

SELECTIONS FROM SPARK

THE WORKERS PARTY OF SOUTH AFRICA (Editorial: Vol.1, No.1, March 1935)

The man in the street, when he looks at the world in general and compares it with this country, will most probably come to the conclusion that he is living in a paradise. Sheltered from all the storms that are raging in Europe, now here, now there, from the nightmare of war with its battlefields, air-attacks, gas-attacks, nightmares of revolution with its uprisings, general strikes, unemployed hunger-marchers, South Africa to his way of thinking is extremely lucky. 'A stable economic order, sound finance, honest administration', unlimited treasure in its gold mines, in its cheap and submissive labour: what more could Capitalism ask for? And he is convinced that Capitalism is the best possible system and that South Africa is going to remain a paradise for ever. We might very well leave this conventional fool in his fool's paradise were it not for the worker who unfortunately is being influenced by this conventional view, is losing faith in the working-class movement and is becoming unwittingly, a supporter of Capitalism.

History *seems* to pass on without leaving any trace of effect upon South Africa, upon the psychology of the people, upon their outlook. And this applies not only to the upholders of Capitalism, the upper and middle classes, but to the subjected and exploited as well. In spite of the lessons of the last three and four decades, the utter failure of the policy of reforms and gradualism, of British Labourism and Fabianism in the political field, and of class collaboration of Trade Unionism on British lines in the economic field of the Labour Movement: in spite of the lessons of the post-war period, on the one hand the successful Russian Revolution, which liberated the working class and poor peasantry from Capitalist exploitation and national oppression, and on the other hand, the general crisis of Capitalism, as a result of the resistance of Social Democracy to the revolutionary change, the advent of Fascism in a number of countries and a growth of the disease in almost every country, a last effort of rotting Capitalism to save itself by any means in spite of the terrific crisis which is now in its sixth year, a crisis which has revealed the rotteness and vileness of the system in its wholesale destruction of commodities, while people are starving for lack of them, which has revealed the inability of Capitalism to control the productive forces, has revealed its anarchy and inner contradictions in spite of the terrible misery inflicted on the working and oppressed masses, the lowering of their standard of living, the 'speed-up' methods, the chronic

unemployment and repression, conditions crying out for a revolutionary change, in spite of all this, Marxism has so far not succeeded in getting a firm foothold in the working-class of the English-speaking countries, and the great bulk of workers in South Africa, are either unaware of their historic role as the only progressive class in society, or they are indifferent, or they still entertain illusions concerning Democracy, Education, and a peaceful and gradual 'growing into socialism' by way of reforms.

Why is it? How can we account for it, and explain it? It is certain that a correct answer to this question is of vital importance to the working-class movement of South Africa as a whole, and in particular to the Workers Party of South Africa. For history has proved beyond any doubt that only revolutionary Marxism can bring victory to the working and oppressed people, and that all the distortions — Revisionism, Menshevism, Economism, Austro-Marxism — can end only in disaster. No middle way is possible. *Either* the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, *or* the dictatorship of the Bourgeoisie, that is, Fascism, war, barbarism, destruction.

In the first place it must be admitted that the objective conditions were not very favourable for a revolutionary movement. Here in South Africa, Capitalism has succeeded, more completely perhaps than elsewhere, in dividing the working-class, using in full the strong racial prejudices. It was not only skilled against unskilled, higher paid against lower paid, as in other countries, but it was also White against Black. The miserable wage (if it can be called a wage) paid the unskilled, to the Native, and the tremendous profits and super-profits derived from the enormous exploitation, made it possible for Capitalism here to bribe the skilled worker, the white worker, with a higher wage, a much higher standard of living, than in the countries of Europe. The white worker has as a general rule become an aristocrat of labour, and by ceaseless capitalist propaganda carried on by the Church, the Press, the Schools, and 'public opinion', has been kept separate, economically, culturally, and socially, from his black fellow-worker. Indirectly he has become the supporter of Capitalism, the supporter of Segregation, the supporter of the Colour Bar. And here we find the objective conditions for such a strange phenomenon as the South African Labour Party, which even among so-called Labour Parties, *has no equal* in its slave driver's policy and programme.

The Native worker, usually a worker only of the first generation, coming from the Reserve or the Kraal, backward, downtrodden, uneducated, could not at once shake off his tribal way of life, his barbaric naivety, and his suspicion of the white man, whom he could not imagine in any other role than that of an oppressor. Marxism was too much for him as a start.

And yet it would be wrong to assume that the failure lay in the objective conditions only. There are two historical facts which would refute such an

assumption. First, the Russian Revolution, and secondly, the temporary successes of Marxism in South Africa during the years 1920–1926.

Those who have studied the history of the revolutionary movement in Russia can easily see that many of the objective drawbacks of South Africa existed in pre-revolutionary Russia: backwardness, illiteracy, divisions on racial grounds. Yet all this, though it had far-reaching results after the Revolution, *did not prevent* the Revolution, because there was a revolutionary Marxist Party which knew how to fight against those obstacles and remove them from the revolutionary path.

The other encouraging fact which cannot be denied was the formation and growth of the Communist Party of South Africa. Those who read the old issues of *The Bolshevik* and *The Bolshevik*¹, those who know the great amount of propaganda and educational work done by the Communist Party of that time, who have studied the formation and successful development of the I.C.U., the strikes of 1921 and 1922,² and the slow penetration of the wall of racial prejudice, must admit that the failure has not been the result of objective conditions only, but of subjective weaknesses as well. The mere fact that the leaders of the Marxist Movement in South Africa were mostly foreigners was a serious drawback. Both the white workers and the intelligentsia looked upon it as a foreign movement and stood aloof. Trying to force the pace and unable to perceive the psychological factor in the racial cleavage, the Communist leaders antagonized the two sections to an even greater degree.

There were besides many blunders and mistakes on the part of the leadership. The role of the intelligentsia was not well understood and thus a useful ally was neglected. And then came the big change. The zigzag policy of Stalinism in the Comintern, the policy of breaking with the existing Trade Unions and building up separate revolutionary Red Trade Unions, the fatal slogan of 'A Native Republic', the theories of the Third Period, of Social Fascism, of the United Front From Below Only³ — all these could not but have most disastrous effects on the revolutionary movement. The best elements of the Party, those who were trying to raise a critical voice, were expelled, driven away, branded as counter-revolutionary. In a short time the Communist party was reduced to ruins. The degeneration of the small Communist Party of South Africa was merely a part, on a small scale, of the greater degeneration of the entire Communist International. The more the various Communist Parties of the world followed out the dictates of the Comintern, the more impotent, sectarian, and useless they became. 'National Bolshevism' broke the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat. The need for a new International became imperative.

But this was not all. In their blunders and ukases they managed to compromise the very name 'Communist', just as the Social Democrats did

with the name 'Socialist'. Because of this, and in order to escape possible confusion, and to avoid placing a handicap on the new Party from the start, we have had to drop the name originally chosen, 'The Communist League'⁴ and to adopt instead a new name THE WORKERS PARTY OF SOUTH AFRICA.

Notes by Editor

1. Presumably 1920 (the black miners' stike), and 1922 (the white miners' strike).

2. This seems to be a mistake. I have found no file of the *Bolshevist* and there is no reference to this title in any history of the CPSA. The editor(s) undoubtedly meant the *International*

3. The Comintern declared in the late 1920s that in the coming years, called the 'Third Period', world capitalism would be in crisis, and the objective conditions for its overthrow had arrived. Communists were instructed to set up revolutionary red trade unions and break with reformist bodies. All those belonging to groups outside the official communist parties were dubbed 'social fascists', and alliances with leaders of such movements were forbidden. Instead, the communist parties were told to participate only in united fronts with rank and filers — a mistaken tactic which proved to be a complete failure. In South Africa, despite the opposition of S.P. Bunting, the CPSA was instructed to campaign under the slogan of a Native Republic. This led to the near collapse of the party.

4. After the split in the Lenin Club, the majority adopted the name 'Communist League of South Africa', and the minority became the Workers Party of South Africa. It is not certain whether *Spark* No.1 appeared before or after the split. The above editorial resembles the May Day manifesto of the Lenin Club in 1934. I have only found two copies of the Communist League paper, *Workers Voice*, Vol.1, No.3, October 1935, and Vol.1, No.6, February 1936.

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THE TWO NATIVE BILLS

Editorial: Vol.1, No.3, May-June 1935

'Whoever consoles the slave instead of arousing him to revolt against slavery aids the slaveholder' (Feuerbach)

The Union Parliament, or rather the Select Committee of both Houses, has presented the country for its 25 years jubilee with two Native Bills. And without doubt these Bills can justly be considered the crowning work of 25 years of repressive legislation.

To the revolutionary Marxists, who have followed the so-called Native

policy of the Union Government since the famous Botha's Natives Land Act (which even the bourgeoisie calls the Act to keep the Natives out of the land), and who saw in their true perspective the Black Manifesto and the Smithfield speeches of our true Christian guardian, this crowning work, *The Natives Parliamentary Representation Bill* and *The Native Trust and Land Bill*, will cause no surprise. For at least we know that the oppressed classes and races can expect no justice from British Imperialism or from Colonial Capitalism. The crimes of both have no limit.

The publication of these Bills has been a shock to some archaic liberals of the Victorian school, or to humanitarian or Unitarian fools, who believe, or at least pretend to believe in the ultimate victory of 'democracy' — bourgeois 'democracy'. The shock is so great that they — who are the first to protest against the setting fire by a white brute to a Native hut, or such cases as the inhumanly blinded Sabatini, and similar minor brutalities of the white man's Christian rule — they have been plunged under a cold douche and can do no more than gasp. We may leave them to themselves until they recover and regain their power of speech. Those whom we have in mind, with whom we are preoccupied, are the Native town worker and the Native intellectual, who unfortunately are still listening to the missionaries, to the liberals, to the Professor Brookses and Jabavus, and are still centring their hopes in their King, in English liberal tradition, and so on. And they, the Brookses, the Jabavus, the Ballingers, the Marquards, who are the disappointed, the shocked, who are consoling the Native, they are the enemies of the Native.

We are not disappointed, we are not shocked. British Imperialism, British finance capital, is everywhere the same, true to itself, in India, in China, in Egypt, in South Africa. To expect from them an improvement in the lot of the oppressed people, oppressed economically, culturally, nationally and socially, is just as idiotic as to expect money from an octopus! Like the octopus it has but one function — to suck, suck, suck. The colonial people are its defenceless prey. True, even the octopus must sometime leave its prey, when it has to fight another octopus or some other deadly enemy. Then the British octopus had to fight the slave-driving Dutch sharks, then indeed they gave concessions to the Bantu and the Coloured. Then they gave them sham-equality and liberty; they gave them the vote. But that time has passed. The robbers have come to terms and now we have this delicious cake of Fusion. Those who have noted our spoken and written words for the last two years can well remember our analysis of this beautiful cake and our forecast *how* it will be used against the oppressed and workers of this country. All those [re]sounding fanfares, those solemn phrases, that decorative sweetness ('burying the hatchet', forgetting 'the lifelong strife' and establishing 'peace and unity in South Africa for the welfare and benefit

of all*) could deceive only simpletons of the Ballinger type, who are now counting up the number of Englishmen and Dutchmen respectively in the Select Committee, and asking: Where is English liberalism gone? We said at the time: The robbers have come to terms, not in order to give concessions to the workers, not in order to improve the lot of the Bantu workers and peasants, but to attack them, to exploit them more extensively and intensively, and to take away from them the remnants of such political rights as the subjected classes had succeeded in wresting from them in the years when the robbers were at loggerheads.

The driving force for Fusion were (i) the division of the spoils, cheap and ever cheaper labour, the real source of the ruling classes' profits, and their power and luxury; and (ii) the elimination of competition for this cheap labour.

For these reasons British Imperialism dropped its liberal cloak, which had fulfilled so useful a purpose in the past, giving Britain a hold on the imagination of the Bantu and Coloured (England the true friend of Native, devotion to Queen Victoria, to the Union Jack, etc.); and surely the liberal readers of the *Cape Times* must have wept in silence over this change of front, while they studied in editorial columns the shameless defence of the Representation Bill, and when they read there that overseas critics of South African Native Policy 'will today find themselves astonished at the generally liberal nature of the proposals'; and that a 'really honest attempt has been made upon liberal lines to enable them to work out their destiny under the white man's guidance in fuller and freer measure than ever before'. All this about a Bill which deprives the Native of the vote! However deeply we may compassionate such liberals as the Rev.R. Balmforth, Mr.Wm. Ballinger, Mr.L. Marquard, or Sir James Rose-Innes, in their shocked grief, we must rejoice that British Imperialism has come out at last in its true colours. For it is the mind of the Bantu millions that concerns us, and their old illusion of British Imperialism, and their faith in that illusion, still cloud their consciousness and prevent their awakening. It is for us to see that this illusion is destroyed.

For the same reason South African Capitalism has had to drop the dream of Independence. In the hope of realizing another dream, the dream of Segregation, they have had to drop the first. When there comes a competition between sentiment and profit, capitalism always chooses profit. Botha, Smuts, and now Hertzog have all had to tread the same road. This month we have seen Hertzog in the suite of British Imperialism at the Jubilee celebrations in London! The Empire is now his greatest ideal! How many fighters of the old Republics must have mourned in their homesteads over this final triumph of British Imperialism! And however we may pity the relics of bygone days, with its Stofbergs and its van der Merwes, we

must nevertheless learn for ourselves the revolutionary lesson. We must realize that the hopes for a revolutionary fight of South African Capitalism versus British Imperialism has no longer any foundation — it is a thing of the past. We have to deal with a united enemy, with Imperialism-Capitalism.

But leaving aside for the moment the advantages and disadvantages arising from these two points for the revolutionary movement, we turn again to Fusion. We have said that as a result of Fusion we have now a first blow — these two Bills. Others will follow. That means that these Bills would have been impossible without fusion. It is common knowledge that since 1925 Gen. Hertzog has tried hard to deprive the Natives in the Cape of their franchise. His efforts were unsuccessful, because the necessary two-thirds majority could not be obtained. But now, suddenly, 'the old passions have lost their intensity', the atmosphere has essentially 'changed', and with good feeling, with give and take'. Coalition and Fusion have done the rest, and, 'as a revival of the old passions *would break up the government*, the Bills are likely to reach the Statute Book'. Thus it is clear that this was the pre-arranged price for Fusion, that the voting in the Select Committee was a farce, for 'a revival of the old passions would break up the government'.

In this way Segregation, the dream of the African slave-drivers, is realized. The 'Master and Servant' division of Piet Retief a hundred years ago is again alive. The Native as the hewer of wood and drawer of water came back to life in the Civilized Labour Policy of the entire Fusion government. A white South Africa! The Native is not considered a part of the population of South Africa. He is an alien, a leper, who must be segregated. Nay, more. According to Smuts he is not even a human being. 'The Native in South Africa is the most enduring animal', said Gen. Smuts to a non-European audience in U.S.A. a few years ago. A man may well rub his eyes and wonder whether he is living in 1935 or 1835. In South Africa the clock is put back.

Yet it would be a big mistake to put the whole blame on the shoulders of the Dutch, or on the Northern Provinces of the Union. Was not the initiation in this policy taken by the Cape in 1894 when the Glen Grey Act was passed? And near about that time, in 1892, were not restrictions and qualifications put upon the franchise in order to make the Native vote ineffective? After that it was only necessary to remove those restrictions from the European franchise, and, behold! there you had the political segregation line. Then the women's franchise for Europeans only made the Native vote so feeble as to be practically worthless.

Yet even this nominal franchise of the Cape Native was a thorn in the flesh for the European ruling classes. And now the largest part and the most productive part of the population is deprived of any political right or shadow

of right. In this policy British Imperialism shows its real face.

Of course our Liberals and Fabians, 'friends' of the non-European, will set to work to console the disfranchised with the plan of Native Representative Councils, and a new Bunga, though even the Jingo press calls this merely a 'sop'. Or they may bring up the Land Bill by way of a consolation. For consolation is the political task and function of these 'friends' in capitalist society. And who is not a friend of the Native nowadays? Every exploiter, every bloodsucker, every rogue, every hireling, speaks of 'trusteeship' and the welfare of the Natives. Land for the Native to be bought with funds appropriated by a parliament made up of mineowners and landowners and their servants! What a mockery! What a joke! Just listen to what they themselves say.

'The success of this scheme (Native Trust and Land Bill) remain to be seen when it comes into operation, but generally speaking what we want to do in the country is *to keep down* Native over-population and not to give them more breeding ground' (Mr Justice Simpson).

Or again, read the proceedings in Parliament concerning the Vaal-Hartz scheme, and you will see how the legislators give land to the Natives, that is, how they rob them of even the miserable little share of land that they still have.

In this dark hour for the Natives, we consider it most injurious to console them, or to soften the blow with fine phrases about morality and justice, with loose promises and large hopes. Moreover, reminders that no nation that oppresses other peoples can itself be free, are by themselves sufficient. It is very necessary to add that liberation can be achieved not by submission, but *only* by fighting. Imperialism and Capitalism are doomed. But they will not die a natural death. They must be overthrown by a Revolution. The Revolution is a matter of life and death for all the oppressed, workers and toilers. If the Bantu workers and intellectuals, if the Coloured (who are next in the order of repression), if the white and Indian workers and Intellectuals, will realize that only if the International Revolutionary movement of the working class, only if the realization of the teachings of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, only in a South African and a World October-Revolution, lies our hope and salvation. If this blow will open the eyes of the Bantu workers and peasants, and free them from illusions, if the blow will bring us nearer together, South and North, black and white, then the disfranchisement of the Bantu may turn out to be a blessing, a temporary loss which will be followed by a real economic and national liberation of the Bantu from ALL oppression. For only the Revolution, only the over-throw of Imperialism-Capitalism can bring full liberty, full equality to all inhabitants of this country, of whom the Bantu form the greatest component part.