

“THE ALEXANDRA BUS BOYCOTT!!!

In 1949 when the people of Western Native Township in Johannesburg started a boycott of the Municipal Tram Service they coined the slogan “Not a Penny More!” Now eight years later, the people of Alexandra and all over the Reef have again come out on a boycott against a penny increase in fares. But what started off over a penny, has grown into something so big, so powerful, that it is time we stopped to have a closer examination of the Bus Boycott, that we pose to ourselves the question – is it really only over a penny?

For the past year, all over the country, there have been what the press described “incidents”: but these “incidents” were all symptomatic of a growing change. In every single case it was a blind hitting out by the people against the ruling class policy of oppression. Yet it showed a forward movement on the part of the people. A fervent desire not to let life pass. What was lacking was that no adequate weapon of struggle was at hand with which to meet the rulers. The start of the “Treason Trial” again brought the people to the fore. Again they looked for a leadership. Again they had to retreat because the leadership was not there.

And now.....the BUS BOYCOTT. For over a month now the people have held out in the face of police intimidation, of threats from their employers, of terrific deprivation and suffering to themselves. But it is possible for them to do so NOW they have a weapon which the ruling class cannot break so easily.

This is the significance of the Bus Boycott. And so far the only section that has truly realised it is the parliamentary leadership of the Herrenvolk. Schoeman has correctly seen it as a trial of strength – for that is exactly what it is. They realise that for once they are not dealing with people drugged with Non-Violence or under the heavy opiate of martyrdom. But with a people who realise and feel their strength in the united action of a people – hence their tenacity and determination. In their boycott they are meeting the Herrenvolk as man to man. In the boycott they see their strength and are finding themselves. That is why under the flimsiest of pretexts even the army has been called in to protect the buses! But the police have been forced to admit that they cannot even

find any suspicion of intimidation and violence on the part of the boycott leaders.

The same struggle which has forged a unity of strength and of action amongst the people has also forced all the opportunists into the open. The Liberals, with typical cunning have shifted the whole focus from the struggle to a harmless economic question. They appeal to the Herrenvolk on grounds of humanity not to raise the fares. They tell the ruling class, "You segregate them, and now you are making them pay...but the way in which you do it is so obvious!" At the same time they sound the warning bell – "This can lead to an explosion." They together with their bed-fellows, are urging a settlement before the boycott gets out of hand. And so they propose a subsidy for transport. In other words make the people pay for it indirectly.

Their tune of sympathy and charity is a deadly attack on the boycott weapon. Any attempt to rob the people of their strength and to degrade the struggle to the level of the sick and the lame that need charity.

Yet whole sections of the leadership of the National Movement have taken up this call. Without any shame they quote "facts and statistics" to prove that they cannot pay the penny more. As if the people are not aware of this.

It is no longer, in fact it hardly ever was, a question of a penny more. Through accident, as a result of the increased bus fares, the people have found their true weapon of struggle. A weapon that belongs to them. This is the new era which the boycott is heralding in – an era where the people are learning how to settle accounts with the oppressors.

The people of Alexandra Township, the other reef areas and now of Port Elizabeth, are fighting on behalf of the entire oppressed people of South Africa. They are not fighting over a penny. In fact it is costing them more – much more, if we even looked at it from the point of view of the statisticians.

We who are miles away from the struggle of the Bus Boycotters must however see our closeness to the struggle. For out of Alexandra Township has emerged the weapon whereby the oppressed can fight, and fight successfully, not only fare increases – but also against Bantu Authorities, Urban Areas, Pass Laws – in fact, against the entire Herrenvolkist policies and for full democratic rights for the whole nation of South Africa.

For us in S.O.Y.A. of the All- African Convention and the Non European Unity Movement, who have always advocated the Boycott as weapon of struggle, it is not merely gratifying to see its terrific impact on both the people and the Herrenvolk. It is an inspiration to see this weapon not only being vindicated, but being proved as the most effective weapon a defenceless people can have. We do not, however, pat ourselves on the back. For the victory and the fruits rightly belong to the people. But it brings home to us again and again the political lesson that the enemies of the people have all the time tried to prevent the people from learning the use of and discovering the power of the Boycott. When they could no longer deride it and talk it out of existence, they sought to prostitute it. They applied it to oranges, to cigarettes – in fact to everything but politics.

But now a people in action by the very dynamics of that action have revealed to us the strength that lies in our hands. The strength that can only be revealed when we sever the chains that bind us to the Herrenvolk. When we cast off the professional negotiators, the hirelings of the Herrenvolkism and stand on our feet as men and women worthy of a place in a truly democratic South Africa.

This is true lesson of Alexandra Township – a lesson for the entire nation of South Africa.

This is what the Schoemans and the Strijdoms are afraid of. That is why they stubbornly resist all attempts to settle the fare dispute, because they realise that it long ago stopped being merely a fare dispute, and that the oppressed South Africa stands at the dawn of a new day.

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