united and independent struggle, free from the influences of the herrenvolk and untrammelled by a misplaced allegiance to any section of it.

With the leaders, then, diverting their energies into working the new Acts, the enthusiasm of the African people was bound to wane. The spirit of unity which had characterised the 1935 period received a mortal blow, the full effects of which were only later to reveal themselves. We have said that the formation of the All-African Convention was the organisational expression of the enthusiasm and determination engendered in the people by the announcement of the Bills. The momentum of this enthusiasm carried it to 1937 when the Draft Constitution constituting the All-African Convention as a permanent body, was formally ratified in the midst of speeches which still breathed the spirit of unity. Now it often happens that a political act takes some time before it bears its evil fruit. The "Compromise" of 1936 was of this nature and it was not until after 1937 that its bitter harvest began to be reaped. National unity had received a shattering blow.

After the furious activity of the first elections under the Native Representation Act, confusion reigned and apathy set in. A blight fell on the political arena and Convention entered a period of decline. The leaders had not only flouted the 1935 decisions of Convention, but many of them also began to desert Convention itself. They went their various ways, pursuing their own individual and petty organisational interests. Gone was the spirit of national unity which had been the motivating power carrying the people to the highest peak of political consciousness and the maximum organisational unity — a power which had swept aside all petty bickerings, petty organisational rivalries and pre-occupations, a power which had welded together not only the hitherto rival leaders but also the whole leadership together with the masses.

CHAPTER 5

The Significance of the All-African Convention

Notwithstanding the temporary vicissitudes which overtook the Convention, the indubitable fact remains that the formation of the All-African Convention was a turning point in the political history of the African people. The period 1935-37 marked the highest point of development in organisation affecting them as a group. The political exigencies of the time and the crisis of the Hertzog Bills had compelled them to organise on a nation-wide scale. The creation of the A.A.C. was a spontaneous act. Without any premediated theory the people brought into being a form of organisation which could knit them together into a single compact unit, capable of being a fighting force.

Prior to this, as we have indicated, there had existed many small organisations each operating independently of the others. There were political and professional organisations, trade unions and civic and church bodies, etc., all of which had one purpose, the fight for liberation. But each one worked in isolation from the rest. The characteristic feature of this stage of development was a mutual suspicion and rivalry between the various organisations, each of which was dominated by a single personality. It became, one might say, the duty of the leader or leaders of one organisation to denounce all others, not because of differences in political policies or principles, but because they could not brook any rivalry in the leadership. Each one felt that the other organisations were not necessary and that everybody should join the particular organisation where he was leader. Thus all political fights degenerated into a personal squabble and the leaders exhausted all their energies in fratricidal strife.

This state of affairs is not to be ascribed simply to the personal attributes of the particular leaders of that time. It must be borne in mind that the lack of political clarity and the formulation of aims and principles, together with organisational deficiencies, provided the soil in which such defects could thrive. In the absence of a clear formulation of their *raison d'être*, their function and purpose, organisations found themselves caught up in petty and personal concerns. This was bound up with the fact that the organisations were attached to individual leaders, who were looked up to as heroes, with the result that the whole activity of organisations tended to revolve round these leaders and their ambitions.

In such an atmosphere it is not surprising that the African people did not consciously formulate their tasks and work out a programme of struggle against the oppressor on a nation-wide scale. Their vision was circumscribed and turned in upon themselves; their energies were dissipated and exhausted in mutual strife.

Then came the crisis of 1935, which altered the course of development and precipitated the people into taking a leap in the growth of political consciousness. Now

in the day-to-day struggle for existence the people are not aware of a growth or a ripening process that is taking place. They have not the time to stand aside and observe objectively what is happening to them. It is only when they are faced with a crisis that it becomes evident that a growth has been taking place. For when they act, they act with a maturity which they themselves are not aware of. The programmes and the political institutions which are spontaneously created at such a time reflect this growth and are evidence of the fact that a maturing process has been taking place unobserved.

We pause here to comment on the word "spontaneous". The idea of spontaneity is often associated with mysticism and identified with some kind of divine inspiration. But the so-called spontaneity of action on the part of the people is not at all spontaneous in the strict sense of the word. It itself is the outcome of knowledge acquired in the hard school of daily experience. The masses may not be able to express this knowledge in words, formulate it in theory and present it in a considered statement of principles. Nevertheless, their so-called "instinctive" or "spontaneous" action is guided by their knowledge — a knowledge which may also have been acquired as a result of past failures.

It is against the background of such a growth of a whole people that the sudden coming into being of the All-African Convention acquires meaning and significance.

In creating this body, the African people made a tremendous discovery, which was to mark a turning point in their history. With a leap of imagination and a creative genius — which a people achieve under stress — they had lighted upon a form of organisation which was not only capable of welding a whole population into a single unit, but which at the same time opened up a vista of theoretical and political possibilities. But the masses were not aware of the full significance of what they had discovered. And the leaders themselves did not at any time stop to examine it, formulate the nature of the discovery and evaluate its possibilities. Yet it is essential that this should be done.

This discovery marked a higher political level. It might be said to fall into two parts, i.e. one can look at it (a) from the purely organisational aspect and (b) from the political aspect. Both of these call for a somewhat detailed examination.

(a) The Organisational Aspect.

The problem was to create a mouthpiece for the whole of the African people, a forum from which their voice could be heard. It was obvious that no single party could fulfil this task. A single political party cannot represent a whole community or race, for the mere fact of belonging to the same race has nothing to do with a man's political affiliations. In any given community people share different political ideas ranging from the extreme left to the extreme right, with all shades of leftists, centrists and conservatives in between. These must naturally fall into their various political groupings or parties. Any attempt, therefore to form a unitary political organisation or party was doomed to fail. Further, no one party could claim to represent tribalists, nationalists, internationalists and liberals, and at the same time integrate and attend to the specific tasks of industrial workers, farm labourers, peasants, professional classes, etc. Yet the very crux of the problem was to find a form

of organisation which would meet the demands arising out of a two-fold oppression — national oppression and class exploitation. The problem was to find a means of integrating and co-ordinating the national struggle with the struggles of the people striving to defend themselves against exploitation in their respective fields of labour. It was this objective fact, along with the particular stage of development reached by the people at the time, which dictated the form of organisation required.

In establishing the All-African Convention, then, the African people had discovered such a body. The prominent idea at the time was *unity*. The dominating thought in everybody's mind was how to remove competition and eliminate all rivalry between organisations. Each leader was to bring his followers to the Convention, and he together with the leaders of other organisations was to form a single leadership with a common aim and purpose. Mutual antagonisms and rivalry were replaced by the spirit of cooperation. The leader who jealously guarded his personal position was replaced by a unified leadership and petty sectional considerations gave way to a form of thought which embraced the whole race. In such a body the interests of each constituent part were identical with the interests of the whole. Yet this did not mean that the individual organisations were to lose their identity and be swallowed up by the whole. On the contrary, the recognition of a common aim and purpose would revivify and strengthen the component parts, while the strengthening of each component part would in turn enormously reinforce the whole.

Federal Organisation

Let us picture the structure of the All-African Convention in some detail and see how it works concretely.

Once the All-African Convention was established, the first duty was to build it up. For this it was necessary to have organisers who would go round the country, putting before the people the idea of this new form of organisation. Let us suppose that it had been in the position of having a full-time organiser — as was the intention at the time. What would his task have been? What would he have done? First he would have to bring to the masses the policy of Convention. (This will be dealt with later). He would have to educate them to the idea of the federal structure of Convention. How would he do this? In his tour round the country he would find that in some places there were no organisations at all in existence. Here he would ask the people to form an organisation; he would put before them the example of a number of organisations already existing in other places and he would recommend them to choose one according to the conditions and burning problems of the particular place, either rural or urban. The actual choice would be left entirely in the hands of the local people. But the organiser would insist emphatically that, whatever organisation they decided to form, it should ally itself to and co-ordinate its struggles with the other African organisations throughout the country. This would be done by affiliating to the All-African Convention. He would stress the point that the individuality of their organisation would be maintained. The control of its finances, etc. would be a matter entirely for themselves. All that the Convention would insist upon is that they would do nothing in contradiction to the policy which is, or shall be, decided upon by the whole people in Conference.

In some places the organiser would find that there are many different organisations in existence and here his method would be rather different. He would not attempt to form a new organisation to compete with existing ones. This would be totally opposed to his purpose. He would get in touch with the leaders of the local bodies, ask them jointly to call a public meeting in which he would urge the people to join any one of the existing organisations — it wouldn't matter to him which one. The main thing is that not a single man or woman would fail to join an organisation. But — and this is of the utmost importance — they must see to it that whatever organisation they join shall link itself up with the rest of the African organisations, by affiliating to the All-African Convention. These, then, would be some of the tasks of the full-time organiser.

In the case where — as has happened — the All-African Convention has no funds, the same thing could be done, perhaps even more effectively, in another way. (And this incidentally would also demonstrate the superiority of the federal structure). While the federal body itself may have slender financial resources, it is possible for some of the constituent bodies to have sufficient funds to allow of full-time organisers for their organisations. Let us say, for example, that the Voters' Association, the Trade Unions, the African National Congress and the Teachers' Association were all affiliated to the Convention and could each afford an organiser. What would their function be and what would they do? Bearing in mind that the prime impulse which brought the All-African Convention into being was the urge to unity on the part of the people — a unity which replaced rivalry and disruption — the organisers would see their task as much more than simply propagandising their own particular organisations. They would see their respective organisations as links, vital links in a whole structure, each one being necessary to the life of the whole.

Their attitude to their respective organisations would be guided by their recognition of the fact that to strengthen their own organisation was to make a contribution to the strength of the whole. Conscious of their common tasks, they would tour the country together and thus make a practical demonstration of unity. Wherever they held meetings they would urge the people to join their respective organisations; the workers their trade unions, the teachers the Teachers' Association, and if there were a Congress branch in that district the people would be asked to join it or any other political party that happened to be in existence there — with one proviso: that each and every one of these organisations should regard themselves as parts of a whole and affiliate to the All-African Convention. Under such conditions there would be no room for rivalries; there would be no fear of one organisation ousting another. For the dominating consideration would be the contribution to national unity.

Now as to the manner in which the federal body functions, To its annual Conference all the affiliated organisations send their representatives; all the political parties of all degrees of political opinion varying from the extreme left to the extreme right are also represented. Thus in this body representative of the whole African population, deliberations are held in a truly democratic manner and whatever decisions are made they will reflect the desires of the majority. It is this which makes the All-African Convention the mouth-piece of the African people, the forum from which their voice can be heard. It is in this way that it can decide on a policy to be followed

by all. Whatever decisions are made are carried back by the delegates to their respective organisations, which then act in accordance with the declared policy.

Local Co-ordinating Committees

As to the channels through which this policy is carried out: In every district there are usually a number of organisations existing independently. The idea is that within the federal structure the activities of these already existing bodies should be co-ordinated in the following manner:- To take an example of a rural district in which there are branches of the Farmers' Association, the Teachers' Association and the Voters' Association, etc. A co-ordinating committee is created, consisting of two or three representatives from each of these bodies, and it acts as a sentinel guarding over the interests of all in that district. If anything affecting a section of the community should arise — such as an attack on the teachers — it is not the teachers' association alone which takes the matter up, but the co-ordinating committee. Its representatives put the problem before their respective organisations, who together take up the fight under the leadership of the co-ordinating committee. Thus the people are taught in a practical way how to put up a united resistance. If they succeed in a specific battle, the credit goes to no one particular organisation, but equally to all of them, and once again rivalry is eliminated. If they resist another attack and again succeed, the people being to learn the value of united action. The strength of the co-ordinating committee increases and thence also the strength of the various organisations as a whole.

To understand, then, what this federal structure, the All-African Convention looks like in action, picture first the annual Conference at Bloemfontein, which decides on policy. This is directly linked with the local co-ordinating committees in every province, in every town, rural district, dorp or village. These in turn are rooted in the masses through the various organisations, who deal with their specific problems in accordance with the policy which has been decided upon at the Conference. It might be likened to a heart which through the arteries feeds every limb of a vast body. But at the same time there is a reciprocal flow from the masses through the local committee to the representative body. Unity is the guiding principle permeating the whole structure. Unanimity of policy dictates unanimity of action. In this way there is established a dynamic unity, not only between the various leaders who constitute a single leadership, but between this leadership and the masses.

(b) The Wider Political Aspect

We have said that the discovery of the new form of organisation, the All-African Convention, thus capable of uniting the people on a national basis, opened up still wider possibilities of political and ideological development.

If the African people themselves were still unaware of the potentialities of their discovery, the rulers were fully alive to the danger to itself inherent in this development. It was not the form of organisation per se that worried them so much as a further development which sooner or later would follow it. *it could prove a basis for a new outlook* They are aware of the interconnection between the form of an organisation (which itself marks a development) and the political outlook which

accompanies it. This form of organisation, uniting a whole people, cleared the way for a national outlook, the logical outcome of this particular stage of development. A *national outlook* on the part of an oppressed people constitutes the first stage of a threat to White domination. Such a development of political consciousness had to be arrested by the ruling class at all costs.

Organised Disruption

For the rulers it was necessary to sow confusion amongst the masses and instead of unity create disunity. The idea of the All-African Convention had to be smashed at birth. It was comparatively easy for them to succeed, at least in part, because the idea had not yet become part and parcel of the people's thinking.

Their tactic was to build up a particular leader by boosting him in their Press. For this, they found a tool in Mr. Dube. He was the first one to break away from Convention and with him went practically the whole of Natal. The *herrenvolk* Press acclaimed him as a great statesman, a moderate, a practical politician and in fact the epitome of all the virtues. They crowned him with a halo of greatness and conferred a doctorate on him. It was as Dr. Dube that he led Natal to the Native Representative Council at Pretoria.

This was a clever move on the part of the oppressors. Seeing the rewards and honours heaped upon Dube, others followed suit. The noble sentiments that had surrounded the birth of Convention had evaporated and one after another the leaders deserted. Amongst them was that same Mr. Selope Thema, who in 1936 had moved that the All-African Convention should be established as a permanent body. But these people could not smash the Convention by the mere act of breaking away and asking others to follow suit.

Still another and more thorough method of disruption had to be devised. It had to be organised disruption. And what could be better for this purpose than an organisation? What could be better than one already in existence and well-known? Thus the African National Congress (A.N.C.) was resuscitated. The Congress die-hards saw an opportunity for the purpose of breaking the All-African Convention, with all that it stood for. They let it be believed, however, that Congress would be a means of gathering the unorganised masses and bringing them into the Convention — as had been agreed in 1935.

But as soon as the Congress had gathered to itself a fairly respectable number of people they wrenched the organisation away from the Convention. By this time Dr. Xuma, an ex-Vice-President of the Convention and Chairman of its Executive Committee, was now head of the African National Congress. (It will be remembered how stirringly he had addressed the 1937 Conference of Convention from London, calling the people to unite under the All-African Convention and show the world that they meant to stand together at all costs). Here it is interesting to observe how the *herrenvolk* proceeded in their tactics of organising disruption. In 1935 Dr. Xuma had been a new and comparatively unknown figure in the political field. Unlike the generality of African intellectuals and the older leaders, he was independent of Government employment. He was, moreover, one of the most outspoken during the 1935-37 period, and nobody had been more eloquent than he in urging unity under Convention. The eyes of the younger generation were naturally turned

towards him with considerable hope and expectation. But the very reasons which made the oppressed Africans look towards him with such hope, made the herrenvolk look askance at him. At this stage – be it noted – his eloquent appeals for unity found no place in the columns of their Press. They took good care to ignore him. For at this time, it must be remembered, unity had been the key-note of the mood of the whole African people who were strong in their determination to resist. At that time, too, the Congress leaders, who were all in the Convention, received no publicity in the herrenvolk Press and not even their President was heard of.

When the African National Congress, however, began to break away from Convention, the attitude of the herrenvolk Press became totally different. Their propaganda machinery proceeded to function with a particular end in view. It proceeded to build up the President of Congress, Dr. Xuma, as a great champion of the cause of the African people. Every speech of the new leader was splashed in their Press; every eloquent appeal for unity received publicity. That is, they helped him to unite people under Congress. Yet there is nothing that the rulers fear more (as they themselves have indicated inside and outside Parliament) than the unity of the oppressed. What is the explanation of this seeming contradiction? Why was the silence of the Press, that had surrounded the unity of the people under the All-African Convention, now replaced by a blast of publicity for “unity” under the African National Congress?

This might be answered by asking another question: what was the nature of this unity under Congress, at this stage? Congress was now breaking away from Convention, from the larger unity, from national unity. It was breaking with the new policy of Convention and thus not only arresting this new development, but taking a retrogressive step. For to unite people in this way in a splinter organisation which was breaking away from Convention, was to foster organised disunity. This was the surest method of disrupting the unity so recently achieved by the African people. To speak of a unity which was actually a breaking away from unity, a disruption of unity, was of course to sow confusion in the minds of the people. This explains the tactics of the herrenvolk press in boosting the Congress at this time. The rulers had to foster and support, by every means at their disposal, an organisation which set itself up in opposition to the All-African Convention. For it had to kill the very spirit of unity on a higher political plane – the unity which had given rise to the formation of the All-African Convention.

What the rulers had succeeded in doing – and this the younger intellectuals do not know – was to plunge the African people back to the pre-1935 period, that whole epoch in which the struggles of the oppressed were reduced to a stalemate by fratricidal strife. The young intellectuals who left school at the end of the thirties or the early forties and who entered the political arena at that time, were handicapped by a false and incomplete picture of events. The Press presented them with ready-made figures of national heroes, and, being filled with a desire to take up the cause of their people, they naturally threw in their lot with these popular figures.

They never stopped to ask what had been the past history of the people, least of all what had taken place in the immediate past. They never stopped to wonder exactly why these leaders were so popular with the herrenvolk press. But with the

ardent zest of earnest youth they threw their energies into the building of the organisation in which they found these leaders, i.e. the African National Congress. They did not realise that by organising Congress at this stage they were in fact organising disunity; that by building Congress in opposition to the other organisations unified under the All-African Convention, they were destroying national unity. They who wanted to advance the cause of their people were in effect fostering a sectionalism and a racialism which are the very antithesis of true nationalism.

CHAPTER 6

Regeneration of the All-African Convention

The Background

In spite of all the forces ranged against the progress and political development of the African people, they could only succeed in retarding it. They could not crush it. With all the power of press propaganda and other means of disruption they could maim but not completely destroy the Convention, with all that it implied. What the people, with a tremendous leap of imagination had achieved under stress, could not be wiped out. The potentialities of their discovery could not be permanently frustrated.

The people had been persuaded to take a wrong turn that led them into a political desert. It is not to be supposed that they were reconciled to their oppression, nor had they lost interest in their liberation. On the contrary, the accumulation of their daily experience under the Slave Acts made their determination all the stronger when they finally began to emerge from the political desert and set foot on the new road of struggle. Those to whom they might have looked for a lead had deserted the All-African Convention and were busy operating the dummy councils and advisory boards. But there were a few who kept the Convention alive with its depleted forces. They were aware of its potentialities. It was a weapon of struggle demanded by the times and sooner of later it would be forged by the force of objective conditions.

By the beginning of the forties the people were tasting to the full the bitter fruits of the Compromise. The fraud of the Land Act had become apparent to all. Land hunger was more acute than ever.

When the Land and Trust Bill had been put before Parliament in 1936 the Prime Minister, General Hertzog, had made solemn assurances that millions of morgen of land were to be given to the Africans. He had said:

“We are now establishing a trust, and allow me to tell you that in the interests of the Natives as well as in the interests of the Europeans we are going to be liberal towards the Natives in the future. We can be so, because the danger in connection with the franchise has been removed.”

(Hansard, 1936, p.4083).

In the same year he redoubled his assurances:

“The Government wish once more to give the assurance that it is their earnest desire to see that the obligations towards the Natives of the Union arising out of this Bill in conjunction with the Representation of Natives Act recently passed by the joint sittings of the two Houses shall be faithfully carried out, and trust that this statement will be regarded as sufficient guarantee of the same.”

Seven years after these golden promises had been made, the people were suffering starvation and destitution in the Reserves as a result of land hunger. They were learning through bitter experience the real meaning of the 1936-7 Hertzog Acts. In 1943 the Minister of Native Affairs openly declared in the Senate:

“We do not buy this land for the Natives to settle down and become peasants. We buy it for the Natives to plough while they go out to work.”

In the same year Mr. Gemmill, an important figure connected with the recruiting for the Chamber of Mines, in giving evidence before the Mine Wages Commission said:

“If you pay the Native more wages, or if you give him more land, he is going to stay at home. He is not going to work in the mines.”

Indeed, by this time, the Africans did not need to be told that the very crux of the matter was the insatiable demands for cheap “Native” labour which dictated the whole Native policy of the rulers. To maintain, and in fact, increase land hunger was an essential part of that policy. It had become abundantly clear to them that the promised land would never materialise.

The herrenvolk in their Parliament could not help but come out with some of the naked facts concerning African land hunger. In a debate on Native policy Senator Malcomess said:

“I go so far as to say that our whole progress and prosperity depends on Native labour.” (Hansard)

In the same speech he confessed that:

“What is driving the Natives from the Reserves into the towns is hunger, want of land and the poll-tax. Forty per cent of the Reserves do not own any land.”
(Hansard)

Senator Brookes plaintively announced:

“I do want to submit that the combination of not buying the promised land for the Natives in Natal and trying to get land for European settlement in Zululand is an absolutely unfair thing . . . We have already got a great deal of the best land in Zululand taken away from the Natives, and now to take away what is left”

Senator Vermeulen stated with brutal frankness:

“The intention was *not* to give land to Natives on land owned by European farmers . . . Of what use would it be to remove squatters from farms and put them on land acquired by the Government? . . . I do not think that when those laws were passed the intention was that land should be acquired in order to provide accommodation for those squatters. But then the question may be asked: What must become of them? Let me say immediately that there is lots of room for those people on the farms. There is a serious shortage of labour on the farms.”

Senator Basner (ex-C.P. member) "Native Representative", had to admit that:

"As we are situated at present, all our talk and all our promises of education of the Natives and of land for the Natives is just so much talk and nothing else."

He put it to the House that: "The Government will not spend the money to improve the Reserves, because if they improve the Reserves they kill the gold mines." Then, twitting the Minister of Native Affairs who had introduced the five-morgen policy in 1943, he continued:

"The Native must not get enough land on which to become a settled Native peasant. He must get only enough land to place his family, but he must go out to work."

Even the miserable allotments to which they were limited under the five-morgen scheme were hedged in by innumerable restrictions, obligations and supervisions by inspectors and agricultural officers from the Native Affairs Department (N.A.D.). As if the herding of Africans into these pens were not itself sufficiently outrageous, they must needs subject the people to a galling interference.

"The moment they (the agricultural officers) get on the trust farms . . . they think that at last they have a farm of their own and that there are hundreds of Natives who can work for them. They get the Native people to come and cultivate their gardens and land and they treat the Native people, not as responsible people to whom the land belongs, but as their servants. The first thing they do is to make it clear to the Natives that *they* have the right to the farm." (Hansard)

Two further quotations will serve to illustrate the day to day experiences of the people. We feel it necessary to quote at some length, because such incidents indicate very clearly the source of the rising tide of discontent which stirred the people at this time. The Land Question was at the very core of their disillusionment. Under their professed plans for the improvement of stock and the preservation of the soil for the benefit of the African people, the rulers launched a campaign to deprive the already impoverished people of their cattle — cattle which are the main source of their subsistence. In this they received the support of the so-called leaders together with the familiar "friends" of the Africans. Said Senator Malcommes:

"When the Department of Native Affairs some years ago brought forward their recommendation with regard to limitation of stock, I saw the benefits that would accrue to the Natives if they followed this policy, and I gave the Department my full support. I went down to the Reserves and I met many of the leaders and discussed with them this question very carefully. Several of these leaders, *against the wishes* of his followers, agreed to come in with the N.A.D. and agreed to a limitation of stock. I should like to tell the Minister the objection of these followers to these leaders was that they were not sure what the N.A.D. would do when the Department got control. They felt that *they were putting their necks in a noose* and they did not know when the noose would be pulled tight . . . *Those Reserves that agreed to limitation of stock are very discontented today and there is a very bitter feeling amongst them.*

I would like to give an illustration of what is happening. An inspector turns up to cull the stock. He goes through the stock of a certain Native. Unfortunately he does not look for the co-operation of that Native and he does not consult him. He simply says: "That animal must be removed." If the Native protests then he is simply told he will be brought before the court and sued. No explanations or reasons are given. The next year a different inspector comes and he culls the very stock that the other inspector passed, and so the Natives are asking me today whether it is an instruction from the N.A.D. to cull quantity or quality. They cannot understand the attitude of the N.A.D. I have seen a case where a Native had a type of shorthorn cow . . . which gave about three quarters of a bucket of milk. That Native was told he had to get rid of that cow and he was threatened if he did not do so. What he did was he opened the gate leading into the Reserve that had not agreed to limitation of stock. The cow is running there today and every night it is brought to his fence and it gives him the milk he wants for his family . . . I have a case in my area where the Natives agreed to limitation of stock but where they had been cut down to *three morgen* and where their stock has been cut down to three head of cattle, those to consist of either 3 head of cattle, or one cow, one horse and four sheep. I want to ask the Minister how can these people plough with one cow, one horse and four sheep, and how can they possibly live?" (Hansard) (Our emphasis).

Yes one might well ask how a whole peasant family depending entirely on land and stock, can live on one cow, one horse and four sheep. But that Senator Malcommes should ask the question is typical of the cynical humanitarianism of the liberal, who leads the lamb to the slaughter and at the same time commiserates with him. It is not surprising that having shed his crocodile tears, he proceeded to put forward a plea for the quislings who were assisting in putting the noose round the necks of the people, and asked that they should receive some consideration for services rendered.

"I also feel," he said, "that the leaders of the Natives who went against the wishes of their people and agreed to limitation of stock should have the fullest support of the officials of the Department and they should be consulted in every possible way."

The second incident (from Natal) illustrates with equal force the outrageous treatment to which the people were being subjected. Senator Wessels is speaking:

"The Natives had their cattle there to be dipped and the inspector condemned them without an exception and did not approve of a single one. He immediately gave instructions to have them castrated. They immediately set to work to castrate the bulls and within a week the work was completed. Within 14 days the Natives received summonses from the inspector to the effect that they are keeping bulls which are not approved. . . . The Natives got a fright. Hundreds received summonses all of a sudden and all on one day. The attorneys then sent out their 'touts' among them to say that they would help the Natives. The Native thinks that he is guilty. The touts brought them together and told them that they had to pay one or two pounds for *vula mnyango* (to open the door) Approximately 400

pounds was collected. The Natives went to court and said that they pleaded guilty. I knew nothing about it, but the injustice lies therein that the Natives were summoned some 10 days or more after the bulls were castrated and they were fined 10 pounds or 14 days' imprisonment. This is apart from 'opening the door.'" (Hansard)

These expressions of regret are all the more nauseating in view of the fact that these so-called miscarriages of justice were not isolated events. It is not a question of the action of this or that magistrate or the insolence of petty officials. It is much deeper and wider than that.

In a system of society where one section of the population arrogates to itself all the state power for the purpose of dominating and enslaving another section, it devises a set of laws to carry out this purpose. Through its judicial and administrative systems, its courts, its police, its various officials, it puts these laws into operation. Now every law that is passed against the subjugated people must carry with it the basic connotations of the master and servant relationship. To put it another way, the ramifications of the policy of oppression and exploitation penetrate into every aspect of life, political, economic and social. The daily application of these laws must of necessity breathe the very spirit of the basic relationship. The very attitudes and behaviour of officials are determined by the whole racial atmosphere in which they operate. The meanest and lowliest member of the "master-race" gives expression to the master-slave relationship and deems it necessary to show the slave where he belongs. His crudities and brutalities stem directly from the laws of the land, which sanctify racial oppression.

The incidents quoted above, far from being isolated cases of a miscarriage of justice, are actually an integral part of the greater injustice, namely the oppression of a whole people. The Hertzog Acts of 1936-7 were a clear formulation of that policy. The African people were becoming aware that the Native Representation Act had been designed to rob them of their few political rights and that the Land and Trust Act, another edge to the same axe, was designed, not to give them more land, but to drive them off the land.

There were other factors which contributed to the heightening of political consciousness in the people. The second World War inevitably had its repercussions in South Africa and by 1943 its effects were seen in a deepening of the general ferment throughout the country.

Every war has the effect of throwing the ordinary social and economic activities out of gear. With this, age-old ideas are shattered and long-established habits are broken. The very movement of troops, the distribution and intermingling of various peoples throughout the world contribute to the exchange of ideas and the broadening of outlook. The war slogans intended by the rulers to mobilise the population for war are interpreted by the various sections of the population according to their station in life and their political aspirations.

In the second World War the slogans: "Fight for Freedom", "War against Fascism", stirred the imagination of the oppressed peoples of the world. For them, the fight against Fascism did not end with the defeat of Hitlerite Germany; it meant the struggle for their own liberation against their oppressors. The fall of Singapore had a tremendous psychological effect on all the peoples of the East who had for

generations groaned under the heel of British, French, and Dutch Imperialists. The old myth of the invincibility of the White "master-race" was shattered.

South Africa felt deeply the repercussions of these events and their implications. At the beginning of the war the rulers had perforce to divert some of their attention from the important business of putting into effect the plans they had drawn up for the complete enslavement of the Africans. As the armies of Hitler routed the Allied powers in one theatre of war after another, the attitude of the herrenvolk towards the Black man began to alter. They appealed to him to join the forces, and help to defend South Africa, not, however, as combatant but as a mere menial and baggage-carrier. Then as the armies of the Axis powers over-ran Europe, rolling over the plains of France, Dunkirking the helpless English troops and threatening the very shores of England; as the Japanese tide swept through Java, swallowed Singapore, overflowed into Burma and threatened the very gates of India, the feeling of insecurity on the part of the rulers increased. When the alarm of a Japanese invasion of South Africa was sounded they were thrown into a state of consternation. The result was that the herrenvolk changed their tune towards the oppressed.

Ministers of state vied with one another in holding out promises of improved conditions for the Blacks. General Smuts went so far as to say that he would arm every able-bodied Black male if the Japanese landed on the shores of South Africa. It was an astounding statement coming from a South African prime minister and throws a flood of light on the state of mind of the herrenvolk at that time. It implied that the Blacks were being recognised as human beings, or at least they were to be allowed to die as men, if nothing else.

But then came another shift of events in the world arena. Japanese imperialism had taken too much at one bite, like a mamba which has swallowed a huge ox and has to lie still for a while to digest its prey. When it became evident that the Russians had decisively turned the tide of war against the Germans in Europe, the South African herrenvolk recovered their sense of security. They felt no further need to placate the Africans and the other sections of the Blacks. All their promises went by the wind. Now they were ready, before even the war was over, to go full steam ahead with their Hertzogian policy against the Africans.

It is true to say that their plans were on a national scale, covering the whole front, not only of the African population but of all the Blacks, i.e. the Coloured and the Indians, as well as the Africans. On the African front their schemes took one form in the "Native Reserves" to meet conditions there and they evolved what was subsequently known as the Reclamation and Rehabilitation Schemes. In the towns their schemes took another form and were called by different names, but their purpose was one and the same, namely the regimentation of African labour. In the all-embracing schemes directed to this end the Africans had to be hounded out of the "Native Reserves" while at the same time the "redundant Natives" had to be hounded out of the towns and all of them had to be driven, from whatever direction, into one inescapable channel leading to the serfdom of the White farms and the slavery of the compound system on the mines.

On the Indian front they evolved what was known as the Peggung Act, which aimed at intensifying the segregation of the Indians, limiting their trading rights,

severely restricting their right to buy land, and relegating them to bazaars or ghettos. The Coloured people also came under the fire of these comprehensive schemes. The rulers established the C.A.C. (Coloured Advisory Council) and created a special section in the Department of Social Welfare for dealing with Coloured Affairs. These two institutions were analogous to the dummy Native Representative Council and the obnoxious segregatory Native Affairs Department. This was recognised by the Coloured people as marking the first stage in the plan to disfranchise them. The next step would be to remove the Coloured voters from the common voters roll and put them on a separate voters' roll and in this way deprive them of citizenship in the land of their birth. It was a pattern already too well known to the oppressed through the experience of the Africans in the Hertzog Acts of 1936-7. Side by side with this the rulers put forward their Housing Schemes which the Coloured people recognised as yet another aspect of the Segregation policy identical with the Location system for the Africans and the bazaars (ghettos) for Indians.

The Spirit of Resurgence

With the end of war in sight, the herrenvolk, strong in their sense of security, proceeded with their plans in respect of the Blacks on the assumption that they could establish the old master and servant relationship. It did not seem to occur to them that a war had intervened — a war which had a revolutionising effect on established ideas and habits of mind amongst all the oppressed throughout the world. The Blacks in South Africa, too, were no longer prepared to accept the old relationship. Their hopes had been aroused by the slogans: **Fight for the overthrow of Fascism! Fight for Freedom!** Many of them had risked their lives in the war. When, therefore, the Atlantic Charter was noised abroad with its grandiloquent promises of a New Order giving social security and freedom, the Blacks naturally expected that they, too, were included. But, far from any of their hopes being fulfilled, they were already having a bitter foretaste of what this "New Order" was to mean for the oppressed.

Faced with the various oppressive schemes, which, as already indicated, were on a nationwide front affecting all sections, the Blacks determined to fight back. The Coloured people replied to the segregatory measure, the C.A.C. (Coloured Advisory Council) by forming the National Anti-Coloured Affairs Department, a federal body uniting the existing Coloured organisations throughout the country, similar to the All-African Convention. It was formed for the purpose of resisting the new measure, but at the same time it resolved to launch a struggle for full democratic rights. It swiftly gathered the Coloured people together and boycotted the Coloured Advisory Council as an institution. These individuals who had accepted positions on it were thrown out of all the people's organisations to which they belonged.

The intensive campaign against the new measure, the holding of meetings and the dissemination of pamphlets all led to a rapid heightening of political consciousness. Every move of the rulers was exposed. Every day brought its political lessons. The government-imposed C.A.C. was rendered helpless and paralysed in face of the resistance of the people. But that was not all. Their struggle against this particular mea-

sure brought home to them the fundamental nature of their oppression. They realised that their fate was indissolubly bound up with that of the other sections of the oppressed, the Africans and the Indians. The defeat of African resistance in 1936-7 had opened the way for the move against them. They were beginning to understand that the battle of the African is the battle of *all* Blacks in South Africa, that an attack on one section is an attack on all, and that the freedom of each is bound up with the freedom of all. With this new outlook on their struggles the Coloured people demonstrated an unprecedented determination to resist. The Anti-C.A.D. grew by leaps and bounds throughout the country.

The Indians, too, launched a campaign against the Pegging Act. But their campaigns took a different form. The South African Indian Congress, under the leadership of the Indian merchant class, followed a course of action which revealed a basic difference in outlook between their organisation and the federal organisations representative of the Coloured people and the Africans, namely the Anti-C.A.D. and the All-African Convention respectively. Although the Indians realised that they, like the rest of the Blacks, were oppressed and though their leaders, too, mooted the idea of coming together with the other sections of the Blacks, yet their approach to the problem differed in certain important respects. Although they spoke the same language – the language of unity – they did not in fact identify themselves with the rest of the Blacks. This was because the interests of the merchant class, which comprised the leadership, were not identical with the rest of the oppressed including the Indian masses. Moreover, this section clung tenaciously to the idea that they were Indian nationals and looked to “Mother India” for assistance in their plight. This double allegiance, together with their economic interests, dictated their whole approach to the method of struggle and thence to unity. They thought in terms of negotiation with the Government rather than of principled struggle, in terms of appeals to U.N.O. and deputations to “Mother India” rather than a determined resistance together with their brother oppressed. For them the unity of the Blacks was to be used as a means of threatening the South African Government with a view to obtaining concessions for the Indian merchant class.

It must be said here that while the oppressed people were able in retrospect to understand the intentions and designs of the Indian merchant class leadership, it was not at that time apparent to them that their whole approach to the struggle was different. There was indeed a cry for unity from all sides, from the Indian workers and poor peasants as well as the rest of the Blacks. The Indian leaders had to give expression to this call for unity in order to retain the confidence of the masses. Thus, in the Conference of the South African Indian Congress in June 1943, they introduced a perfunctory resolution:

“it is the considered opinion that the time has come for the Indian community of South Africa to make common cause politically, educationally and economically with all other Non-European peoples of South Africa”

Time was still to reveal what the real “considered opinion” of the Indian merchant class was.

On the African front the 1943-44 period was to mark the turning point in the

struggles of the people. Their accumulated disillusionment made them ripe for a new development. Once more there was a ferment amongst the masses and the spirit of resurgence communicated itself to the All-African Convention.

In June, 1943, the Western Province Committee of the All-African Convention issued a leaflet, "Calling All Africans", which was a rallying cry to the African people and clearly reflects the altered mood of the oppressed. Its keynote was the unity of all Blacks. Pointing out that the world crisis resulted in South Africa in an unleashing of oppressive measures against all Blacks simultaneously, it said:

"There is a clamour for unity . . . There is a great desire amongst all sections of the Non-Europeans to forge a weapon not only for political defence but for attack. There is a determination not only to defend ourselves but to launch a struggle for full democratic rights . . . It is obvious that the different Non-European groups have now realised the need for unity – unity not only within their respective groups, but of all Non-European groups. The present-day conditions demand such unity. It is not a thing that comes from the air. The desire for unity comes from the realisation that our physical differences, our colour differences, our cultural differences have nothing to do with our economic and political position. There is one fundamental factor common to us all and that is oppression. Our coming together, therefore, is not a question of the will of this or that individual, this or that section. Our unity is determined by our very position in the social structure of South African society. It is the objective conditions which determine and demand this unity and our conscious desire for it arises from our recognition of this fundamental fact."

The leaflet went on to emphasise that

"All our forces should be concentrated on making this unity a reality. That is the great task for Convention. The realisation of this unity would be a milestone in the history of the Non-Europeans in South Africa."

Pointing out that what was required was a purposeful and dynamic unity, a unity which should be a means to an end, it continued:

"Convention will be called upon to devise ways and means of making this unity a living fact by carrying it to the people, the workers and peasants, most of whom are illiterate. The movement must find its roots amongst the people. And this is possible only if Convention takes up the problems which are now agitating the people, problems that are becoming every day more acute."

The stirring quality of this leaflet set out by the Western Province Committee of the All-African Convention reflected the hardening temper of the people as well as a new consciousness of their tasks. Shortly afterwards, on August 26, 1943 a special meeting of the Executive Committee of the All-African Convention was convened in Bloemfontein. At this meeting it was decided to issue a Manifesto: "The Clarion Call – A Call To Unity". It was a frank statement openly admitting past mistakes and failures and calling upon all Africans to embark on a new road of struggle. This Manifesto ushered in a new period of regeneration for the All-African Convention. We reprint it in full in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

The Clarion Call—A Call to Unity

“From the people comes the call to the Convention, a call for a lead. The Executive Committee of the All-African Convention at its meeting on the 27th-28th August, 1943, had decided to respond to the call of the people, and submits to the coming conference of the A.A.C. the following Manifesto:

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

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

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

“Of what use is it to us when a few far-sighted Whites are worried over our terrible plight, because ‘the Native’, as they say, ‘is the backbone of our economy

and we must not waste our greatest asset'? Of what use is it to us when they admit that 'the Non-Europeans are treated worse than slaves. Under the old Cape slave laws we could not ill-nourish a slave or allow him to become a public burden. In Africa today the Native was allowed to become a source of danger and infection — for economic purposes'.

"Of what use is it to us that these few ask the question whether they should 'allow the Native to go on carrying us on his back without allowing him food to keep him from falling down from exhaustion? The hopeless inefficiency of driving the willing horse without giving him a mouthful of oats, must prove that we none of us think about the sane development of our country . . .'? Of what use is it to us if all they think of is to give *some* oats to the willing horse so as to keep him in harness? Of what use is it to us when the S.A. Medical Association devotes a special number to the Transkei territories describing the horrible conditions under which our people live, presenting a picture of a 'slowly degenerating Native community where half of their children never grow up and a third die before they reach the age of three years' .?"

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

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

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

"Again great promises were given us. The poll tax system was to be investigated and the gaoling of defaulters was to be stopped. The pass system, which was later to be abolished altogether, was to be relaxed immediately on the Rand. Our Trade Unions were to be recognised by law, and the same laws that protect the White workers were to apply to our workers. These promises were made by the Prime Minister, General Smuts, by the Minister for Native Affairs, Colonel Reitz, by the Minister of Labour, the Hon. Madeley, and other responsible ministers of the Crown. The Prime Minister and the Secretary for Native Affairs, Mr. Smit, publicly acknowledged that the segregation policy had failed and they promised a new deal for the Africans. That was a time of great promises by the Rulers and of great

hopes by the Non-Europeans.

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

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

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

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

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

“We cannot resign ourselves to slavery and death. Therefore there is only one way open for us: to fight for our rights as citizens of our country. Therein lies our freedom and our future. These eight years, and especially the years of the war, have proved to us that we are not the only ones to discover the road to freedom, that everywhere the people have to fight for their rights and for their freedom. We have also learned that not only we, but the Coloured people and the Indian people in South Africa have travelled the same wrong road, although separately. The White

man wants this country for himself, with all the Non-Europeans as servants and slaves. The same policy that applied to us in 1935 is now being applied to the Indian and the Coloured people. But they are not repeating our mistakes and they are fighting back. The Coloured people are uniting behind what they call the Anti-C.A.D. movement, a kind of federal organisation like our All-African Convention. The Indian people are also uniting behind their federal organisation, the S.A. Indian Congress.

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

Unity here are other tasks facing us at the Convention. The war is nearing its end and the military outcome is a foregone conclusion — a victory for the United Nations. Still, this does not mean that Hitlerism, the creed of race superiority is defeated. The people will have to see that they are not robbed of the fruits of victory, as they were after the last war. Freedom will not be presented to us on a platter. We shall have to fight for it. The White rulers of South Africa, especially with views so similar to Hitler’s race theories, will not voluntarily give us our freedom and our rights. From the pronouncements of the Prime Minister after the General Election, we can see two things. He wants to unite all White people for a final settlement of the relations between Black and White, meaning, of course, all Non-Europeans. He also looks to the North for a Pan-African Empire as South Africa’s fruits of victory. He thinks of much more than the Protectorates, but they are surely figuring in his plans.

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

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

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

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

“From the foregoing it is clear how important the coming Convention is for our people, for all the oppressed people and for South Africa as a whole. It may mark a turning point in our history.

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

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

Summary of Common Disabilities

- (1) The African people have no franchise.
The Indian people have no franchise.
The Coloured people have no franchise. (A few in the Cape have a semi-franchise, their full franchise having been taken away by the Act of Union).
- (2) The Africans have the Trust and Land Act, a “Native Land Act” which prohibits them from buying land anywhere except in specified areas.
The Coloured, so far, are affected by an unofficial practice now becoming all too common, of imposing restrictions in estates, forbidding the sale of such property to Blacks for all time. They may expect government intervention in the near future in the form of a “Coloured Land Act”.
- (3) The Africans in towns have locations and barracks. The Indians in towns have bazaars and barracks. The Coloured have Coloured townships which

will grow more and more even in the Cape, as a result of the new policy of residential segregation or housing schemes — glorified locations.

- (4) The Africans, Indians and Coloureds are all discriminated against and suffer the effects of:
- (a) The civilised labour policy;
 - (b) The Mines Act, the Colour Bar Act;
 - (c) Apprenticeship Act;
 - (d) Factories Act;
 - (e) Workmen's Compensation Act.

The Programme of the All-African Convention

The All-African Convention is a federal body which affiliates all organisations whose constitution and policy are in keeping with the aspirations of the oppressed peoples of South Africa. The term Africans, as designated in the title, means "all people in the continent of Africa who are not Europeans."

The All-African Convention was established as a permanent body in 1937 for the purpose of co-ordinating the activities and struggles of all African organisations in their fight against oppression. It was to be the mouthpiece of the African people.

It is pledged to fight for full democratic rights of all oppressed people in the Union. These rights include:

- (1) Universal suffrage for all adults irrespective of colour and sex. This includes, the right to membership of parliament and all State councils.
- (2) The right for all Union nationals, irrespective of colour, to buy land or property anywhere in the Union.
- (3) The right of all Union nationals to trade anywhere they please.
- (4) Equal government assistance to all farmers irrespective of colour.
- (5) The right of employment in all State departments of all people irrespective of colour.
- (6) Equal educational facilities and equal subsidies for all children irrespective of colour.
- (7) Compulsory and free education for all children up to Standard 7 and free education up to Standard 10.
- (8) Equal pay for equal work.
- (9) The right to form Trade Unions.
- (10) The abolition of all colour bars in industry, including civilised labour policy.
- (11) The repeal of all colour discrimination in political, educational, industrial and social spheres.

The manifesto was adopted by the Conference of the All-African Convention in December, 1943. All the resolutions were passed except No. 8 re representation at the Peace Conference before the period. Conference felt that no useful purpose would be served by sending delegates to a Peace Conference of Imperialist government.

CHAPTER 8

December Conference—1943

When the All-African Convention held its Conference in Bloemfontein on the 16th and 17th December, 1943, the pivotal point round which its discussions revolved was the question of unity. It had to deal first with the unity within the African section itself and thereafter the larger unity, the unity of all Blacks.

Now concurrently with the sessions of the All-African Convention, the African National Congress was holding its Conference, also in Bloemfontein. The rank and file of Congress raised the question: *Why are our leaders keeping us apart?* Why are we holding two different conferences? The people were demanding unity and they could not understand why the Congress should be holding a separate conference while the other African organisations in the federal body, the All-African Convention, were discussing the same problems of oppression a few yards away. This protest from the floor resulted in the drawing up of a resolution to the effect that the All-African Convention should be asked to form a select committee of ten to meet ten representatives from Congress with a view to discussing unity between the two bodies. The All-African Convention agreed to this and the special committee met on the 16th December. After a lengthy discussion

“the final decision arrived at by the joint committee by majority vote was that the All-African Convention shall be the recognised political mouthpiece of the African people”. (minutes of the A.A.C. Conference, 1943, p.9)

When the President of the Convention reported this decision the All-African Convention received the news with acclaim and passed the following resolution:

“In view of the decision made at the meeting of the joint delegates of the A.N.C. and the A.A.C. on the previous night of December the 16th, 1943, that the All-African Convention shall henceforth be regarded as the official mouthpiece and the Co-ordinating body of the African people; and in order to give effect to this decision so that unity may be achieved in practice and not merely in resolutions, this session of the A.A.C. sitting at Bloemfontein on December the 17th, 1943:

- (1) Invites all the branches of the African National Congress which were affiliated from the inception of Convention up to 1941 to re-affiliate to the All-African Convention.
- (2) Invites the African National Congress to affiliate to the All-African Convention.
- (3) Urges the African National Congress in the name of unity to come back to the All-African Convention so that the unity that was demonstrated in 1935 and continued to 1941 should be recovered and improved upon”.

This done, the All-African Convention proceeded to deal with the question of the larger unity of the Blacks as a whole. This found its place against the background of a full discussion on the present political situation in South Africa, the disastrous effects of the policy of "divide and rule" and the magnitude of the tasks facing the Blacks. Finally it adopted a long resolution rejecting the policy of trusteeship and the Hertzog Acts. It was a resolution which breathed the spirit of the "Clarion Call." We quote the last section (8) to indicate the direction in which the Convention was moving:

"The Convention is firmly convinced that just as the division of the people into masters and servants serves only a small White ruling-class, so the division of the oppressed themselves (Africans, Coloureds and Indians) serves only this small ruling class, against the interests of the country as a whole and also the majority of its people. The first step to overcome these artificially fostered divisions and to bring harmony and goodwill amongst all the people, is the unity of all oppressed peoples of South Africa.

"The Convention therefore welcomes the Executive Committee's invitation to the two other Non-European groups and expresses satisfaction at the presence of the fraternal delegations as the guests of Convention.

"Furthermore, it resolves to send a representative delegation to the Conference of all the Non-European sections, which is to take place in Bloemfontein after the conclusion of this session of Convention, and to take whatever steps are necessary for the laying of a solid foundation for Unity of all Non-Europeans in their just struggle against all oppression and discrimination."

Thus, the All-African Convention took the first practical steps in calling the Non-European Unity Movement into being.

Preliminary Unity Conference, December, 17th, 1943

In response to the call of the All-African Convention a Conference was held on the 17th December, 1943, immediately after the Conference of the A.A.C. for the purpose of discussing the unity of all the Non-European sections. The Coloured people were represented by delegates from their federal body, the National Anti-C.A.D.; the Africans by the delegates elected at the Conference of their federal organisation, the All-African Convention. The delegates from the South African Indian Congress representative of the Indian section failed to turn up. The secretary, however, sent a telegram expressing regret that

"their elected delegates were unable to attend as they were engaged in matters arising out of the Pegging Act. They were, however, in whole-hearted agreement with the Unity Movement." (Minutes of 2nd Unity Conference)

This Conference was regarded as a preliminary one for the purpose of exploring the channels through which unity of all the Blacks could be established. All the decisions taken were to be of a provisional nature pending confirmation by the various groups at their respective conferences. Delegates visualised an all-in Unity Conference in the near future and to this end a provisional committee was formed which would take upon itself the task of preparing for and convening such a Conference.

The main question for discussion was the basis on which such unity should be established. Delegates were of the opinion that simply to come together was not enough. They expressed themselves strongly on the need for placing the struggle on a principled basis, because experience in the past had shown that without such a basis there is always the possibility of one or other section making use of the others for its own benefit. It was emphasised that a loose unity or ad hoc combinations to be decided on from time to time were not acceptable since they would open the door wide for opportunism. It was felt that all sections should agree to bind themselves to certain principles of action. With this in view Conference drew up a programme containing the minimum demands of a people seeking democratic rights – the 10-Point Programme.

The 10-Point Programme was to constitute the basis of the principled struggle of the Non-European Unity Movement (now the Unity Movement of South Africa). Conference drew up a comprehensive resolution of 12 clauses. We shall here quote the preamble and clauses 8, 9, and 12, together with the 10-Point Programme:

Extract from Draft Declaration of Unity:

“These organisations of the Non-Europeans, which in themselves are not political parties but federal bodies embracing various political, economic and social organisations and parties of all shades of opinion from every walk of life, have met together in Conference at Bloemfontein, 17th Dec., 1943.

After frank and friendly deliberations on questions affecting all Non-Europeans in South Africa, the Conference has come to the following conclusions:

(8) “The recognition that Segregation is an artificial device of the rulers, and an instrument for the domination of the Non-European, is at the same time a recognition that the division, strife and suspicion amongst the Non-European groups themselves is also artificially fostered by the ruling class.

From this it follows:

- (a) That no effective fight against Segregation is possible by people who tacitly accept segregation amongst themselves.
- (b) That the acceptance of Segregation, in whatever form, serves only the interests of the oppressors.
- (c) That our fight against Segregation must be directed against the segregationists within as well as without.
- (d) That the unity of all the Non-Europeans is a necessary precondition for this total fight against Segregation.

(9) “As representative of the Non-European oppressed people, we have come together in full recognition of the above in order to lay the foundation for real unity amongst the Non-Europeans. As the purpose of this unity is to fight against Segregation, discrimination and oppression of every kind and to fight for equality and freedom, for all, such a Unity Movement cannot and must not for a moment be considered as directed against the Europeans (an anti-European front). It is an *Anti-Segregation front* and, therefore, all those European organisations and societies which are genuinely willing to fight Segregation (as distinct from those who profess to be against Segregation but

in reality are only instruments of the ruling class) are welcome to this anti-Segregation Unity Movement.

(12) "In view of the fact that all the disabilities, economic, educational, social and cultural (enumerated above) all flow from the lack of political rights, the struggle for full democratic rights must become the pivotal point of our struggle for freedom. But while recognising that our struggle is chiefly a political struggle, we must not neglect any other form of struggle so long as it serves the cause of liberation. Thus it is the duty of every organisation attached to this Unity Movement to unfold to the people the meaning of the following programme, a programme not for bargaining but for representing the minimum demands and fundamental needs of all sections of the people.

10-Point Programme

1. *The FRANCHISE, i.e. the right of every man and woman over the age of 21 to elect and be elected to Parliament, Provincial Council and all other Divisional and Municipal Councils.*

(This means the end of all political tutelage, of all communal or indirect representation and the granting to all Non-Europeans of the same universal, equal, direct and secret ballot as at present enjoyed by Europeans exclusively).

2. *Compulsory, free and uniform education for all children up to the age of 16, with free meals, free books and school equipment for the needy.*

(This means the extension of all the educational rights at present enjoyed by European children, to all Non-European children, with the same access to higher education on equal terms).

3. *Inviolability of person, of one's house and privacy.*

(This is the elementary Habeas Corpus right. The present state of helplessness of the Non-European before the police is an outrage of the principles of democracy. No man should be molested by the police, nor should his house be entered without a writ from the magistrate. The same right to inviolability and privacy at present enjoyed by the European should apply to all Non-Europeans. All rule by regulations should be abolished).

4. *Freedom of speech, press, meetings and association.*

(This means the abolition of the Riotous Assemblies Act, directed specifically against the Non-European. It embodies the right to combine, to form and enter Trade Unions on the same basis as Europeans).

5. *Freedom of movement and occupation.*

(This means the abolition of all Pass Laws, and restriction of movement and travel within the Union; the right to live, to look for work wherever one pleases. It means the same right to take up a profession or trade as enjoyed by Europeans).

6. *Full equality of rights for all citizens without distinction of race, colour or sex.*

(This means the abolition of all discriminatory Colour Bar laws).

7. *Revision of the land question in accordance with the above.*

(The relations of serfdom at present existing on the land must go, together with the Land Acts, together with the restrictions upon acquiring land, A new division of the land in conformity with the existing rural population living on the land and working the land, is the first task of a democratic State and Parliament).

8. *Revision of the civil and criminal code in accordance with the above.*

(This means the abolition of feudal relations in the whole system of justice

– police, magistrates, law-courts, and prisons – whereby the punishment for the same crime is not the same, but is based upon the skin colour of the offender. There must be complete equality of all citizens before the law and the abolition of all punishment incompatible with human dignity).

9. *Revision of the system of taxation in accordance with the above.*

(This means the abolition of the Poll-tax or any other tax applicable specifically to the Non-European, or discrimination between Europeans and Non-Europeans. There should be one, single, progressive tax and all indirect taxation that falls so heavily upon the poorer classes should be abolished.

10. *Revision of the labour legislation and its application to the mines and agriculture.*

(This means specifically the revision of the Industrial Conciliation and Wage Acts, the elimination of all restrictions and distinctions between the European worker and a Non-European worker, equal pay for equal work, equal access to Apprenticeship and skilled labour. This means the liquidation of indentured labour and forcible recruitment, the full application of Factory legislation to the mines and on the land. It means the abolition of the Masters and Servants Act and the establishment of complete equality between the seller and buyer of labour. It also means the abolition of payment in kind, and the fixing of a minimum wage for all labourers without distinction of race or colour)."

Along the New Road

In the following year, under the pressure of events and with the mounting tide of discontent amongst the people, the All-African Convention Executive Committee met in Johannesburg on the 7th July (1944) and issued a Statement: "Along the New Road". We shall quote extensively from it because it clearly formulates the ideas of the Convention during this period. At the same time it reflects the mood of the people.

Extracts from the Statement: "Along the New Road"

"Just over six months have passed since we met in Bloemfontein. It was there that we took several important decisions. We decided to turn away from the old road of passivity to the new road of leadership. We totally rejected the policy of segregation and we agreed upon the road of Unity with the other Non-European groups. Without doubt these were very important and very good decisions. But when we turn to look at the practical steps taken to apply these decisions and to translate them into action we have no cause to be satisfied with ourselves. We have not followed up these decisions with the necessary vigour and drive. Our attitude has rather been one of waiting, and the people's enthusiasm and hope after the last Convention has begun to sag. While the people everywhere are on the move, while the militancy of the masses is rising everywhere, we wait, we hesitate to give the lead. But the plight of the people is such that they cannot afford to wait. Things are not improving, they are deteriorating, and the people are becoming desperate.

"During these six months the ruling class had not been hesitant. It has been very active indeed – forging new chains for us. These six months have seen the final dashing to the ground of the hopes of those who still clung so pathetically to the belief in a 'change of heart' on the part of the rulers. In an unmistakable way we have been finally shown, not only in words but

in deeds, that the Atlantic Charter applies only to the White man. No four freedoms for the Non-European! Only the old bonds of slavery called by four different names: "trusteeship", "segregation", "separation", "development on his own lines".

The statement went on to point out that, while false promises had been made during the war, the present session of Parliament was busy tightening up all measures against the Africans. There was the proposal to extend the Pass system to the Cape Province: there was wholesale imprisonment of Africans under the Pass Law; there were evictions, expropriation of land, deportations.

"In short", the Statement continued, "this session of Parliament was an eye-opener to those who have been wearing blinkers up to now. The way in which the Minister, van der Byl, openly admitted the sinister nature of the three Slavery Acts, especially the Land Act of 1936 . . . the way in which the new Native Laws Amendment Bill was brought in to drive the urbanised African from the towns into the farms, closing every loophole of escape from the forced labour system on the mines and farms . . . All this must surely have torn off the blinkers.

"And now after this most revealing session of the rulers' Parliament, what was our reply? What should it have been? In reply to the outrageous and the intolerable conditions imposed by the three so-called 'Native' Laws, there have been minor revolts, protests and demonstrations. But all these were sporadic, unco-ordinated and ill-prepared. We sympathise whole-heartedly with the people of Pietersburg who were forced to defy the inhuman laws and regulations. We sympathise and associate ourselves with the African teachers in their public protests and demonstrations. We sympathise with the workers who were forced to strike against the intolerable conditions of labour and wages. We sympathise and associate ourselves with each and every protest and demonstration against the Pass Laws, but at the same time we consider that all this energy and activity should be co-ordinated into one political field and not dissipated in sporadic outbursts, now here, now there, without hope of success.

"At a great meeting of protest against the Pass Laws, a motion of no confidence in the Minister of Native Affairs was carried unanimously. This is all very well and without doubt expresses the view of every African (except a few chiefs who addressed him recently as the father of our people). But why only in the Minister of Native Affairs? As if it was only Mr. van der Byl who is responsible for our oppression. No in our opinion this is incorrect. It is not merely this particular Minister who deserves our vote of no confidence for he is but the executor of the Government's policy. It is in the government as a whole that we have no confidence. And as long as this government, or any other which may take its place, bases its policy on segregation and trusteeship, denying us full citizenship rights, full representation in the political, economic, and cultural life of our country – so long will it not have our confidence.

"Yet this no-confidence in the Government, based as it is on our irreconcilable opposition to and rejection of the segregation policy, will remain an empty gesture if all we do is to adopt a pious resolution to this effect, while in practice we participate in working these very same laws that destroy the

tion of this policy will lead to the utter ruination, physical and mental, of our people. From this it follows that we must fight against this policy with all the means at our disposal. At this juncture the only weapon we possess is Non-collaboration. . . .

"As a first practical step we feel very strongly that the Africans who serve on the Native Representative Council would be doing a signal service to the African people if they resigned *en bloc*. We must uncompromisingly reject the sham representation. Let the people know that we are voiceless. For we ARE voiceless. Why then should we give the rulers a cover for our oppression and rightlessness, by this make-believe? Why should we feed our own people the illusion that we have representation? Seven years of the N.R.C. giving it a trial have shown the utter uselessness of this sham council. After 1936 some of our leaders might have honestly believed in the fairy tales nurtured by the rulers - that now the three Bills were passed the 'danger' from the African had disappeared and the European would show a change of heart, since he would have nothing to fear, and an era of reforms would begin. Then, too, there were other leaders who believed that we have reached the limits of oppression and there would be no more repressive measures. But this session has proved the fallacy of these illusions.

"No one can have any illusions about the N.R.C. after this session. And if the members of the N.R.C. are true to their people, if they have the interests of the people at heart, they should not hesitate a moment longer; they should refuse to serve as a shield for the rulers, to serve as an instrument of oppression. They should resign *en bloc*. There must be a parting of the ways: either with the people against the government, against the oppressors, or with the government against the people. The appeal, the demand of the Convention should go out to all the elected members of the N.R.C. to resign collectively and immediately. Should a few refuse to serve the interests of the people, the rest must expose them before the people and show where they belong. . . .

"Naturally, our rejection of this sham representation and our refusal to work these Native Acts does not stop with the N.R.C. We reject just as emphatically the sham of our "representation" in Parliament: three Europeans to "represent" six and half million Africans, while two million Europeans are represented by 150 people. No matter who these three may be, however able they may be, they remain 3 against 150. Even if they were 10 or 20 against 150 we would still be in the same position as we are today. They may speak to their heart's delight, but whether there are 150 or 50 in the House nobody takes any notice of what they say. The policy and decisions of the rulers are not affected one iota by what the "Native Representatives" say. Indeed, the rulers are pleased with the show, with the pretence that the Africans are represented. The "Native Representatives" themselves admit the uselessness and futility of this sham of representation: 'It seems at times useless for us to speak or plead . . . but when we get up against the main issues, the main question of the Natives in the country we are up against a blank wall and our position seems to be hopeless'. (Senate Debates)

"Dare anyone maintain that after seven years of this kind of 'representation' the lot of the African is better than it was? No! Even the "representatives" themselves admit the opposite. We are going down, physically and materially, and this "representation" has not been capable of slowing down this process, let alone stop it. Poverty is grinding down the African. But poverty is the result of our voicelessness, of our lack of rights, our lack of representation, real

representation. It is because of our lack of political rights that we have no land, that we have no place on the land or in the towns; that we have to slave in the mines for two shillings a day or on the farms for ten shillings a month; that we have to live in hovels and pondokkies, in dirt and squalor, so that typhus and other diseases are mowing down our people; that we have no sanitation or adequate medical facilities, and no milk for our children; that one baby out of every two dies before it is a year old and the majority of those who grow up receive no education nor can they enter a trade or profession. All this will go on as long as we are deprived of our political rights.

“But we cannot even begin to fight for political rights as long as we maintain this sham representation . . . Enough of this farce of trusteeship! The plea of the rulers that the time is not yet ripe for giving the African his rights and freedom, that he must be treated like a child and a minor, that he is not yet ready for civilisation and is still ‘slowly emerging from barbarism’ – this is already a hundred years old. Today, unlike our forefathers, we know that it is their deliberate policy not to let the African become civilised and to deny him education; not to let him buy land or become a settled peasant on the land and to prevent him also from becoming a permanent town-dweller, from becoming a skilled artisan and from forming trade unions. In short it is their deliberate policy to debar him from civilisation and then shout: ‘He is not yet ripe for civilisation!’ All this while they were destroying his customs, traditions and way of life, ruthlessly destroying his economy, his family and his moral codes, shattering them by the impact of a capitalist economy and capitalist greed for profit and power.

“The African was good enough, useful enough as a means of building civilisation in South Africa. He was good enough to build the towns and railways, the harbours and roads, the mines and the factories, the power-stations and the dams, the vineyards and the orchards, the telephones and the telegraphs and everything that makes a country civilised. But he is not good enough to enjoy the fruits of that civilisation which he has built by his labour. He must be pushed back to his tribalism, even if it is already destroyed. He must be kept in slavery because he is “not ripe” for civilisation. ‘It is no good giving a Native land’, they say, ‘because he ruins it. It is no use giving him higher wages, because he just squanders it . . .’

“And so the farce of a few assigned Liberals pleading for reforms meets with the same reply year after year: ‘The time is not yet ripe’ . . . ‘The time may never come’. That is the crux of the matter. It was and is and ever will remain the aim of the ruling class to use the African as one uses a tool to build civilisation, but never to allow him access to this civilisation which he has built . . .

“If we continue with this farce of ‘Native Representation’, which is worse than no representation at all; if we continue to cover up the sham debates on this and that grievance and continue with indecision, internal squabbling and failure to unite and organise our people and all Non-Europeans, ‘the time may never come.’ It is not at all a matter of the number of our ‘representatives’ (three or ten or twenty), nor of isolated outrages such as those at Pietersburg, Molepo, Siboto and Makoba Location, or of this or that oppressive law – even the Pass Law – but of one gigantic outrage against eight million people, an outrage known as segregation and trusteeship.

“It is against this gigantic outrage that we have to concentrate the unified

political activity of our people. It falls, therefore, upon the All-African Convention to translate into action our resolutions:

1. Totally rejecting the Segregation policy.
2. Turning from the road of passivity to the new road of active leadership and
3. Of Unity with the other sections of the Non-Europeans.

“We have now outlined the immediate policy to be followed in connection with the resolutions. But this is not enough. Our political policy cannot be brought to full fruition unless our organisational and educational activity keeps pace with it. They are interdependent. Without firmly established provincial, district and local centres of the All-African Convention, with firm roots and widely-spread branches, we can neither enlighten the people, nor inform them, nor unify them. Nobody will do this important work but we ourselves. There is no time to be lost. Enough of this indecision. Enough of this hesitation and waiting. The people are waiting for enlightenment. The people are waiting for a lead. Let us do our duty. Only then will we have a right to ask the people to do theirs”.

Here, in the document quoted above, one recognises a new tone, firm and unequivocal, a new language, clear and outspoken, new ideas and a new consciousness. One might even say this was a new people. Yes, a new people. What a difference between the clear formulation of tasks, the knowledge of where they stood and where they were going, which characterises this document, and the nebulosity of resolutions in the past! The people who had tried to resist the 1913 Land Act were then slaves in a colonial country, slaves in mind and body. They could think only of sending deputations to London to plead their cause – slaves humbly begging for justice from their imperial masters. The people who had come together to fight the Hertzog Bills in 1935 had passed brave but nebulous resolutions indicative of their groping efforts, albeit in the right direction. But there was still a great deal of confusion, for they were still tied to the Liberals. The leaders had to run hither and thither seeking help from the “friends of the Africans” – and found the notorious “Compromise”.

But now, by 1943-44, there has been a transformation. The people have broken loose from the ties that bound them to the Liberals and their influence, which had so long stifled their thinking and retarded their growth. They had thrown off the slave habit of mind and emerged from political tutelage. They were entering on a new road untrammelled by the ideological influences of the oppressor-class and they were exercising a new-found intellectual freedom, an independence of thought, which enabled them to formulate clearly their position, their tasks and the methods they must adopt in the struggle.

When the Conference of the All-African Convention met in December, 1944, it had far-reaching decisions to make. It had before it the Statement of the Executive Committee: “Along the New Road”. This was thoroughly discussed and its implications carefully analysed, for the delegates realised that it marked the first step along the new path of struggle. It was finally accepted. Next they had to discuss a report from the delegates who had represented the Convention at the Preliminary Unity Conference the previous year, where the 10-Point Programme had been put forward

as the basis of struggle of all Blacks. Convention whole-heartedly endorsed the decisions of the Unity Conference. It passed a resolution adopting the 10-Point Programme, finding it "the clearest expression of the needs and aspirations of every section of the people". The Resolution further stated: "It finds in the 10-Point Programme the foundation upon which the Unity of all Non-Europeans can be built. It finds that only the realisation of the 10-Point Programme can bring about a true democracy in South Africa, can bring peace and security to all the people of our country and terminate the strife and division."

Conference also resolved:

"to call upon all the members of the Native Representative Council (N.R.C.) to tender collectively and, if possible, together with the Parliamentary representatives, their resignations."

What comes out of all the resolutions and documents of the A.A.C. during the period of 1943-44 is that there is a sharp break with the past. What emerges can be expressed under a number of points: (a) the rejection of the inferiority of the Black man and (b) the claim for full equality; (c) the clear formulation of the tasks facing the oppressed and consequently (d) the evolving of new methods of struggle.

Once the African people had sloughed off the slavish attitude of mind and begun to recognise themselves as men and women endowed in all respects with the same capabilities, the same human needs and desires shared by all humanity whatever its race or colour, it was inevitable that they should apply this new outlook to their politics. To claim full equality was necessarily to reject the policy of trusteeship and segregation. A man could not be an equal and an inferior at one and the same time. The policy of trusteeship flowed from the idea of the inferiority of the Black man and this dictated the creation of special segregatory institutions for a "child-race": the Bungas, the Urban Location Advisory Boards and the Native Representative Council. It also led to the creation of special departments of state, such as the Native Affairs Department which deals separately with matters affecting the Africans; the special Education Advisory Board for "Native Education", segregatory schools, separate inferior education etc. — in a word everything that is synonymous with inferiority.

All these the African people had to reject and they did so emphatically. Having turned their back on trusteeship they proceeded to stake their claims as equal members of the South African State. This they did in the 10-Point Programme, a programme which was at the same time to guide them and determine the method of struggle. It was to constitute a principled basis of struggle. With a new-found political clarity they went straight to the core of their social and economic disabilities, namely, the lack of political rights. Their very first demand on the 10-Point Programme was for full democratic rights. Moreover, they were able to view the struggle in its entirety. Every single disability affecting now one section and now another of the Africans was seen as part and parcel of a single system of oppression. Further than that, every piece of legislation, every ordinance or regulation against any section of the Blacks was seen as falling into place in a unified system of law designed for their enslavement. Oppression was recognised as being indivisible. Recognition of this fact led to the further recognition i.e. the imperative necessity for the unification of the struggle.

This unification was a concept with far-reaching implications. It meant not only the unification of the struggles within each racial group, but also the unification of the struggles of the oppressed as a whole. It meant that in every centre, be it urban or rural, in districts however remote, the people could carry on their struggle in the knowledge that it was dynamically connected with the general struggle of the oppressed. The specific issues facing the people in different parts of the country were dealt with in accordance with a unified policy.

Thus 1943-44 ushered in a new period, with its new outlook and new methods of struggle. The Movement was launched on a principled basis. It will be recalled that in the past people had been guided more by their allegiance to this or that particular leader – whithersoever he might lead them – than by allegiance to a principle. Leaders themselves, lacking sheet-anchor, were often prone to follow the path of opportunism. Now principles replaced opportunism and leadership replaced individual leaders.

CHAPTER 9

New Methods of Struggle

Having defined its tasks and formulated its programme, having turned from the role of passivity to that of active leadership, the Convention was in a position to carry its new policy to the masses. The reaction of the people was a measure of how well the Convention had given expression to their needs. Seven years of bitter hardship and deep disillusionment had convinced them that their leaders had led them into a political swamp. And now their sullen passivity gave way to a warm response to the new policy. With a perception sharpened by experience they recognised that the new policy answered their needs and aspirations. This didn't mean that they understood fully what the new road would involve. A great deal still remained to be done first in respect of educating the people to the full implications of their line of action. They had to learn the meaning of the new policy in terms of the day-to-day struggles. They had to be taught that their rejection of trusteeship and segregation meant the rejection of all the inferior segregatory bodies. Concretely it meant in practical politics the application of the policy of non-collaboration with the oppressor. The people had to be taught that if they operated or assisted in the operation of the dummy councils, the N.R.C. the Advisory Boards, etc., they were in fact operating the machinery of their own oppression.

A great deal of educational work was carried out by the All-African Convention.

The Rehabilitation Scheme

In 1945 the African people in the "Reserves" were presented with what was called the Rehabilitation Scheme. When Mr. D.L. Smit, then Secretary for Native Affairs, outlined the scheme for the first time before the Ciskeian General Council (Bunga) he spoke in terms of a scheme

"wider in scope than anything conceived before . . . which aims at correcting mistakes of the past and ensuring a better life for the inhabitants in the future."

The All-African Convention analysed the proposed scheme in detail. The Western Province Committee of the A.A.C. published a pamphlet: *The Rehabilitation Scheme, A New Fraud*, which placed the scheme against the background of the whole "Native Policy" of the rulers, with its system of laws for the regimentation of African labour. The people themselves did not find it difficult to realise that when the schemes had been put into full operation, many families would be rendered landless and driven out of the places of their birth. It became clear to them, too, that the scheme envisaged a radical reduction of their already sadly insufficient stock. They understood quite well that the root of their trouble was not at all overstocking, as the authorities claimed but understocking. The stark facts showed that the people were

suffering from malnutrition and the multitude of diseases traceable directly to sheer undernourishment, and the children were dying for lack of milk — all because of the shortage of stock. The few cattle themselves were dying for lack of grass. And the root of all this destitution of man and beast and of the soil itself was *Land Hunger*.

With this understanding of the proposed measures, and reinforced by their new outlook, the majority of the people of the Transkei “Reserve” where the scheme was first applied, opposed it. The organisations of the people there linked up their opposition to the scheme with the general struggle against oppression. They saw in these schemes a new *Nongqause* which would render vast numbers of the people a prey to the vultures of labour, without land, without cattle, without rights of any kind. The acceptance of the scheme by the Bunga of chiefs more than anything else opened the eyes of the people to the function of such institutions.

By this time the leading organisations in the Transkei were members of the A.A.C. They took the opportunity of explaining to the people that segregatory institutions like the Bunga should be rejected, not only because they had accepted this particular scheme, but because they are foreign to a democratic system of government. They were part of the system of trusteeship and in this sense were instruments of oppression. The proposed “village settlements” were likened by the people to the locations system in the towns and the mine compounds, about which they knew so well. The restrictions to be imposed in these settlements reeked so much of the regimentation familiar to them in the town institutions, that it helped them to link the plans of the “Rehabilitation Scheme” with the general system of oppression as expressed in the so-called “Native Policy” of the country.

The resentment of the people mounted as the Rehabilitation Scheme was more and more applied. Even some of the villages which had previously been persuaded to accept, on seeing how the scheme was being applied and the way it was affecting them, now became discontented. All over the Reserves the people resisted with a stubbornness which was new and all the more significant coming from the section of the population which was traditionally regarded as the most backward. As one delegate put it to the Non-European Unity Conference in 1948 in his report on events in the Ciskei (Cape Province): “To the cry of the people for more land, the Government can only answer with the so-called Rehabilitation Scheme, which confiscates their homesteads and reduces their cattle . . . The people are in desperate need of land and cattle. The people are kicking against this Rehabilitation Scheme. But in the fight they find their own headmen and chiefs and the Bungas ranged against them, as well as the Government officials. In their despair they resorted to violence against the officials who carried out the Government order, failing to understand the real forces against them. At Kingwilliamstown three policemen were killed and as a result twelve men were condemned to death.”

Side by side with this blind hitting out at individual officials, this anarchist impulse which could only rebound back on themselves and cause still greater suffering, there was evidence of a proper assessment of the situation. They showed a considered judgement as to their position and the course they should follow. They realised that resistance could not be carried out effectively within the framework of the Government-created institutions. As the delegate in the same report went on to say:

“The people have voluntarily formed Location Committees against their headmen and Bungas to assert their right to decide how they should own their land”. (Minutes, N.E.U.M. 1948).

In the Transkei the AmaXesibe (Mt. Ayliff) threatened to take up arms in defence of their stock i.e. against the forced “limitation of stock”. The majority of the people, too, repudiated their chief, who had accepted the Scheme. They held meetings in the hills under their newly-formed organisation, the Kongo. Then the following year a member of the Convention (I.B. Tabata) was arrested and charged with inciting the people against the Rehabilitation Scheme. In the district of Idutywa the people cut down the fences that were erected in conformity with the Government scheme and a number of arrests were made.

In Pondoland the people were strong in protest against their chief, while the surrounding villages totally rejected the scheme. In the district of Peddie, they threatened arms in protest against the branding of their cattle by government officials. At Sheshegu they renounced even the use of the dipping tanks, preferring to build their own and running them themselves, free of government interference. In the Middledrift and Debenek districts a number of villages repudiated the claim that they had accepted the Scheme and strenuously resisted its imposition. They accused the headmen of going behind their backs. A number of arrests were made here also. In some villages the people formed their own “people’s committees” and collected money for the defence of the arrested men. In the Bessiehoek Reserve in the district of Harris Smith, O.F.S., the people opposed the culling of cattle under the Scheme. All over the country resistance goes stubbornly on. It is a grim fight whose story has still to be told.

The Transkei Organised Bodies (T.O.B.) took up the struggle on behalf of the people on the whole Transkei front and laid down the principles to be followed in the struggle, principles which were in conformity with the policy and the decisions of the All-African Convention. They pointed out that the rejection of the new government schemes had to be seen as part of the struggle for the solution of the whole land problem and the solution of this land problem itself could not be separated from the root problem of the franchise. Land hunger is the effect – one of the results – of the lack of political rights and cannot be solved without first achieving political rights.

The Boycott

The determined rejection of the Rehabilitation Scheme was only one manifestation of the new outlook of the people. It led also to the rejection of all those institutions which were part of the machinery of segregation. They turned their attention to rendering these institutions ineffectual. And for this they employed the weapon of the Boycott. The main point of attack was the Native Representative Council (N.R.C.), the newest and most exposed of these institutions. In its Statement, “Along The New Road”, the Convention had called upon the Members of the N.R.C. to resign immediately and *en bloc*. The Transkei Organised Bodies took this up and carried it to the people. The struggle went on in earnest. In 1946 the Transkei Voters’ Association (which is part of the Cape African Voters’ Association) twice met and twice repudiated the sham representation under the 1936 Native

Representation Act. In September, 1946, the T.O.B. held a Conference at which they expressed themselves strongly against segregation and called upon the so-called "Native Representatives" and the M.R.C's to resign. Then in December, 1946, the Cape African Voters' Association in its Conference decided to boycott the elections under the Native Representation Act.

In January, 1947, the biggest and most representative gathering of Africans seen in the Transkei for many years was held in Umtata under the joint auspices of the T.O.B. and the Transkei Chiefs' and People's Association. It decided by an overwhelming majority that: "As a token of our dissatisfaction with the whole policy of segregation, and in order to facilitate the proposed boycott of the coming Parliamentary elections (under the Native Representation Act), the members of the N.R.C. should resign forthwith". It was at this Conference that a rift in the whole of the Transkei became clearly evident between the people on the one side and the chiefs, headmen, Bunga members and M.R.C's on the other. In May 1947, in Umtata, at a meeting of the Transkei, it was decided to boycott the elections (under the N.R. Act).

The mounting tide of opposition was so great that even the African National Congress, which had stubbornly set its face against the boycott movement, was threatened with either being drawn willy-nilly into the stream or swept aside and driven into the limbo of the forgotten. Dr. Xuma, President of the A.N.C., assessing the situation, hastened to call an Emergency Conference in October, 1946. The immediate cause of this was the adjournment of the N.R.C., which was itself precipitated by the rising temper of the people and their determination to have done with this sham representation. At this Conference, dominated by the M.R.C's and their satellites, the African National Congress pretended to join the tide of the Boycott movement. We say "pretended" advisedly, as will be clearly demonstrated in the sequel.

In December, 1947, the All-African Convention reiterated its policy of Non-collaboration and in particular called for the boycott of the elections under the 1936 N.R. Act. It passed the following resolution:

Boycott Resolution

"Having fully considered the policy of trusteeship in all its aspects, how it is designed to keep the Non-European, especially the African people, in a position of permanent inferiority;

and having had actual experience of the operation of this policy, the dire poverty, landlessness and ruthless exploitation of the Non-European;

and in view of the fact that this policy is given expression to in the segregated government institutions, such as the Native Representative Council, Advisory Boards, Bungas, etc., which serve to persuade the people into believing that they are represented in the Government of the country, thus making them keep their eyes away from the only place where laws are made, namely, Parliament,

this Conference therefore rejects the sham representation provided for in the 1936 Acts, and all forms of special and segregated institutions foreign to a democratic system of Government.

"This Conference, after full deliberation, has come to the conclusion that nothing less than full democratic rights, including direct representation in

Parliament, can meet the aspirations of the people, and calls upon the African people

1. to refuse to operate the machinery for their own oppression.
2. to Boycott The forthcoming Elections.”

Further, in dealing with an attempt on the part of the rulers to counter the tide of the boycott with what was known as the Smut's Proposals, intended to woo the intellectuals including the sulky M.R.C's, and generally to “improve” this dummy council (the N.R.C.) by increasing the number of seats and giving the M.R.C's the right to levy more taxes on the shoulders of the people, the All-African Convention resolved:

“Inasmuch as the ‘new’ Proposals of Smuts are an integral part of the old policy known as the Hertzog Native Policy, embodied in the Native Acts of 1936-37: The Native Representation Act, Natives Land and Trust Act, and the Amendments to the Native Urban Areas Act of 1925; and inasmuch as these new Proposals do not deviate one whit from this policy, but entrench the existing oppressive policy by seeking to perfect the machinery of oppression; and inasmuch as the ‘new’ Proposals merely seek to enlarge the present dummy N.R.C. and enlist the services of the N.R.C.'s as tax-collectors, this Conference, after full consideration, has come to the conclusion that these proposals are designed to draw in more groups of the African people to help in the further intensification of their own oppression. This Conference, therefore, entirely rejects the Smuts Proposals and calls upon the people to refuse to be a party to their own oppression”.

The firmness of the All-African Convention and the clear and uncompromising stand it took up communicated itself back to the people. Everywhere the struggle went on between the people and the quislings. The by-election caused by the death of Mr. Hemming, Transkei Native Representative in Parliament, brought the struggle in the Transkei to a head. The various White candidates who offered their names for election found themselves up against a wall of opposition. For the first time African people in the Reserves went to meetings called by Europeans and spoke as man to man and told them outright that they were not prepared to listen to them, and that they could not have them addressing meetings in the Transkei against the decisions of the people.

On finding the Africans adamant in spite of all their cajoling the White candidates withdrew their names, leaving only one to enter, unopposed. In this way they deprived the Africans of the possibility of demonstrating their total rejection of the sham representation. Advocate Buchanan, who thus entered Parliament as a White “Native Representative” of the Transkei immediately decided to go and address his constituency. But when he arrived at Umtata where his first meeting was to be held, the people refused to hear him, arguing that they didn't recognise him as their Parliamentary representative. Despite the pleadings of both himself and Adv. D.B. Molteno, who had accompanied him, the people maintained that Adv. Buchanan had been informed during the elections that the Voters' Associations embracing the whole of the Cape Province, and all the responsible major organisations of the people, had made it clear that they boycotted the elections and therefore could not recognise any so-called “Native Representative” in Parliament. In all the subsequent meetings in the Transkei he met with a similar fate. It has to be recorded,

however, that in the same year, July, 1947, the same Adv. Buchanan went to the Conference of the Cape African National Congress where he was welcomed by its President, the Rev. Calata, who presented him to Conference with the following words: "I ask the Conference to allow me to extend a warm and hearty welcome to Adv. Buchanan, the new representative of the Transkei". Here spoke a voice out of the past, the epitome of reaction, and it was to persist and still bring disruption into African politics. But more of this later.

At the beginning of the following year the elections of the M.R.C.'s fell due. But the people held fast to their decision to boycott. In February, 1948, the Executives of the T.O.B. and the Transkei African Voters' Association held a joint meeting. The issue they had to decide upon was the "problem posed by the fact that candidates were seeking election in spite of the people's decision to boycott." They issued a joint manifesto denouncing the candidates and calling for a boycott. On the 6th March, 1948, the T.O.B. and the Transkei Voters' Association held a joint meeting at which they passed the following resolution:

"The T.O.B. and the Transkei Voters' Association in joint resolution

- (1) call upon all candidates in the current elections to withdraw in deference to the people's will;
- (2) repudiate the authority of the N.R.C. to speak on behalf of the people who have on several occasions declared that they do not wish to participate in any elections under the Native Representation Act;
- (3) expel from the Transkei Voters' Association Messrs. Jeremiah Moshesh, C.K. Sakwe, Saul Mabude, E. Qamata, G. Dana, Thomas Poswayo and Theo Ntintili, who by seeking election to the N.R.C. flouted the decision of every meeting held in the Transkei on the boycott question;
- (4) urge Africans in other provinces and the electoral area of the Cape proper to intensify the campaign to implement the boycott decisions".

(Inkundla, 24.3.48).

These are clear and unambiguous directives which mark a maturity engendered in the heat of the struggle. They strike a note of uncompromising firmness. Here is nothing shallow, no mere words for words sake or act of braggadocio. They reflect a spirit that has permeated every section of the people throughout the Transkei. They are the expression of a will which at last has found words to formulate its demands, a will to live as men and women without apology or supplication. They are the expression of a spirit surging up from the depths of long experience.

In December of the same year the President of the All-African Convention, Professor Jabavu, made a ruling that no member of the N.R.C. could be a member of Convention. The following year the Cape African Voters' Association expelled its ex-Secretary Mr. Sigila for having stood for elections for the N.R.C.

The Teachers

It is a significant fact that the struggle at this stage is under the leadership of the vocal section which is capable of formulating the principles necessary to guide any movement and protect it from the shoals of opportunism. The teachers, who constitute the greatest single unit of the vocal section among the African people, had up to now either been lukewarm or had been too timid to join in the struggle as a body.

Some of them, it is true, had participated as Voters or members of other organisations of the people. The attitude of the majority of them had been that of maintaining the professional sanctity of the Teachers' Organisation, and preserving it from the taint of politics.

But so much had the new spirit permeated the mass of the people in all walks of life that the teachers for the first time posed to themselves the question: What is the position of an African teacher in the given social set-up? And what is his function? The answer to these questions could no longer be delayed. The events crowding in on them were like a challenge compelling them to come to grips with these questions and define their own position. For three years, beginning from 1945, a battle was being waged within the Teachers' Organisation, the Cape African Teachers' Association (C.A.T.A.) representative of the whole of the Cape Province and the Transkei. It brought home to them the realisation of the fact that their organisation, though a few decades old, had no clear policy, because it had no clearly defined principles. Thus at the 1948 Conference of C.A.T.A. the teachers discussed and adopted a Statement of Policy which was a culmination of the long-drawn-out struggle within the organisation itself.

In its Preamble it stated:

"Our struggle is inseparable from the general struggle of the African people. Whether we like it or not we belong there. For decades the Teachers' Associations have treated the question of African education as if it were the exclusive concern of the African teachers' associations and the question of labourer's wages the exclusive concern of the labourers . . . Let us entertain no flattering opinion of ourselves. Let us put ourselves where we belong and see ourselves where we really are".

The Statement went on to illuminate how the conditions governing the African teachers were bound up with and determined by those which governed other sections of the African population, so that the struggle for higher wages, for example, could not be divorced from the general struggle for raising the status of Africans in general. As the document stated:

"The salaries of African teachers are based upon the wages in other fields of employment open to Africans . . . In order not to upset the labour policy of the country a constant ratio must be maintained between the wages of the Black labourer and the wages of the Black teacher . . . It is clear that our struggle is inextricably bound up with the struggle of the African labourer. Even our slogan: 'Equal pay for equal work' is an old trade union slogan. It implies the recognition of merit irrespective of colour. It implies the abolition of the Colour Bar. It implies the granting of full democratic rights. So any one who makes this demand is fighting for the principle of full democratic rights. But we have already established the fact that it is futile to strive to obtain equality between White teacher and Black teacher unless there is equality between White labourer and Black labourer. In short . . . to seek equality between White teacher and Black teacher is to seek full social, economic and political equality between White and Black in South Africa. Our slogan therefore implies that our struggle is the general struggle for emancipation of the African. There can be no escape from that conclusion".

Having thus stated their standpoint the teachers concluded that their organisation, the C.A.T.A., together with all the other organisations, "must come together and co-ordinate their struggles in the fight against their common oppression — the fundamental oppression of the Black man". Fully aware of their position and their responsibility to the population as a whole and fully realising the political implications of the step they were taking, the Teachers at this Conference decided to affiliate their organisation (C.A.T.A.) to the All-African Convention.

From this time on, everything they did, their approach to every question, stemmed from the claim to full equality, which was the very core of the standpoint taken by the A.A.C. in 1944 — a standpoint which the teachers had now accepted without reservation, as members of the federal body (A.A.C.). This acceptance was clearly evidenced in the Memorandum which the C.A.T.A. drew up in answer to the questionnaire presented by the Eiselin Commission on "Native Education". A comparison between the C.A.T.A. memorandum and those issued by the teachers' organisations in the other provinces, O.F.S. Transvaal and Natal, all of which are not affiliated to the All-African Convention, reveals the world of difference between those organisations which have accepted the new outlook and the new policy of the 10-Point Programme, and those which have not, between those organisations which claim full equality and those which still accept inferiority.

The Conception of Equality

When in 1944 the All-African Convention declared the policy of the rejection of trusteeship and asserted the claim to full equality, few realised the far-reaching effects it would have upon the people. First on their minds, on their outlook, and thence on their struggles. Although on paper it may seem a simple thing for a people to recognise themselves as equal to other human beings, yet if we visualise the generations of oppression, the sheer weight on mind and body of a system of slavery armed with all the machinery of the state, all the legal and ideological weapons designed to obliterate from their minds the very capacity to think of themselves as human beings: if we visualise the steadily insidious effect of the conditions of their existence, the brutalising squalor and deprivation which of themselves engender the feeling of inferiority — if we take all these things into consideration we begin to understand the leap which the people took at this time. We begin to have some idea of the magnitude of this conception of equality.

It gave rise to confidence and self-reliance. It enabled them to throw off their dependence on the ideas of the enemy-class. It made it possible for them to assess the various groups in society, their policies and their class-interests, and the motivations of their actions. In this way they were now able to cut across the current ideas imposed on society by the ruling-class for its own interests and self-preservation. They could now strike out on an independent path. That is why they were able to choose their true allies in the struggle, those who had the same disabilities and therefore the same political aspirations as themselves. This liberation of the mind released the latent energies of the people. Shedding their inferiority, they were inspired with a new hope and a new determination.

This is what lies behind the militancy of their demands, as we have described them before. At the moment the struggle is still in its first tentative stages. Never-

theless the basis has been laid and the broad general lines have been established. It was no longer a question of palliatives, of "improving" this or that separate institution for the Black man. It was nothing short of full equality, political, social and economic. In their struggles, too, it was no longer a question of this or that tribe, this or that section, or even a question of colour. It was a question of the oppressed people as a whole, whatever their colour, language or creed. That is why the All-African Convention, recognising the necessity to broaden the base of the struggle, helped to create the Non-European Unity Movement, and affiliated to it. The "New Road" of the A.A.C. which was adopted in 1944, laid the basis for the development of a true national movement, a movement that has come to stay in South African politics until it has fulfilled its mission.

Here we may emphasise that it is not an anti-White or racialist movement. In fact racialism is foreign to it and indeed wholly contradictory to its principles. Racialism is an enemy of Black unity. If at the moment the movement is called "The Non-European Unity Movement", this is dictated by the objective conditions existing in South Africa today, whereby the various Black groups are subjected to specific racial oppression over and above economic exploitation. The designation, 'Non-European unity' is used rather to call attention to the community of interests of the three groups and to emphasise the necessity to counter the propaganda of the rulers who in their own interests have always fostered artificial racial divisions. The elimination of racial antagonism amongst the oppressed peoples is the first step towards the abolition of racialism in general. But the Non-European Unity Movement is conscious of the fact that racial harmony can be accomplished on one basis only — that of full equality of all races and all peoples.

CHAPTER 10

Chief Obstacles in the Way

In the last few chapters we have described the highest level of political development reached by the people, as expressed by the All-African Convention, a body which from its inception was regarded by all as the mouthpiece of the African people. It must be borne in mind, however, that the clarity of their formulation reflected rather the clarity of the leadership of the Convention and not by any means that of the people as a whole. Even though the struggles of the people, as described above, had started along the lines of the New Road this did not mean that they had fully grasped all the implications. The delegates who attended the Convention Conference might be clear, but these on the whole represented the most advanced individuals in their respective areas. Each district usually sends its local leaders to represent them at the Conference. It is not enough that these leaders should collectively hammer out a policy and understand its implications. This is only the beginning of the task. It is necessary for the people to understand and grasp all that is involved in the policy they are to adopt.

The All-African Convention was acutely conscious of this necessity. That is why, in 1945, it decided to bring out from time to time a newsletter, known as "The Voice of the All-African Convention". Its function was to inform the people of the activities of the Convention, educate them in its policy and interpret the concrete issues of the day in the light of this policy. There is no doubt that such an organ plays an important part in the enlightenment of the people. More than that, it helps to give them a feeling of solidarity, binding each individual to the whole. It must be acknowledged, however, that at present the extent of the contact by this means is limited. As a method of education and contact its potentialities have not been sufficiently explored. Large numbers of people have not been reached, even by the Convention itself, for organisationally it has still a great deal of leeway to make up. The political influence of the Convention has spread because its ideas so closely answer the people's needs and aspirations, but its influence is out of all proportion to its organisational strength.

This disparity between its numerical weakness and its great influence must be bridged if the Convention is to fulfil its potentialities and carry out its tasks. Large numbers of the masses still lie outside the orbit of its organisation and this unorganised mass constitutes a weakness in the struggle of the whole. Though from time to time it may feel the influence of the new ideas, yet as long as it is not organically identified with the federal body, the Convention, it is open to reactionary influences. It is a prey to opportunists, careerists and other agents of the ruling class. It is true that the once great influence of the liberals is at a discount and the rulers have had to fall back on another crop of agents. The more the

people surge forward in their development, the more the leaders are forced to lean heavily on the quislings within, quislings who speak the same language as the people and are the more difficult to detect because they have the same complexion.

These stumbling blocks to the progress of the people are of three kinds: (a) the chiefs or chieftainship; (b) the dummy institutions; the Bungas, Advisory Boards, the Native Representative Council; (c) the African National Congress.

It might seem strange that in the middle of the 20th century there are still educated people who believe – or profess to believe – in chieftainship, an institution which belongs to the pre-feudal days. It may seem strange, too, that at this stage in the development of industrial capitalism the herrenvolk should go out of their way to extol tribalism and chieftainship. But when we understand the motive that lies behind the determination of the rulers to bolster up this anachronism then we can clearly see the infamous role of those African intellectuals who join the herrenvolk in their clamour for the restoration of power to the so-called “natural leaders”, the chiefs.

At the present time every effort is being made to break up the people into tribal units. In the rural areas steps are being taken to impose on the people a strict territorial demarcation according to tribe. In some cases they are appointing chiefs where none have existed since the military conquest of the Africans. In the Butterworth District we have an instance of a chief being installed over what is not even a tribe. The people have lived there amicably for generations. In fact, tribal affiliations have been broken and long since forgotten. But now, flying in the face of the daily existence of the people, the rulers must needs install a chief over them. This man is known as a Fingo chief – which is rank absurdity. There is no such thing as a Fingo tribe. The so-called “Fingoes” were in the first place made up of various tribes who had migrated to the Cape at different times during the 18th and 19th centuries and the blanket term “Fingo” as applied to them never had any meaning as a designation of their ethnic affiliations. But this – and any other – absurdity does not worry the rulers so long as they can pursue their policy of “divide and rule” and recreate the old conditions of tribal antagonisms.

In the remote parts of Zululand and the Transkei tribal feuds are still allowed to break out from time to time. In the mine compounds African workers are herded together according to their tribes and thus here in the towns, too, tribal feuds occur. So long as faction fights are the rule, so long is it impossible for the people to unite against a common oppression. Now the trend in modern society today is for people to group together according to their respective classes. Modern methods of production and distribution of the means of subsistence tend to weld the workers together irrespective of colour and race. This in fact is what is actually happening, as the strikes which have taken place, particularly in Johannesburg, as well as the growth of political organisations, have shown. This is why the rulers are trying so strenuously to set the clock back to the dark ages.

This is the reason also for their “revision” of the system of education of Africans by expunging academic education and placing a premium on illiteracy and ignorance. In this way they can create an army of defenceless Black workers, maimed by ignorance, rent asunder by tribal antipathies and fit only to be dumb tools for the per-

formance of menial tasks. Here we cannot but recall the alarm which Rhodes as far back as 1894 expressed on behalf of the herrenvolk at seeing a few Africans getting academic education.

“Why!” he said, “I have travelled through the Transkei and have found some excellent establishments where the natives are taught Latin and Greek. They are turning out kaffir parsons, most excellent individuals, but the thing is overdone . . . There are kaffir parsons everywhere – these institutions are turning them out by the dozen. They are turning out a dangerous class. They are excellent so long as the supply is limited, but the country is overstocked with them. These people will not go back and work and that is why I say that the regulations of these industrial schools should be framed by the Government, otherwise these kaffir parsons would develop into agitators against the Government” – (*Cecil Rhodes: His Political Life and Speeches*, by Vindex)

It is worth while noting here that these sentiments were expressed in Rhodes's introduction of the Glen Grey Bill which created the Bunga system. In his argument he linked up the labour problem with the land problem and with education. He clearly saw that to deprive the African of land and to withhold education from him were two edges of the same weapon – they were a means of creating an army of cheap labourers to solve the problem of labour shortage. Today the herrenvolk have not changed in their attitude. The linking up of tribalism and chieftainship with a “revision” of education is true to the old pattern. Thus the anomaly of tribalism deliberately fostered in the midst of modern industrialism is seen as an attempt to maintain a vast reservoir of cheap labour. In this scheme the chiefs play an important part. It is not surprising that the herrenvolk have a fund for maintaining various chiefs all over the country. They are a cog in the vast administrative machinery for the control and the oppression of the Black man.

The question of the control of the subjugated Africans is one which has occupied the minds of the rulers ever since the early stages of the military conquest. Let us hear how the architects of the “Native Policy” spoke in the early decades of the last century. It was Dr. Philip, the Liberal-Missionary, Superintendent-General of the London Missionary Society, and the most far-sighted agent of British rule in his time, who more than anyone else clearly formulated what was subsequently to be known as “Native Policy”. He posed the problem in this manner: “We have conquered some of the tribes in the Cape Colony, but the problem is how to govern them. We have to annex the territory up to the tropics. We have to establish a system of civil administration. For this we need the chiefs”. Now this is the policy thus formulated early by Dr. Philip, which has been followed up to this day. Subsequent governors and governments were merely to work it out in detail, making the administrative machinery as efficient as possible.

Once, complaining of the delay on the part of the British Government in fully applying his “Native Policy”, Dr. Philip said: “Had a few of the chiefs been subsidized by having small salaries allowed to them, we might by this time (1843) have had the affairs of Kaffirland in our own hands”. (See “Bantu, Boer and Briton”, by W. M. Macmillan). Then we have the testimony of Lieutenant-Governor Andries Stockenström, an Afrikaner who had come to an understanding with Dr. Philip

on the question of "Native Policy". Writing to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, he said:

"I believe that every measure tending to lower the importance of the chiefs is calculated to weaken the hold we have on the people".

On another occasion, at a meeting of the ruthless Lieutenant-Governor, of Sarili ka Hintza fame, and the "great humanitarian", the Rev. Dr. Philip, Superintendent-General of the London Missionary Society, the conversation turned on the all-important subject of the subjugation of the African people. Stockenstrom stated the matter clearly:

"Let us gain the confidence of the chiefs and they, with the power of the Government and the efforts of the missionaries will influence the masses. . . . These two forces combined (i.e. Church and Government) will not civilize unless they make the native chiefs *the principal levers in the operations on their people*". (Andries Stockenstrom: Autobiography)

This, then, was the purpose for which chieftainship had to be preserved. The chiefs had to be paid servants of the Government. They were to be used as agents to "civilize" the people, teach them the "dignity of labour" (as Rhodes expressed it) and in short help reduce them to a position of slavery and keep them there at the bidding of the herrenvolk.

When the function of chieftainship is thus understood one would expect that no African leader in his proper senses would support it. Yet the incredible has happened. Dr. Xuma, President-General of the African National Congress, in announcing what he called "the minimum programme that Congress called upon the country to take to the people", said amongst other things:

"What is wanted . . . is an intensive campaign and organisation for direct representation in all legislative chambers . . . and recognition of the status of chiefs". (*Inkundla Ya Bantu*: 4.2.48).

Here we see a man staking a claim for democratic rights and in the same breath asking for the very negation of democracy. The kindest interpretation that could be put on such a statement is that it reveals a confusion of political thought. More of this later. Dr. Xuma, however, was not alone in this appeal for the restoration of chieftainship. In May 1949, the Rev. J. Calata, Secretary-General of the African National Congress and President of the Cape A.N.C., accompanied by Professor Z.K. Matthews, went on a deputation to Dr. Jansen, Minister for Native Affairs, in connection with the status of a paramount chief. In an interview, the leader of the deputation, Rev. Calata, is reported to have said:

"The fact that he (the paramount chief) has no fixed home lowered his status and had a bad psychological effect on the Gaikas . . . To a large extent detribalisation could be prevented if the Gaikas knew that their chief had permanent headquarters where *they could periodically go to renew the tribal bonds*".
(*Cape Argus*: 20.5.49) (Our emphasis)

This would have gladdened the hearts of Dr. Philip, Lieutenant-Governor Stockenstrom, Sir Harry Smith and Cecil Rhodes as surely as it must have gratified Drs.

Jansen and Malan, General Smuts and Strydom, etc. In fact they themselves couldn't have better expressed the function of a chief. Those trade unionists who have worked hard to organise the African workers in Johannesburg and who have conducted strikes, know well how their efforts have been frustrated by the simple device of bringing in the chiefs at the crucial moment to talk to the members of his tribe, warning them against "detrified agitators" and their bad influences. They know to their cost, and to the cost of the struggle of a whole people, the meaning and purpose of "renewing the tribal bonds".

The Dummy Institutions

The nature of the second stumbling-block to the progress of the people can best be indicated by reference to those who introduced the whole idea of the *Bungas* system. Let us hear what that arch-imperialist, Cecil Rhodes, had to say when introducing the second reading of the Glen Grey Bill, July 1894:

"The natives had in the past an interesting employment for their minds in going to war and consulting in their councils as to war. But by our wise government we have taken away all that employment from them. We have given them no share in the government — and I think rightly, too — and no interest in the local development of their country. What one feels is that there are questions like bridges, roads, education, plantation of trees and various local questions, to which the natives might devote themselves with good results. At present we give them nothing to do, because we have taken away their power of making war . . . We do not teach them the dignity of labour, and they simply loaf about in sloth and laziness. They never go out and work . . . Now, I say the native are children. They are just emerging from barbarism. They have human minds, and I would like them to devote themselves wholly to local matters that surround them and appeal to them. I would let them tax themselves and give them funds to spend on these matters — the building of roads and bridges, the making of plantations, and other such works . . . By that means I propose that the country shall gradually be relieved of local expenditure in the Transkei".

In summing up the Bill he said:

"It is a proposition submitted to provide them with district councils . . . to employ their minds on simple questions in connection with local affairs; . . . and last, but not least, by the gentle stimulant of the labour tax to remove them from a life of sloth and laziness; you will thus teach them the dignity of labour". (Vindex: Cecil Rhodes).

Rhodes, who boasted that he always called a spade a spade, certainly stated his plan with brutal frankness. Over and above the direct and indirect taxation which the Africans had to pay into the general coffers of the state, they had to tax themselves to defray the expenses of running the machinery for their own oppression and also to relieve the white tax-payer and the state. Moreover, in this way the *Bungas* would have a little money to play about with and — in Rhodes's phrase — "occupy their childish minds". The Bill under discussion was intended for the Glen Grey District, but even during the debate Rhodes was calling it a "Bill for Africa". He prophesied that the other Provinces would sooner or later adopt it too

and his prophecy was fulfilled to the hilt. For the Bunga system was later applied in the Reserves throughout the Union of South Africa. Indeed it proved to be so successful that the rulers fashioned a similar machinery for the urban African population in the form of the Location Advisory Boards.

The fact that the Bunga system exists up to this day and has not yet been overthrown, demonstrates Rhodes's astuteness. Having tied up the people to these local dummy councils dotted all over the country, they proceeded to create a dummy-in-chief for the whole Union — The Native Representative Council — to allow the higher ranks of the intellectuals to occupy their minds in the higher altitudes of Pretoria. The cynical attitude of the herrenvolk to the Black man could not be better illustrated than in the way they have worked out this mockery to the utmost detail. They have draped this solemn farce with a colourful pomp and ceremony for the delectation of the children, investing it with all the democratic trappings of elections, secret-ballots, etc. Periodically the whole population is thrown into an election fever for the so-called representatives and candidates. And all for what?

Every time the African people participate in these mock elections, every time the intellectuals vie with one another for positions in the councils, they are assisting in the perpetuation of this gross deception. It is not simply a question of the uselessness of these councils. It is more serious than that. They are positively dangerous. They are the people who retard the process of wrenching the scales from their eyes, so that they cannot understand clearly their present position, nor see the only way in which they can liberate themselves. There is another aspect of the situation which it is well to ponder over and that is that the Native Representative Council was created in order to forestall the growth of a national movement and an opposition to it. It was meant as a bribe to the intellectuals, who would otherwise use their talents, their education and their energies in the building up of a powerful movement outside the channels so carefully created by the Government. Such an independent movement is the last thing the rulers want. In fact they will do everything to prevent it. For it is only in this way that the oppressed can liberate themselves.

That Rhodes's plan was a piece of diabolical genius has been conclusively proved by history. For consider its disastrous effects on the African people throughout the first half of the 20th century and on their struggles for liberation. The dross that was dangled before the intellectual was seized by him as if it were the real gold, until at last he clings to it for all the world as if he had lost the capacity to distinguish the counterfeit from the true metal. He clings to it with such tenacity that he even seems prepared to wreck the struggles of his people.

The role of the members of the Native Representative Council was thrown into strong relief as the African people began to realise their true position and were taking the first steps towards throwing off their shackles. In 1943-44 the All-African Convention was launching on the New Road, rejecting trusteeship and repudiating the Native Representation Act, with all its segregatory institutions. In 1945 the M.R.C.'s countered this by making representations to the Government with a view to "improving" the N.R.C. and thus entrenching the Native Representation Act of 1936. A special Recess Committee of the N.R.C. composed of Professor Z.K.

Matthews, Messrs. R.H. Godlo, L.P. Msomi, R.V. Selope Thema and S. Mabude, recommended *inter alia* that the Council should ask the Governor-General:

“to increase the number of electoral areas from four to six by making the Transvaal and the Free State separate areas and by dividing the Cape, including the Transkei, into two parts. If European representation in the Senate was at any time increased, Native representation should be increased proportionally. Representation of Africans in the House of Assembly should be increased from 3 to 10 members, of whom seven should be elected. In the Provincial Councils Africans should be represented by three persons in the Cape, two in the Transvaal and one each in the Free State and Natal. Further: The members of Native Representative Council should be increased to 60, of whom 48 should be elected – 18 for the Cape, 18 for the Transvaal, 8 for Natal and 4 for the Orange Free State”. (Imvo: 1.9.45).

What does all this amount to? More jobs for African intellectuals. But for what purpose? If Rhodes’s original plan entailed bribing a few intellectuals and chiefs, now the intellectuals themselves are pleading with the Government to harness larger numbers of them to assist it in working the machinery of oppression against their own people.

While the people are breaking with inferiority and all that it implies, and gathering their forces to launch a concerted struggle against the Native Representative Act and for full democratic rights, the M.R.C.’s on the other hand are putting forward a plea for the negation of democracy. They are racking their brains to find a way of “improving” the sham Council in order to make it presentable to the people. Moreover, as the people began to put their rejection into effect and agitated for a boycott of all elections under the Act, the M.R.C.’s were forced to take their stand against them. Fearful of losing their prestige, they resorted to political trickery. At first they pretended to agree with the people over the boycott, but as election time approached they flouted the decisions of the people and stood for elections, thinking, however, to cover themselves with the ridiculous slogan of “boycott candidate”.

During that whole period beginning with the by-election in the Transkei in May, 1947, to the election of the N.R.C. in 1948, while the people were rallying together under the banner of the Boycott, and while every single organisation in the Transkei had declared for the Boycott, it was at this point that the M.R.C.’s clearly revealed their role as disrupters of unity. It was then that the organisations in the Transkei realised that as long as they had the M.R.C.s in their midst, it would not be possible to unite the people for a concerted and principled struggle. Accordingly they expelled every one of the M.R.C.’s from their organisations, together with all those who stood for elections. (March 1948)

With this decisive action of expulsion the Transkei set a practical example to the country as a whole. This did not mean, however, that the M.R.C.’s were safely isolated from the people and could no longer infest the body politic with the poison of opportunism. On the contrary, they found a home in the bosom of the African National Congress. Lodged in this organisation the M.R.C.’s are doing everything in their power to retard the political progress of the African people.

It is they who are standing in the way of unity – unity of Congress with the other

organisations in the All-African Convention. It is they who are refusing to break with trusteeship and inferiority and are causing dissension in the ranks of the Africans. It is they who, by pursuing the policy of collaboration with the oppressor, are tying up the people to the dummy councils. In a word it is they who are disrupting the unity of the people and demoralising the struggle.

CHAPTER 11

African National Congress

Now it is not so difficult to recognise the first two obstacles to progress because the link between them and the government is clearly perceptible. The chiefs and the members of these dummy councils receive payment for their services and this the people know. It is a very difficult matter, however, with the third obstacle, the African National Congress (A.N.C.). The people find it difficult to recognise the function of this body. It is the sentimental attachment to the past. They still think of the African National Congress as it used to be when it was first created. In 1912 it really was an organisation of the people. It was representative of a people who had emerged from tribalism and it was under its auspices that many took part in the struggle for liberation and sacrificed their lives. It is because of this past that the people still cling to the A.N.C. They fail to recognise that the Congress their fathers knew, died some twenty years ago, and that what masquerades as this old organisation of the people is actually a corpse deliberately propped up by all the agents of the Government in our midst.

An organisation grows as long as it keeps in step with the times and nourishes itself with current ideas, i.e. keeps itself vital and alive with progressive trends of thought. The moment it ceases to do so, it ceases to be healthy, sickens and dies. But the people are not aware of the precise moment when death takes place, and this is where the danger comes in. It is only in retrospect, long afterwards, that they can tell when it died. Even in the case of the human body it is indeed not easy to recognise the state of death. It carries within it the seeds of decay long before its final dissolution, but only when the rate of growth of the living cells is exceeded by the rate of decay, can it be said that death has begun. A man may continue to exist many years before life is completely extinct. With the human body, however, there is this advantage, that when the heart stops, people recognise that life is extinguished. Nothing more can be done and the corpse is buried. No matter how much the person was loved or valued, the corpse must be buried. In self-preservation society buries its dead, for it knows that otherwise disease and pestilence may fall upon the people.

With a political body, how much harder is it to ascertain the advent of death. Here there is no stoppage of the heart to signal the precise moment of death. And even when the organisation is at last recognised to be dead the people continue to cling to it for sentimental reasons and refuse to bury the corpse. The result is that it continues to pollute the atmosphere and infect the body politic with all manner of diseases known in politics. Self-preservation demanded that the corpse should have been buried. The African people today are paying very dearly for their failure to bury the African National Congress 20 years ago.

Already at the time of the I.C.U. it had been obvious that the A.N.C. had ceased to play a progressive role and was blocking the way to further development. While it itself could no longer grow it fought any attempt to form a new organisation that would be more in keeping with the times. But this reactionary role of Congress was not clearly observable until the late thirties and particularly the early forties. In the crisis of 1935 at the time of the Hertzog "Native" Bills, the people broke through the resistance of the Congress leadership and spontaneously created a new organisation, the All-African Convention, which was to speak for the African people. Now by its very nature the All-African Convention did not replace the African National Congress; as a federal organisation it gathered under its wing all the existing organisations, political, civic, trade union, church bodies, etc. In this way, the A.N.C. too, found a place for itself in this all embracing body. That same clique of Congress leadership which had been propping up the corpse and using it as an instrument in the service of the herrenvolk, now found a niche within the new organisation.

It was from this vantage point that they proceeded to spread their infection. From the very beginning they made an attempt to kill the Convention. Being in the majority on the Executive of the A.A.C. they embodied in the Constitution a clause to the effect that Convention shall meet only every three years. They knew quite well that an organisation which meets only once in three years must surely die. They also incorporated another clause to the effect that Convention shall not permit individuals to joint it, nor form branches, but only affiliate to existing organisations. In this way they sought to leave a clear field for Congress to gather into itself the unorganised masses while robbing the Convention of the possibility of a direct contact with the people. Thus they hoped to cash in on the political upsurge, and, having received a new lease of life, break away from the Convention. It was this same Executive, with the clique of Congress leadership in the majority, which went to Cape Town and negotiated with Hertzog in 1936. Its disastrous effects are all too well known; the disruption amongst the people, shattering the newly-acquired unity and leading them into a political desert for the next seven years.

When the Congress die-hards thought they had sufficiently strangled the Convention they withdrew from it, leaving it, as they thought, to die. And it is true that at this time the once brave Convention was like an animal which had received a mortal wound. But its enemies had reckoned without its potentialities and its latent resources, which were to emerge with the increasing pressure of events.

When the Convention didn't die, the Congress clique redoubled their efforts from without in an attempt to bring about its final extinction. In a letter, dated 15.11.40 from Professor Jabavu (then President of the A.A.C.) to the Rev. Z.R. Mahabane (then President of the A.N.C.) the following statement appears:

"The last few issues of 'Umteteli' revealed a subversive move by unknown parties (a) to unseat you in the Presidential position of the A.N.C. and substitute Dr. Xuma and (b) to abolish the A.A.C. in order to put the African National Congress in its place."

From this we see that the manoeuvrings had taken definite shape and the line of attack was clearly discernible. For as long as the Rev. Z.R. Mahabane, who was also Vice-President of the Convention, remained the head of Congress, he was an

obstacle to their disruptive plans. There was always the possibility that he would go over the heads of the clique of Congress die-hards and, with considerable prospect of success, appeal directly to the rank and file, urging all the branches of Congress to return to the Convention. They had to get rid of him at all costs. And this they did, installing in his place as President-General of Congress, Dr. A.B. Xuma, who from now on leads the Congress for nine years of its chequered history – or shall we say career?

In December, 1940, the Natal African National Congress presented to the annual Conference of Congress the following Resolution:

“That the African National Congress is highly indebted to the All-African Convention for its labours in seeking redress and justice for the Africans in connection with the ‘Native Acts’ and also in assisting to awaken the spirit of union among the African people.

“That emergency having been passed, however, the A.N.C. feels that the A.A.C. has now fulfilled its useful purpose and now in order to obviate overlapping and misunderstanding, naturally attendant upon running two national bodies with identical aims and objects, the All-African Convention should now cease to function and merge in the African National Congress.”

The enemies of unity now felt in a sufficiently strong position to come out into the open. They were so sanguine that they could actually visualise the Convention signing its own death warrant by voting itself out of existence. The more wily ones amongst them, however, were well aware of the futility – in fact, naivete – of such wishful thinking and they adopted another tactic, a more dangerous one because more subtle. They started a long drawn out controversy between Congress and Convention. The purpose of this protracted affair was to hold up and paralyse the work of Convention, to stop it from working out its ideas, framing its policy and going to the people with a constructive line of action. All the energy of the Conference of the A.A.C. was to be consumed in these time-wasting efforts. They professed, then, a great desire to unite the African people by bringing Congress and Convention together. On the face of it this sounded plausible enough. But, as time was to reveal, this was only another ruse for the undermining of Convention.

It must be admitted that this clever move did not spontaneously arise out of the fertile brains of the Congress clique. Actually there was a strong desire for unity throughout the country and the rank and file of Congress also expressed this genuine desire. To them it seemed ridiculous that Congress should be holding conference in one hall while at the same time the other African organisations were discussing the same problems in another hall. They forced their leaders to approach the Convention with a view to uniting the two bodies. As the leaders could not refuse these demands without exposing their hand, they gave the appearance of complying. But they proceeded to turn necessity to inglorious gain.

This is what happened. As a result of pressure from the rank and file of Congress, the Rev. J.A. Calata, Secretary-General of the A.N.C. sent the following letter to the Conference of the All-African Convention sitting in Bloemfontein, December 18, 1940.

“Dear Sir,

At the annual conference of the African National Congress held at Bloemfontein on the 16th December, 1940, it was resolved to ask the All-African Convention to elect a Committee of three representatives to meet in joint committee three representatives from the African National Congress to consider how the two bodies could co-operate to bring about a united effort in the political struggle of the race. The Committee should be required to report to the All-African Convention during this session.” (A.A.C. Minutes, 1940).

After some discussion the Convention elected the following three members to represent it on the sub-committee: Professor Z.K. Matthews, Messrs. J.A. Nhlapo and L.T. Mtimkulu. The leader of the delegation was Professor Z.K. Matthews, a delegate representing the South African Teachers’ Federation and an official on the A.A.C. Executive, namely, Secretary for Protectorates Contacts. After joint deliberation the A.A.C. delegates brought back their report, as follows:

“Recommendations of the Joint Committee of the A.A.C. and A.N.C.

Whereas it would appear that there exists some overlapping of activities and misunderstanding as to the status and position of the two bodies, the A.A.C. and the A.N.C. in the organisational life and activities of the African race, both of which claim to be the co-ordinating body of the different organisations in the country.

“This committee recommends:-

1. That the two bodies be requested so to amend their constitution that they will clearly define their respective spheres of labour.
2. That the definitions of their scope should as far as possible be on the following lines:-
 - (a) The A.N.C. should confine itself to the political aspirations and constitutional rights of the Africans and to other cognate matters.
 - (b) The A.A.C. shall be the co-ordinating and consultative committee of African National organisations dealing with social, educational, economic, political and industrial matters.
 - (c) Wherever possible the representatives of affiliated national organisations on the consultative committee shall be president, chairman and secretary of such organisation.
3. Except in special circumstances organisations of a mainly local character shall not be eligible for direct affiliation to the A.A.C.”

Conference perceived that these recommendations would have serious and far-reaching consequences on the life of the All-African Convention itself. It would not be proper, therefore, to allow the delegates present to take a decision on the Recommendations there and then. The country as a whole must be given a chance to make up its mind on the issue. Conference accordingly decided that the delegates should take the Recommendations back to their respective organisations and all other African organisations affiliated to the A.A.C. and discuss them thoroughly. The following year they would bring their verdict to the Conference of the A.A.C.

What stands out clearly in these Recommendations is that those who framed them had one purpose in mind – to kill the All-African Convention as it was constituted in 1936-7 and reduce it to the status of a mere committee. For consider what

the Recommendations involved. First, the Convention was to be removed from the political arena and concern itself primarily with social, educational and economic matters. Secondly, hundreds of organisations were to be excluded from affiliating to Convention on the ground that they were local bodies, and not national in their scope. Thus at the most only about a half-dozen organisations would qualify for affiliation to the A.A.C. And even those could not send their ordinary rank and file members as delegates to the Conference. Only presidents, chairmen and secretaries could represent them. In this way, the All-African Convention, which had been conceived by the people in 1936-7 as an organisation to gather the Africans together, unite them on a scale hitherto unknown for a concerted and sustained struggle, a body which was to unify the struggles of the people in every walk of life, was now to be reduced to a "consultative committee" of a dozen or so heads of "national organisations".

If this piece of machination had succeeded, well might the people have cried:

"O, what a fall was there, my countrymen!
Then you and I and all of us fell down,
While bloody treason flourished over us."

But the people were not to allow it to succeed.

Those who have not understood the tortuous mentality of the agents of the herrenvolk operating in the midst of the oppressed might have been staggered at this apparently senseless stab in the back of a people's organisation. But it was not at all aimlessly conceived. It was a deliberate plan to emasculate the Convention and render it impotent while leaving the political field clear for the A.N.C. It was part of the old plan of Congress die-hards who would not brook the rise of any organisation, any development among the people, that constituted a threat to the policy of collaboration with the herrenvolk on the basis of inferiority.

The following year, December, 1941, the Conference of Convention again met. It must be explained here that although the Constitution still stipulated that it should meet every three years, the progressives circumvented this clause by demanding emergency conferences, pointing out that the Africans were faced with a crisis. As had been agreed, delegates reported the decisions of their respective organisations on the question of the Recommendations of the Joint Committee of the A.N.C. and the A.A.C. By an overwhelming majority they were rejected. Thus the A.A.C. was to remain as the federal body federating all the African organisations and constituting the mouthpiece of the African people.

This decision the Congress leadership quietly ignored. They continued to keep Congress isolated, refusing to come in with the other organisations. It is not to be supposed, however, that they left the matter there. In order to cover up their tracks and divert attention away from their betrayal of unity, they strove to represent themselves as actually the champions of unity. From now on we hear them again and again taking up the cry for unity, while rejecting unity in fact. Nothing could have been more calculated to sow confusion than such a tactic.

In December, 1942, Dr. Xuma, President-General of the A.N.C. came out with a grand new scheme. A new Convention was to be called for the purpose of bringing out a new document described with various imposing titles: "An African

Charter", "Bills of Rights", or "Reconstruction Programme". In a letter to Professor Jabavu, President of the A.A.C. (16.8.43) Dr. Xuma explained that it was an ad hoc Convention.

"To make the move national," he wrote, "we have established a Committee including all members of the N.R.C., heads of Teachers' Associations, representatives of Trade Unions and others who are not specially members of Congress, but are prominent leaders in the country."

He wrote also that the All-African Convention

"should participate by sending delegates to the ad hoc Convention."

The cynical attitude of Dr. Xuma towards the people's organisations could not be better demonstrated than in the way he set up this ad hoc Committee. Only the previous year, the decision of the majority had been that all African organisations should be united under the A.A.C. But now, going over the heads of these same organisations, he coolly invited the federal body, the A.A.C. itself to send delegates. This might have seemed sheer madness, but when viewed from his angle there was method in it. His move, while it had the appearance of striving for unity, in fact hit at the roots of unity. Anything and everything was legitimate so long as it undermined Convention and disrupted real unity.

The reason for the obsession to destroy Convention began to reveal itself in certain incidents about this time. Dr. Xuma and the rest of the Congress die-hards were following a line of behaviour *which could only flow from a political position diametrically opposed to that of the All-African Convention* and its policy of Non-collaboration with the oppressor. One example will suffice at the moment. In February 1943, the Parliamentary Select Committee on Soldiers' Pay invited both Congress and Convention to give evidence on behalf of the African people. The leaders of the Coloured and Indian organisations were also giving evidence. When Dr. Xuma arrived in Cape Town, the Convention Committee (Western Province) suggested to him that the two African bodies, the A.A.C. and A.N.C. should present a single memorandum calling for equal pay for all soldiers according to rank irrespective of colour. But he preferred to present a separate memorandum on behalf of Congress. The leaders of the Black sections, however, received from him a promise that he too would ask for equal pay for all soldiers of the same rank irrespective of colour. But on arriving at the Parliamentary chambers he changed his tune. After he had presented his prepared memorandum, the members of the select committee cross-questioned him as to its full import. Let us quote the verbatim report.

Mrs. Ballinger: "You are not asking that they should receive the same rate of pay you are asking for the African volunteers. Are you asking that the African volunteers should be paid exactly the same rate of pay as European volunteers?"

Dr. Xuma: "I say the same as every other Non-European".

Mrs. Ballinger: "You are not asking that they should receive the same rate as Europeans?"

Dr. Xuma: "Not at this time. Nor for the African volunteers who attested for service in Africa".

Mrs. Ballinger: "So your emphasis is on the European rate?"

Dr. Xuma: "No."

This testimony is explicit. It reveals Dr. Xuma's fundamental political position — the acceptance of inferiority. This is what separates him and his Congress clique from the All-African Convention.

When the A.A.C. met in December, 1943, it again found itself faced with the same delaying tactics, with yet another resolution from Congress calling for a joint committee of twenty to discuss unity of the two organisations. A very long discussion ensued in which delegates differed as to the usefulness of continuing this already protracted dispute. One speaker, in opposing the adoption of the resolution, said:

"there were a number of very urgent matters requiring the attention of Convention. A great deal of time would be wasted in a discussion that would yield no fruit".

He pointed out that after discussions at two previous conferences a final decision had been taken in 1941:

"to the effect that Convention shall be the mouthpiece of the African people. The Congress leadership had not abided by that decision. There was no guarantee that they would now, after wasting valuable time, abide by the decision which the proposed committee would come to . . . Dr. Xuma, now President-General of the Congress, was himself responsible for drafting the Convention Constitution . . . The leadership of Congress was responsible for this division and it was a waste of precious time to go over the same ground with them. The Convention should devote the short time at its disposal to urgent problems crying out to be solved. Let the Convention give a lead, then the people would brush aside all these artificially created divisions and follow Convention."

(A.A.C. Minutes, 1943).

Other delegates felt that Congress must be given yet another chance and Conference finally decided in favour of the motion, appointing ten delegates to meet the ten Congress representatives. Next day Professor Jabavu (President of the A.A.C.) reported that after a lengthy discussion the Joint Committee of Congress and Convention had decided by majority vote "that the All-African Convention shall be the recognised political mouthpiece of the African people". The A.A.C. accepted the Report and accordingly passed the following Resolution:

"In view of the decision made at the meeting of the joint delegates of the A.N.C. and the A.A.C. . . . that the A.A.C. shall henceforth be regarded as the official mouthpiece and the co-ordinating body of the African people; and in order to give effect to this decision so that unity may be achieved in practice and not merely in resolutions, this session of the A.A.C. sitting at Bloemfontein on December 17th, 1943,

- (1) Invites all the branches of the A.N.C. which were affiliated from the inception of Convention up to 1941, to re-affiliate to the A.A.C.
- (2) Invites the A.N.C. to affiliate to the A.A.C.
- (3) Urges the A.N.C. in the name of unity to come back to the A.A.C.

so that the unity that was demonstrated in 1935 and continued to 1941 should be recovered and improved upon." (A.A.C. Minutes, 1943).

This Resolution was moved by Dr. J.S. Moroka, the same Dr. Moroka who was to become President-General of Congress in December, 1949.

Having closed a long chapter of time-consuming controversy, the All-African Convention forged ahead with its tasks. Having, as it believed, at last effected internal unity, i.e. within the African section, it now turned all its energies to problems long overdue. It was imperative to tackle vital matters of re-organisation and political orientation. First of all it amended the old constitution so that Convention should meet at least once a year and in emergency more than once. Then a new clause (e) was added, as follows:

"The aim of Convention being to represent all the African people, to bring together and organise those Africans who are not members and/or are unwilling to become members of any of the existing organisations affiliated to the Convention, with this in view, to open branches of the Convention, especially in rural districts where such Africans can join the Convention in the capacity of individual membership."

The first amendment removed the stranglehold that had been placed on Convention since its inception – to meet only once in three years. Now it could act promptly and directly in the problems of the people as they arose. The second amendment catered for the mass of unorganised people who were unable otherwise to join Convention because there were no organisations in their district or were unwilling to join existing ones. It also created direct contact between the people and the Convention.

In this same Conference, 1943, and in the following one, 1944, Convention devoted its entire attention to crystallising its ideas and formulating its policy and programme so as to meet the needs of the people under conditions of ever-deepening crisis, disillusionment and discontent. It was a period which, as we said, marked a turning point in the struggles of the Blacks. The Convention, basing its approach on the rejection of inferiority and trusteeship, evolved the policy of non-collaboration with the oppressor, and laid down the basis and the broad general lines of the struggle. Realising the community of interests of all Black oppressed, it looked to a wider unity and at the 1943 Conference called the other sections of the Blacks to a preliminary Unity Conference with a view to broadening the base of the struggle and co-ordinating the efforts of the different sections.

Here we see the rapid development in the field of ideas and the outlook of the people. There has been a development, too, on the organisational level – a development in fact engendered by the new ideas. The keynote was unity. Like the ever-widening circles caused by a stone in a vast pool, the idea of unity was spreading throughout the mass of the people, transcending the artificial barriers of colour and struggling to reach out even to the most politically backward sections amongst them. It is against this background of political upsurge that we must view the machinations of the African National Congress in the ensuing period and the treacherous political role it played.

It will be recalled that in December, 1943, Congress brought a resolution to the Convention requesting a Joint Committee to discuss ways and means of uniting the

two bodies. This Committee, composed of equal numbers from the A.N.C. and the A.A.C., had decided by majority vote that the A.A.C. should remain the political mouthpiece of the Africans. This meant that Congress should re-affiliate to the Convention. The decision was regarded by many as a great achievement marking the end of the organisational stagnation and opening up great possibilities for real unity amongst the Africans.

Congress and the Non-European Unity Movement

(Unity Movement of South Africa)

Alas, these hopes were to be dashed to the ground. Once again the Congress leadership ignored these decisions. By this time it was becoming obvious that they never had any intention of uniting the people, and their role as disrupters of unity was taking shape. Not only did they keep Congress out of the unity in the African section, but also out of the wider unity of the Blacks. Their activities as disrupters was transferred to a wider arena. A perusal of the Minutes of the first few Conferences of the Non-European Unity Movement (N.E.U.M.) reveals the unconscionable time and effort spent in vain in discussing the question of bringing the Congress into the Movement. At every conference individual members of Congress (attending in some other capacity) adopted the attitude that it was the fault of the Convention that Congress was not represented at the N.E.U.M. Conference. In spite of assurances that Congress had been invited through its officials, the President-General and the General-Secretary, these members persisted in their denials of this fact. For example, Mr. Ngubeni, a well-known Congress organiser from the George district, "asserted that the A.N.C. did not receive invitations to this (the third) Conference." (Minutes) The Joint Secretaries quoted the relevant correspondence disproving his statement, and even this did not quell the zeal with which they pursued their insinuations. Thereupon Mr. Basson (representative from the A.P.O., a Coloured organisation, and the Anti-C.A.D., Kimberley) reported as follows:

"In Kimberley the local Anti-C.A.D. Committee was invited by the A.N.C. to its Conference, December, 1944. There they asked the President, Dr. Xuma, for a clear declaration on Unity. The reply was that they could not make the statement because they were not invited to the Unity Conference. Mr. Basson had asked the Secretary to put this categorically in writing, but he refused to do so. Mr. Basson considered that this reply was an excuse. They were sabotaging unity since not a single delegate at the A.N.C. Conference had raised the question of unity." (Minutes: 3rd N.E.U.M. Conference).

The following day the Conference of the N.E.U.M. unanimously passed the following Resolution:

"This Conference directs the incoming committee to open negotiations personally as well as by letter with the African National Congress with a view to drawing them into the Unity Movement on the basis of the Ten-Point Programme."

The efforts made to carry out this injunction are clear from the following quotation from the Joint Secretaries' Report given at the next N.E.U.M. Conference, December, 1945.

"Immediately after the conclusion of Conference, our Chairman, the Rev. Mahabane, went to Johannesburg to interview Dr. A.B. Xuma, the President-General of Congress, but the latter declined to meet our Chairman. The secretariat then sent the Resolution (see above) to Dr. Xuma by registered post on the 1st February to which we received a formal acknowledgement dated 1st March. We wrote again (May 17) to Dr. Xuma . . . and pointed out the urgency of the position. We also appealed to the President to use his influence to draw Congress into the Unity Movement . . . We wrote in similar strain to the Secretary of Congress. No replies were received to these letters. On instructions from our Chairman we invited both the President and the Secretary to attend the Executive meeting held in Johannesburg in July, but the reply was that as 'they were not members of the Executive' they could not attend. At the Executive meeting the whole matter was discussed and it was resolved that a further effort should be made, so a committee was appointed to seek an interview with Dr. Xuma. But once again the President refused to discuss unity with us . . . We again invited Congress to attend this Conference." (Minutes: N.E.U.M. 4th Conference, December, 1945).

This was not the end of the efforts made by the N.E.U.M. to draw in the Congress. The Joint Secretaries again reported on the matter at the 1946 Conference. The following extract from the Minutes will suffice:

"Soon after the last Conference we wrote to the National Secretary of the A.N.C. We received no reply to this letter. We again invited them to the Executive meeting . . . and to this Conference. These communications were made by registered post."

Here we see the Congress leaders adopting the same technique of sabotage as they had done over several years in relation to the unity of the Africans within the All-African Convention.

Operating in the wider sphere, however, the Congress clique were bolder and did not confine themselves simply to silent sabotage. They actively condemned the unity of all oppressed. The so-called Bantu press went all out to decry the Unity Movement and all the scribes belonging to the Congress fold spilled gallons of ink in an attempt to vilify it. They even had the effrontery to put forward the argument: how can we have unity with the Coloureds and Indians when we haven't got it amongst ourselves? This, from the very people who had done everything to maintain a perpetual state of disunity amongst the Africans.

Dr. Xuma, on the occasion of a violent attack on the African Democratic Party, which he regarded as a rival to Congress, took the opportunity to proclaim boastfully: "A year ago I had stood against the Non-European United Front." In the same speech, apparently for the edification of the herrenvolk, he declared that

"the Non-European United Front had turned out to be a toothless bulldog." (Imvo: October, 1943). (Ref. to an abortive Unity, 1939).

CHAPTER 12

Bogus Unities

The method of open frontal attack on the part of the Congress die-hards did not work and they found it necessary to change their tune again. The pressure of events was impelling the people to come together and the urge to unity was so strong that the tide threatened either to drown the herrenvolk agents or cast them aside, leaving them high and dry. They realised that they must adopt a different tactic. So once more they resorted to the more subtle method of proclaiming themselves protagonists of unity while making sure that they were obstructing unity. While holding aloof from the Unity Movement with its principled basis of struggle, they made abortive attempts at establishing various forms of bogus unity.

We have already mentioned Dr. Xuma's ad hoc Convention for the African Charter-Bill of Rights. Then there was the National Anti-Pass Campaign Committee, the Unity Pact between the three Doctors, Dadoo, Naicker and Xuma, and later the Votes-For-All Assembly. In all these Dr. Xuma had the support of the Congress die-hards.

The reason for all their political acrobatics lies in the false political position which they had taken up. Having turned their backs on the only road of struggle, the principled struggle, they were without sheet-anchor and had to resort to shifts and tricks of political action. The very logic of their position led them into opportunism. Now, in politics, whoever ceases to represent the true interests of his oppressed people, wittingly or unwittingly becomes a tool of those sections of society who consciously serve the interests of the oppressor. When Dr. Xuma behaves in an unpredictable manner, now vacillating and now plunging headlong into this and that ad hoc committee and then as abruptly abandons them, or when he makes a statement and then promptly acts contrary to that statement — it might be said that he does all these things in obedience to this law. He may be unaware of it, but the law operates on him all the same. A savage falling over a cliff knows nothing about the law of gravity, but he falls down in conformity with it no less than Newton himself.

The important thing to observe here is that an individual's personal quality has nothing to do with the issue. In politics, he who acts as an agent of a class other than his own may or may not be sincere. But this does not affect his objective function. In fact quite often, the more honest he is, the most useful he is to this class and the more dangerous he is to his own people. Precisely because he is sincere he stands a better chance of misleading a greater number of innocent people. Sincerity, then, is by itself not enough. It is not the primary attribute by which to judge a leader. In any case it is a difficult thing to determine, since nobody has yet invented an instrument for measuring a man's sincerity. What does matter — and this is the only measuring-rod — is the result, the effect of a leader's actions on society. The only pertinent question is: *Who benefits by his words and actions?* To answer that question is to

know which class or section he serves.

To illustrate our point let us examine two of Dr. Xuma's political ventures:

1. The National Anti-Pass Committee, and 2. The Unity Pact of the Three Doctors.

National Anti-Pass Campaign

The idea of starting a special body for an isolated fight against one of the disabilities of the Africans did not originate with Dr. Xuma. The Anti-Pass Committee was formed by the Communist Party of South Africa outside Congress. But in order to make it appear national in character, the Communist Party persuaded Dr. Xuma, President of the A.N.C., to come in with them on the scheme and made him President of the National Anti-Pass Committee. At first he opposed it, arguing that there was no need for yet another organisation and that it was the function of Congress to take up such matters. Later, for reasons that were never made public, he agreed to the scheme and assumed office in this new organisation. In this instance it was obvious from the very beginning that he was acting under the influence of the Communist Party of South Africa.

The campaign showed every sign of gaining popularity, for the carrying of passes had always been a source of bitter resentment to the people. Desperate with the desire to rid themselves of this badge of slavery they were ready to clutch at anything if it held out such a promise. Conferences were held in the various provinces rallying them to the Anti-Pass slogan; dates were fixed in advance for the great pass-burning day; then, as enthusiasm mounted, the day was postponed. After this performance was repeated, Dr. Xuma abandoned the whole business. A few people in isolated locations burned their passes, and paid the penalty. The movement as such, being deserted by the leadership, had dwindled away.

Here the question must be asked: What was at the back of this Anti-Pass campaign? And who benefited from it? Certainly not the people, nor even their organisations. Neither did their struggles gain anything from it. On the contrary, they received a set-back, for the disillusionment, the confusion and the disappointed hopes could not but have a detrimental effect on their morale. The reprehensible nature of this move is shown up when we consider the political atmosphere prevailing at the time, with the people awakening to a new consciousness. The second World War was coming to an end and the struggles of the oppressed throughout the world were pushing themselves to the fore. The Imperialist countries were already haunted by the spectre of unrest amongst the enslaved peoples. In the East these struggles had assumed such magnitude that they threatened to overshadow the last stages of the war. The peoples of Asia had staked their claim for full independence and self-determination. As we have already said, the war slogans: "Fight against Fascism!" "Fight for Democracy!" for them meant a fight for their own liberation. And this new spirit had penetrated Africa too. The Blacks of South Africa were staking their claim for full democratic rights. The All-African Convention had come out with the New Road rejecting inferiority, and, together with the Unity Movement, was laying the basis for a principled struggle — the 10-point Programme. They were no longer asking for petty reforms here and there. It was the time to struggle for fundamental things, for full democratic rights, the lack of which is at the root of all their racial disabilities.

It is against this background that the Anti-Pass campaign of Xuma and Co. shows up in a most reprehensible light. To choose the Pass Laws as an issue and isolate them from the rest was to deflect the attention of the people from the fundamental cause of their disabilities and at the same time distort the nature of the struggle against the whole repressive system. Still more reprehensible was the method adopted in the campaign. A new organisation was specially created, its sole function being to fight the passes. The existing organisations had to be shelved while this campaign was going on and they would only come into their own when it was over. This was a way of undermining the existing organisations, since to remove them from the struggles of the people is to deny them the reason for their existence.

The Communist Party of South Africa

The fact of the matter is that in this instance Dr. Xuma had become a tool in the hands of the Communist Party of South Africa. In all the foregoing one can trace the pattern of their tactics. And here it is necessary to pause and analyse the situation. It has long been the Communist Party (C.P.) line either to control or to kill an organisation. It cannot tolerate a movement or organisation which is not dominated by itself. Every time there is political excitement over some oppressive measure, the C.P. is the first to set up a hue and cry against it. They do not call upon the existing organisations of the Blacks to fight the issue.

They either organise the people round the C.P. itself or set up an ad hoc body or committee in which their own men play a leading part. When the campaign comes to an end they dissolve the ad hoc body — but with a few new recruits to the credit of the C.P. It is true that disillusionment comes to these recruits in course of time, but the point is that the people's organisations themselves are not allowed to develop because they are not allowed to fight the issue under their own banner and thence grow into a permanent, independent force. In other words, the people are kept defenceless so that when the next onslaught takes place the C.P. can always appear as their champion. At all times the C.P. gets hold of one or other of the leaders of the Blacks and uses him as a decoy.

The question to ask is: Why does the Communist Party of South Africa behave in this manner? — a party that is supposed to stand for the workers. To answer it adequately one would require to know the political and sociological structure of South African society and the power of ruling-class ideas as well as the composition of the C.P. itself. In the first chapters of this book we have dealt with the structure of South African society and the way in which ruling-class ideas have penetrated every stratum, dominating all thinking. It is only necessary to add a word as to the composition of the Communist Party of South Africa.

The few Blacks in the C.P. have by and large joined it by filling in the membership form which is publicly distributed, without having the slightest idea of what Communism really means. The preponderating conscious element in the Communist Party is drawn from the White petit-bourgeois intellectual section. It is this element which is responsible for formulating its policies. And it is just this section which is particularly susceptible to ruling-class ideas. Their daily existence connects them with this class in manifold ways, through social and economic bonds. In fact it

is the very milieu of their existence. Even those few trade union functionaries operating in the working-class are themselves limited in their social contacts to the trade union bureaucrat and the white worker, who constitutes an aristocracy of labour in South Africa, and is himself riddled with the herrenvolk prejudices and ideas. This is why in every political crisis the C.P. of South Africa finds itself standing four-square on the side of the herrenvolk parties.

Consider the war question, for example. During that whole period, beginning at the time when the Soviet Union entered the war, the C.P. of South Africa, was indistinguishable from Smuts' Party. In the "Friends of the Soviet Union" and allied bodies, the members of the C.P. and the Bishop Lavises, etc., were all of one fraternity. With equal zeal they mobilised man-power, labour, industry, etc., in one grand war effort. From pulpit to social club, from factory to rural village they were busily engaged recruiting the oppressed to join the army — even as baggage-warriors — in order to defend "their country". At this time a favourite argument on their lips was that nothing must be done to embarrass the Government in its prosecution of the war, and General Smuts was proclaimed as the greatest leader in the "fight against Fascism".

One more example will suffice. In the political crisis that arose during the late forties, the Communist Party once again took up its position on the side of the herrenvolk. At that time the organisations of the Blacks within the Unity Movement were rejecting inferiority and trusteeship and the African section was giving practical expression to this by means of the boycott of all segregatory dummy institutions created for a "child race". The C.P. strained every effort to break this boycott. They sent in their own men to stand for election as members of Advisory Boards in the towns, the N.R.C. or as White "Native Representatives" and urged their tools and sympathisers to do likewise. They advanced spurious arguments to defend their line. But no amount of eloquence could disguise the fact that to operate these segregatory institutions was to accept the herrenvolk idea that the Blacks were an inferior people. To keep these institutions alive is in the interests of the ruling-class.

The Doctors' Unity Pact

We have indicated that whoever ceases to represent the true interests of his people becomes a tool in the hands of those who consciously serve the interests of their own class. We shall examine in this light the Unity Pact between the three Doctors: Dadoo, Naicker and Xuma. First of all these three Doctors with their organisations had all been invited to the preliminary discussions which led to the formation of the Unity Movement, as well as to subsequent conferences. Dr. Xuma (as already stated) ignored the invitations. The other two, Drs. Dadoo and Naicker, had refused on the ground that, though they were leaders of a substantial section of the Indian people (the Nationalist Group) they were not in the official leadership of the South African Indian Congress (S.A.I.C.).

The attitude of the South African Indian Congress towards the Unity Movement and the 10-Point Programme was expressed by its representatives at a special Conference arranged between it and the All-African Convention together with the National Anti-C.A.D. on the 8th July, 1944, in Johannesburg. In a discussion on

the 10-Point Programme, which the A.A.C. and the Anti-C.A.D. considered to be essential to a principal unity, Mr. A.I. Kajee (S.A.I.C.) said:

“If it (the 10-Point Programme) was taken to his Congress as it stood it would be rejected, for the reason that the S.A.I.C. was committed to the principle of compromise. . . . The Indians would stand to lose if they adopted a programme which did not give expression to this principle (of compromise).” (Minutes: N.E.U.M. 2nd Conference).

When asked by the Chairman whether the representatives of the S.A.I.C. would accept the first three points of the 10-Point Programme, Mr. Kajee answered that on point 1 (the demand for full franchise)

“they could not commit themselves, as the Indian Congress stands by the Policy of Compromise.” He stated that: “in their negotiations with the Judicial Commission now sitting in Natal, they had accepted the principle of a ‘Communal’ vote based on educational and property qualifications. They had accepted this in order to appease European public opinion which feared the Indians on the ground that they (the Indians) wish to swamp the Europeans and concentrate political power in their own hands.” (Ibid).

Mr. Chowdree (S.A.I.C.) in arguing against the 10-Point Programme, said:

“Our only hope is to compromise, and that is the tactic of my group.” And again: “The present power in the land would take away our present rights if we started shouting ‘unity’ all over the country. Smuts is a great man but he will not tolerate your challenging the state power.” (Ibid).

This special Conference, held for the purpose of bringing the Indians into the Unity Movement, ended in failure. The S.A.I.C. leadership rejected unity, refusing to be committed in advance to the 10-Point Programme. It was clear that they were not prepared to engage in a struggle for the liberation of all the oppressed. They were interested only in striving for communal representation or a franchise based on property qualifications. Such a franchise would benefit only the rich merchant class, leaving the large masses, the poor peasants and workers, in a completely defenceless state without a voice. Subsequent developments were to show that they were concerned only with their own class interests.

At this time a furious battle was being waged in the South African Indian Congress between the Nationalist Group led by Doctors Dadoo and Naicker, and the old guard represented by Kajee, Chowdree and others. The methods used by the younger group to unseat the old guard are interesting. They illustrate two things: (a) that the Blacks throughout the country were ready for unity of all oppressed; (b) the unscrupulous use to which this readiness can be used for opportunistic ends. The Nationalist Group, sizing up the situation, started a campaign against the old guard, accusing them of rejecting unity. They got in touch with the N.E.U.M. and arranged tours of Natal by an official of the N.E.U.M. The Indian masses rallied to the call of unity and on this wave of enthusiasm Doctors Dadoo and Naicker unseated the Kajee group, taking over the leadership of the S.A.I.C. With their end thus achieved, they proceeded

to turn their back on the Unity Movement.

The change of leadership in the S.A.I.C. did not result in a change of policy. Drs. Dadoo and Naicker merely continued where the Kajeeds had left off, and with their full co-operation. Their tactic was to arouse public opinion in Europe, America and India, carry their grievances against the Ghetto Act to U.N.O. and force the South African Government to a round table conference with the Government of India — all with the object of winning concessions for the Indian merchant class in South Africa. The Passive Resistance was started and hundreds of poor Indians went to gaol. The merchant class poured money into the venture. The Africans, too, were encouraged to “passive resist” by burning their passes. Money was forthcoming for this also, the whole tactic being to embarrass the Government. Dr. Xuma was asked to go to U.N.O. and there to create the necessary atmosphere for the discussion on the grievances of the Indians. He was to give his testimony — albeit from without the U.N.O. council chamber — as to the sufferings of the Black Man in South Africa in order to give weight to the case of the Indians.

These, then, were the three signatories, and this was the background, to the Unity Pact of the three Doctors. For Drs. Dadoo and Naicker it had a very specific purpose. The leadership of the S.A.I.C. was at this time wooing the support of Asia in their case against the South African Government. During their previous tour of India it had been pointed out that, for the Indian merchant class to hold themselves aloof from the Blacks in South Africa and look down on them as inferior, definitely weakened their case against the South African Government. Now on the eve of a big Asian Conference, which the two Doctors were to attend, it was necessary to produce documentary evidence of unity between Indians and Africans. Hence the pact with Dr. Xuma. Thus armed, they could at one and the same time ensure the support of Asia and hold out a threat to the South African Government, in this way strengthening their hand for the round table Conference at which they hoped to extract concessions for the Indian merchant class.

But what of Dr. Xuma? What did he hope to gain from all these machinations? Did he represent anybody but himself? His whole behaviour in this matter revealed his fundamental attitude towards the people and also towards his own organisation. Shortly before, he had called two Conferences of the African National Congress, one in October and another in December, 1946. At these he had deliberately withheld the invitation from the Unity Movement to Congress. Neither did he breathe a word about his impending Unity Pact with the two Doctors. What is one to think of the head of an organisation who thus arbitrarily acts on his own in a matter that presumably involves a change of policy, without consultation in Conference? The fact that he did not consult them shows a remarkable irresponsibility. That he proceeded to lend the name of Congress to this deal reveals with what contempt he regarded his own organisation. But the full measure of his irresponsibility is brought home when we contemplate the fact that the mass of the African, Coloured and poor Indian peasants and workers could benefit nothing from it. On the contrary, they stood to lose by it in so far as it could only sow confusion and disillusionment, thus delaying the consolidation of the real unity movement of all Black oppressed in South Africa.

It must be pointed out, however, that in all Dr. Xuma's political actions during this period, he had the active or tacit support of the clique of die-hards constituting

the leadership of Congress. In this sense the African National Congress itself is used as an instrument in the interests of sections of the population other than the Africans. The irony of the situation lies in this, that the very organisation which violently proclaims itself to be "pure African" is precisely the one which is in the service of any but the African people.

CHAPTER 13

Zig-Zags of Opportunism

We have considered it necessary in the previous chapter to pause and deal in more detail with certain facets of the situation, the political deviations and their interplay. But now we return to the main stream of political activity during the middle forties. Picture once more the situation, with the war at an end and the herrenvolk going full steam ahead with their plans in relation to the whole of the Blacks, while on the other hand the political consciousness of the people is growing day by day. The political ferment is mounting to a climax, each new oppressive measure making clearer to them the extent of those plans and hardening their determination. The new ideas are taking root. Fed with the successes of the other oppressed in the Far East, and encouraged by the growing unity amongst themselves, they are imbued with a new hope. The new spirit pervades every section and expresses itself throughout the country, now in a clash with the authorities at Mt. Ayliff or the Peddie District where the people are resisting the Rehabilitation Scheme, now in a revolt of the youth in church-controlled institutions of learning, or in small industrial strikes — all culminating in the African Miners' Strike of August, 1946, which was drowned in blood.

The significant factor about this strike is that it was undertaken by men who are usually regarded as coming from the most backward section of the population. Drawn from the remote villages and almost entirely illiterate, they constitute a body of migrant labourers recruited under contract for the mines. They are herded in the mine compounds and barricaded from the influences of the town and industrial environment. Yet in spite of this they conducted a strike which shook the herrenvolk out of their complacency. In consternation they saw the very heart of their economic structure being threatened. The heroism of the African miners in face of police batons, tear-gas bombs, rifles and machine guns, was a testimony to the temper and spirit of a whole people.

The repercussions of this event were felt far and wide. Every Black man was filled with a sense of anger and resentment at the fate of their brothers. In Johannesburg the African workers attempted to organise a general strike, which failed because they were disunited and were taken unawares. While the African miners were being shot, a few miles away in Pretoria the members of the Native Representative Council were holding their yearly deliberations, but they were not allowed even to discuss the calamity which had befallen those they were supposed to represent. Goaded by the general spirit, they realised that they had to do something, make some kind of gesture as the so-called representatives of their people. They staged the first act in the farcical drama that was to be played out in the ensuing period. They adjourned the session of the N.R.C. indefinitely.

“The Voice,” the organ of the All-African Convention, in commenting on this act, said:

“The same despair and frustration of the people that has caused the mine-workers’ strike, has brought about the bursting of the safety-valve of the ruling class – the Quisling Council. It would be a complete perversion of the truth to say that these 16 individuals, who have placed themselves in the service of the Government against the interests of their own people, have now suddenly discovered that the N.R.C. is a fraud. No, it was due to the wrath of the people. Driven to despair by the conditions that were created during these last ten years, with the connivance of the Council, the people made it impossible for them to go on with the fraud. And they themselves were forced to admit that they they had become ridiculous in the eyes of the people. As P.R. Mosaka said: ‘they were held in contempt in the country’.”

“The Voice” goes on:

“And yet even now, after admitting ‘that the time has come for them to recognise that the experiment has failed,’ the members of the N.R.C. still refuse to draw the only possible conclusion, namely to resign. Instead they left the door open – they merely adjourned.” (“The Voice”, No.11)

There is no doubt that the people themselves were seeing through the fraud of the dummy institutions. The rulers were alarmed. How uneasy they were is evident from an editorial in one of their papers, the “Cape Times (17.10.46):

“The race problem today in this country is worse than it has ever been throughout our history . . . Relations between European and Non-European were never nearer breaking-point.”

The S.A. Institute of Race Relations, that watch-dog of the ruling class, put out the red signal signifying danger. In a statement drawn up by its Executive it said:

“These are serious symptoms of mounting discontent among the Natives. The Bantu people are not only losing patience with the responsible authorities, but, what is worse, they are losing confidence in the good faith of Europeans.”

They proceeded to give the following piece of advice:

“If we Europeans fail to make ample concessions to social justice while there is still time and temper to do so . . . in South Africa the period is drawing to a close in which honourable compromise is possible.”

Then, true to their role as liberals, they went on to appeal to the “responsible” Black leadership.

“not to forsake the path of co-operation and to welcome every genuine gesture of goodwill.”

Emergency Conference

There was no need for the Institute of Race Relations to make so eloquent an appeal to their protégés. The M.R.C.s themselves were deeply committed to a policy of collaboration with the oppressor. But they were on the horns of a dilemma. The people were demanding their resignation from the N.R.C. and an end of the farce of “representation”. All those organisations affiliated to the A.A.C. had pronounced

judgement against it. How then were the M.R.C.s to find a way to re-open negotiations with the Government, continue to operate the dummy Council and yet still maintain an appearance of representing the people? Once more the African National Congress came to their rescue. They went to this body to provide them with a mandate to go back to the N.R.C. Dr Xuma, President of the A.N.C., called an Emergency Conference to meet in Bloemfontein, on the 6th and 7th October, 1946, at which the M.R.C.s occupied the position of honour. In the circular convening the conference Dr. Xuma had stated:

“The Council has taken the initiative to call public attention to the farcical position of the Native Representative Council.”

If one were not so familiar with the language of these people — schooled as they are in the ambiguities of the liberals — one might expect from this high praise that the M.R.C.s were resigning from the dummy council or contemplating doing so. But the upshot of the Emergency Conference was that they received their mandate to go back to the Council.

The same M.R.C.s who, on the 14th August had protested: “We have been asked to operate a toy telephone,” six weeks later beg for a mandate to return and operate the toy. They who had solemnly declared:

After ten years, since the great experiment of segregation was begun, we, the members of the Council, are able to say, unequivocally, that the experiment has been a dismal failure,”

are now pleading to resume the “great experiment”. In truth, the councillors *had* called the attention to the “farcical position of the N.R.C.”, for what could have been more farcical than this *volte-face*?

There is no doubt that to carry through their designs at the Emergency Conference required the utmost ingenuity. As an object lesson in the art of political deception we quote the resolution passed at this conference:

“(This Conference):

- (1) Endorses in full the action taken by the M.R.C.s.
- (2) Calls upon all Councillors to attend a meeting convened for the 20th November, or any other meeting called for the purpose of hearing a reply of the Government to their demands;
- (3) Declares the Native Representation Act of 1936 to be a fraud and a means to perpetuate the policy of segregation, oppression and humiliation;
- (4) Calls upon the African people as a whole to boycott all elections under the Act and to struggle for full citizenship rights.”

Here we see before us, standing to its full stature, a two-headed monster, a Janus, looking in two opposite directions at one and the same time. Its one face is turned in the direction of the herrenvolk, the other towards the people. The contradictions in the Resolution are not the result of mere ignorance and confusion of thought. They are born of the desire to serve two masters, to pacify two irreconcilable forces. Parts one and two of the Resolution are a complete capitulation to the M.R.C.s and the Government. Those who had declared that “the Native Representation Act of 1936 is a fraud and a means to perpetuate the policy of segregation, oppression and humiliation”, are

receiving a mandate to go back and perpetrate the fraud. This is an acceptance of inferiority and the idea of a child-race, and nothing could be more pleasing to the herrenvolk who regard the dummy councils as an essential part of the machinery of oppression. Parts three and four of the Resolution, on the other hand, are intended to play up to the sentiments of the people. The blatant contradiction in one and the same resolution, between the acceptance of inferiority and the claim to full equality is couched in such grandiloquent terms that it is not immediately evident to the people. But the sum total is an ignominious betrayal of their political aspirations.

Contradictions of Opportunism

Events, however, have their own logic. This Resolution, facing in two opposite directions, gave rise to two diametrically opposed policies, both of which were followed by Congress. And this is what was responsible for the remarkable zig-zags in political action in the ensuing period. The first part of the resolution led to collaboration with the oppressor, the line which the Congress leadership had followed all along. The Emergency Conference had been called to endorse this policy. But in order to attain this end they had been forced to give the appearance of falling in line with the desires of the people. Hence parts three and four of the Resolution, leading to non-collaboration. Thus we see two mutually exclusive policies being advocated by one and the same organisation.

The people themselves, not realising the significance of the first part of the resolution, attached importance only to the second part and regarded it as expressing the meaning of the whole. So great was the pressure of the masses that Congress was compelled to declare for the boycott. The very next month, November, 1946, the Cape Town Branch of the A.N.C. called a meeting of organisations and passed a resolution, from which we quote the following clauses:

1. "This Conference of African Organisations of the Western Province here assembled:
 - (a) Endorses the decision of the Bloemfontein Emergency Conference, but in view of the changed situation calls upon the members of the N.R.C. to resign forthwith and cease collaboration with the Government under the Representation Act of 1936.
 - (b) Declares the Native Representation Act of 1936 to be a fraud and a means to perpetuate the policy of segregation, oppression and humiliation.
 - (c) Calls upon the African people as a whole to boycott all elections under the Act and to struggle for full citizenship rights.
2. (a) Conference hereby resolves to set up a Committee to campaign for the boycott of elections under the Representation of Natives Act of 1936."

These were bold words, but before very long they were to swallow every one of these words with a shamelessness typical of hardened collaborators.

One month later, December, 1946, the annual conference of the African National Congress also declared for the boycott.

It was then that the leadership, caught in the logic of their own political trick, took alarm and set about trying to undo the effects of their resolution. On July, 1947, at a

meeting of the Cape African National Congress, the President, Rev. J. Calata (who was also the General Secretary of the A.N.C.), said in his presidential address:

“I believe that it is extremely important that this resolution to boycott the next elections should be reconsidered and that a special conference of the National Congress should be called as early as possible for this purpose.”

Then he let the cat out of the bag when he went on to say:

“I happen to know that the President General is contemplating something on the same lines and may welcome a resolution to strengthen his hands.”

This announcement must have come as a shock to the people and made them wonder what their leaders were doing behind their backs.

The same issue of the *Inkundla* (July, 1947) which carried a report of Rev. Calata's speech, carried also the injunctions of the President General, Dr. Xuma, in an article headed: “Intensify Boycott Campaign.” In this he explained:

“To many people the boycott of the elections under the 1936 Acts seems meaningless and unwise. It is because most people do not realise that the 1936 Acts completed not only the disenfranchisement of the African but also affected adversely his right of free access to land, his economic, social and educational benefits. . . . The boycott resolution therefore was a demand for common citizenship.”

Here, in the two statements by the heads of Congress, the Janus-head of the August Resolution has found its fullest expression. The contradictions are almost absurdly complete; and both are expressing Congress policy.

The truth of the matter is that the demand for the boycott came spontaneously and unambiguously from the people, in spite of and against the reactionary leaders. The Congress diehards were aware of this. They also knew that the people would leave any organisation which went against the boycott. That is why they agreed to disagree on the question. The Calata wing of Congress could go on assuring their masters, the *herrenvolk*, that they had no intention of deserting them, while the Xuma wing could canvas the support of the masses under the pretence that Congress, too, was for the boycott and non-collaboration with the oppressor.

At this period all and sundry were forced to advocate the boycott. The Communist Party of South Africa, too, fell into line. True to their tactic, they shouted the loudest of all to demonstrate their zeal for the people's cause. In fact they so outdid themselves in their zeal that it was subsequently to prove embarrassing when the time arrived for one of their all-too-frequent about-turns. It was at this time that the C.P. issued a statement: “The Boycott of Elections under the ‘Representation of Natives Act, 1936’,” under the signature of its General Secretary, Mr. Moses M. Kotane, who was also an important leader of the African National Congress. Let us hear the “Moses”:-

“When at the Emergency Conference of Africans, on October 7, 1946, the delegates by 495 votes to 16 decided to boycott all elections under the Representation of Natives Act of 1936, they took one of the most important decisions in the struggle for democracy in South Africa. The importance of the boycott decision lies in the fact that it is a practical effort

to remove the veil behind which the political enslavement, economic strangulation and social degradation of the African people are perpetrated and perpetuated. The decision has riled and infuriated the ruling class and its press, shown up the 'Native Representatives' and many of the so-called friends of the Natives, and has embarrassed some of the African leaders." ("Freedom," Sept-Oct., 1947).

The statement continues:

"The Communist Party National Conference in January this year endorsed the decision of the Bloemfontein Conference to boycott completely the farcical representations granted under the Representation of Natives Act, and expressed 'the readiness of the Communist Party to participate in any active campaign to make this decision effective.'" (Ibid).

In a fury of castigation against those who oppose the boycott, it goes on:

"Arguments against the boycott come from two sources: (a) those to whom representation of 'Natives' has become a paying proposition — £1,000 a year, free travelling pass, plus the honour which accompanies the letters MP." (Ibid).

And waxing more and more eloquent:

"If we are dominated by fear of stooges and reactionaries, and if we are to allow our actions to be conditioned by the attitudes of such persons, then it means that we can never agree to Africans embarking on a boycott . . . The best way to deal with 'representatives' who get into Parliament against the views and interests of the people they claim to represent is to repudiate them publicly." (Ibid).

Again:

"We are aware of the fact that the system is designed to safeguard and ensure white domination in this country . . . If therefore we are agreed that the system of representation is bad and ineffective, why should we be afraid of people who will take advantage of the loopholes in the law to get into Parliament? Those European 'friends of the Africans' who, while they themselves enjoy full democracy and citizenship rights, are opposed to the boycott and are consequently against the Africans ridding themselves of something deceptive and achieving for themselves the full franchise which these Europeans enjoy, cannot escape from being looked upon by the Africans as representatives of white supremacy." (Ibid).

It was not long before the Communist Party, too, was to make a desperate attempt to swallow these heroic words, which stubbornly stuck in their throats. Even at the moment when they were taking a decision to boycott the elections. Mr. Sam Kahn a leading member of the C.P. was preparing to launch his candidature as "Native Representative". He was associating himself on the political platform with the same Advocate Buchanan M.P. whom the C.P. was castigating as having "flouted the decision of the Transkei African Voters" and therefore must be "looked upon by the Africans as a representative of white supremacy". The pattern of contradiction here, too, is clear.

Within the C.P. itself are two currents running in opposite directions. The one wing — what may be called the Kotane wing — living closer to the people and carried along by the force of their demands, is pushed in the direction of non-collaboration, while the other, the dominant wing in the C.P. represented by the White intellectuals whose roots are in the herrenvolk class, were being impelled towards the policy of collaboration and were already making openings for a retreat.

Sounding the Retreat

It was in November, 1946, that the M.R.C.s had returned to the Council with the full backing of the Emergency Conference Resolution. There they had pleaded to be reinstated, provided that a face-saving formula could be devised, as the following resolution reveals:

“Since its inception, this Council has loyally co-operated with the Government, and would continue to do so as long as it is not expected either expressly or by implication, to sacrifice in the process the legitimate rights and interests of the African people.” (Natal Mercury, 5.1.49, in report of speech by Dr. W.J.G. Mears, Sec. Native Affairs, to the N.R.C. summarising events since 1946).

The hollow sham of the self-righteous reservation implied in the latter part of the resolution could not deceive anybody. “Loyally to co-operate with the Government” was, *ipso facto*, to betray the interests of their people. In the face of the past and present record of legislative measures against the Africans, in face, too, of the recent evidence of the tightening of the screw and the ruthless suppression of the African Miners’ Strike, this resolution lends itself to only one interpretation — the collaborators are pleading not to be too obviously exposed in the eyes of the people. What a pregnant phrase is this: “as long as it (the Council) is not *expected* . . . to sacrifice . . . the legitimate rights and interests of the African people.” Who expected them? It would seem from this that when the Council accepted office they had regarded themselves as “expected” to sacrifice the rights of the people — as part of their duty.

In the same resolution the Councillors continued:

“In the circumstances, this Council feels compelled to adjourn the session in order to make it possible for the Councillors to make fully known to the African people the nature and contents of the Acting Prime Minister’s statement.”

(Be it recorded here that the Acting Prime Minister’s statement was to the effect that the Government was not prepared “forthwith to abolish all discriminatory legislation affecting Non-Europeans in this country” — as the Council had requested in August, 1946.)

It was this self-evident, almost platitudinous fact, if you please, that the Councillors solemnly proposed to lay “fully” before the people. The M.R.C.s had apparently made a sudden and momentous discovery — that the Government would not “forthwith” grant the Africans full democratic rights!

What is significant in this resolution is the drop from the almost challenging tone

of the August days. Under the excitation of the mine workers' strike they had been so carried away that they actually allowed themselves to stand upright and make demands – and for full equality at that. But within three months, as if afraid of the spectacle of their own temerity, they hastened to climb down and assume their more familiar and wonted posture. It is now no longer a question of adjourning until such time as the Government shall “forthwith abolish all discriminatory legislation”; they are asking for an adjournment merely “to make it possible for the Councillors to make fully known” – what the masses knew long before Hofmeyer even expressed it.

All this strangely erratic behaviour, now demanding “forthwith” – as if the Government would present them with freedom on a platter – and now meekly appealing for co-operation, is not just a demonstration of political naiveté. It signified an attempt to cover up their tracks and pave the way for a retreat. The M.R.C.s had been the first to sound the retreat and from every quarter the intellectuals in the African National Congress and the Communist Party were to follow suit, not immediately, but at various times as the occasion offered.

July, 1947, had found Rev. Calata clamouring that the boycott resolution should be reconsidered and a special conference of the African National Congress should be called for this purpose. (In the same month – it will be remembered – that Dr. Xuma was “intensifying the campaign.”) The very next month came an announcement from Mr. Paul Mosaka, M.R.C., as follows:

“The leaders of the National Congress have not indicated how this (boycott) resolution of Conference is to be implemented. Meanwhile, Dr. Xuma has openly declared his opposition to the boycott. Professor Matthews, Councillors Champion and Thema and Mr. R. Baloyi, prominent members of the National Executive of Congress, are not supporting the boycott resolution and attempts are being made to call a special Conference in order to rescind or reverse this Resolution.” (Umteteli: 168.47).

In November came a direct injunction from the M.R.C.s against the boycott, couched in the familiar evasive circumlocutions:

“Having regard to the present circumstances among the African people, the Councillors are not prepared at this stage to advise them to refrain from voting.”

The following month, December, 1947, was a month of great activity. All the important African organisations held their Conferences. It was the eve of the dummy elections of so-called Native Representatives and all the organisations took up their positions on the burning issue of the boycott, ranging themselves unmistakably according to their acceptance or rejection of inferiority and trusteeship. All those organisations affiliated to the All-African Convention once more declared for non-collaboration with the oppressor and therefore for the boycott of the elections. The Cape African Voters' Association issued a call to all voters to boycott. The African National Congress on the other hand reversed its previous resolution, decided to break the boycott and thus declared for collaboration with the oppressor. Needless to say, they found a formula which attempted to disguise their true intent. That is when they invented the notorious meaningless slogan: ‘Return the Boycott Candidates’. The C.P. followed suit in reversing the boycott decision.

In January, 1948, Rev. Calata, Secretary General of Congress, accompanied by Prof. Z.K. Matthews, M.R.C. and Executive member of Congress, go down to Port Elizabeth to report the "good news" of the Congress about-turn. Now the battle breaks out into the open between the protagonists of the two policies. The campaign for the boycott is intensified and hundreds of meetings are held all over the country. The organisations in the Convention go to the people and around the question of the boycott pose the larger issue, the position of the Black man in all its vastness — whether he shall accept inferiority and helotry or claim equality and full democratic rights. The people rally to the Convention policy and in March the Transkei Organised Bodies expel from their organisations the M.R.C.s and all candidates to the N.R.C. In defiance of their decisions, however, White candidates offer themselves for election. The herrenvolk, realising the larger nature of the issues involved, sink their party differences and support them. The White candidates hold meetings, but the followers of Convention seize the opportunity to expose them as representatives of the herrenvolk seeking to perpetuate White domination. On the other hand the Congress and the Communist Party support the White candidates.

When the elections finally took place nearly 50 per cent of the voters did not go to the polls — a remarkable achievement considering that the idea of the boycott was new and involved a complete break with the mental attitude of the past, the slave mentality instilled into them for generations; considering, also, how the press had been organised against the boycott: the herrenvolk press, the C.P. press and the so-called Bantu press all going full blast against it. And added to all this had been the African National Congress operating from within, i.e. amongst the people.

The curious phenomenon calling for comment at this period is the brazenness with which the Communist Party and the African National Congress made a political turn-about in the space of a few months and still had the effrontery to expect the people to put their trust in them. The C.P., which had so severely censured as "representatives of white supremacy" all those "European 'friends of the African' who, while they themselves enjoy full democracy and citizenship rights, are opposed to the boycott," was now putting up its White members as candidates. Gone was the accusation that "representation of 'Natives' has become a paying proposition — £1,000 a year, free travelling pass, plus the honour which accompanies the letters M.P."

These arch political tongue twisters now turned their vituperation against the boycott, dubbing it as "a negative and defeatist tactic." "At the moment, for instance", they write, "a policy of 'non-cooperation' or boycott is being urged as the only 'salvation' possible for the Non-European peoples." ("Freedom", C.P. organ.) This deliberate distortion, calculated to discredit the movement, was dictated by the necessity to justify their own betrayal. And the greater the need to cover up their tracks, the greater was the lie. It can be said that at no time did the Blacks regard the boycott as an end in itself to be treated in isolation. It was always regarded as a means to an end, as part of the general struggle.

And the very essence of the boycott was its break with the slavish attitude of the past, which accepted inferiority; a turning from the role of passivity to positive action — the road of struggle. Only a few months before the C.P. had hailed the boycott as "one of the most important decisions in the struggle for democracy in South

Africa”, and had lauded it as “a practical effort to remove the veil behind which the political enslavement, economic strangulation and social degradation of the African people are perpetrated and perpetuated.” But now that the logic of their own opportunistic policy placed them in the position of having to defend precisely those institutions which veil the enslavement, strangulation and degradation of the Black man, they turn a somersault and say:

“The essence of the (boycott) campaign is that the Non-Europeans should turn their backs on political struggle, isolate themselves from the Europeans, and, in short, accept segregation.” (Ibid).

What monstrous falsification is this? They who, by breaking the boycott, are in the very process of stabbing the political struggle in the back, the struggle *against* segregation, they who are working the institutions of segregation and tying the people to them, shamelessly accuse the protagonists of the boycott of accepting segregation. They even have the brazen impudence to pose as the defenders of the Black man. And from one lie they are forced to commit another, for they continue:

“An obvious organic weakness in the boycott tactic is that the ruling class itself wants to abolish the institutions concerned, the N.R.C., the Advisory Boards, the African Parliamentary franchise.” (Ibid).

Everyone outside the C.P. and the Congress fold knows that, far from abolishing these institutions, the Malan Government wants to strengthen and extend them to a degree and with a thoroughness hitherto unaccomplished.

The flood of vituperation against the boycott was not limited to the C.P. The various Congress scribes vied with one another in their attacks against it. With a desperate ingenuity they thought up all sorts of arguments in defence of the dummy institutions while at the same time presenting themselves as champions of the people’s cause. For this purpose the herrenvolk opened the columns of their press to them, apparently reckoning that “*Inkundla ya Bantu*” covered too small a field. From the columns of the big dailies to the magazines, from church publications to the smallest local news-sheets, attacks on the boycott were churned out for consumption by the intellectuals.

Mr. J.K. Ngubane, editor of *Inkundla*, in a pamphlet published by “The African Bookman” entitled: “Should the Native Representative Council be abolished?”, wrote:

“Those who clamour for the unconditional abolition of the Council fail to realise that it is still a very useful lever to facilitate the organisation of the African people against discrimination.” And again: “So far, the Council has been a fairly good school of political training; now it must be turned into a training centre for Africans in the art of administration.”

What frivolity! Rhodes himself could not have better defended his plan of introducing such institutions to occupy the minds of the “child-race”.

Elsewhere in an article in *Umthunywa* (13.12.47) entitled: “Should we boycott the coming elections?” he assumed the mantle of castigator. In as eloquent a piece of nonsensical verbiage as one would meet within a month of journalism — begotten under the influence of herrenvolk propaganda, he wrote:

“Merely to boycott elections is to be unreliable, unrealistic and unstatesman-like.”

This pocket edition of a statesman, without knowing it, falls into the language of his masters. He goes so far as to describe the boycott as a fascist weapon with which the people must not soil their hands. How familiar is this method used by so-called statesmen who deliberately evoke, by the mere use of words, a blind emotion against something they fear. Making use of the people's intense hatred of fascism, they do not scruple to turn that hatred against the very struggles of the oppressed. And today they do not scruple to equate fascism with communism; they fling out words such as “communist agitators” to excite feeling against all oppressed peoples striving for liberation. Every Black man who dares to raise his voice is labelled a “red”, an “agitator”. The African mine workers' strike is viciously suppressed, in the name of “communist activity”; so-called “Native riots” in Johannesburg excite positive hysteria under the bogey of communism; the people's resistance to the Rehabilitation Scheme in the remotest parts of the country is in some weird and mysterious way connected up with Moscow. So Mr. Ngubane was not original when he dubbed the boycott, the people's weapon of struggle, as fascist.

By a curious contortion of his thought processes he even contrives to present himself and his kind as the champion of “National Unity”. He writes: “We should not overthrow national unity for the emotional satisfaction of boycotting elections.” Leaving aside his emotional satisfactions, what is of interest here is the self-same tactic we have observed the Communist Party employing. Those who are responsible for breaking the boycott and sowing confusion and disunity have the effrontery to pose as the defenders of unity. Since the beginning of the boycott movement the people had been uniting with a single purpose, expressing a single desire – to fight against the common enemy, oppression. But in the name of “national unity” these agents of the *herrenvolk* threw wide open the door of disunity. For all the petty, fratricidal squabbles associated with these mock elections to a dummy council were being resuscitated. In this, the Congress with its M.R.C.s did a great service to the ruling class.

Let us pause again to see what was involved in this period. In the political crisis the issues were posed in a clear-cut form. All organisations were compelled to take up their real position and reveal their true colours. There was no room for fence-sitters. The people had an exceptional opportunity to rally together on the boycott issue, demonstrate their solidarity and present a single front against oppression and all the agents of oppression. They had an unprecedented opportunity of showing up the White candidates for what they were – representatives of white domination – stripping them of the last remaining fig leaf and leaving them exposed for all to see. But it was Congress which saved them from this ignominious exposure. It was Congress that shielded the liberals and saved them from being rooted out once and for all.

There is another side to the picture, however. In the sharpened political situation Congress could no longer disguise its true role. It itself had been exposed. Its behaviour had the effect of delaying unified action on the part of the people, but did not and could not disrupt the continuing process of unification. In fact its opposition actually contributed to the strengthening of the political position of the All-African Convention. In the fight the protagonists of the boycott had had an opportunity of both

clarifying the new ideas and steeling themselves on the anvil of experience. It can be said that the Convention emerged stronger from the fight, both politically and organisationally. The Cape African Teachers' Association, the biggest single unit of the vocal section, threw in its lot with the new ideas and affiliated to Convention. Since then a number of local bodies of the people have also affiliated and are carrying on the struggle in their respective fields on the principled basis of the 10-Point Programme.

CHAPTER 14

New Efforts at Disruption

The farcical elections were over. Most of the old M.R.C.s had been returned to the dummy council, but were more than ever in a state of suspended animation. There had been a change of government and the new masters weren't even giving them an opportunity to play ball, even to save face. What they wanted was complete and abject servility from the "skeptels". Having achieved what they had clamoured for, even at the expense of the unity of the people, they were now in a position of uneasy eminence, receiving no support from the new Government and on the other side unwanted by the people. The All-African Convention for its part was consolidating its gains. The demand for unity was growing more insistent – unity not only among Africans but of all oppressed. The Unity Movement of South Africa was claiming the attention of the people. The Congress die-hards became alarmed. Once more they got busy with their attempts at disruption and once more Dr. Xuma was used as midwife to yet another abortive attempt at another "unity".

Surrounding himself with journalists at what was called a Press Conference in Johannesburg, he delivered himself of the following:

"All men and women of goodwill of all races in South Africa must organise public opinion in order to attain common citizenship of all races."

Continuing, he said:

"I believe in co-operation . . . Wisdom should guide the Non-European people to co-operate to the fullest extent possible to attain their objective for the Vote for all."

The Inkundla (14.4.48) reporting this, wrote:

"In less than 24 hours of Dr. Xuma's call for co-operation among the Non-European people for full franchise rights, a Working Committee consisting of African, Indian and Coloured leaders has been formed in Johannesburg to campaign for Votes for All."

Within 24 hours! A truly remarkable speed. One cannot resist the impression of some stage manipulation. With this fanfare of a press conference the new venture was announced and christened the "First Transvaal-Orange Free State People's Assembly For Votes For All." The convening of similar assemblies in Natal and the Cape was also visualised.

But the venture encountered opposition from the very beginning. While the Committee was making preparations for the first meeting of the Votes-For-All

Assembly the outcry was so great that many of the alleged sponsors repudiated responsibility for it. Within the Congress fold it produced quite a storm in a tea-cup. Throughout the Transvaal there was an uproar over the appearance of yet another ad hoc body to confuse the people. At the Conference itself Dr. Xuma was conspicuous by his absence and it became necessary for the sponsors definitely to establish who had fathered the unwanted baby. In the Minutes of Conference the following interesting item is recorded in the report of the Working Committee:

“Before the ad hoc Committee was formed, a small deputation from the initiators of the Assembly met Dr. A.B. Xuma, President of the African National Congress. The aims of the Assembly were fully discussed and he was asked to become one of the first sponsors. Dr. Xuma pointed out that, as National President of his organisation, he was unable to sponsor a purely provincial assembly. He, however, agreed to make a National Call to the South African people to organise for the franchise, and to hold a Press Conference in Johannesburg where his call to action could be issued.”

From the point of view of technique the stage management was excellent. But there was a hitch – the people intervened. The baby was still-born.

“All-African National Congress”

Undaunted, the agents of the herrenvolk tried another tack. Soon afterwards the stage was set for yet another unity venture, this time confined to Africans “only”. In their careering after any and every unity but the principled unity of the 10-Point Programme of the Non-European Unity Movement, there is an almost fascinating variety and incongruity in the forms it assumes. There had been the unity pact with the Indian doctors, then the Votes For All Assembly which embraced all men and women of goodwill of all races, Indian, Coloured, African and Whites, etc. Now they proposed an exclusive unity for Africans. This was to be known as the All African National Congress. According to their own account, this broke down primarily because the All-African Convention insisted on the acceptance of the principle of unity of all Black oppressed.

But that is not the whole story. The behaviour of the leadership of the A.N.C. in this instance followed the old pattern so familiar to us in the pre-1943 period of internal disputes of Congress versus Convention. The setting is similar and the motivation is the same. The immediate past of Congress history, with all its twists and turns, its prevarications and its machinations, in short, its opportunism and betrayals, had exposed it and seriously discredited it in the eyes of the people. It had become abundantly clear that the old Congress die-hards had lost sight of the struggles of the people. They were pre-occupied with concern for the preservation of their own position of leadership of an organisation that had long since fallen out of step with the demands of the time. Thus they instinctively saw in Convention a source of danger and a threat to their position. In all their actions they seemed to be obsessed with the idea of killing Convention and removing it from the arena of African politics. Here, unable to evolve any new method they fell back on the old one, by presenting themselves as champions of African unity.

This time there appeared to be a greater prospect of success. With the advent of

the Malan Government and the evidence of still more sinister measures against the Blacks, with the alarm of the people about Apartheid and the cry for unity on all sides, the conditions seemed highly propitious for dealing a knock-out blow at Convention. The collaborators sent out the call for unity, with the cry: The race is in danger! Let us close our ranks. Let us forget our past differences and programmes. And, as the "Inkundla" expressed it:

"There can be no future for us as a people unless we stand together at any cost . . . Now is not the time to split hairs about bringing into being the All African National Congress."

These epithets were not casually chosen. They were hitting at the very core of the matter. Knowing that Convention would pose principles as a basis for unity, they were casting a shadow in advance by innuendos; principles were belittled as "hair-splitting"; unity had to be achieved "at any cost". Anybody who dared to raise the question of basic policy and programme would be accused of "wrecking unity". Having thus prepared the ground, they presented the country with the brand new scheme. They proposed that Convention and Congress should be liquidated and a new body should rise from the ashes — the All African National Congress. It was to be the political party which every African would be expected to join. In other words it was to be the African National Congress under a new name. It was a subtle plan in keeping with the desperateness of their position. Under the pretext of abolishing both the federal body, the Convention, and the political party, the Congress, they were in effect proposing to liquidate the Convention and leave the field clear for the Congress to emerge triumphant as the sole organisation.

It was clear why the collaborators wanted to see the name of Convention disappear without a trace. The Convention was a thorn in their flesh. It was a constant accuser of their political crimes against the people, a constant reminder of their betrayals, of their collaboration with the oppressors. If only they could get the Convention out of the way, their past might be forgotten. And further than that, the M.R.C.s would be free to go on happily operating the dummy councils and enjoy the fruits of their services without the accusing finger being pointed at them.

December, 1948, Conferences

In view of the fact that these proposals for African unity had come from the Congress leadership, it might have been expected that the sessions of the annual Conference of the A.N.C. preceding the talks on unity between the African National Congress and the All-African Convention, would have been devoted seriously to the subject and to working out the terms they intended to propose as the basis for the new organisation. But the irresponsible conduct of the leadership at this December conference brought their sincerity into question. By all accounts the leadership blocked any attempt at serious discussion and the Conference frittered away its opportunities. Dr. Molema, a leading member of the Congress Executive, was moved to comment on the Conference as follows:

"General Disorder was installed as Commander-in-chief and he ruled with a terrible authority, heartrending to the poor African looking for light and guidance."

These words were a crying indictment of the M.R.C.s, for it was they who had been responsible for the tragic fiasco and the confusion which prevailed. Pledged as they were to the policy of collaboration with the oppressor, the last thing they wanted was an open and frank discussion on a programme, since such a discussion would have exposed their political bankruptcy.

At the Joint Conference of the A.N.C. and the A.A.C., held on the 17th December, 1948, in Bloemfontein, the Convention spokesmen presented the proposals on the basis of which Convention considered that unity should be effected. They were: (a) the acceptance of the 10-Point Programme, which implies full equality of all men irrespective of race, colour or creed, and direct representation in Parliament, Provincial Councils, etc.; (b) the acceptance of the principle of Black unity – the unity of ALL oppressed against oppression; (c) non-collaboration with the oppressor; (d) maintenance of federal structure of the All-African Convention. In order that nothing should stand in the way of unity, and also to belie the accusation that the two bodies are divided by rivalry between the leaders, the Convention offered to guarantee to Congress a certain number of seats in the Executive. Congress members could in addition stand for any of the remaining seats. This meant virtually handing over the leadership to the African National Congress. There was only one proviso to all this, namely, that Congress should accept the principled basis of unity. On this basis Convention wanted to bring about unity there and then.

The chief spokesman for Congress, Professor Z.K. Matthews, M.R.C. in chief, did not reply to any of the vital points raised by the Convention spokesmen. Instead, he proposed (as we have already indicated) that existing political organisations should be disbanded and in their place a new organisation, on an individual basis, should be set up. While his organisation accepted unity in principle, he felt that it would take a long time before it was established. It became obvious that not even the foundations of a principled unity could be laid at this conference. The discussions were adjourned and it was agreed that the Executives of both organisations would meet early the following year.

Breakdown of Discussions

On April 17, 1949, the Joint Executive meeting took place, from ten o'clock in the morning till three o'clock next morning. Only two items were discussed: non-collaboration as a basis of unity and the form of organisation required to put this into effect. Negotiations broke down and the meeting ended in dismal failure. The first six hours were spent in a dispute on the acceptance of non-collaboration.

Speaking for Congress, Mr. J.B. Marks said that "there were fundamental differences between the All-African Convention and the African National Congress . . . It would be wrong to stigmatise as collaborators those who did not agree with non-collaboration at this stage. The proposal for non-collaboration is opportunistic. The Convention delegates use the term to suit themselves. They exclude from the meaning of the term, segregated schools." (Record of Joint meeting by General Secretary of A.A.C.)

Mr. Selope-Thema, M.R.C. (for Congress) said that: "if the Convention delegates advocated a boycott of Government institutions then they should carry out

their policy to its logical conclusions. We should not exclude educational institutions which are also segregated and inferior. . . . The M.R.C.s did not say that the Council should not be abolished but that Malan must come and tell them so himself . . . If we accepted Convention policy then we should have nothing to do with Europeans. If a lawyer who defends an African in European courts is earning a living and not collaborating, then M.R.C.s were also earning a living . . . The Bunga had done many things. It had granted bursaries and planted trees. If he were to go to the people in Pietersburg and tell them to have nothing to do with the Bunga, they would think he was mad." (Ibid.) "Several other Congress speakers spoke more or less in the same strain." (ibid.)

The Convention delegates answered these points and moved the following resolution:

"In view of the political crisis facing the African people to-day; in view of the urgent necessity to unite the people for the purpose of fighting oppression and for full democratic rights,

this joint session of the All-African Convention and the African National Congress Executive Committees meeting in Bloemfontein this 17th day of April, 1949, resolves that this unity be based on:

- (1) A demand for full citizenship rights equal to those of the European.
- (2) A rejection of inferior status as expressed in the segregated and inferior political institutions created for a so-called child-race and for the perpetuation of white domination, viz. the N.R.C., the Bunga, Location Advisory Boards and any other institution of a similar nature which may be created to substitute, supplement or strengthen the existing institutions.
- (3) The acceptance of Non-collaboration, i.e. the rejection of the N.R.C., Bunga, Location Advisory Boards, the Natives Representation Act, etc."

When this resolution was finally put, it received no opposition. The explanation of the strange acceptance of the resolution by the Congress delegates, in view of their speeches against non-collaboration, became evident as the discussion on the next point unfolded. In leading the discussion on the structure of the proposed organisation, Mr. A.P. Mda (for Congress) said *inter alia* that:

"The most effective way of appealing to the Africans as people suffering oppression was to appeal to them on the basis of colour. We could only meet oppression by organising on the basis of African Nationalism. This presupposes a unitary organisation. The advantages of such an organisation were that we would be able to mobilise the majority of the people in a language that they could understand. Secondly there could be no contradictions within the body caused by groups which may place certain interpretations on certain principles because of differences in political outlook. There was a grave danger in admitting different groups in the same organisation, particularly when major decisions have to be made . . . We must appeal to Africans as such to unite as Africans." (ibid.)

Here we see not only a racist but something more sinister. This is dangerously like the methods of a fascist dictator. It is interesting that this line of argument was pushed most vehemently by the ardent "African Nationalists". It is not unrelated to their racialistic theories, in fact it is the other side of the same coin. Here they advocate a monolithic party to represent a whole people and claiming to be their mouth-

piece. According to them such a party would brook no differences of outlook or opinion. All groups which differed from them would be excluded "particularly when major decisions have to be made." Yet it would be regarded as speaking for a whole population. They would arrogate to themselves the right to decide what political outlook the people shall and shall not have.

The All-African Convention delegates argued that in a national movement engaged in a national struggle for liberation, you cannot have a monolithic party to represent all; the mouthpiece of a people must represent all strata of society. In a national movement there are bound to be many groups and parties of various shades; you will find political organisations, civic, social and trade union bodies, etc. and all these must find their place in the national movement. Let us agree on minimum demands, they said. What is necessary is to unite on the basis of a *minimum* programme and in this way attain a *maximum* unity.

After many hours of discussion, Mr. L.K. Ntlati (Congress), seconded by Mr. O.R. Temba, moved the following resolution:

"That Unity be accepted on the basis of a unitary organisation, with federal features."

When asked the nature of these "federal features" the movers replied that this should be left for the joint conference to decide, but that:

"roughly it meant that the conference would decide which organisations to accept on a federal basis and which not to accept." (Ibid.)

Thereupon the Convention spokesmen moved an addendum to the resolution:

"That organisations accepting the policy of the new organisation will have a right to affiliate."

Congress refused to accept this addendum and it was on this point that negotiations broke down. Congress delegates felt that if Convention would not yield on this point, then they did not consider themselves bound by the previous resolution for non-collaboration.

The behaviour of the collaborators (the M.R.C.s and their supporters) at this conference throws a light once more on their methods. Here we see the technique of political deception carried to a fine art. Their tactics should serve as an object lesson to all Blacks. Placed in a tight corner and faced with irrefutable arguments, they agree – and they do not agree. Pledged to a policy of collaboration with the oppressor while knowing that the people were demanding non-collaboration, they could not oppose it without exposing themselves. Therefore they pretended to accept it, but promptly proceeded, in the very next step, to ensure that the resolution would be nullified by the unitary structure of organisation which they proposed.

Now there is a vital link between policy and the form of organisation, that is to say, between policy and the means of carrying it out. Given the existing situation in South Africa, with the many organisations of the people, some existing in isolation and others already affiliated to the Convention, the federal structure is the only effective means of putting into practice the policy of non-collaboration. Convention was adamant on this point. To demand the formation of a new organisation

in fact meant the breaking up of the existing ones; it meant disarming the people, disintegrating their forces and thus rendering them defenceless. For Congress to reject the federal form of organisation and insist on building a new, unitary party was tantamount to turning their back on the struggle. To insist on a single party was to exclude the vast majority of the masses from participating in the struggle — they who have so painstakingly built up their various organisations for precisely this purpose. This would enable the collaborators to paralyse the struggle and tie up the people to the machinery of oppression.

Warning to Whites

In case some doubting Thomas might think we have read too much into the statements of the Congress leadership, let us hear what their chief spokesman, Prof. Z.K. Matthews, has to say on the question of non-collaboration. It was on the occasion of his eloquent address delivered at the conference of the S.A. Institute of Race Relations in January, 1949. This took place very soon after the December unity talks and **before** the joint meeting of the two executives. On this occasion he was at great pains to explain his attitude towards non-collaboration and what he understood it to mean.

His address, entitled: “An African policy for South Africa”, might well have been entitled: “Warning to Whites” for the greater part of his paper is devoted to warning the White man of the danger of non-co-operation between White and Black. With staggering ingenuity he actually contrives to equate the people’s policy of non-collaboration with the oppressor with the ‘apartheid’ policy of the oppressor.

“It has been pointed out,” he said, “that there is a growing feeling among Africans that the policy to which they should lend their support in the future is that of non-co-operation. Certain sections among them look upon this as one of the most suitable answers to the European policy of apartheid, which is itself tantamount to a policy of non-co-operation.”

Note the cold, impersonal “objectivity” which, however, is not above resorting to a downright distortion. He goes on:

“But whether it is espoused by Europeans or by Africans the policy of non-co-operation is not compatible with the living together and interdependence of Black and White to which the two groups have become accustomed over so many generations.”

He is so hypnotised by the outlook of his confrères, the White liberals, that his very thinking and phraseology are indistinguishable from theirs. It is the liberals who shed tears over the passing away of “the living together and interdependence of Black and White,” to which they have “become accustomed over many generations”. Yes, the disturbance of the pleasant, old “master-and-servant” relationship in which the slave knew his place. Again he says:

“Once the policy of non-co-operation becomes endemic on both sides of the colour-line, the resultant friction and antagonism will prove disastrous to the country as a whole and there will be no ‘areas of liberty’ for anyone.”

One is driven to ask: On which side of the colour-line is he speaking? Who is threatened with disaster? And what disaster? It is difficult to believe that it is a Black man in South Africa who is speaking. The act of a Black man refusing to co-operate in working the machinery of his own oppression is seen as "disastrous, causing friction and antagonism." The act of struggling to remove the chains of oppression is viewed as most disturbing to the idyllic conditions of servility. And incidentally, what are those "areas of liberty" which he fears to lose? At present the herrenvolk has the liberty to oppress the Blacks. But the Black man has not even the liberty to decide how he shall live and where he shall live, where he shall work or what kind of work he shall do. The only liberty he has is to die in poverty. Could it be that the Professor was thinking that the Black man still has the "liberty" to serve on the N.R.C., i.e. to tie the chains about his own feet?

Having thus voiced his fears about the "disaster" resulting from "non-co-operation", he goes on:

"Neither European apartheid nor African apartheid can be regarded as practical solutions of the problem of race relations."

This statement is a direct attack against the proposals of Convention for a basis of principled unity, particularly "the acceptance of non-collaboration with the oppressor". Prof. Matthews explicitly states:

"That is the true meaning which must be given to the resolutions of non-co-operation with the White man at the recent Conference of the A.A.C. and the A.N.C."

His warnings and pleas for co-operation were all the more urgent in view of the fact that at a recent meeting of the N.R.C. called by Mr. Mears, the Secretary for Native Affairs, the M.R.C.s had just been told of the intention of the Government to disband them and replace the Council with a more effective machinery of segregation. Mears had said:

"It is its (the Government's) intention to encourage and develop the local Council and Bunga system throughout the Union with due regard, wherever possible, to ethnic and tribal affiliations."

Three days after Professor Matthews had delivered his speech, his lieutenant, Mr. R. Godlo, M.R.C., addressing a meeting at Langa, said:

"We want the N.C.R. retained . . . We (the M.R.C.s) did not know about the boycott until after the adjournment in 1946. In fact we are opposed to the boycott."

These, then, were the views of men who occupied important positions in the Congress leadership. These were the true opinions of a man who was the chief spokesman at the unity talks between the A.A.C. and the A.N.C. Executives. It is interesting that he (Matthews) expressed himself more explicitly before an audience of White liberals than either to the joint conference or to his own organisation. Is it any wonder that the negotiations at Easter broke down completely?

Zigzags Continue

It is hardly necessary to pursue further the inconsistencies and contradictions of Congress for the remainder of 1949. As we have seen, the more it changes, the more

it is the same. Having taken up a false political position and being rooted in collaboration, the leadership found itself veering now in one direction and now in another. We may add simply that at the July Provincial Conference of the Cape African National Congress, they are reported to have adopted a resolution for non-collaboration and for the boycott of the by-election to the N.R.C. then pending. But after taking this decision, at the very same conference they proceeded to elect Prof. Z.K. Matthews, M.R.C. in chief, as their president. What is more, with persistent inconsistency, their members took part in the elections and one of them was elected. But it did not occur to anybody to expel him.

December, 1949, finds them, at the annual conference of the African National Congress as a whole, reiterating their faith in non-collaboration, and promptly replacing as president-general a supporter of the M.R.C.s (Dr. Xuma) with a true-blue M.R.C. himself, Dr. J.S. Moroka. Thus we have the absurdity of an organisation electing to the presidency both of the Natal Congress, the Cape and the mother body itself, members of the N.R.C., while officially it is supposed to be committed to the policy of non-collaboration. The more they take up the progressive slogans and the more loudly they proclaim them, the more they shift in fact towards the path of reaction.

It is too early to judge what Congress is going to do under the new president. But the first three months of 1950 have not indicated any change. And indeed there can be no change, as long as the leadership remains substantially the same. If the Communist Party made use of the former president there is every evidence that they intend to do the same with the new president-general.

CHAPTER 15

Conclusion

In the course of this book we have endeavoured to depict the awakening of a people. The evolving of the organisation, the All-African Convention, has been dynamically bound up with this process of awakening. Its ideas, its policy and programme are an expression of new ideas and a new outlook foreshadowing the nature of the struggles to come. We are but at the threshold of a great movement which will arouse stirring events in its wake. It might be said that the All-African Convention marks the beginning of a new epoch where for the first time our struggles are guided by a set of principles, where every issue is viewed and tackled in the light of these principles, where our approach to every problem is guided by them.

For the first time in our struggles a tradition is being established for consistent and principled action along a definite course. It is a tradition of struggle undertaken by men and women who, having established their objective and clearly formulated the method of carrying it out, labour steadfastly in the full realisation that victory is not just around the corner. It will be a long and protracted struggle. This is a tradition that our youth will inherit and which will fortify and steel them when they in turn must take their place in the fight.

If we have dealt with the Congress leadership in detail, it is not with any desire to recite their misdeeds, and least of all are we concerned with personalities. We have done so with the object of bringing home certain important lessons. Those individuals who constitute the Congress leadership are part of our body politic. They are remnants of our past history and they reflect old habits and modes of thought.

There are certain weaknesses inherited from our past, which are hard to slough off. These flow in part from a lack of understanding of our tasks. Having failed to analyse the nature of society and discern the motive power driving the various forces in it, the old leaders were not able to take up their proper positions. They were unable to fix their bearings in the vast sea of political cross-currents and steer a straight and steady course towards their goal. Their failure to grasp the nature of the conflicting forces in South African society, and therefore to understand the destiny of the national movement, robbed them of the possibility to embark on a serious struggle. For them it was a question of educating the oppressor as to the sufferings of the Black man with a view to changing their hearts.

This outlook dictated their political tactics of petitions, deputations, etc. It dictated also their attitude to their organisations and towards the people. Their organisations were no more than a means of reinforcing their petitions. They did not see them as fighting organs. That is what explains their pre-occupation with organising the small vocal section to the exclusion of the vast masses of the uneducated. This

also gave rise to another train of attitudes. Each local leader tended to use his organisation in a spirit of partisanship and expected his followers to do likewise. But once remove the *raison d'être* of an organisation — the driving power of its existence — then it turns in upon itself. It becomes a question of personal prestige: who is more important than another and who has a greater following, etc. Young men and women growing up in this atmosphere learn to look upon an organisation as a means of enhancing their own social position. This gives rise to petty jealousies which find their way even amongst those who are genuinely devoted to the cause of their people.

There is another aspect of the matter, which, though it is closely connected with the preceding, belongs more properly to the domain of political thought. The failure of the leaders to see the struggle in its entirety has given rise to a certain parochialism. The various local leaders lived an isolated existence, each one pre-occupied with petty local reforms without relating them to the rest and losing sight of the fundamental questions. This in turn has tended to reinforce the organisational exclusiveness, the rivalries. All these, then, are some of the weaknesses inherited from the past.

If we are to make any progress we must start with a full knowledge of those weaknesses. We must pose clearly the fundamental tasks, see the struggle in its entirety, arm ourselves with understanding and the determination that arises from it. A great responsibility devolves upon the intellectuals to bring to the movement a knowledge and a full consciousness of its tasks.

But they have first to arm themselves with ideological weapons. History is rich with the accumulated experiences of other peoples and nationalities who have gone through similar struggles and had the same aspirations as the oppressed in South Africa. If the young intellectuals would drink from the well of knowledge of the past, study and draw sustenance from this rich treasure, which is the heritage of mankind; if they could see their struggles as part of the whole, of the forward march of mankind, and find inspiration in the struggles and successes of the other oppressed peoples throughout the world today — then they would not feel weighing upon them so heavily the pressure of the local tyranny.

If they understood their tasks and realised what they are called upon to contribute to the struggle, then they would not rest until they had gone out to the people, till they felt that their ideas were taking shape and finding practical application in the daily struggles of the masses. The people are ready, more than ready for a lead. The leadership dare not let them down. It falls upon the All-African Convention, the federal body which is the mouthpiece of the African people, to give them that lead.

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I.B. Tabata is president of the Unity Movement of South Africa and The African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA). At present he is in exile, like many fighters for liberation past and present.

As an indefatigable organiser, orator and writer, he has been very active in the national struggle of the oppressed Blacks for over thirty years. He was a co-founder of the All-African Convention in 1935, and one of its young militants who laid

the foundations of the Unity Movement, attempting to unite all sections of the Blacks. His uncompromising opinions have made exile another battleground for him.

He has addressed the Organisation of African Unity several times. With the arrest, torture and trial under the Terrorism Act of 13 leading members of the Unity Movement in 1971, he visited Europe and England and addressed a Committee of the United Nations in 1972.

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