

Editorial

THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

A SOUTH African General Election is a remarkable phenomenon. In one sense, it is a formal acknowledgment of the democratic principle. All the trappings are there: candidates address the electorate about their respective policies; there is a secret, direct ballot; the people's representatives, duly elected, proceed to Parliament and legislate. And all of this is a tribute to the great idea that has swept through and conquered most of the world since the French and American revolutions: the idea of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity; the idea that government of the people, for the people, and by the people shall not perish from the earth; the idea that the People Shall Govern.

Yet it is all a bitter mockery — dust and ashes in the mouths of the millions of voteless dispossessed who are supposed to stand and look on in respectful silence while they, the White Masters, debate and decide how we are to be governed; with exactly what degree of severity, or hypocrisy, the White aristocracy is to be maintained in its privileges and monopolies; in what proportions the loot derived from our exploitation is to be divided among the slave-drivers who have taken our farmland, those who have seized our mines, and those who own the industries built up by our labour. Those are the issues being discussed in this election. Not a word about the great matters which engage serious people everywhere in this Sputnik Age, when the very survival of humankind hangs upon the averting of war. Not a word about the gaunt starvation that stares into the tiny, crowded location homes or the huts of most South Africans; of the bestial savagery which Verwoerd's Chiefs and Swart's police have unleashed in Zeerust; of the cynical theft which is Group Areas; of that ruthless and inhuman persecution which is the Pass Laws — the Terror that walks by Night.

At the slightest suggestion that the African National Congress — whose members cannot vote or stand as candidates — should find other means to obtrude its views, aspirations and policy into the election, the leading Parties react with equal horror and disgust. The very idea! What has this election got to do with them? The Nationalist Party newspapers become near-hysterical and accuse the United Party of being responsible. Sir de Villiers Graaff denounces the A.N.C. and calls upon the Government to take serious measures to stop it.

On the one hand: lip-service to Democracy, observance of its outward forms; on the other hand: the reality of a harsh autocracy, claiming all-but divine right, regarding any challenge from the people as blasphemous and treasonable. Here is the essence of the contradiction, the deep unreason and illogic upon which our country's institutions are founded, which makes them essentially unstable, indefensible, incapable of survival.

WE SHALL NOT BE SILENCED!

By the time this article appears in print, the great National Workers' Conference which the Congress movement has been building and preparing for over many months will have met in Johannesburg, the delegates

back in their home centres and places of work, actively implementing the Conference decisions. We do not, of course, know what steps will be decided upon there to implement the will of the people.

But one thing is already quite clear — it has emerged unmistakably from the February Regional conferences — and that is what the will of the people is. The people want an end to pass laws and apartheid. They want higher wages and a national minimum wage of £1 a day, guaranteed by law. They want a say in the affairs of their country.

What remains is to see that these profound needs and aspirations of the great majority of our people do not remain unvoiced and unheard at this crucial time, of all times, when our rulers are going through this solemn farce (to the true democrat, an act of blasphemy) of pretending to ascertain that sacred thing, the People's Will, of passing off the result to South Africa and the whole world as the genuine article.

By mass action in support of their most urgent demands at this precise time, the voteless majority will be doing two things.

They will be staking their claim for higher wages and the ending of pass-terror and apartheid in the post election period: irrespective of whether the packed electorate returns the Nationalist or the United Party.

And they will be showing the world, in the clearest and most emphatic manner what the will of the South African people really is.

As against these vital considerations there are some who counsel inaction at the present time, because a mass demonstration of the voteless people now might embarrass the United Party in the eyes of the electorate and panic the voters into the arms of the extreme party — the Nationalists. It might be well argued, against this, that if nothing else will show the voters the folly of continuing with the Swart-Verwoerd line of merciless repression, such a demonstration will; that it will bring home to them, in the only possible way, the extreme danger to South Africa of permitting the Nationalists a further term of office.

But, in the last analysis, both arguments — based, as they must be, on mere speculation — are irrelevant to the deeper issues which are involved. The real opposition to the Nationalists in this country is not and never has been the United Party. Had it depended upon the resistance of the cowardly leaders of the U.P., the country would long have been transformed into a jackboot republic, modelled upon the Reich of the German National Socialist Party, which the present leaders of the Nationalist Party used to admire so greatly and so openly — when they thought Hitler was going to win the war. And if this has not yet happened, though we have gone so far along that road, if it is still possible, though difficult, for the voice of opposition to make itself heard in South Africa (including the voice of the U.P.), then it is no thanks to the men who stood up in the House and the Senate and voted with the Nats for the Public Safety Act and the Criminal Laws Amendment Act. It is thanks to the thousands of heroic men and women, named and nameless, who in the Congress movement have faced prison, banning, deportation, unemployment, physical violence and even death itself, rather than submit to tyranny.

It is this Opposition which is the sole shield of the people and their hope of freedom. And its activity must not be relaxed, but intensified precisely

because it is election time; the time of the highest political consciousness and activity in the country for all sections of the people; the time of the greatest danger of Fascist reaction (as anyone who saw and heard the hysterical crowds at Strijdom's Johannesburg meeting would testify); also the time of the greatest opportunity for democratic advance.

Already, as we write, the mere preparations for the National Workers' Conference are compelling the leaders of the political parties to pay heed to the voice of the people; to speak about their demand for a £1-a-day minimum and other needs. The high and mighty Prime Minister stoops to utter crude threats, warning the people of punishment by "the full might and authority of the State" if they go on pressing this very moderate, even beggarly demand. The masses will not be frightened by such contemptible talk, or intimidated from taking lawful action within their rights. They will make their voice heard in this election time — they know, with the sound instinct of the common people, that their future depends upon it.

But effective action, in these testing conditions, depends in no small degree upon the preparedness and the will of the people's organisations to give sound and united leadership. While Graaff and Strijdom — safe in the knowledge that there is no Congress representative present to answer them — lash the African National Congress verbally in their political meetings, they are paying unwilling and unconscious tribute to the fact that the A.N.C. is the acknowledged leader of the majority of the people of the country. And the people themselves are looking eagerly and with confidence for Congress to reply.

Congress is not replying as vigorously and as loudly as it could. The reason must be sought in the difficulties that have arisen within the organisation, and we make no apologies for returning to this urgent theme in this issue of "Liberation."

THE A.N.C. CRISIS AGAIN

It is tragic that in these circumstances in the two biggest provincial organisations of the African National Congress — the Cape and the Transvaal — disunity and confusion still prevail.

What are the sources of this disunity? And what should be done to put matters right? We cannot answer the second question until we understand the answer to the first.

And here we must distinguish very clearly between two distinct types of disagreement that have arisen:

1. There are frictions and disputes between groups of honest and loyal Congressmen, all of whom support the present policy and National leadership of Congress;
2. There is a definite organised faction which calls itself "Africanist", and which seeks to oust the present National leadership and policy in favour of one of crude racialism.

Let us, first, deal with the second type of disagreement. There is room, as we have said before in this magazine, for people of different viewpoints under the broad roof of the African National Congress. We cannot and should not expect all members of a broad emancipatory organisation to

share identical views on every subject. But we can and must expect every member of Congress to give loyal support to the elected leadership; to support Congress policy as laid down in the Constitution and as decided from time to time by National Conferences; to refrain from activities harmful to Congress. What then shall we do with an organised conspiracy which disregards all these conditions of membership?

That there is such a conspiracy, we can no longer be in any doubt. At the special conference held recently in Cape Town a private letter was read out which created a great sensation. It was from the Provincial Secretary, Mr. Tshunungwa, to one of his supporters in Congress. And the letter made it quite clear that he, Tshunungwa, was using his official position as Secretary, in an attempt to fight Congressmen who oppose his "Africanist" faction. He is not interested in building Congress, but in building up his anti-Congress group. And this is not just a little clique in the Cape, it is nation-wide conspiracy attempting to seize Congress and change its policy.

This now notorious letter informs his friend, Mr. Mbengo, that — having successfully intrigued his way to the Provincial secretaryship — he, Tshunungwa, was "appointing" Mr. Mbengo and six others as a Provincial working Committee. (Since when, may we ask, do the rules permit a secretary to "appoint", without the approval of the Executive, a Working Committee?) Even more interesting are Mr. Tshunungwa's "reasons" for this strange step — and strange it is indeed, for he is intending to shift the Working Committee from Port Elizabeth, which is the storm-centre of the Cape and a Congress stronghold, to the relatively quiet backwater of Queenstown. And why? Not because he thinks it is a more appropriate place, in Congress interests, but because he does not like the people in Port Elizabeth, he thinks they are "leftist" and "mad". "I have now written to that mad Working Committee in Port Elizabeth demanding all the Provincial matters . . . I have silenced them for good now".

In the course of this silly letter — all puffed up with egotistical self-conceit — Mr. Tshunungwa claims the "approval" of some of the senior Cape Congressmen for some of his antics. We shall spare them the embarrassment of quoting their names here, for we are sure they did not know what he was up to, and that — now the cat is out of the bag — they will lose no time in repudiating him.

What is truly disturbing is not just the exposure of this shabby intrigue, or even the appearance of black-shirted "Africanist" thugs at the Cape Town conference. It is the plain evidence that what we have here is a Union-wide conspiracy — concentrated on just these two centres whose correct leadership in recent years has made them the pride of the whole progressive movement: Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg.

In the Transvaal we find similar behaviour from people like Mr. Madzunya and Dr. Tsele. Mr. P. Leballo is one of the leaders of this anti-Congress group in the Province. He gives interviews to anti-Congress newspapers in which he makes the most wild, untrue and treacherous allegations against respected leaders. He openly says that it is the aim of his clique to capture the Transvaal leadership and use this as a stepping stone to gaining National control.

Now we should be misleading our readers if we gave them the impression that this anti-Congress group of so-called Africanists represent any

sort of powerful or important section in Congress. It does not; and all the attempts of such papers as "The World" and "The Sunday Express" to blow up their stature and give them prominence are, intentionally or otherwise, thoroughly misleading.

At National Conferences of the A.N.C. this anti-Congress group of "Africanists" has made repeated attempts to get Congress to repudiate the Freedom Charter. On each occasion they have failed miserably. They received a tiny handful of votes against hundreds who voted for the Charter. They have made repeated attempts to disrupt the alliance, which has been built up in the course of common struggle and sacrifice, between the African National Congress and the Indian Congress, the Congress of Democrats, the Coloured Peoples' Organisation. They have tried, in these efforts, to make use of the lowest racial prejudices. They have said, falsely and lyingly, that the A.N.C. is "controlled by", "dictated to" or "subsidised by" its sister organisations. (What a servile mentality it reveals of these people, who cannot imagine any relationship between Africans and other racial groups except one of master-and-servant; who really believe, or pretend to believe, that the respected and elected senior leaders of Congress, who have not feared to face all the terror and persecution of the fascist-inspired National Government, are men who are going to "take orders" from anyone except the membership of Congress itself! People like that, we fear, are just incapable of understanding the truly equal and fraternal relationships that exist between the different Congress organisations, which are an inspiring preview of the free South Africa of tomorrow, as we have all seen at the Drill Hall and elsewhere!

The anti-Congress group of "Africanists" has also failed miserably in these efforts to drive a wedge between Congress and its allies. The average African, never mind the average Congress member, is not mad. He understands perfectly well that Congress will fight more effectively for its goal of democracy and equality if it joins hands with other organisations which have exactly the same aims. The masses of the African people are hungry for freedom in our lifetime: they are not likely to be influenced by people who only want freedom if it is won by "ourselves alone" — even if that means waiting for another generation. And the people have too much respect for and confidence in their beloved leader Chief Lutuli and his brave and respected colleagues to believe the Africanist slanders that the Congress leaders are "selling" the people.

By itself, then, this self-styled "Africanist" anti-Congress group is nothing but a discredited and contemptible clique of office-seekers, disruptors and careerists who enjoy no backing or support whatever from the rank and file, inside or outside of Congress. Indeed, looked at objectively, their activities are most suspicious. Why, at this very time, when the A.N.C. and the Congress movement is the main target of the reactionary forces, when the U.P. is shouting for the Government to "deal with" Congress, and Strijdom is threatening merciless action, à la Zeerust, against Congress, when many of the leading Congress figures have been committed for trial on a capital charge — why, we ask, at this time is it that the "Africanist" group is directing all its venom and spite, not against the Government . . . but at the Congress leadership? Who does it benefit? Who wants Congress split and confused at the present time? It would pay the Government very handsomely if someone would do this dirty work for it. As soon as one begins to look calmly and objectively at this anti-

Congress group, one begins to realise there is something very sinister about it. It says openly that it prefers the Nationalists. Some of its policies sound very much like those of the Nationalists. And it shows the same hatred of Congress leadership as the Nationalists do. Sooner or later honest Congress members are going to start asking themselves: In whose interests are these people working?

UNNECESSARY DISPUTES

But, at present, honest Congress people are not asking these questions because they are too busy conducting unnecessary, trivial disputes among themselves. And the anti-Congress "Africanist" group is glorying over these disputes, revelling in them, and making hay while the sun shines. Because of the disputes they are able to join one or other side and play a role as some sort of "leaders" which, by themselves, they would never be able to enjoy. In the course of the disputes, some people become so blinded by factional passions that they are ready to seize the hand of the devil himself if only it will help them to score a cheap victory over their fellow-Congressmen: a hollow victory too that can only weaken our Congress movement.

It all reminds one only too painfully of what happened in Hungary, not so long ago. The workers' socialist Government, led by Rakosi, made certain mistakes. In criticising these mistakes, and in working for reforms, some people, honest workers and socialists, became so carried away by factional passions that they were prepared to join hands with actual Fascist elements, bitter reactionary elements, who were using the dispute not to achieve reforms but to destroy all the gains of the Hungarian working class and the basis of the socialist State.

When honest men fall out and begin quarrelling, that is when crooks come into their own.

That is what has been happening in the Transvaal.

We wish to make it quite clear that we have the greatest confidence in the integrity and honesty of the members of the Transvaal Executive Committee of the African National Congress. We said, in our last issue, that we thought that they had made a mistake in not adhering to the usual election procedure at the November Conference, and we still think so. But that does not mean that we associate ourselves with all the silly accusations that have been levelled against them by the "Africanists" and others. We know perfectly well that they did a good job in organising the Province, and that they did not mishandle any Congress funds. That is precisely the sort of wild and irresponsible accusation that is likely to be made by enemy agents, seeking to sow disruption.

We are fully convinced, also, that the majority of the branches which petitioned for a special Transvaal Conference were and remained honest and loyal Congressmen, supporters of the Charter and the Alliance, anxious only for the advancement of the movement.

But, looking back on it, we shall see that serious mistakes were made by both sides. On the one hand the petitioners should never have joined hands with the disruptive "Africanist" group, who — as they must have known perfectly well — were not sincere but merely trying to fish in troubled waters. And even if they did not know it to start with, they

should have seen it as soon as this anti-Congress group went running to the offices of the "World" saying it was a big "Africanist revolt" in Congress. They should, there and then, repudiated the "Africanists" and thrown them out.

On the other hand, some members of the Executive were equally at fault. They immediately pretended to believe the "World" story — although they knew perfectly well that many of the leaders of the petitioning group were staunch supporters of Congress policy and of the Charter. They labelled the whole thing as "an Africanist plot." They talked airily about "a few disgruntled elements" — although it was perfectly obvious that dissatisfaction, or at any rate, misunderstanding was widespread. Looking for a scapegoat, they started blaming the National Executive. And they stubbornly refused to consider any compromise, while the situation grew worse and worse.

We all saw what happened: the sorry exhibition at the Special Transvaal Conference, when hooliganism and mismanagement brought the whole thing to an end in chaos and confusion. Only the Government (and the "Africanists") were pleased, and rubbed their hands in pleasure.

What happened there made many Congressmen suddenly wake up and realise what was happening. While people were quarrelling over who should hold the steering-wheel, our bus had left the road and had come to the edge of a cliff.

We do not propose, here, to go into all the details or to sit in judgment upon the rights and wrongs of the events following upon that terrible Conference. It has not been without its value. It has led to intervention by the National Working Committee in a situation where all could see and understand that intervention was necessary and inevitable. It has led to the dissolution of the Requisition Committee, and the isolation of the anti-Congress "Africanist" conspirators with only a few of their more short-sighted or irresponsible collaborators. But, at the same time — while there was obviously need for prompt action — we cannot help feeling that some aspects of the Working Committee's intervention were somewhat over-hasty and ill-considered. In particular, the abrupt "suspension" of the Transvaal Executive has given the impression that somehow the Executive was being penalised, or held responsible for the position which had developed in the Province. And this has created a new source of friction and dispute: this time between the Provincial and National leaderships.

Nevertheless, there can be no acceptable explanation or excuse for the intemperate and undisciplined reaction of the Provincial leaders: and we sincerely trust that by the time these lines appear wiser counsels will have prevailed. Loyalty and obedience to the National leadership is a first essential for our whole struggle; and never more so than now, when the whole movement is under the fiercest attack of the enemy.

The present situation should never have been allowed to develop, and no doubt there will be many useful lessons to draw when this emergency is over.

But when we find that our bus is heading for the edge of a cliff, our first task is not to start arguing exactly whose fault it is that is went off

the road. Our first task is to get the bus back on the road: the broad Congress road to Freedom.

Our first and immediate necessity is that the quarrelling should stop and that every single Congressman and Congresswoman should get down, all out, to the vital job of implementing the decisions of the National Workers' Conference. Every member and friend of Congress has a plain duty at the present time. We must NOT and we shall NOT tolerate a position where different "parties" (ALL of them supporters of broad Congress policy and of the Lutuli leadership) are running round to the Branches, trying to canvass support for themselves

While vital Congress work remains neglected;

While Strijdom, Verwoerd and Swart are preparing an all-out attack on Congress and on the people;

While the anti-Congress "Africanist" group is carrying on its dirty work unnoticed, and preparing to walk in and destroy the proud organisation we have spent the best years of our lives working for and building up.

We appeal to — more, we demand of — every single honest Congress member and leader, whether at Branch, Provincial or National level, that he or she reconsider his or her position in the light of this desperately earnest situation, calmly and reasonably, without emotion or anger; that we all put any false pride aside, any unworthy suspicions and accusations; that we put an end to all clique-building, intrigue and factionalism, and all pull together for the good of the Congress.

This is not an argument about policy. If it were, we should say: go ahead with it; it is good and healthy; let each one have his say, using the methods of reason and fair, democratic debate, until the issue is decided at National Conference. But all of us here, at present, are agreed about policy: everyone, that is, except the "Africanist" group of disruptors, whose weapons are lies and slander and statements in the enemy press, and whose proper place is right outside the Congress.

Therefore this is an unprincipled dispute, and we have a right to demand that you must stop it. All the main leaders who support the Freedom Charter and the Freedom Alliance must urgently be brought together — and we appeal to the senior officials to do so without delay — NOT to discuss the rights and wrongs of past disputes (a Special Congress Commission of Enquiry could perhaps be set up to do that, and to report in due course); NOT to bandy recriminations and cast doubts on people whose sincerity we know, in our hearts, cannot be doubted; BUT to find a way for the Movement to work with the utmost devotion, enthusiasm and effectiveness in the present emergency.

And if any leader thinks he is too big to sit down with people on the other side of the dispute, then we say that such a person is not too big but too small to be any sort of a leader in the people's struggle.

We say, we have a right to demand these things be done. What is it that gives us that right? Only one thing: our faith and our knowledge that the immediate future of fifteen million human beings now depends on our Congress movement — the only truly human and sane force in the country — upon its unity, solidarity and integrity.