

I.B. TABATA

PRESIDENT, UNITY MOVEMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA
A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

I.B. Tabata, at present living in exile in Zambia, is President of the Unity Movement of South Africa as well as of one of its affiliates, the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA). He was brought up near Queenstown, Cape Province, and educated at Lovedale and Fort Hare College, Cape Province. He has played a leading role in the national struggle of the oppressed Black population in South Africa for over 30 years, being an indefatigable organiser, an orator and at the same time a writer and political philosopher. He was a co-founder of the federal body, the All-African Convention, in 1935, which united the many organisations, civic, peasant and teacher bodies amongst the Africans, who comprise by far the largest proportion - about three quarters - of the Black population. Then in 1943 the progressive leadership of the All-African Convention established the Non-European Unity Movement, now known as the Unity Movement of South Africa. This was in recognition of the necessity for the wider unity of all sections of the oppressed, the Coloured and Indian minorities together with the Africans. It declared a Ten-Point Programme for full democratic rights for all, irrespective of race, colour or creed. It was emphasised that this was a minimum programme. Tabata was a co-founder of this movement also and organised throughout the country explaining the new policy and encouraging the people to tackle their problems in the light of this policy.

The strategy of the leadership of the Unity Movement was consistently based on the assumption that, in the given conditions of South Africa, the democratic stage could only be achieved under the dictatorship of the proletariat assisted by the African peasantry, and that, with the seizure of power, the proletariat must immediately put the socialist tasks on the agenda of the day. I.B. Tabata has comprehensively summed up the outlook and aims of the Unity Movement in a pamphlet entitled: The Revolutionary Road for South Africa. This was published in England in 1969 and widely distributed. Delegates from the various countries attending the Non-Aligned Conference held in Lusaka, Zambia, September, 1970, all received a copy. It was also translated into Swedish and Danish.

From the beginning, however, I.B. Tabata's writings have been part and parcel of the struggle, reflecting each stage or crisis affecting the Blacks in South Africa, summing up a campaign amongst the peasantry or amongst the workers in the towns, addressing themselves to every section of the population on the issues involved in the struggle, exposing the plans of the government for the further exploitation of the Blacks, or unmasking the machinations of the enemies of the Movement who sought to divert the energies of the oppressed into false channels.

Tabata's book, THE AWAKENING OF A PEOPLE, published by the All-African Convention in 1950, is a history of the political development of the Blacks in South Africa. It traces this development from the emergence of the African National Congress in 1912 during the crisis of the land-robbing Land Bill affecting the African peasantry; the spectacular success of the I.C.U. (the Industrial and Commercial

Workers' Union) in the early twenties, and why this movement among the African workers, half trade union and half political body, failed. The next stage of development was the birth of the All-African Convention during the crisis of the notorious "Native" Bills, which had the effect of rallying the Africans on a nation-wide scale to forge an organisational weapon in their defence. Then came the challenge of the Unity Movement representing all sections of the oppressed and their demand for full democratic rights for all. The Awakening Of A People is a book that looks into the past political development of the oppressed in order to clarify the tasks of the present and provide clear political directives for the future. It found its way to the remote regions of the peasant "Reserves" as well as being a source of inspiration to the young intellectuals. Like all Tabata's speeches and writings, it has since been banned by the South African government.

In THE REHABILITATION SCHEME; A NEW FRAUD, also published by the All-African Convention, Tabata fully exposed and explained a scheme by the government for the further economic enslavement of the Blacks by depriving the majority, the African peasantry, still further of land and cattle, thus smoking them out of the Reserves and channelling them into the mines and the white farms as cheap black labour. He had toured the Transkei Reserve, addressing the peasants on the real purpose of the so-called Rehabilitation Scheme and the inter-relationship of the government schemes for the exploitation of all workers. The peasant struggles against the Rehabilitation Scheme throughout the late forties and fifties were to form an important focus of peasant resistance. The turning-point in the peasant struggle

was when Tabata was arrested in 1948 at Mount Ayliif, Pondoland, in the Transkei, and was charged with inciting the people against the Rehabilitation Scheme. The peasants attended his trial in force. The victory in that case had a far-reaching effect on their resistance. As the news spread, even those peasants who had been hoodwinked by the government chiefs into accepting the Scheme, everywhere rejected it.

Peasant resistance spread throughout the Transkei, across to Witzieshoek Reserve in the Orange Free State, then into Natal Province on the East Coast and over into Zeerust and Sekhukhuniland in the Northern Transvaal, where the army let loose a reign of terror on men, woman and children. The Pondoland Revolt in 1960 marked a culmination of peasant resistance. Throughout that period the All-African Convention had encouraged the formation of independent peasant committees which became affiliated to the deferal body and thence to the Unity Movement.

THE BOYCOTT AS A WEAPON OF STRUGGLE was another pamphlet by Tabata and it was born out of the heat of the struggle organised by the Unity Movement against the system of segregated elections imposed on the Africans by the Native Representation Act, that had robbed them of the last vestige of political rights and fobbed them off with three white "Native representatives" in a parliament of 150 whites representing a fifth of the population. By taking part in segregated elections for these three Whites and a useless Native Representative Council, the Africans were operating the machinery of their own

oppression. The Boycott organised by the Unity Movement and the All-African Convention was supported by the peasantry in the Transkei and by many Africans in the towns. The African National Congress, backed both by the white liberals and the Communist Party of South Africa, after first supporting the boycott, reversed its policy as elections drew near and launched an attack on the Unity Movement. It was in this situation that Tabata wrote the pamphlet, The Boycott As Weapon Of Struggle and challenged the intellectuals to take up their position on the side of the workers and peasants and against the Government.

After seizing power in 1948, the Nationalist (fascist) party proceeded throughout the fifties to implement its apartheid policy. In 1953 the Nationalist Government passed the notorious Bantu Education Act as part of its scheme for forcing the African population into what is called a Bantu Community, in which ignorant and illiterate chiefs had increased powers to oppress the people. In his book, Education For Barbarism, Tabata analysed the historical and political background to this apartheid outrage on the Blacks and painted a devastating picture of the debasement of teachers and pupils under this system. The book was published by the Prometheus Press (independent) in South Africa.

It was in 1956 that Tabata was banned from public meetings and confined to Cape Town for five years. He was the first to have such a heavy ban imposed on him. During this period he wrote Education for Barbarism, which is regarded as one of his most important works. At the end of his ban he resumed his organisational activities under

increasingly repressive conditions. He traversed the Transkei (Cape Province) and held meetings in Natal Province, in Johannesburg, a big mining and industrial centre in the Transvaal, and throughout the Cape Peninsula.

1960 was the crisis year of the Po. Moland Revolt of the landless African peasantry and the Sharpeville massacre of African men, women, and children by a trigger-mad police. Later that year, Tabata wrote the pamphlet: The Pan-Africanist Congress Adventure in Perspective, in which he analysed the danger of the political adventurism of the young PAC leaders who had broken away from the African National Congress on the grounds that it was under the influence of the Whites, namely, the Liberals and the Communist Party of South Africa. It was during their abortive passive resistance campaign against the carrying of passes by Africans, which had been organised mainly in Johannesburg and Cape Town locations by the PAC, that the Sharpeville massacre had taken place. This had been followed by the declaration of a state of emergency by Verwoerd, Prime Minister and head of the Nationalist Government, with the result that many thousands of Africans who had nothing to do with the PAC were arrested. Tabata in his pamphlet pointed out that the young and inexperienced PAC leaders had been used as pawns in a power game between the die-hard Nationalists and the white liberal bourgeoisie in South Africa, who represented the interests of British and American capital.

A few months later Tabata was instrumental in founding the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA) as the political wing of the Unity Movement, and became its president.

As the Nationalist fascist government greatly stepped up its repressive measures in order to cow the whole Black population, the APDUSA was a landmark in the development of the struggle, clearly manifesting the importance which the leadership attached to the role of the workers and peasants in the liberation of the Blacks. This was all the more necessary because on the one hand the fascist Government was launching an all-out attack to reduce all sections of the Blacks to a position of helotry in the land of their birth, while on the other the liberals and the Communist Party of South Africa, being in control of the oldest African organisation, the African National Congress, were misleading that body to counter the policy of the Unity Movement and not only divide and confuse the people politically, but harness them as pawns in the struggle between the two herrenvolk sections of the Whites for political and economic control. In other words, the liberal bourgeoisie in South Africa were bent on removing the extremist Afrikaner Nationalists (descendants of the Boers) from power. If they had succeeded, it would have meant at best the introduction of a few black faces into Parliament as earnest of a better deal to a privileged section of the Blacks, but certainly not full equality for all. The leaders of the African National Congress had consistently co-operated with the South African liberals precisely because they aimed to be the beneficiaries in this neo-colonialist kind of set up. And to this day the policy of the African National Congress leaders in exile remains the same. That is why they continue to receive the strong support, financial and otherwise, of the liberals at home and abroad.

In the Presidential Address to the first National Conference of the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA), 1962 Tabata stated:

"APDUSA believes that in any society the people who create wealth and civilisation, and therefore are responsible for the progress of mankind, are those who provide labour in its many forms. Here in South Africa the bulk of the people who create the wealth of the country are precisely those despised and neglected workers in the gold and coal mines, on the sugar plantations (Natal), the white farms and in the 'Native Reserves.'" We are not saying that the white worker does not make his contribution, but we are saying that it is the majority of the oppressed Blacks who contribute the lion's share to a civilisation, the fruits of which they are not permitted to enjoy

"We believe that only the class which has a historical future can lead society out of the present crisis. History has placed the destiny of our society in the hands of the toiling masses. If we are to succeed in our task of liberation, we must link ourselves dynamically and inseparably with the labouring classes. Without them we are nothing. With them we are everything and nothing can stand in our way. No power on earth can hold us back in our march."

INTERNATIONAL NATURE OF THE STRUGGLE.

Tabata on many occasions when addressing the Blacks in South Africa, and in all his writings during seven frustrating years of exile, has stressed the international nature of the struggle. He

sees the convulsions of society in this era of imperialist wars and social revolution on a world scale as the conflict between two social systems, capitalism in its period of permanent crisis and socialism that is still struggling to be born in the womb of the old society.

IN THE BOYCOTT AS WEAPON OF STRUGGLE, he said:

"The struggles of the oppressed in this country are similar to the struggles of the oppressed people throughout the world history It is a struggle at this very moment is convulsing Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North, Central and East and West Africa, everywhere where people are striving to throw off the yoke of oppression."

It is logical, therefore, that at the conclusion of his book; Education for Barbarism, where he documents the racist theories and practices of the small rulers of South Africa in a historical period of "degradation, misery and moral destitution," he eloquently depicts mankind as standing on the threshold of new world conquests in their age-long struggle to liberate themselves from ignorance and fear by increasingly extending their control over the forces of nature and - though all too slowly - overthrowing outworn social institutions and evolving new ones. This is no mere expression of a facile faith in mankind. On the contrary, it is to come face to face with the revolutionary imperative of to-day, the conscious and organised struggle on the part of the exploited and oppressed throughout the world to liberate themselves from the yoke of capitalism-imperialism.

AFRICA.

In his seven years of exile Tabata has brought the same

scientific concepts and principled policies to the understanding of the problems of the African continent as guided the Unity Movement in South Africa. In grappling with the problems of Africa with all the violent contradictions endemic to the period of neo-colonialism, he is grappling with the continuing problem of liberating the oppressed peoples of South Africa, which in turn is inseparable from the achievement of real liberation, economic and political, for the independent states, and still further, for the whole continent. In his writings and speeches, in several memoranda addressed to the Liberation Committee of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) on behalf of the Unity Movement of South Africa, in his editorials to APDUSA and in his letters to Heads of States, he puts forward with all the urgency and clarity at his command, the necessity to see the problems of liberation in its entirety and to co-ordinate the forces of liberation in face of the overall plans of imperialism for the re-conquest of Africa.

In a speech entitled Rhodesia, a New Stage in the Struggle in Southern Africa, which Tabata delivered in London, in February, 1966, he states:

"Imperialism has big plans for Africa. That continent is one of the richest in the world. It supplies much of the raw materials for the industries of Europe and the United States. It is vital to their nuclear industry South Africa at the toe of the continent is an important base for imperialism It depends which way South Africa goes, whether or not Africa shall be placed in a position to free itself from the economic

stranglehold of Europe and the United States. South Africa with its great industrial potential, its gold mines and its already high standard of industrial development, with its technical know-how and its mineral wealth, could, if it became free, liberate the whole of Central and East Africa to start off with. By freedom I mean real freedom and real democracy, if South Africa became a socialist state. Such a development would upset the plans of imperialism, whereby the continent of Africa must remain a perpetual client of Europe.... But the imperialists know this and must do everything in their power to counter it."

Elsewhere, in the pages of the APDUSA, which the group in exile publishes from time to time, Tabata discusses how the imperialists are aborting the struggle of the oppressed people under the white racist regime - chiefly South Africa - by "making a strong bid to control the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), and through it the nationalist movements in the unliberated countries." His analysis is summed up in the two articles: The Problems of Africa, and the Crisis of the OAU and The Liberation Movements. Tabata perceives a new situation beginning to develop, marking the end of the successful application of the policy of neo-colonialism in Africa. The imperialists are forced to drop all pretences and "they are now contemplating a direct confrontation in Africa." This brings him back to the key problem, the role of South Africa. In spite of their hypocritical condemnation of apartheid, the imperialist powers have made it quite clear that they underwrite the fascist Vorster regime. From first to last, however, Tabata speaks for the oppressed millions

of South Africa and their vital role in the liberation of the continent. "There is only one defence against fascist South Africa," he writes, "and that is the power and the will of her own oppressed millions to overthrow the exploitive minority regime."

A biographical note on I.B. Tabata has resolved itself not so much into an exposition of the man, as of a liberatory movement. This is a natural thing, for it is the liberatory struggle that is paramount, and the life that has been bound up with that struggle for more than thirty years derives all its meaning from a single-minded pursuance of the liberatory goal.

We may add that I.B. Tabata has twice been invited to tour the United States to speak about the oppression of the Blacks in South Africa and their struggle for liberation. He went first in October, 1965, under the auspices of the Alexander Defence Committee, and carried out a most successful tour, addressing public meetings in towns across the country, as well as many student campuses, and appearing on T.V. Then in October, 1970, he was invited on a similar tour by the Committee for A Free South Africa and is probably returning to the United States later in 1971. He has frequently visited England where there is a London Committee of the Unity Movement. He has also addressed groups in Sweden and Denmark.