

P R E S I D E N T I A L A D D R E S S

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By Leo Siltali

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Meeting as we do under conditions which amount to an internal crisis, we would do well to make a critical survey of our activities during the last few years. In my opinion the best way to set about this would be to juxtapose the ideas of the two schools of thought which, for almost a decade now, have fought for supremacy within our Association. We shall, further, do well to trace each set of ideas to its source, critically examine the kind of behaviour each has given rise to, and, in the light of our findings, determine our stand in the future. We shall choose the year 1944 as our starting point.

Since the Nqabara conference in 1944 there crept into our discussions a word which, with the passage of time, has occurred with increasing frequency. That word is "Struggle". Since we can fix almost exactly the date when it began to feature so prominently in almost every debate in our conferences, it would not be unreasonable to conclude that from that same date there came to the full light of day a new tendency, a new outlook, a new approach to the problems facing us. In fact one might say that the appearance of this word so late in the life of the Cape African Teachers' Association is an indication that before then we hardly had the awareness of the existence of a problem requiring solution. We shall therefore devote some not inconsiderable time to a scrutiny of this mental attitude which has made the idea innate in this word the very hub of our discussions and activities, even to the point of impelling us to have it enshrined in our constitution in the now well known phrase - "To co-ordinate the struggle of the teachers with the general struggles of the oppressed peoples of South Africa."

Among the definitions of the word "struggle" we find the following: "a violent effort or series of efforts." From this definition it can be justifiably assumed that a struggle is bred by one or both of two conditions either of which will however produce the same result, i.e. violent effort. The first is a constraint that may be placed upon the free movement or development of a living organism, and the second, the desire of the organism to attain certain ends in the face of odds, of opposition. In the case of human societies, what leads to a struggle between one or more members and the rest, is a conflict of interests. When the contending parties are grouped around certain definite interests the realisation or continued enjoyment of which either the one or the other party feels will be jeopardised or minimised should its opposites have their way, we then have a struggle of classes. In such a case the question of a head-on collision is merely one of time.

Though the concept of a head-on collision is physical, Man, however, has at his disposal other methods than overt action either to constrain the movements or thwart the desires or ambitions of his adversary. But so has the victim or would-be victim means of

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frustrating the intentions of his opposite number. In any case the result is a struggle. Be it noted that in our statement of the conditions giving rise to a struggle we have not raised the question of morality. All we emphasise is the natural reaction of a living organism to the force that imposes a restraint on its movements or thwarts its desires.

No doubt then, the frequent recurrence of this word in our discussions and writings is an indication of our awareness of the existence of a clash of interests. It therefore remains for us to examine the nature of the forces that constrain us and the instruments used to impede our free progress to the desired end. In this connection a study of the events of the last twelve months should prove highly instructive.

But let us begin with a re-statement of the ends we desire to attain as teachers. Briefly these are :

- (a) The realisation of the principle of equality: of equal pay for equal work and qualifications.
- (b) Free, compulsory and equal State school-education.

The mere absence of these indispensable requirements of a sound educational system and a contented teaching personnel, is a symptom of a much graver ill - the absence of a truly democratic system of government in the Country. This immediately imposes on us, as a section of the oppressed, the task of attempting to convert South Africa, with the aid of the millions of the other disfranchised Non-Europeans, into a thorough-going democracy. But as soon as we turn our heads in this direction, we are immediately made aware of pressure acting in an opposite direction. This, to us, is the clearest indication that group interests are involved. It is proof of the fact that our present position is directly attributable to the machinations of another group that has a vested interest in our continued degradation. For this reason therefore, we are convinced that a study of these events will demonstrate that these pressures are the expression of the antagonisms that spring from a clash of group interests.

It was therefore in the pursuit of group interests that the liberal wing of the ruling class made the desperate but fruitless attempt to inveigle us into an acceptance of a patently inferior type of education when they invited us to a discussion of the Report of the Eiselen Commission last July. It is however sadly true that they managed to entice some principals of Secondary and High Schools to attend against the known and clearly expressed wishes of their Associations. Ever since then these gentlemen have felt called upon to espouse with all their might the cause of differential education as set out in this notorious Report.

It is no coincidence that it is these same men who unashamedly proclaim to the world that they have set themselves the task of disrupting our association. It could not be otherwise, they have allowed themselves to be subjected to pressure from outside. It will also not go unnoticed that it is these identical people who at that same conference thought up the idea of forming a Union-wide Principals' Association one of whose objects is "to consider how best they can lead their respective associations..." Lead them in what direction, may we ask? We may have occasion to return to this later in our address. Members of conference will however remember that it was round about this time that circulars bearing the signatures of these same persons flooded the Country. Simultaneously with this attempt of theirs to influence the teachers to leave their organisation, and contrary to all the facts at the time, the news was published in the

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herrenvolk press that large sections of the C.A.T.A. had broken away from their organisation. In what direction are they to lead "their" respective Associations, we ask again.

And when all this failed to produce the desired effect? You do not have to be reminded how the Department of Education opened a barrage on us early last December, how an ex-President of this Association, taking cover behind the hail that was being showered on us, emerged frantically waving the flag of secession. You know how dismally these shock tactics failed - then. Faced with the resistance of the teachers, the Department felt obliged, in the interests of the class whose instrument it is, to assume a very threatening attitude to us. This time our ranks cracked. A number of teachers resigned their membership of the Association.

So we meet here to-day with our numbers depleted. Yes, the herrenvolk has launched a vicious attack on us. Not only ourselves, but also our sister associations have been made the object of herrenvolk vindictiveness. First the Transvaal African Teachers' Association, and then the Teachers' League of South Africa came under fire. But, as I shall show later on, there is no cause for undue pessimism. We have to bear in mind that the law still stands that action and reaction are equal and opposite. We should further draw encouragement from the knowledge that in any such collision the greater mass always has its way.

Earlier we mentioned the agencies and the instruments used against us. If we are to carry on a consistent struggle we need to understand the tactics of the enemy. Not only this, but we have also to appreciate the effect of these on us and be able to account for whatever results may follow.

I am happy to say that it is no longer necessary in a conference of the Cape African Teachers' Association to go to great length in describing the rôle of the liberals of whose society the disrupters are so enamoured. Your summary rejection of their invitation last July is a clear indication that you fully understand on which side they stand - where their interests lie. However we perhaps need to to examine more closely their friends in our midst.

It has already been stated that what has given rise to the struggle between us and the ruling class is a clash of interests. Now it goes without saying that even the humblest of us does, by his actions, advance the interests of the one or other of the opposing groups. It is also a fact that in any society there can be only two fundamentally and irreconcilably opposed groups. In the present historical setting in South Africa there cannot be even a temporary alliance between us and any of the sections of the ruling class. Whoever then concludes any pacts with any of these sections is not our friend. Be it clearly understood that any such, irrespective of the colour of his skin, is a carrier of the disease-germs of the prejudices and outlook of the group-enemy. Our failure to isolate such will result in disunity in our ranks. I shall emphasise that none of the different sections of the ruling class is placed in as good a strategic position as the liberals to play effectively and efficiently the old game of divide and rule. (If we are not sufficiently vigilant, I can foresee a recrudescence of liberal influence in our affairs, with all the dire fruits which our forbears reaped as a result of their fraternisation with these gentry.)

If then we are to wage a consistent, principled struggle, we have to be sensitive to all pressures of the enemy class. And, I emphasise, these people who attend these Race Relations Institute conferences are the media through which the ruling class transmit their pressure onto us with the consequent disintegration of our organisations.

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In case there should still be among us those who believe in the myth of liberalism, and that the atmosphere at the conferences of the Institute of Race Relations is any cleaner than that, say, at a Nationalist Party Congress, I should ask them to account for the racialistic and even tribalistic tendencies and utterances of the elements who feel so much at home at the conferences of the liberals. I refer to their support of a measure that is clearly calculated to resuscitate tribalism such as the Recommendations of the Eiselen Commission. I shall ask them to read the racialistic references to "The Torch", the only newspaper that has consistently supported this Association and its policy as "the Coloured paper, 'The Torch'". Let them also wallow through the racialistic slime which these black liberals have poured across the pages of their manifesto. Hear how they attempt to whip up anti-Coloured feeling when they mendaciously write: "It was also decided that wheresoever the Coloureds met in conference, there shall their black half-brothers meet also. Obviously the Coloureds can't go to Pondoland where it is imperative (?) for conference to go, but the black half-brothers must go to Namaqualand to oblige their inflicted brothers...." "A section of African teachers has allowed African interests to be supplanted by Coloured interests," the document runs. The point we are making is that whether one is inspired by the Nationalists, e.g. Bhengu of the Supreme Council, or the Institute of Race Relations, e.g. the black liberals, they all spout the same racialistic filth. They have drunk from the same fountain, the question of the exact point where they stooped down to lap up the slime is immaterial. Just as we cannot choose between the front side and the reverse side of the same coin, so can we not make a distinction between the Nationalist and the liberal shoulder of the herrenvolk. Let us be warned. This group in our midst is, to vary the metaphor further, nothing but the wooden horse of Troy, and for our own safety we have to recognise them as such. No wonder then that there should exist a crisis within the Cape African Teachers' Association.

Having disposed of the agents and the wooden horses, even if ever so sketchily, we may now pass on to the instruments. These are mainly intellectual in nature. If we examine the Eiselen Commission Report (which however I am not going to discuss as it appears as a separate item on the agenda) we shall find that it is clothed in pseudo-scientific attire. Without specifying the position that the Black child has to occupy in South African Society, the report goes on to state that inasmuch as there is French or Chinese education, so is it right there should be "Bantu" education. Immediately our students of education, the same who plead for "pure education, unpoluted by dirty politics"; seeing what they think is an accepted educational principle, make a leap for it. They are blind to the fact that "Bantu" and "South African" are not synonymous terms. It does not make them suspicious that the division is on RACIAL lines, and therefore approximates very closely to the CLASS divisions in this Country.

Then again, though they know full well that immediately a culture ceases to satisfy the economic wants of a given age then it just dies a natural death, the Commission, donning a cloak of erudition, plagiarises from some sociological source the maxim that "in general the function of education is to transmit the culture of a society from its more mature to its immature members, and in so doing develop their powers." The question that immediately presents itself is: in what way will the acquisition of a primitive tribal culture assist the Black child to integrate himself into the socio-economic set-up of a South Africa that is rapidly being industrialised. It was not the job of the members of the Commission to reconcile these contradictions. So far as they were concerned this was part of the intellectual armoury of the class they represent.

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Arising, one should say, from a lack of discrimination as to the source whence the idea flows, are certain completely unfounded fallacies as to the nature of the war that is being waged on us. This, in turn has given rise to certain misconceptions as to methods to be adopted in defending our positions. In certain quarters it seems to be held that to offer no resistance will appease the enemy. In this connection one may cite the retreat after the S.G.E.'s second warning or threat. These people were simple enough to believe that a member of the enemy-class could protect them -- against whom?

Now in war one who seeks sanctuary with the enemy is called by a simple but telling word - "deserter"! But we shall refrain from using strong epithets. These people would do well to remember the story of the spider's invitation to the fly. For the latter to have accepted the invitation to walk into the latter's parlour would have been to betray astounding ignorance of the nature of his would-be host. In like manner for any of us to believe in the benevolence of a Department of a State whose primary aim is to protect the interests of the group-enemy by every means including violence, is not only to give up the struggle but to betray the cause for which we stand.

The mere fact of any of us entertaining hopes of protection by those whose interests conflict with ours is an indication that they have lost that independence of thought which alone can put them in the right frame of mind to put up a struggle. In other words they have reached that stage where they have lost consciousness of the irreconcilability of the interests of the subordinate group as opposed to those of the dominant group. When this happens, all awareness of a blocking of development or desire disappears. The absence of this in turn paralyses the will to struggle. In short they have succumbed to the intellectual weapons of the other group: they lie helpless, completely anaesthetised by the propaganda of the herrenvolk. The nett result of this is that they become active, even if unconscious, enemies of their own class interests.

Although we are willing to concede that many succumbed because of their misunderstanding of the nature of the weapons used against them, this can definitely not be said of those who ORGANISE the desertions into the enemy camp. Lest we be accused of being ungenerous to our opponents, we shall allow them to speak for themselves. We now quote from their own manifesto issued less than three months ago. In defining their standpoint they write as follows:

"We maintain that while no single organisation, however well-meaning can ever liberate a whole nation single-handed, when numerically strong, fully representative, officially recognised Cape African Teachers' Association representing employees on the one hand, can work effectively, and singly, to influence the Cape Education Department, representing the employer, on the other hand."

We shall not concern ourselves with the literary qualities of this monstrosity. Let us rather examine the thought process behind the words.

First then, we have the admission that ".no one organisation however well-meaning, can ever liberate a whole nation single-handed." This is OUR standpoint, and it is our emphasis of it that has brought about the crisis within CATA. Then follows their standpoint: "We maintain that when numerically strong, fully representative, OFFICIALLY RECOGNISED Cape African Teachers' Association representing employees on the one hand, can work effectively, and singly, to influence the Cape Education Department, representing the employer, on the other hand." (our emphasis.) The cat has at length been let out of the bag!

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Their standpoint has two - shall we call them - weaknesses. Both are dangerous to us all. The one, for which we pity them, is their failure to grasp the basic fact that the inter-racial relationship as between us and the ruling class cancels out the recognised patterns of behaviour and conduct as between employer and employee - the relationship in our case is one of master and slave. The other, for which we despise them, is the suggestion to teachers that in order to gain preferential treatment for themselves they should desert the people and their struggle for liberation. (Note that on their own recommendation the teachers should not struggle for liberation.) When they have done this, the traitors calculate, they shall be "officially recognised" -- as the enemies of their own class, of course. As such they will be recognised by their masters, and as such do we recognise them now. Into such a morass has opportunism, as opposed to principled struggle, brought a whole section of our intelligentsia. It is a shameful page in our history.

It will be objected by some that the intention of this address is to present a gloomy picture. Not in the least. The intention of the address is to present a true picture of the state of affairs. We have to know that our numbers are depleted, and why. We have to recognise the weaknesses of the past so that we may combat them. It has been necessary to own up quite frankly to our failure to register any marked progress in the past, and to put the blame for this where it should be rightly placed: squarely on the shoulders of those carriers of herrenvolk disease-germs who rested like lead on us, slowing down our progress and infecting large sections of our membership. The necessity for the candour with which we speak of our numerical weakness should be clear to all.

Twelve months ago, almost to a day, we congratulated ourselves on meeting in conference for the first time as a free Cape African Teachers' Association. ~~To-day we meet as a NEW C.A.T.A.~~ New because we have been able to cast aside all the dead wood; because we have rid our organisation of the transmitters of the pressures and the ideas of the herrenvolk. We are a new because a PURIFIED CATA.

Though numerical weakness is usually a cause for anxiety, in the light of what we have said above, we can truthfully say that in this particular case we have reason to be grateful that our organisation has been relieved of the incubus of these purveyors of herrenvolk ideas. We are pleased because we now know that those remaining with us are willing and are able to stand the blows that the ruling class is going to rain on us. It is those who pay more than mere lip-service to our programme and policy; it is those who are genuinely determined to struggle. When we consider what several hundred men and women can achieve when armed with such potent ideas as ours are, we are able to look to the future with calm confidence. With such men and women to count on, we can expect a steady forward movement. In fact we are almost assured of a rapid growth in numbers: but this time whoever comes into the C.A.T.A. will do so strictly on the **UNEQUIVOCAL ACCEPTANCE OF OUR POLICY.**

Pardon me if I dwell a little longer on this matter of numbers; its importance should be my justification. It will be remembered that when the new spirit first made itself felt some eight years ago, our membership stood at a bare 500. With the ascendancy of the new outlook however there was a spectacular rise in our membership. This happened because the teachers who had been standing outside the Association began to feel that the C.A.T.A. was being converted into an instrument of struggle. As early as then, those who had been prominent in the then herrenvolk-ridden C.A.T.A. took fright and left, deserted. They did so because their bodings and prognostications

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that the mere mention of the word "politics" would frighten the teachers away had been proved wrong. THEY and not the rank - and - file were frightened. Then after 1948, when we took a definite stand side by side with the people, our numbers all but quadrupled themselves. Scared by the growing militancy of the teachers of the association and the appeal of its policy for the generality of the teachers, a big section of the conservative wing broke away, taking with them a number of teachers who had not yet fully grasped the real meaning of our policy. These had to be taken away because although it had been hoped they would fight our policy with its orientation towards the people, these recent recruits almost invariably voted with the apostles of the new creed whenever matters of policy were discussed. They left, leaving our numbers at tripple the pre-1946 level.

It is very interesting to watch the tactics of the disrupters. A large, consciously struggling membership is always an embarrassment to the opportunist. So while they induced many of those who were still hazy about the real issues involved to go away, they themselves remained behind in the vain hope of re-capturing the leadership of the Association. They too now have had to admit failure. And as a troop of malignant spirits that have been cheated of their intended prey after hovering about him for a period of years spread out their bat-like wings and, raising a horrid croak, descend in dudgeon into the ether regions, so these sinister figures, unable to deliver the coup de grace on the militant spirit of the C.A.T.A., wail in their manifesto, "the so-called constitutional practice of fighting from within CATA is fruitless. The A.A.C. poison is strong. All the years since 1948 have testified to its strength." And thus wailing, they seek an atmosphere better suited to their nature and character.

So far as numbers are concerned therefore, we stand at just a little higher than in the days before the C.A.T.A. was regarded as a weapon of struggle. The important thing to note here is that the majority of those remaining are those who came in during the period of the ascendancy of the militants. I am here making the point that our policy recommends itself to the younger teachers. The quantitative change has been transformed into one of quality! Youth is with us; the future is ours!

It is because of this rebirth of our Association that it was found necessary to devote so much time to a re-statement of what the older members know to be the A B C of our standpoint. It is because we are to-day being virtually reconstituted. As we launch this new, this purified CATA, we want to fortify our positions against the infiltration of extra-group tendencies and immunise ourselves to non-class ideas. We have to exorcise the caste spirit of the authors of the shameful document referred to above which manifests itself in the despicable intention to leave the people to their own devices whilst trying to wheedle from the oppressor favours for ourselves by laying at his feet a "numerically strong, fully representative, officially recognised Cape African Teachers' Association.

Let us harbour no illusions. Our battle is on two fronts. On the home front we are faced with ignorance and treachery; on the other with cunning and all the resources of the State. Our weapons against these forces are two-fold: against ignorance we use the torch-light of our ideas, the ideas of the oppressed; against treachery and cunning, relentless, unremitting exposure. Not even the State with all its resources can render ineffective these weapons.

We should however not allow our zeal to blind us to the power of the forces ranged against us. The enemy can draw from resources we lack. For one thing we know that during the forthcoming parliamentary session legislation is going to be introduced with a view to implementing the recommendations of the Eiselen

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Commission. Two immediate results will flow from this. The first is that our conditions of service will be altered in such a way as to make our employment less secure than it is at present. By this means they hope to hamper our struggle. The second is that a premium is going to be placed on spying. A strain is going to be imposed on us as a result of the activities of those of our own people who will hope to reap material benefits for informing on their fellows.

We should however not be dismayed by the fury of the onslaught. Much less must we turn into suppliants for peace. We may have to change our tactics, but in no circumstances must we deviate by a hair's breadth from our course of struggle. Let us not be deceived by those who say that all this fury has been unleashed merely to whip a group of obstreperous teachers into submission. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The battle is not being waged just on the teachers, but on all the Non-Europeans. We are merely receiving our share of the scorpions. This is the mad fury of a beast turning at bay. These mad rushes tell a story of their own.

And now, in sheer self-defence, we shall have to come closer together so as to be the better able to take the shock of the mad rush of the herrenvolk beast. In this connection I am happy to say that our readiness to fight is beginning to pay dividends. Already the militant sections of the teachers' organisations in the other provinces regard us as their allies - (modesty does not permit us to say the vanguard) in this struggle. We are drawing to ourselves the best elements in the Country. Who says we are weaker to-day? Let us draw inspiration from this knowledge. We cannot lose. Justice is on our side. History is on our side!!

With our feet firmly planted on the solid rock of principle, and our eyes fixed on the goal for which we are striving, we cannot be shaken or diverted from our course. If we are convinced of the righteousness of our cause; if we firmly believe that the highest duty of every man and woman is to have attempted in his lifetime to assist in the creation of a new and higher society, we shall keep our vision clear so that we do not mistake the dross for the gem. We shall recognise ourselves as nothing more or less than men and women for whom nothing but the best, the very best, is good enough. It is this recognition of our true worth as humanbeings and the rejection of the false and base standards set by the rulers that will give us staying power to resist the pressure of the ideas of the group-enemy. In other words we shall be capable of a sustained effort or struggle only if we recognise our mission. For let it be remembered that we are not merely committed to resist any further encroachments on the rights which some thought had been brought down to the irreducible minimum, but, above all, we are committed to struggle for the attainment of higher ends, for a higher society. These are the things for which we stand and for which we shall struggle.

But in order to bring closer the realisation of our aims; in order that we may also have the pleasure of turning out of our schools boys and girls able to live up to the ideals we daily put before them; in order that the curtain may be rung down on the tragedy that is being daily enacted in every village, dorp, town and city: of broken hopes, soured souls, loss of faith in Man; in order that our children may have something to live for, we must rid this country of this blight of herrenvolkism which eats like a canker into the very vitals of our people, warping the bodies and souls of our children. But in order that our children may be assured of a brighter, cleaner future, we must go to the people and tell them the
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cause of the ills under which the country groans.

I urge you to go to the people for you are of the people. Rouse them to a consciousness of their responsibilities to their children and ours. Acting alone we are doomed to fail, but acting in concert with the millions of the oppressed in this country -- co-ordinating our struggles with theirs -- we shall be able to clean the Augean stables of South African Herrenvolkism. Giving to, and drawing from, the people, thus and only thus can we rise. Much, much beneath your dignity it is, and far be it from you to attempt or even want to attempt, as do the renegades now conferring amidst the foul fumes of collaborationism at Grahamstown; far be it from you to attempt to purchase concessions for yourselves at the price of the continued degradation of the people and the very children you teach. On the other hand go to the people and tell them of the carrion flies that buzz about the intended victims of their masters, the herrenvolk. Go to the other teachers who stand bewildered, not knowing which way to turn. For God's sake tell them not to give ear to the sirens that would lure them to the shambles called an "Officially recognised" teachers' organisation. Tell them that here, on the contrary, waiting for them, is a band of men and women who have chosen the path of struggle. Steep and thorny it is, but at the top lies the prize, ready to be won -- but not without a struggle.

What if the odds are great. What if the wrath of the fascist beast is roused against us. What if we feel his hot breath about our faces, and the foul stench of it assails our nostrils, shall we faint? What if we hear the yelping of the curs at his heels, shall we abandon the cause, shall we give up the struggle? No.

If we must die let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die -- oh, let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Will be constrained to honour us though dead!
Oh, kinsmen! We must meet the common foe;
Though far outnumbered, let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the grave?
Like men we face the murderous cowardly pack,
Pressed, dying, but fighting back!

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