

# STRAIGHT TALK...

## The Spectre of Ethiopianism?

Ethiopianism is definitely not a dead letter. We have repeatedly made this point in this journal and proceeded to explain why it could not roll back into the limbo of the past. It is precisely because the Ethiopian Movement, as the militant series of breakaways of black converts from the white colonial church during the last eighties of the last century came to be known, was an expression of Black resentment of white chauvinism, racism and colonialism, an expression of a resolve to surge forth along the path of consistent christianity and humanitarianism, that it was indeed a political awakening of the black church that contributed to the mainstream of the militant struggles that have gone into the writing of glorious pages in the history of our struggle.

During the years of the Ethiopian Church the Black converts attacked the artificial distortions of Christian dogmas all aimed at the defence and justification of colonial plunder, racialism and discrimination - and the white clergy and parishers alike defended the theological corruption with incredible zest. The black strugglers - and they fought with complete faith in Christ and his teaching, in the name of their brethren and for justice and bread - were labelled rebels, pariahs, sinful and ungodly. Today, about a hundred years later, the seed of Ethiopianism is being sought for. Not one calls it Ethiopianism of course, but those who know and respect their history cannot help but make this important comparison. Ethiopianism was never a spectre as it were, yet a spectre it was called by all the evil hearts it haunted.

The hysteric cries of some high priests of apartheid that are beginning to resound in some Dutch Reformed Church synods, meetings and through the medium of the publication seem to suggest that a spectre of the "Ethiopian fold" is

again haunting the defenders of the evil apartheid system.

There is wrangling. There is strife. Thorough going fissures are yawning with a definitiveness perhaps unparalleled in the last 30 years of Nationalist Party/N. G. Kerk history. And a point has been reached in these struggles where a polarisation of attitudes is evidently assuming shape. They are not the usual theological competitions so characteristic of N.G. Kerk particularly at moments of whipping excitement for N.P. elections, nay they are political winds that are shaking the edifice of the NGK, the pillar of apartheid.

## DEVELOPMENTS

A keen perusal of developments in South Africa cannot miss the fact that such developments are not identical though very much of the same dialectical process as the Ethiopian Movement. Once again, the church has become a front for significant battles in the politico-ideological field.

What is important is for us to see the dominating trends for what they are. To examine each trace of new qualities if any in the hope that our success in this direction will greatly facilitate our forward march.

Last month 123 ministers of the NG Kerk drafted an open letter pleading for non-racial church unity. The examples has been followed by a further 13 according to the 'Star' of 21st July 1982. Alongside this development, a similar happening of no less significance has registered: The United Congregational Church of South Africa has passed a resolution (13/07/82) to stop all dialogue with the white Dutch Reformed Churches until they had denounced apartheid as a heresy, writes the 'Star' of 14th July 1982. These are evidently serious developments that warrant our immediate attention and methodical examination.

Let us remind ourselves that (i) the NGK has been the primary defender, justifier and godlifier of the theory and practice of apartheid, (ii) racial discrimination in church and state is written into the statute of the South African state, (iii) these 'new' opponents of discrimination are saying nothing new and (iv) the ANC, its allies and our entire people have spent more than 70 years fighting for an

inclusive non-racial society, founded on peace, equality and justice.

In welcoming this new reinforcing voice to the patriotic effort, we urge every one to consider the fact that it is not aspects of the system that warrant examination or mere condemnation, but the system as a whole - its theory and practice - calls for immediate attack and uprooting. The rallying slogan of the ANC, "Let us unite in action and act in unity" should serve as our lodestar. We hasten to stress further that failure to respond fittingly will reduce this representation of positive identification within the white church to an attractive but worthless mirage. This will be another battle front and advance will not be gratis. The enemy's ideological castle is being tempered with with new determination and he is likely to react with double rage.

It is interesting to note that already the hardest violators of religious consistency, or shall we say theological honesty are regrouping with haste. They feel they are being assailed by enemies, they think that the roofs of their heavens are being forced to collapse on top of them. That is why they are prolling out, and re-purifying and re-reforming themselves. At the time of going to press a new right-wing church has been formed. Accordingly it is to provide a religious home for Afrikaners discontented with emerging attitudes within the mother church (NGK). The Afrikaanse Reformatoriese Kerk (Afrikaans Reformative Church) as it is called was established by Jan Jooste, chairman of the HNP since the party's inception.

Why these developments interest us and we think of them as an acute urgency is because these new contradictions are a manifestation that the system in all its aspects is not a monolith that cannot be moved. The divisions and signs of positive awakening within the much revered NGK whose purity has all along been defended by the "Grondwet" are evidence of the effect of our own blows, a vindication of the policies and ideals our movement and people have cherished throughout the years from the pioneer days of the Ethiopian Church, the 1912 Mangaung Conference through the Congress of the People and the 'Treason Trial' to the present height of Unity in Action.

These developments are of acute significance since

they do not only occur at a crucial moment in the history of the oppressed people's principled challenge to the status quo, but on the other hand are a reflection of the ferocity of the struggle between the forces of real change against those of empty reforms and conservation. They reflect as much might in the ideas of peace, freedom and equality as they do the emptiness and fallacy of apartheid propaganda.

Finally, as matters get to a boiling point we expect the two trends in white politics represented by the N.P. split to assume their positions behind either of the two camps in the church. This will not be the alleviation of a problem, but rather the intensification of a fierce conflict. It is for us to provide the booster charge to this imminent explosion in order to ensure that the patriotic movement of our country will benefit out of this. In this way, we shall have understood the real meaning of the year's campaign and its crucial significance to the destiny of our struggle.

**FORWARD TO PEOPLE'S POWER!**

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## **A LIFE DEDICATED TO A JUST CAUSE**

-Refilwe Monama

Ruth First is the descendant of the parents who sowed the seed of Marxist thought in our country as early as 1915. Her parents who were Jewish immigrants from the Baltic states, shared their rich experience of the labour movement with the workers in South Africa. This culminated in them being members of the International Socialist League which was to be the founding ground of the Communist Party of South Africa.

Comrade Ruth, born in 1925, was to continue the proud history of her parents. She joined the Communist Party of South Africa as it was then called, while she was still a student in Witwatersrand. She served as a secretary of both the Young Communist League and the Progressive Youth Council. Comrade Ruth joined the Party at a time when it was deeply involved in mass mobilisation, thus