

Editorial:

WAR AGAINST THE PEOPLE

EXCEPTIONAL interest attaches to this month's annual conference of the African National Congress. Always an event of major importance, this year's "parliament of the African people" meets against a background of dynamic developments in the outside world, of vast stirrings throughout the African continent, and of a steadily mounting crescendo of tension in the Union. The tension arises from the virtual war being conducted by the Government against the people.

General Smuts was often referred to by his admirers as a soldier turned philosopher — though, if the truth be told, he was not much of a hand at either, his talents lying in other directions. Dr. Verwoerd is reversing the process; he is the philosopher turned general. As Minister of Native Affairs he was not so much conducting a Department as a war, and as Prime Minister we have no doubt that he will, still more, continue this course. It is a war against the people, and in the first place against the African people; an aggressive, undeclared war; a brutal and ruthless war; a war against defenceless civilians, against women and children.

A friend of ours, who happens to be an Afrikaner, tells the story of a revealing incident during the Johannesburg bus boycotts last year. He was giving a carload of tired workers a lift home to Alexandra when they were halted by the usual police cordon near the Tower garage. "Pas, kaffer!" barked the law. "Maar, konstabel," remonstrated our friend, "Hoekom behandel jy hierdie mense so? Hulle is nie misdadigers nie." The cop looked at him pityingly. "Kan meneer nie verstaan nie? Hulle is die vyand."

They are the enemy! That is the mentality — not only unfortunately of the uneducated constable, newly-arrived perhaps from the platteland, but also of the "cultured" products of Stellenbosch and Potchefstroom universities, the educated savages who staff the Nationalist Party, Parliament, the Senate and the upper levels of the vast army of State servants. And it is they who teach and inculcate this vicious mentality among wide sections of the White population.

Such is the pitiless, inhuman, unyielding mentality of Verwoerdism and the Verwoerdists which confronts the African people of our country in their just struggles for freedom, equality and human dignity. The Nationalists do not know human beings, they only know light-skinned people

and dark-skinned people. They are perpetually at war, and every man is a soldier, wearing a uniform. His uniform is his skin. If it is dark, he is an enemy.

It says a tremendous amount for the moral superiority, maturity and political advancement of the African people (whom the Nationalists like to tell the outside world are primitive barbarians!) that under the leadership of the African National Congress, they have steadfastly refused to accept this false picture drawn by the Nationalists: the so-called "clash of colour." Instead they have seen the picture as it really is: as a clash of principles: on the one side, the Nationalists' principle of racial domination, autocracy and repression, utterly discredited and repudiated throughout the world outside South Africa; on the other side the principle of democracy and human rights, cherished and upheld by the United Nations and by ninety-nine per cent. of humanity.

That is why the Congress and its allies have won the sympathy and goodwill of all the world, and the Nationalists have earned universal disfavour and contempt. But the Nationalists have a hide like a rhinoceros when it comes to the disfavour of those who disagree with them; though they were condemned by every priest, statesman, footballer, athlete, trade unionist and professor in the world, and thrice excommunicated by the General Assembly, they will continue with their oppression and domination as long as there is a penny to be made out of sweated labour — and as long as they are allowed to get away with it!

Nor will sympathy and goodwill abroad — encouraging though such things are — in themselves enable the Congress to lead its people to the promised land. The Nationalists can be defeated and will be defeated in one way only: and that is by the overwhelming might of the democratic majority of the South African people themselves. That majority can only be effective in overcoming oppression and injustice when it is organised and disciplined; led in political action by a skilful, courageous and utterly determined leadership, unyielding and firm in principle but flexible and inventive in strategy.

To provide such leadership is the duty and the honour of the African National Congress, and that is precisely why, meeting at this critical phase of South African and world history, so much interest and importance attaches to the forthcoming A.N.C. Conference.

In 1949, shortly after the inauguration of the first Nationalist Government, the A.N.C. Conference adopted a Programme of Action. It has been falsely asserted by the Africanists (whose leaders have now openly taken up a separate stand and formed a separate organisation, outside and against Congress) that this 1949 "Programme" was a general statement of aims, conflicting with the Freedom Charter. It was nothing of the sort. It was, essentially, a plan of work, and a very good one too, the great majority of whose proposals have been successfully implemented by the A.N.C. leadership. It was a milestone in Congress history.

But today, after ten years of Nationalist misrule, conditions have changed very greatly: for the worse. New and vitally serious tasks face the movement. While adhering to the militant and imaginative approach of the 1949 plan, a new one is urgently called for, one that will take into account the changed conditions and vital problems of 1959.

Let us give an example of what we mean. Congress has traditionally demanded the abolition of pass-laws, and has led many a stirring campaign for this demand. But today the struggle against pass-laws has moved on to an entirely different and higher level: it has become practically a matter of survival for the African people.

THE BATTLE OF THE PASS

It is a far cry from the days when a Minister of Native Affairs could say that "the pass laws are the outstanding barrier to improved race relations," express public horror at the huge number of annual arrests arising out of these wicked laws, and promise to provide for their early abolition. The Minister was the late Deneys Reitz, and though he did not live to implement his promise, he did at least suspend the operation of some of the worst features of the pass laws during the last war.

Alas, Reitz was succeeded by Piet van der Byl, who undid all of Reitz's concessions. And then, following a brief reign by Dr. Jansen, until he was kicked upstairs to the Governor-Generalship, came the grim and terrible Verwoerd Era. Pass laws were extended (what Satanic impulse made the man call his law for this purpose, with the cruellest of irony, an "Abolition of Passes" Act?). The simple Pass became a whole Book: a volume of misery. The Native Affairs Department expanded monstrously, like a huge tick upon the body of the African people, swollen and engorged with blood.

Enforced with fanatical, lunatic intensity, the pass laws have become an endless, unendurable nightmare to the Africans. The occasional raid has become a never-ending military operation by the police against the people. By night and in the early hours of the morning, pickups, "nylons" and "kwelas" ply their continuous bus service between the townships and the jails. As the workers pour out of their trains and buses in the mornings, police teams bar their way. As they go about their business in the cities they are stopped by the hobo "ghost squad". Always the barked refrain from the dog-men: "Pas, kaffer!" Always through the streets the processions of black men, handcuffed one to the other, like victims of an Eighteenth Century slave raid chained on their way through the jungle to the sea, bound for America. And, indeed, what are these police but man-hunters on the raid? Or the farm jails but our "America" of today?

One would have thought, perhaps, that Verwoerd had already turned the screw of the pass system to the limit; that it was impossible to extract any further human suffering from this diabolical machinery of oppression. But that would have been to underestimate his ingenuity. With one stroke

he contrived to redouble the burden. He declared war on African women.

Perhaps no single action of the Nationalist Government, has provoked more deeply-felt resentment and opposition than this extension of pass laws to African women. The epic of the resistance of the women in town and country; the great rally of the 20,000 to Strijdom in Pretoria in 1956: these have already become a part of history.

At first, planning what pretended to be merely an administrative measure "in the interests of the Bantu women" as — what it really is — a military operation, General Verwoerd directed his early attacks upon the womenfolk of the rural areas, calculating that there the brave soldiers of the Native Affairs Department would meet but little effective resistance, and counting upon his gallant allies, his paid and bought Chiefs. He met some unexpected opposition and setbacks in the countryside. But — let us face the facts — he met with some success as well. Emboldened by these early victories (which will yet prove to be but temporary ones) and celebrating his elevation to the Prime Ministership, Verwoerd has now rallied all his forces in an all-out attempt to capture the greatest enemy stronghold.

He has attacked Johannesburg.

On the eve of the Congress conference, evoking a passionate storm of protest, aided by the tame and servile "Chiefs" of the Johannesburg City Council, the new, streamlined "Bantu" Department is trying to force passes upon the women of this great City, the nerve-centre alike of the country's economy and its democratic opposition.

The immediate reaction of Johannesburg's brave womenfolk was characteristic of the spirit of this great city. Within days, following the lead of the vanguard from the Western Areas, hundreds of women were demonstrating outside the pass office. When threatened with arrest, they did not flinch, but singing and giving the Congress salute, they entered the police "bus service" to the Fort. And they were arrested in their hundreds, day after day, until 2,000 had been taken to jail.

Many people must have recalled the great days of the 1952 Defiance Campaign as they saw or read about these events. And, no doubt about it, the action of these 2,000 had transformed the whole struggle overnight and raised it to a higher level. If Verwoerd and the City Council had hoped that pass books would quietly and secretly be issued to the domestic servants without any fuss, their hopes were speedily disillusioned.

But this is 1958, not 1952. The Defiance Campaign of 1952 was, in itself, a means of struggle and a clarion call to awaken the people. It gave Congress a new discipline, earnestness and purpose. It gave the people, who

had come to look on politicians as mere windbags, a new respect for and confidence in the organisation. It was a great turning point in Congress history.

Today, with many of its most eminent leaders on trial for their very lives, there is no longer any such need for the movement to prove its seriousness of purpose. Little by little the rule of law has been removed from South African public life. The laws themselves have been made a travesty of justice by Parliament. The mass political trial has become a familiar feature of Government policy. Savage penalties have been prescribed for "political" offences. To persist with 1952 tactics, under the mistaken impression that we would be able to induce a change of Verwoerd's policy by "filling the jails", would have merely been to swell the revenues of the Government; and to impose an intolerable burden of legal and welfare expenses upon this movement. The rule of law is fast disappearing in this Verwoerd Era, and the team of brilliant democratic lawyers, whose self-sacrificing efforts have so long served to defend the people's liberties in the face of the nascent police state apparatus, are finding their efforts less and less effective in the face of a totalitarian mass of legislation and the steady whittling away of the independence of the Courts. Filling the jails with people's leaders has become the aim of the Government itself. Perhaps a temporary large influx of additional jail inhabitants can temporarily "embarrass" the authorities, but they can always extend the available accommodation.

Thus, one of the important concepts behind the 1949 plan of work, which is related to the Gandhian "satyagraha" idea, is clearly inadequate to meet the completely changed conditions of 1959. New thinking and new plans are needed, and the same is true of many other facets of the people's struggle today: a new approach is needed to the ever-continuing battle to challenge the domination of the minds of the youth, which is Bantu Education; the absolute, totalitarian control of the people of the Reserves, which is Bantu Authorities; the inhuman regimentation, ruination and ghetto-isation, which is Group Areas; the starvation and misery, which is the cheap labour system; the creation of a uniform mass of Non-European unskilled labour, with no prospect of advancement, which is Job Reservation.

If we have chosen the Pass System to illustrate in somewhat more detail the root problem which now faces Congress, it is because in a very large measure, it underlies and serves to illustrate all the others. In a recent editorial on the Passes, the Johannesburg "Star" somewhat naively asked Congress what alternative it had to offer if passes were abolished. How would Congress, it asked, tackle the problem of countering the influx to the towns? The answer is very simple. South Africa is not the first country to be faced with the problems of industrialisation: in countries where some measure of freedom and popular democracy exist, the laws of supply and demand have been allowed to come into play. If fields of em-

ployment, such as farming and mining, offer too few inducements to workers to attract them in competition with industries in the towns, then those employers have been forced to offer higher wages and more attractive conditions of work. But the farming and mining employers, who dominate South Africa, have not been prepared to contemplate this alternative. Rather they have been prepared to impose the entire monstrous system of passes, terrorism, police control, injustice, humiliation — in a word: apartheid — upon the country. For the few exploiters this hateful system produces what they are after — cheap labour. But for the country as a whole it is very expensive labour indeed: it is produced at the price of endless suffering, broken lives, broken families, disease, ignorance, crime, tension, racialism and Nationalist rule.

There is only one power which can end this system: the systematic, massive, enlightened and determined organisation of the masses of the people in their national liberation organisations and trade unions. And for such organisation, Congress needs a new sort of plan; a plan not based upon emotional platform appeals and heroic gestures, but upon relentless work, day and night, throughout the land, in town and country; a plan for absolute efficiency, punctuality and scrupulous honesty in every aspect of work; a plan for systematic and thoroughgoing education, inside the movement and outside, so that every member and the whole world shall be clear beyond doubt what problems we are facing and how they are to be solved.

During the course of this article we have tried to indicate some of the problems to which our leaders should be turning their minds, at Conference and throughout 1959. We do not pretend to have all the answers, but we know that they are problems which the movement is capable of solving. We have not minimised the extent of the obstacles to freedom which confront the democratic majority of the people, but of one thing we are wholly convinced — those obstacles will be overcome, and the people shall govern.

A NEW AFRICA

True, the conquest of freedom in our country is not an easy task. The Nationalists will use every resource of terror, violence and intimidation to preserve their unjust rule; they will seek out disruptors, provocateurs and stooges; they will be helped by international imperialism from abroad, and by cowards and confused elements within. But whatever they may do, their rule is doomed.

A new Africa is in birth.

Whether we look at Egypt in the North, the new Union of Ghana and Guinea in the West, the great stirrings in Nigeria, now on the verge of independent self-government, even, right in the heart of the Union, the tremendous implications of self-government for Basutoland, we cannot but be aware that great things are happening about us. What was yesterday but a dream is coming true before our eyes. Africa is emerging from centuries of slumber. Her people are standing up to claim their birthright to their own land, freedom and full development. The alien Powers, one by one, reluctantly but inevitably, are being compelled to quit our Continent and make way for independent governments of Africans by Africans for Africans.

Each new territory that wins freedom serves as a beacon and an inspiration for the rest. As the area of freedom spreads in Africa the position of the imperialists, desperately clinging to their remaining "possessions", becomes more hopeless and untenable. The people are on the march. The little fountain of liberation has become a strongly-flowing stream, tomorrow it will become a mighty river of freedom in full tide, irresistably sweeping away to the sea the mud and filth of imperialism, the hateful centuries-old curse of alien control, piracy and robbery, of ignorance, poverty, backwardness, disease, exploitation and degradation of the human spirit.

This great prospect, the return and the rebirth of Africa, is no longer, as it might have seemed years ago, when Dr. Du Bois convoked the first pan-African Conference, the splendid but impractical vision of a few noble minds. It is a reality — one of the great realities of our times. People who try to think about and make plans for the future of Africa, whether they are in London or Paris or Washington or Pretoria, without taking into account this great reality looming over the next decade — they are the impractical ones, the dreamers, clinging to empty illusions.

We are living in the closing stages of the era of European domination over Africa. However unpalatable that may be to the Verwoerds and their counterparts in Europe, it is nonetheless the message that will be spelt out large at the All-African People's Congress at Ghana; it inspires and fortifies the members of the African National Congress as they come together for their annual December national conference filling them with the confidence that whatever hardships and sacrifices may lie ahead the final victory of freedom is assured.