

# LIBERATION

*A Journal of Democratic Discussion*

No. 6

November 1953

One Shilling

## THE CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

*"Let it vast assembly be,  
And with a great solemnity,  
Declare with measured words,  
that ye  
Are, as God has made ye,  
free!"*

SHELLEY.

**G**RANTED a new lease of life by the grotesque travesty of democratic institutions which serves this country as a Constitution, the Nationalist Government has celebrated its re-election with a new series of rude assaults on the people of South Africa.

We have no cause to be surprised that Schoeman should seek to suppress African trade unions, Verwoerd to suppress education for Africans, Swart to suppress the outspoken leaders of the people's opposition. What is surprising, and deeply disturbing, is the failure of the nine-tenths of the population which is anti-Nationalist and anti-Fascist to rally and unite its forces in the face of the present headlong Malanite drive towards the Servile State.

### **Inside the U.P.**

When he addressed the United Party provincial conference at Port Elizabeth last month, Mr. Strauss attacked the "rebel" M.P.'s, who had carried the process of toadying to and appeasing the Government — which he himself had initiated — past the limits of decency and party discipline. He attacked the "powerful influences in financial quarters" who stood behind these semi-Nationalists in his Party. He belatedly advised his followers: "go back to principles and don't play at politics." And he delivered himself of these memorable words:

*"Never in the record of human history has any nation prospered permanently at the expense of another, no matter of what colour."*

We wish that Mr. Strauss himself and his colleagues could be made to study those words and ponder their deeper import. Let him apply them to the conduct of Mr. G. B. Gordon and the United Party majority on the Johannesburg City Council, plotting with the Government behind closed doors to implement the inhuman Western Areas scheme. Or the dirty deal that is being conducted to sell the Coloured vote.

The United Party has played a despicable role under the Nationalist Government, deserting its post as Opposition and crossing the floor of Parliament to vote for a Malan-Swart dictatorship. For that betrayal it is now paying with its own disintegration and collapse.

It is not only the United Party which has been caught in a crisis of leadership by the march of events.

### **Trade Union Failure**

Consider the case of the registered trade unions.

The Nationalist Government has not hesitated to lay impious hands on these seemingly stable and invulnerable bodies. To the delight, on the one hand of their powerful capitalist backers; on the other, of the ambitious Nationalist cells in the trade unions, Ministers Swart and Schoeman have not hesitated to issue Suppression of Communism Act orders to over thirty trade union leaders, forcing them to quit organisations which most of them have laboured a lifetime to build. The victims include not only the secretaries of small and struggling unions but also pillars of the Trades and Labour Council like Messrs. Huyser and Sachs, who have long repented the early revolutionary ardours which may have afforded the Liquidator a technical excuse for including them on his List.

The illusions of class peace fostered by the I.C. Act have thus been rudely shattered. Even outside observers like Mr. Ivan Walker, former Secretary of Labour in the Smuts Government, and the Bishop of Johannesburg can clearly see and have openly stated that the entire structure of free trade unionism in South Africa is in mortal peril.

On the whole, the leaders of the trade union movement have failed signally to measure up to the imperative needs of this situation, involving as it does the survival of their organisations which took so much effort and sacrifice to build. There have been formal protests, deputations to the Minister of Labour, petitions. In one or two cases, outraged workers have downed tools in protest strikes for a day. But, on the whole there is a complete absence of a sense of immediate emergency; of any real determination to enlist the rank and file of organised labour in South Africa for mass action of the only kind which could halt the Government. There is no move to summon a wide, powerful alliance of political, religious, ex-service-men's and other organisations to join forces in determined defence of the traditional rights and liberties of the people. Above all,



even at this desperate hour, the trade union leaders maintain the fiction that South African politics is the white man's business; exclude African unions from "all-in" conferences on matters which vitally affect them, and hold studiously aloof from the main bastions of South African democracy: the national liberation organisations of the African, Indian and Coloured people.

The truth is that the leaders of the registered trade unions have lost the militant crusading spirit which marked their early years, which led men to face deportation, imprisonment and even death for the cause of organising their fellow-workers. They have turned reformist and bureaucratic, functioning under the Industrial Conciliation Act as an *adjunct* of the Labour Department, and confining their attention to the phraseology and administration of legal agreements. The I.C. Act, itself a disgraceful and immoral bargain with the employers at the expense of the African workers, has been the instrument of corruption and degeneration of the former fighting associations of the working class into tame benefit societies and complaints offices, along the lines of the much admired bureaucracies of the British T.U.C. The vision and the urgency which fired the pioneers of the trade union movement has been forgotten.

Unless that vision and urgency can be recaptured, and a return be made to the fundamental trade union principle of class, not racial, organisation, the future of the white trade union movement is grim indeed.

## **The African Unions**

And what of the African trade unions?

It is a tragedy for the African trade unions that they have attempted to follow the lines of the established trade unions of European workers in this country. We have seen the dead end into which this type of bureaucratic, reformist organisation has led the Europeans. For colonial-type workers, such as the non-whites of South Africa, such an approach offers no prospects whatever. After thirty years of conscientious training of potential organisers as passable book-keepers, filing clerks and students of industrial legislation the African trade union movement has not been able to achieve a level where it could offer a serious challenge to Schoeman's legislation. The place of a trade union organiser is not in the office, but in the factory — preferably as a worker in that factory. Instead of passing resolutions "demanding" recognition from the Government, the job of the unions is to compel recognition from the employers. The task of building African unions which are real living associations of the workers, not "complaints offices," and which understand the inseparable connection between national oppression and the poverty of the workers, is one of decisive importance to the



whole future of the national liberation movement. Mr. Schoeman's "bleed the unions" Act cannot prevent that task being accomplished. The only thing that can prevent it is the lack of understanding on the part of the workers and their leaders of what is required. Recent signs among African trade unionists indicate that former misunderstandings are fast being dispelled.

## **The Role of Congress**

A powerful factor accelerating the development of African trade unions, would be the organised and enthusiastic assistance of the African National Congress.

Before Congress, however, can give proper attention to this and other matters of urgency, it must set its own house in order. Although it has clearly shown itself, over the past years of Nationalist misrule, to be the most advanced democratic force in the country, the national liberation movement is not immune from the stresses that have rocked every opposition movement in the country.

Congress is not a homogeneous body; it does not consist of a single social class, and it is not united by any specific philosophy, beyond the broad conceptions of freedom from oppression. It is right and proper that this should be so; indeed one of the main faults of the proposed new draft Constitution which has emanated from certain circles for discussion at the forthcoming national conference, is precisely that it endeavours to replace the wide, all-embracing character of Congress, open to all patriotic Africans with a narrow, rigid and sectarian outlook.

There is room within the Congress for men and women from every walk of life, and of every shade of democratic opinion; that is its strength. But there is no room for spies and deserters, and there is no room for deliberate disrupters and political gangsters. And when one hears of cliques within the Congress who organise assaults on fellow-Congressmen, or who set up secret societies to capture leading positions through deliberate campaigns of lies and slanders, or who mischievously set one Province against another and the African against the Indian Congress — then we must say it is time for Congress to conduct a searching investigation into such reports and, if they are true, to expel those responsible from its ranks. For if they are left to carry on, men like these will end by destroying the Congress, the principal hope and mainstay of democratic South Africa.

We have not hesitated in this Editorial to speak our mind frankly and bluntly, although we know some people will not like us any the better for it. We do not think the cause of emancipation will be served by verbal diplomacy and smoothing over differences.

## **A Brighter Side**

At the same time, we should not like to give the impression that all is dark and gloomy on the South African scene. On the contrary, the very factors of oppression and danger which panicked the careerists into tottering and disruption, have encouraged "the fearless and the free" into more resolute resistance. An event of first-rate political importance was the emergence during October of the South African Congress of Democrats, a body established at the instance of the African and Indian Congresses to unite those sections of the population which they themselves do not cater for, and draw them in as partners in the common struggle. The significance of this organisation is not in its numbers — for at this stage it has not many — but in the fact that it kills the idea that the issue in South Africa is a racial one of white versus non-white. It is nothing of the sort; and the addition of an organised body of white persons who stand four-square with the liberation movements for equal rights and opportunities to all, will serve to underline the truth: that this issue is one of principle. The new body has no set of principles of its own separate and distinct from those of the Congresses: it seeks to complement and not to compete with them; and a minority suggestion that it should do otherwise found little favour at the Conference. It may sound very daring and "progressive" to propose that such a body should work "among all sections of the population," and then to accuse the majority of "wanting a colour bar" when they insist on the body serving its stated purpose and functions. Of course, the new Congress has no "colour bar," and like the draft Congress constitution referred to above, which is also full of "daring" "Left" phrases, the minority proposals merely create confusion where none existed before.

## **People's Assembly**

One of the reasons for the ability of the factionalists in the A.N.C. to carry on with their activities is the lull which has taken place since the closing of the first phase of the campaign last December. True, members were given a vitally necessary organisational plan to work on, but organisation is only really possible around a central political theme and objective. It was the absence of such clearly-defined and widely understood objectives which gave the mischief-makers their opportunity to fish in troubled waters.

As the annual national conference approaches, the time to formulate and agree upon a central plan and specific objective becomes pressing. We cannot abstain from expressing a warm welcome for the proposal made in the presidential address to the Cape provincial A.N.C. conference, that the Congresses should take the initiative in convoking a great Assembly of the People,



*"From every hut village and town,  
Where those who live and suffer, moan  
For others' misery and their own."*

The United Nations Commission on race discrimination has called upon the peoples of this country to get together and resolve their differences. They will call in vain on the Malan Government to do any such thing; if they did convene such a conference we might expect the non-whites perhaps to be represented by the "Bantu National Congress" and the "Kleurling Volksbond," seated of course in a separate hall— or two halls — and notified in due course what the baases had decided! Nor can we expect any fruitful results from the proposed conference of the Institute of Race Relations, heavily weighted as it would be bound to be in favour of the dominant minority.

But what the Government will not and the Institute cannot do, the Congresses can and should do, in company with the Trade Unions, the Liberal and Labour Parties, and every other major body that is prepared to join with them. It could be a wonderful venture, mobilising and inspiring the whole of the democratic forces of our country, uplifting and educating vast masses of the people.

*'Let a great assembly be  
Of the fearless and the free....'*

(The verses in this article are quoted from Shelley's "The Masque of Anarchy," published in 1832)

## **BRITISH GUIANA -- A PRELUDE TO MASSACRE**

By A. M. KATHRADA

Speaking at the Conservative Party Conference at Margate recently the British Colonial Secretary, Mr. Oliver Lyttleton, said that their "thoughts must be with those men and women of every race under the Crown who were living in the two territories where law and order was menaced by wicked men...."

He was referring of course to the events in Malaya, Kenya and now in British Guiana. And while these words were uttered at Margate, more than 600 British troops (500 men of the Royal Welch Fusiliers and 120 from Jamaica) landed on the soil of British Guiana. Many more had already sailed.

He was thinking of Booker Bros., McConnell and Co. Ltd. and of Demerara & Co. Ltd. — the sugar barons — who were faced with the militant demands of their under-fed, under-paid workers for improved conditions and for the recognition of their trade union