

Liberation

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Editorial

SEARCHLIGHT ON THE CONGRESSES

The ten years that have passed since the disaster of 1948, when the caricature of democratic institutions that passes for a General Election in South Africa first produced a Nationalist parliamentary majority, have been years of sorrow, suffering and indignity for the people of our country; years of anger and bitterness. We cannot, and we shall not here, attempt to reckon up the balance-sheet; for one cannot even begin to reckon up the wrongs that the Nationalists have done to the people, and above all to the Non-White people. We can count the years of their harsh rule in terms of hunger; in terms of homes broken and families cast adrift; in terms of children whose minds are being deliberately deformed in schools of oppression; in terms of cruelty, degradation and intolerable insult. Let the parlour-politicians and shebeen intellectuals hold forth about the idea that "there is no difference between the Nationalists and the U.P." We are no defenders of the timid opportunism of the United Party! But let us ask the man in the street — the women forced to submit to that badge of servitude — the pass; the countryfolk burying their sten-gunned dead; the urban African hounded beyond endurance and finding life impossible on starvation wages; the Indian and Coloured people, insulted, degraded and robbed . . . and we shall find but one answer, in a dozen languages, spoken in a voice of burning anger: "These people are a pestilence that has descended on the country; we cannot tolerate them any longer; nothing could be worse; the Nationalists must go!"

And go they must. For there is another side to the anguish of the past ten years; a side written in heroism, steadily-growing mass political awareness and organisation, the brotherhood and unity that has been born out of the dark decade of 1948-1958. The people have shown, in a thousand

ways, more and more over these past ten years and never more so than in the fateful year of 1957, that whatever the cost and the sacrifice they are no longer prepared to submit to tyranny. The machinery of force and repression that has been built up by Swart and Verwoerd can no longer contain the people's anger; it breaks out ever and again, in Alexandra, in Zeerust, in Port Elizabeth, and every time, more conscious, more organised, more purposeful. Leaders are banned, banished and arrested, but for each one banned, new fresh leaders come forward, ordinary men and women from the workshops and townships and farmlands. People are losing their fear of prisons, beatings, even death. All the separate protests, against Group Areas, against passes, against removals and deportations and banings and censorship; all the separate demands, for higher wages, for decent housing, for proper education, for human rights and democratic freedoms: all are merging into a single mighty stream which sooner or later must sweep away the Nationalists and all their works. They must go, and they will go!

How shall they go?

As we approach nearer to the 1958 General Election, a weighty responsibility rests upon the White electorate of this country. In past elections they have demonstrated, beyond reasonable doubt, that they are unfit to retain their present monopoly of the franchise. But will they, in the face of the realities of this Sputnik Age, in the face of well-nigh universal disapproval from every country in the world, and in the face of the torrent of anger and resentment from the majority of the people of South Africa — will they persist in yet again returning a Nationalist Party majority to the Assembly? Or will they open their eyes to the truth: that another Nationalist-dominated Parliament will close the door to peaceful progress in our country and intensify every conflict to the point where it can only be resolved by a major trial of strength in which the European minority will be the major sufferers?

That is the real issue in this 1958 election. Not whether Strijdom is too ill to continue in office; not whether Graaff is the ideal fan for Prime Minister; not whether the United Party is better able to preserve "White leadership" than the Nationalists. But whether the European voters will have learnt sufficient from the past ten years to understand that they stand at the crossroads, that they have to share South Africa with others who are still denied the vote, and that another term of Nationalist Government will be the last straw, the final declaration of war, the fatal act which closes the door on negotiations and agreed solutions.

The two big political parties cannot and will not place this issue before the electorate. It rests on others to do so. It is the duty of the Labour Party and the Liberal Party to speak out loud and clear in these fateful couple of months, in terms of unmistakable warning. But above all, the task of clarifying the issue belongs to the great political organisations of the Non-European people themselves, which have risen to such great heights of courage and wisdom over the past dark decade, who have won the recognition of most in our country and nearly all outside it as the true voice of South Africa.

The African National Congress has shown a hundred times — and not least in Chief Lutuli's analysis of the election situation — that in its leadership, wisdom, humanity and understanding it stands on an immeasur-

ably higher level than the Nationalist Party. It has reached out to build bridges of understanding between the races; and as fast as the Nationalists have destroyed bridges, the Congress has rebuilt them and built new ones. Had it not been for Congress and its humanistic policy, which while it fortifies and creates African national unity and self-confidence, at the same time rejects racialism and strives for freedom for all men and women — had it not been for this Congress policy, we believe, South Africa would already be a hell of hatred and bloodshed, with men of each racial group at the throats of their fellows. And now, in this critical pre-election period, it has been Congress, with its partners in the democratic alliance, the Indian Congress, the Congress of Democrats, the Coloured Peoples' Organisation and the Congress of Trade Unions, which has proved through the statesmanlike bearing of its representatives at the multi-racial conference its superiority to the narrow doctrines of racial exclusiveness. And through the Lutuli call "The Nationalists Must Go!" this movement of the voteless has placed a challenge and appeal to the voters which they will ignore at their cost and their peril.

The Lutuli Call can still save South Africa. But, that message of hope and emancipation has still to be made effective. As a call it will remain a paper manifesto, an interesting and moving document perhaps for the future historians of our country. To make it an effective and living factor in this critical short period ahead it has to be brought home to everyone in South Africa, White and Non-White, voters and voteless alike. There is only one way in which the call can be brought to life. And that is by its being expressed unmistakably through the determined conscious action of hundreds and thousands of people.

For years political leaders, trade unionists, social workers, economists and others preached the lesson that the urban workers of South Africa were suffering from desperate poverty. What brought that lesson to life, brought home with unmistakable clarity to every man, woman and child in the country? The massive, heroic action of the thousands who took part in the bus boycotts a year ago!

So, too, it is no use our merely saying that "the Nats must go!" and that we shall not tolerate them any longer. We may issue innumerable press statements and leaflets — it will not be good enough. What is necessary is that we must show how we feel in this matter; we must, in hundreds of thousands prove our determination to free our country from this pestilence in a language that all can understand — the language of action.

And there is only one organised force in the country capable of carrying out this giant's task: the Congress movement. With a full knowledge of the issues that are at stake, with clarity, unity of purpose, determination and unsparing, selfless, brave work, Congress can swing the balance, and open up the road to peaceful progress towards a democratic South Africa in the short weeks between now and April 26. The way has already been prepared with the great struggles of 1957, with the plans and preparations that have been made for the Regional and National Workers' Conferences in February and March. What is needed is that Congress shall clear the decks for action and put its organisation and membership in order for these great tasks of the immediate future.

But to do that it is, in the first place, necessary that the movement must rise above some of the disturbing symptoms that have been revealing themselves in recent months, to the great delight of every reactionary and enemy of freedom. Congress members are only human. They make mistakes and they have disagreements. More particularly, in times of stress and strain such as we live in, these disagreements tend to become over-emphasised, and the mistakes magnified. Certainly if mistakes are made, they must be rectified. And if individuals are unsuitable for their position, they must be replaced. That is precisely what conferences and democratic procedures are there for.

What, however, is all-important at the present time is the maintenance of Congress spirit and unity in the face of the fundamentally important tasks immediately ahead. We must correct errors and choose our leaders in such a way that we take nothing away from the unity and the Congress spirit and solidarity that we so urgently need today.

Let us examine some of the problems of the movement in the light of these guiding principles.

We shall start, by way of illustration, with the unhappy position that has arisen in the Transvaal Province of the A.N.C. We believe that it has turned out to be a mistake to call on the Provincial Annual Conference last November to return the existing leadership *en bloc*. No doubt it was proposed with the best motives. The Congress leadership is under fire, and it seemed to be a way of expressing confidence in and solidarity with those who are under Government attack, to vote solidly for their return to office. But Congress Constitution is there to see to the proper democratic functioning of the organisation, and it is wrong to suspend that functioning because of attacks made by our enemies — unless conditions exist which make it absolutely impossible to carry on in the normal way. Such conditions did not exist last November and they do not exist now. The surest proof that the decision was mistaken was that instead of leading to a demonstration of unity it has turned into a demonstration of disunity, more serious than any that have arisen in the Transvaal Congress for many years.

Worst of all, instead of discussing political principles and policies, the whole Province has been turned upside down in an absolutely useless and time-wasting dead-end discussion of personalities. It is absolutely false to suggest that there is a fundamental cleavage on policy between the Transvaal executive and its critics. True, it has been suggested that the critics are "Africanists." Who makes these suggestions? First of all, the incorrigible mischief-makers of "The World." And secondly, some of the members of the present executive.

What is this "Africanism" everybody is talking about? It would not be unfair to describe it as a sort of "Nationalism" of the Malanite variety, turned upside-down. Instead of saying the Afrikaners must be the master-race, these fellows say the Africans must be the master-race. Now it is true that Congress has got beyond this immature view-point to the deeper wisdom of rejecting each and every variety of master-race ideology in favour of a truly human vision of equality and brotherhood. But isn't it also true that the very fact of oppression and the official preaching of White baasskap inevitably brings forth this very reaction of African assertiveness and exclusiveness? You tell a man, "Your people are no good;

mine are better." Isn't his natural reaction to say, "Nonsense; your people are no good; mine are better." In a sense, this is the necessary first step towards accepting the Congress concept of equality; it is the first step towards casting out the servile mentality inculcated by the ideologists of "Bantu" inferiority. It has always existed in Congress, and will continue to exist, under whatever name, as Congress continues to recruit new members among the rank-and-file of the masses. Congress must take these new members, welcome them and educate them; not drive them away by swearing at them! The "Africanists" of today — all but a handful of cranks who will soon expose themselves — are the good and loyal Congressmen of tomorrow: we have seen all this happen before!

But apart from this, is it really true as the "World" and some executive members pretend, that the branches and individuals who are behind the petition for new elections, are really "Africanists?" Some of them may, of course, be dissidents, even Africanists, fishing in troubled waters. But it is plain ignorant or dishonest to say that these people constitute only a tiny minority of those who want reform in the Transvaal Congress. The proof was plain to be seen at the December National Conference. The overwhelming majority of the Transvaal delegates were critics of the executive. Yet when it came to the vote reiterating support for the Freedom Charter, the so-called Africanists who voted against this turned out to be a tiny isolated group.

We say with absolute confidence: ninety-nine per cent of the Transvaal Congress members stand four-square behind the established policy of alliance with other Non-European organisations and with democratic Europeans, behind the Freedom Charter, behind the National leadership of Congress. But many of them have lost confidence in some of the present members of the Transvaal provincial executive. Whether these feelings are justified or not; that is not the point. The point is that no member of a democratic organisation is justified in clinging to a position when the progress of the organisation itself requires that changes should be made. We have no masters and servants in our Congress; the masters are the members themselves and their servants are their democratically-elected executives and officials. A leader may show his true loyalty and quality sometimes by stepping back to the honourable position of rank-and-filer, and giving another man or woman the opportunity to develop, by exercising them, the faculties and experience of leadership.

We think the decision of last November was mistaken. Elections should have been held in the normal way. Failure to do so resulted in a split between supporters and critics of the present executive. The mistake must be rectified if further progress is to be made. The way to rectify it is to now provide for a new choice of leaders, in which a representative leadership of honest Congress members from both sides of the dispute should be elected, with the support of all, to work loyally for the implementation of Congress policy, the strengthening of the Congress Alliance, the defeat of the Nationalists and the winning of the Charter. If this is done quickly and in a good spirit, the breach will be soon healed and Congress will be able to face its vital tasks like one man. Nor should there be any more constitutional quibbles. The present executive will show its stature and win the gratitude of all lovers of freedom if it takes the logical step of resigning en bloc, calling a special conference and holding new elections,

in which of course the present executive members will be able to submit themselves for re-election. We confidently believe that they are big enough people to do so.

Space does not allow us here to go into similar details concerning Congress affairs in the other provinces. But we are sure that a similar spirit could put to rights various disputes which may have arisen in the Cape and Natal. People are putting far too much stress on individuals and personalities, like petty little shopkeepers who imagine that their own progress is the only thing that matters and are always out to give a dig to their "rivals." There is only one sort of "competition" between Congressmen that is good and healthy; let us "compete" to see who can do the most work and give the greatest benefit to the movement, whether as leaders or as rank-and-filers. Let us put an end to complacency, conceit, tale-bearing, tittle-tattling and undermining the reputation of others. If you have a complaint to make, make it in open Congress and let it stand up to open investigation. Otherwise shut up! This is not a matter of "Left" or "Right". Admittedly there are different shades of opinion in the national movement; we would not have it otherwise, for then it would cease to be a national movement and become something different. But this is not a matter of different opinions, the present policy of Congress is broad enough to unite all democrats and patriots. It is these clique-builders, whether of the Right or the so-called Left which are ruining Congress. In our opinion, they must stop it.

An unhappy position prevails, too, in the Coloured People's Organisation. The Transvaal executive members who chose to resign at this critical juncture must have known that their action would weaken the organisation and the whole Congress movement. Why did they do so? We know that many of them are honest and sincere people. Why did they allow their feelings about a particular issue to run away with them to the extent that they took a step which will be hailed with delight by all enemies of Congress?

The issue itself is a simple one. In this month's Liberation, a contributor puts the case for a boycott "on principle" of the forthcoming Coloured parliamentary elections. He is answered, fairly and squarely; by Mr. Mandela. In deciding Congress tactics, one thing and one thing only is, ultimately, cardinal and relevant: the progress and benefit of the movement and of the masses of the people. To adopt any other criterion, to elevate any particular tactic into a matter of principle is to fall into the sort of sectarian error which has bedevilled the Non-European Unity Movement in the Cape for so many years, and made it a brake upon rather than an aid to the progress and advancement of the Coloured people. Decide arbitrarily on a single tactic — in this case, the boycott. Make it a matter of absolute principle. Call everyone who, though sharing the goal of freedom and equality, adopts any other tactic, a sell-out and a quisling. You will, whether you realise it or not, be splitting the camp of progress and doing a fine job for the Nats and other upholders of White supremacy. That is exactly what the NEUM has been doing all these years. A reading of the recent SACPO Transvaal Bulletin, full of the ranting name-calling we have come to associate with "The Torch"

convinced us some time ago that this barren NEUM approach of petty-bourgeois "ultra-revolutionarism" was infecting SACPO in this Province. This latest action has confirmed this impression. We can only hope that some of the dissident SACPO-ites will realise their error, and see, also, that they are being used by others who are clever enough to remain behind the scenes, before they commit political hara-kiri.

We may perhaps seem to have drawn an over-pessimistic picture of Congress shortcomings in this editorial. But we are convinced that the movement will not be able to meet its tremendous responsibilities at present unless it faces up to and overcomes these shortcomings, and we have chosen to speak bluntly about them because without straight talk there can be no straight thinking.

But this is not of course, the whole truth about the Congress. It has shown time and again that its members, because of their close links with the people, have the strength and the ability to rise above every misfortune. The Congress movement has survived every vicious blow aimed at it by the Nationalist Government. It has survived the removal of its most able and experienced leaders by Ministerial edict; and though, no doubt grave damage has been suffered in the process and grave mistakes made, the end result can only be that the movement will emerge with more experienced and tested cadres than ever before. It has survived innumerable laws, bans on meetings, police interference and persecutions: and in the process has grown bigger, more popular, hardened and more realistic. And if Congress has survived all these attempts to exterminate it, Congress will survive internal difficulties, the product of confusion, misunderstanding, selfishness and ambition as well.

It is therefore with every feeling of optimism and confidence that we have dealt with our present difficulties. Let not the opponents of democracy begin prematurely to cheer because we of Liberation, a magazine which has consistently backed Congress policy (though we have been and remain a fully independent journal) now see fit to criticise some negative features. We are criticising ourselves, not in despair, but to clear the decks for decisive action. A movement which indulges in idle boasts of its strength and hides away its weaknesses need not be feared very much. But when a movement speaks publicly of its weaknesses, and sets to work to put them to rights, wise men among its opponents will realise that it means business.

We offer no apologies, therefore, for these remarks. To all Congressmen and Congresswomen we say at this critical time: Friends, if you are sincere, you will understand that our sharp words are just and necessary. Let us cast aside all apathy, personalities and small matters. Great tasks await our full and undivided attention; our unsparing work. To friends of the Congresses who stand outside and criticise, we say: Get into the Congresses and build them up; they are the hope and the future of South Africa. To the upholders of White supremacy, we say, do not mistake this critical mood for a sign of weakness: it is a mark of strength and the guarantee of our victory!