

AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

P. O. Box 9207.

2 - 3 New Court Chambers,
44 Commissioner Street,
Johannesburg.

11th February 1952.

The Honourable The Prime Minister of the
Union of South Africa,
House of Assembly,
Cape Town.

Sir,

We, the undersigned, have the honour to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 29th January, 1952.

The National Executive of the African National Congress, at a special conference convened for the purpose, has given careful consideration to the contents of your letter, and has instructed us to address you as follows:

It is noted that exception is taken in your letter to the fact that the resolution adopted by the African National Congress at its 1951 Conference was directed to the Prime Minister instead of the Minister of Native Affairs and his Department. The African National Congress has at no time accepted the position that the Native Affairs Department is the channel of communication between the African people and the State. In any event, the subject of our communication to you was not a Departmental matter but one of such general importance and gravity affecting the fundamental principles of the policy practised by the Union Government, and its effect on the relations between Black and White, that it was considered appropriate to bring these matters directly to the notice of the Prime Minister. The suggestion that we were actuated by a so-called "recent rift or purge in Congress circles" is without foundation and entirely beside the point in so far as the substance of our case is concerned.

In reply to our demand for the abolition of differentiating laws, it is suggested in your letter that there are "permanent and not man-made" differences between Africans and Europeans which justify the maintenance of these laws. The question at issue is not one of biological differences, but one of citizenship rights which are granted in full measure to one section of the population, and completely denied to the other by means of man-made laws artificially imposed, not to preserve the identity of Europeans as a separate community, but to perpetuate the systematic exploitation of the African people.

The African people yield to no-one as far as pride of race is concerned, and it is precisely for this reason that they are striving for the attainment of fundamental human rights in the land of their birth.

It is observed that your Government rejects out of hand our claim for direct representation in Parliament and other Councils of State. This is the kernel of the policy of apartheid which is condemned not only by the African, Indian and Coloured people, but also by a large section of white South Africa. It is precisely because of this policy that South Africa is losing cast in international circles.

Your letter suggests that the policy of your Government is

.../motivated

motivated by a desire to protect the interests of the African people in various spheres of life, eg., land rights, and unspecified privileges not enjoyed by them in other countries. The Reserve Land policy has always been designed to protect European rather than African land rights, and even within the so-called Reserves, Africans hold only occupancy privileges at the discretion of the Government. These Reserves are notoriously congested and overcrowded, and the so-called rehabilitation scheme, notwithstanding the protestations of just intentions with which it is camouflaged, has aggravated the misery of the people and rendered thousands destitute and homeless, and has exposed them to vexatious regimentation by Native Commissioners and petty Trust officials. In this connection we note that even the Native **Laws** Amendment Bill, which is now before Parliament, in spite of all its harsh and draconian provisions, has been described as a "protective" measure. There can be no doubt that, like similar measures passed hitherto, this Bill is intended to protect and advance the interests of Europeans and not those of Africans. It is those discriminatory laws that are preventing the African people from developing their ambitions and capacities, and along lines satisfactory to themselves.

As far as the Bantu Authorities Act is concerned, it is clear that this Act is part of the policy to which we are opposed, namely, that "the Government is not prepared to grant the Africans political equality", and is not, as you suggest, "designed to give the Africans the opportunity of enlightened administration of their own affairs"! Nothing contained in the Bantu Authorities Act can be a substitute for direct representation in the Councils of State.

With reference to the campaign of mass action which the African National Congress intends to launch, we would point out that as a defenceless and voteless people, we have explored other channels without success. The African people are left with no alternative but to embark upon the campaign referred to above. We desire to state emphatically that it is our intention to conduct this campaign in a peaceful manner, and that any disturbances, if they should occur, will not be of our making.

In reiterating our claim for direct representation, we desire to place on record our firm determination to redouble our efforts for the attainment of full citizenship rights. In conclusion we regret that the Prime Minister has seen fit to reject our genuine offer of co-operation on the basis of full equality, and express the hope that in the interest of all concerned the Government may yet reconsider its attitude.

(Signed) DR. J. S. MOROKA (President-General)
W. M. SISULU (Secretary-General)