ALL
AFRICAN CONVENTION

Presidential Address

BY
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THE AFRICAN CRISIS.

All Africans, as well as all other non-White races of the world have been staggered by the cynical rape by Italy of the last independent State belonging to indigenous Africans. After hearing a great deal for twenty years about the rights of small nations, self-determination, Christian ideals, the inviolability of treaties, humane warfare, the sacredness of one's plighted word, the glory of European civilisation, and so forth, the brief history of the last eight months has scratched this European veneer and revealed the White savage hidden beneath.

Two decades ago, millions of human lives were sacrificed at the altar of Belgian neutrality; to-day nothing has been done to stay Italy's determination to butcher in cold blood and asphyxiate our peaceful fellowmen of Ethiopia. Italy's defiance of solemn pledges has been met by hesitation, prevarication, caution, dialectics and pusillanimity, in turn. In 1914 it was a case of a White European nation, Belgium; to-day it is only Black Abyssinia.

As on other occasions, the Churches of the countries concerned claimed that God was fighting on their side, and invoked His blessing to prosper their imperialistic ambitions. Organised Christianity has so far failed to
curb the animal propensities of rapacity and selfishness in
the hearts of men who rule empires. The present world
muddle seems to be exactly what it was two or three
thousand years ago. Take away our scientific knowledge
of tools and we are where we were then. One man did
paint and illustrate a better way of living, but was
murdered by his Jerusalem contemporaries for doing so.
His professed followers have ended in lip service to Him,
so far as war goes. They have partly wished to effect the
change, and partly failed to take the necessary risks. Our
Prime Minister, if I interpret his Parliamentary speech
rightly, has disowned or superseded Christianity as a
working proposition in politics. The governing ideal in
human history is once more the Law of the Jungle. The
modern system centres round the glorification of national
empires. In so far as we are included as subjects within
and under these empires, we share the blame for their
tragic obliquity even against our will.

The structure of European political morality has
suddenly tottered and collapsed from above our heads
down to its pristine level of the jungle that obtained two
thousand years ago.

Might is still right, though it is no longer the might of
the sword but the vaunted science of aeroplanes raining
dynamite bombs and poison gas. That, in short, is the
pride of so-called White civilisation. It constitutes a
moral challenge to the rest of humanity.

(2) THE UNION PARLIAMENT.

During the debate on the Colour Bar Bill at Cape Town
in 1926 one member triumphantly asserted that he
supported the Bill because self-preservation was the first
law of nature, and defended the policy of repressing the
non-Europeans of this land. Early this year Parliament
again endorsed this policy by backing the Prime Minister
who declared:—

"I do not understand at all what you mean by Chris­
tian principles. Christian principles count for very
much, but there is a principle of self-preservation for a
nation, the principle which causes everybody to sacrifice
his life in time of war . . . . I place that principle still
higher. It is the only principle, that of self-preserva­
tion, of self-defence, by which humanity itself and
Christianity itself will ever be able to protect itself."

This astounding declaration rules out Christianity very
clearly from the politics of the Cape Town House of
Assembly, because, as one well-known writer puts it,

"Politicians are men of the world—of a world so
close and familiar to them that they can no longer descry
either its wonder or its horror. That familiarity be­
clouds the wider and deeper aspects of truth and
corroses the spiritual instruments that apprehend them;
it is no rare thing to find its victims mistaking a balance
of conflicting selfishnesses for justice, and supposing
freedom to exist wherever active revolt is not."

Guided by this philosophy of self-preservation as a
basis for discrimination, the Union Parliament has, since
its existence from 1909, registered no less than thirty-six
pieces of colour bar legislation against us, and this seems
the only basis on which such laws can be justified. Par­
liament has grown accustomed to passing differential laws
at our expense as a matter of course. They have fallen
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into a rut, as it were, from which they are unable to emerge
ty as they will. Out of sheer habituation they take it for
granted that segregation laws are morally right \textit{in se} even
where the rights of those on the opposite side of the
colour line are interwoven with theirs, as, for example,
the indirect taxes through which we circulate millions of
pounds over which we have a mathematical and moral
claim to have a say on terms of equality. To be denied
the equal right to dispose of money we equally contribute
is the absurd logic of segregation. We have been legislated
out of our equal right to sit in the Provincial Council by
reason of our black colour, segregation and self-preserva-
tion.

When we interviewed the Prime Minister last February
as a deputation representing the All African Convention,
all our instructions from you were inflexibly rejected on
the ground that Parliament only wanted this, and not that.
No heed was paid nor reference made to our answers
given through the five official regional conferences at
Maritzburg, Pretoria, Mafeking, King William’s Town
and Umtata, that cost the State £4,000 ostensibly for the
purpose of ascertaining our opinion. We asked for bread,
but got a stone. We asked for the preserva-
tion of the political \textit{status quo}, but got, instead, a new Bill embodying
our political inferiority and segregation plus a new colour
bar in the Provincial Council. On asking for the postponement
of the Land and Trust Bill till we had the
chance to visit the released areas \textit{in loco}, the Prime Minister
gave us to understand that the Land Bill would not be
proceeded with straightway after the first Bill; but, to our
amazement, it was taken and pushed through without
further reference to us. No regard was paid to our

request for the excision of the Squatters’ Section Four.
The few members who loyally fought for our cause (all
thanks be to them, the courageous eleven who worthily
challenged the course of ruthless injustice) at the Joint
Sitting were made to count for nothing, the proceedings
at one stage being steam-rollered in dictatorial fashion,
concluding with a photograph and festive celebrations, I
believe, elsewhere.

The impression one got of Parliamentary methods in
South Africa was that only the interest of White men is
considered by the majority of members. Everything is
rigidly subordinated to that interest. Outside the walls
of Parliament one found a large section, both articulate
and silent, who fearlessly espoused our cause by press
propaganda, public meetings and lobbying, and they
represented the old liberal tradition that is dwindling.

Inside Parliament, however, there is one paramount
interest, that of the White man. To demonstrate this,
let us, for instance, take the Budget. Most State budgets
in the world normally show some degree of lopsided
incidence of taxation burdens as between those able to pay
and those too indigent to pay, groups known as \“the
haves” and the \“have-nots.” This year’s Union budget
has astounded everybody in its totally callous neglect of
consideration for the poorest section of the population
who have silently shouldered their taxation without getting
anything from the vast wealth they help produce for this
country. Indeed the Black man planteth the vineyard
but eateth not of the fruit thereof.

For us the budget speech affords but little joy. Its
gifts are lavished among the rich in such profusion that
into a rut, as it were, from which they are unable to emerge try as they will. Out of sheer habituation they take it for granted that segregation laws are morally right *in se* even where the rights of those on the opposite side of the colour line are interwoven with theirs, as, for example, the indirect taxes through which we circulate millions of pounds over which we have a mathematical and moral claim to have a say on terms of equality. To be denied the equal right to dispose of money we equally contribute is the absurd logic of segregation. We have been legislated out of our equal right to sit in the Provincial Council by reason of our black colour, segregation and self-preservation.

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some of the white beneficiaries have actually declined to accept the gifts out of a sense of shame and fear of their constituents. The Minister of Finance, perplexed to find ways of scattering his phenomenal surplus derived from cheap Black labour, a surplus that has recurred for years in succession, chose to relieve the opulent groups from income tax, leaving the lucky White farmers, because of their omnipotent franchise power, free from all direct taxation that cannot be labelled nominal. These farmers were privileged to feed their cattle and pigs at a cost of only 5/- per bag of maize during the drought while starving Natives had to pay 18/- a bag to save life from death, as the Government had made a law for the convenience of White farmers to sell mealies in England for about half-a-crown, feed their animals for 5/6, and turn round to us and say it is the law, and the law cannot be changed! That is the meaning of the new policy of "Trusteeship" so-called. I think it stands self-condemned ab initio.

No wonder our neighbours of Rhodesia have characterised it as being "distinctly ungenerous." Just think of the ghastly fact that the Black races have enabled the Government to reap profits of over six million pounds per annum through their cheap labour at the mines, labour that would cost four million pounds more if it were White labour, especially when working profits have risen by 100%, and dividends swelled by 70%, the Treasury will not let go the one odd million pounds of Poll Tax sucked out of the blood of our people under distressing circumstances of poverty and even penury. Nobody in Parliament so far as I am aware suggested the reduction or abolition of this draconian tax of blood. I think it is fair to be taxed according to income and ability to pay, but the Native Poll Tax of £1 all round is a savage anachronism. On the one hand the pensions for aged White men of sixty, who never pay Poll Tax as we do, have been increased, while on the other hand the Black men of sixty who are too poor to pay any tax but have always paid it, get no pension whatever and are forced by law to find £1 or go to prison. Parliament genuinely does not know that this tax absorbs the wages of two full months each year in the case of thousands of our people. Such things will be known only when we are represented on an equality by Black men in Parliament, and there are many in this hall who are good enough for that position. We have no choice but to keep on agitating for this equality. Otherwise we shall never be rescued from this travesty of justice.

(3) THE ALL AFRICAN CONVENTION.

Last December in this hall we held a mammoth and epoch-making gathering representative of every conceivable African organisation in the Union and parts of our adjoining Protectorates, for the purpose of giving our reply to the Native Bills such as they were then. We framed a unanimous answer and your committee proceeded to carry out your instructions, it is hoped, to your satisfaction. We must now make plans for the future and consider

(a) What to do with the new Acts, (b) how to consolidate this organisation and promote its unity and efficiency, and (c) devise schemes for improving our economic welfare by self-help.

We are thus confronted with a greater problem than
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ever, a problem demanding prevision or foresight instead
of precipitate impetuosity; sanity in place of hysteria,
and combined action rather than mutual wrangling.
Your discussion will, I hope, result in a sensible agree-
ment as regards our attitude to the new legislation and
towards the future of the Convention.

You will have to examine a number of possible courses
along with their advantages and disadvantages. Among
these will be:—First, to declare a complete boycott
on all the new Acts, adopting a policy of retaliative
reprisals and bottled revenge.

In favour of this, we could startle White South Africa,
attract the notice of the rest of the world and win our
rights by using the fear of a bloody revolution as a weapon
of propaganda.

Against this, one cannot calculate what the end of it
would be. It might end in disaster. It presupposes
that every single person literate and illiterate will obey our
word of command. It presupposes a perfect organisation
where there are no blacklegs. It will be hard to apply it
to the Land and Trust Bill. Its collapse would make
the last state worse than the first, because it would pre-
clude all possibility of our unity thereafter. It rests on
the use of force.

(b) To make an unconditional acceptance. This
course offers no advantage whatever, for it would mean we
accept all these laws as being just.

(c) To evolve an intermediary policy of using what
can be used and fighting against all that we do not want.
The advantage here is that we can keep the goal we are
striving for constantly in view before us and work for the
repeal of these colour bars backed by the strongest support-
ing forces in the country. We would keep our self-respect,
get new opportunities to initiate fresh efforts, educate
backward followers and ensure loyalty. Its drawback is
that it will prolong the battle and exasperate those who
are burning for quick results.

(d) There will possibly be other alternatives that will
emerge from your discussions. Whatever be the diversity
of opinions you hold, you will be well advised to be
mutually tolerant, remembering that we are all working
for the same end, to save Africa from virtual serfdom.

There will be no divergence of opinion as to the need
of self-help and a more effective mobilisation of our
economic forces for that purpose. Here I shall venture a
few suggestions.

We should find a solution for an escape out of poverty
by all practicable means within our power. So long as
we are an impoverished community we shall never rise
and scale the heights of success to which our mental and
physical capacity entitles us to attain. We should burst
our way into the vocations that create wealth among our
communities. Those of us who secure a better education
must abandon the idea of confining our ambition to
Teaching and the Ministry, necessary as these are in all
life. It is time for us to take up Law, Medicine, Commerce
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further them. Let us learn how to support our own
traders however humble they may be, out of a patriotic
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abstraction and an isolated ideal, but it is a necessary preliminary step for people in our stage of development to attain commercial effectiveness, especially because we have often been criticised for being bad business men as a race. I do not subscribe to that condemnation, and it is for us to disprove it by deeds. In America I found a slogan among the Negroes “Keep your money within the colour,” meaning that a Black man should do all his shopping at another Black man’s shop whenever possible. If a Negro trader supplies good sugar, then all the Negroes in the town or district buy their sugar at his store, making him flourish and provide employment to others of his race. Following that example, we could multiply the number of our humble shoemakers, tailors, grocers, taximen, bus contractors, butchers, farmers, co-operative stores, adopting a scheme of self-upliftment to counter the Government’s anti-Black and repressive “Civilised Labour” policy.

(4) A WORLD OUTLOOK.

Among our tasks is that of educating our Union rulers on our view of affairs and our reason for claiming equal rights, because our situation here is but symptomatic of the world-wide travail of all repressed communities and dominated classes even apart from the local colour problems that complicate and obscure the true issue of class repressing class. Our ways of thinking have to be revised till we dispassionately apprehend the general problem of our failure to live amicably as an evil facing all mankind, and as such needing concerted effort by all nationalities. We must be agreed and determined upon certain fundamental principles such as these:

(a) Segregation and colour bars must go; alternatively we want a separate State of our own where we shall rule ourselves freed from the present hypocritical position.

(b) Economic repression must go. We can do that partially ourselves; for if we but knew our power we could hold up the industries that depend on our labour in one day and secure terms approximating fairplay. We are not so powerless as we often imagine ourselves to be.

(c) Selfishness must go. In our primitive African tradition we used to smell out and destroy all abnormally acquisitive individuals as a danger to society. By this crude method we guaranteed all men a chance to have food, shelter and clothing without prejudice. This is a lesson we Africans can teach Christendom, for Christendom still needs a change of heart from selfishness.

The supreme task of this Convention is to protect the interest of Africans not only in the Union but in all Africa. It is our duty to protect our fellow Africans in the Protectorates against being forced into the Union of South Africa contrary to their wish, until the policy of the Union is changed and made more liberal than it is at present. One eminent European press writer in this country last February flattered us in the following words:—“This All African Convention is to-day to the Natives of the Union what the India Congress is to the people of India. It is recognised by the Parliament of this country as the mouthpiece of the Natives of South Africa, and any resolution which it takes on Native questions will carry great weight not only with the Black peoples of the whole of Africa, but also with the Government and Parliament in Great Britain.”
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That is the outcome of unity and unified organisation which we must jealously guard against losing. In order to retain this unity, we, leaders, must avoid mental stagnation. Our minds should be kept refreshed by the breezes of fresh knowledge gotten from the vast available literature concerning what other leaders in the rest of civilisation are doing in facing problems similar to ours.

For example, a stirring Presidential Address was delivered last April in Lucknow by Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, head of the All India Congress, a perusal of which (in its full version) gives much food for thought. In the course of that address he indicated that the efficiency of Congress organisation means little if it has no strength behind it, "and strength, for us, can only come from the masses." He emphasised the fact that the vital section of the Indian population was that of labour and the peasantry, and that the leaders must protect these classes from suppression and exploitation; for the most important question was appalling poverty, unemployment and indebtedness. Hence the need for closer contact with the masses.

These exhortations are applicable to us. Whatever we do or decide upon, we must not lose touch with our backveld masses. The time is ripe for us leaders to reconstruct and rehabilitate all our mass organisations to fight starvation, poverty and debt.

Says Nehru, "Let us not indulge in tall talk before we are ready for big action." I think this wise advice is worth following.

Once we emancipate our people from the servitude of poverty we shall be able to accomplish great deeds. The stumbling blocks placed in our path are for us to remove.

If we do not work hard to remove them we shall get only what we deserve to get. If we succeed in removing them we shall be in a position to render to the world the contribution due from Africa.

(Read the "Minutes of the All African Convention," June, 1936, price 1/3 post free, Lovedale Press).
That is the outcome of unity and unified organisation which we must jealously guard against losing. In order to retain this unity, we, leaders, must avoid mental stagnation. Our minds should be kept refreshed by the breezes of fresh knowledge gotten from the vast available literature concerning what other leaders in the rest of civilisation are doing in facing problems similar to ours.

For example, a stirring Presidential Address was delivered last April in Lucknow by Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, head of the All India Congress, a perusal of which (in its full version) gives much food for thought. In the course of that address he indicated that the efficiency of Congress organisation means little if it has no strength behind it, “and strength, for us, can only come from the masses.” He emphasised the fact that the vital section of the Indian population was that of labour and the peasantry, and that the leaders must protect these classes from suppression and exploitation; for the most important question was appalling poverty, unemployment and indebtedness. Hence the need for closer contact with the masses.

These exhortations are applicable to us. Whatever we do or decide upon, we must not lose touch with our back­veld masses. The time is ripe for us leaders to reconstruct and rehabilitate all our mass organisations to fight starvation, poverty and debt.

Says Nehru, “Let us not indulge in tall talk before we are ready for big action.” I think this wise advice is worth following.

Once we emancipate our people from the servitude of poverty we shall be able to accomplish great deeds. The stumbling blocks placed in our path are for us to remove.

If we do not work hard to remove them we shall get only what we deserve to get. If we succeed in removing them we shall be in a position to render to the world the contribution due from Africa.

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