PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS
TO THE
ALL AFRICAN CONVENTION

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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS.

Eighteen months ago the emergency meeting of this Convention adjourned stunned by what may rightly be described as the most reactionary piece of legislation ever passed by any parliament claiming to be civilised, an Act abrogating equality of citizenship at the expense of a loyal people merely on the ground of colour and race differences. We then decided to try out, rather than boycott, the substitute of an admittedly emasculated franchise, a franchise branded with inferiority, with results all too well known by now. At that time we had been assured by the Chairman of the Native Affairs Commission that this abolition of political equality would, by some talismanic virtue known only by himself, change the Europeans and make them kind-hearted towards the Africans.

Instead of displaying that new sympathy, the Union Parliament actually devised, as a next step, and passed a most condemnable Act shot through and through with rabid anti-African prejudice and repression, viz., the Native Laws Amendment Act, an Act probably unparalleled in Christendom or in pagan despotism for ruthless injustice, and passed it in the teeth of innumerable protests by European and African organisations, nay, by the whole nation outside of Parliament. And this is not the first time the Union Government has rushed anti-Native legislation against the better feelings of its populace.

As though this were not sufficient evil for the day, the head of the Government proceeded thereafter to demand from England the transference to his Union, of the adjacent Protectorates.

This Convention, as you will remember, had incidentally anticipated the situation by opposing the proposal on the ground that such transference would not be in the best interests of the Africans in those Protectorates, especially while the policy of the Union Government continued to be that of Segregation, Colour Bars and all sorts of political and economic discriminations at the expense of the Africans. It is some consolation to find that public opinion in England has at long last been roused on the question. Certain influential bodies in England have taken action and formulated the following statement:

Great Britain has no right, morally and legally, to cede a protected Territory like Bechuanaland or Swaziland or Basutoland, without its consent, to any other power, even within the British Commonwealth of Nations. The Natives of the Protectorates earnestly desire to remain under the protection of Great Britain. They wish, however, to be under the Colonial Office and not, as at present, under the Dominions Office, to which the three South African Protectorates, without being consulted and without their consent, were transferred about 1927. Of all the numerous Protectorates of Great Britain, these three are the only ones under the control of the Dominions Office. These three Protectorates were no parties to the Act of Union, or to any agreement or understanding that they were to be incorporated in the Union, at any time. The Act of Union, whilst making provision for the enlargement of its borders, neither implied nor promised the transfer of the Protectorates to the Union. The Memorandum prepared by the Parliamentary Committee for studying the position of the South African Protectorates (August, 1934) and signed by Lord Selborne, as Chairman, pointed out that Rhodesia
and the Protectorates were in an identical position. He summed up as follows: "It is quite clear that Rhodesia was not given to the Union at the time of the passing of the South African Act, 1909. Nor were the Protectorates. When the South African Bill was before the House of Commons the Minister in charge stated: 'The wishes of the Natives in these territories, will be most carefully considered before any transfer takes place.' Reference may also be made in this connection to the following statement made by General Hertzog in the Union Parliament on March 25, 1925: 'Our position has always been, as a party, that we are not prepared to incorporate in the Union any territory, unless the inhabitants of the territory are prepared to come in.'

Today the Union has within her borders over 6,000,000 Natives, for whom no adequate material provision has yet been made. Is it wise, at this stage, to add hundreds of thousands more to that number? Is this urge to annex the Protectorates prompted by a concern for the welfare of their inhabitants or by a desire to replace wastage of man-power? We have had 27 years of Union rule, and the percentage of unfit Natives resident within our boundaries has so greatly increased that it is estimated over 50 per cent of the Natives recruited for work on the mines are rejected as being medically unfit. Surely the solution to this problem is not the introduction of further supplies of labour to be similarly exploited, but rather the care and development of the resources which are already at our disposal. In certain quarters in the Union, it has been strongly urged that space should be found in the Protectorates for the Union's surplus Natives. It is natural, therefore, that the Protectorates should feel that the Union is more interested in the acquisition of their land than in the economic condition of their inhabitants. What legal guarantee have they for their security? Only this year (1937) the Appellate Division decided that the courts could not question the validity of an Act of Parliament. Already we have on the Statute Book an Act (No. 38 of 1937) which provides that the area of any tribal land may, at any time, be curtailed, if it be deemed "expedient in the general public interest"; or a whole tribe may be removed from its hereditary land to "any other place" within the Union: Would it be reasonable for the Natives to surmise that it might be considered "expedient in the general public interest" to appropriate their land, where suitable, for White settlement? It has been suggested that the true analogy to the Protectorates' position is that of the Transkei, and that a comparison of the two is all in favour of the Union. Mr. A. B. Payn, the local member of Parliament, is reported to have summed up the position of the Transkei as follows:—"In describing the economic importance of the Transkei in the Union, Mr. Payn (according to the Cape Times report) said that its population of 1,200,000 owned one-third of the Union's cattle and one-seventh of its sheep, and provided one-third of the Native labour on the gold mines. The territory, he said, was one of the most fertile tracts in South Africa, but owing to the Government ban on the export of cattle from it, and the consequent increase of grazing animals, it was rapidly becoming a desert. The low prices paid for wool and the tax on Transkei tobacco had reduced the natural wealth of the country tremendously. Under present conditions, indeed, it was impossible for a Transkei Native to become prosperous. The adoption of the 'civilised labour' policy,
too, had obliged the Union Natives to leave their work in the town and return to the Transkei. The result was that they were now reduced to a state of economic slavery. The Transkei, he said, deserved far greater consideration from the Government. Unless we adopt a sympathetic attitude, an educated type of Native will arise who will be bitterly antagonistic towards us. It is necessary that, if the Europeans wish to exclude Natives from certain fields of employment, some other branches of industry shall be provided for them.

This position in the Transkei does not produce in any Protectorate the desire to become an integral part of the Union. For, should the Protectorates be transferred, what reason have the Natives to suppose that they would receive better treatment than those living in the Transkei, should the Union continue to pursue her present policy?

"The main features of our present policy are separation, repression, and distinction on the grounds of colour." In the words of Professor Leo Fouche (Professor of History at Witwatersrand University) which were published on December 12, 1936, "We have decided to coop up the Natives in reserves, which are wholly inadequate for their purpose. We claim the colour-bar as the corner stone of our relations with them. But our entire economic structure is based on 'cheap' Native labour. So, while we push the Natives into their reserves with one hand, with the other we drag them forth again, and by the hundred thousand, to our industrial areas. There we teach them a thousand new things, new wants, new inspirations. We inoculate them with the virus of 'progress' and then return them to their kraals, as restless, dissatisfied apostles of change... Thus we provoke a terrible new challenge for ourselves. Instead of honestly facing the problem in its new aspect, we play the ostrich. Our children will suffer for our lack of courage."

"At the close of this last session (1937) the most repressive law yet enacted enables Natives born and bred in the urban areas and living there as respectable citizens, to be deported to some other place in the Union, without their consent. There are those who maintain that our Native policy is not one of repression but one of trusteeship. Are they aware of these facts: (1) In 1934 over 60,000 Natives were imprisoned under the provisions of the Native Taxation Act, not because they were unwilling to pay their taxes, but because they were unable to do so. (The rest of the community are not liable to such taxation, but even if they were, the inability to pay would never be made a criminal offence). (ii) Native education is neither free nor compulsory. Yet a large proportion of the cost is met out of the "direct" taxation referred to above. Though there is compulsory free education for all White children as far as standard VI., an educational authority recently stated that only two out of every 400 Native children were given the chance to proceed beyond Standard II.

"In view of these facts it appears that our vision has been limited. Must not our conception of trusteeship widen, if the Protectorates are to enter the Union willingly?... We have built on a basis of materialism and exploitation of both land and labour. Let us remember that the livelihood of our State is vitally dependent upon our natural resources. The time is ripe for national reconstruction on a basis of co-operation, and the development of all sections of the community. Each
of these has a valuable contribution to make toward the upbuilding of a united nation. A policy of repression prompted by fear, creates its own vicious circle. It is impossible to ignore the value or importance of any individual section, particularly the largest, without fear of the future consequences. Until we have evolved a constructive and progressive policy for our most backward citizen—those Natives already under our control—is it practical to assume further responsibilities? The Right Hon. Sir James Rose Innes, in an address delivered in 1934, reviews the position thus:—

"Black and White have to live side by side in this country. The Minister envisages the future as one in which the White man will keep the Black in permanent subjection. Not a very lofty ideal. Surely there is a better one. Can we not look forward to a future in which the two races, not physically intermingled—for no one wants that—but retaining each its own individuality, with equal opportunities and equal freedom, will work together for the advancement of their common country? That is surely the finer vision.’ Will it not be time enough to discuss the transfer of the Protectorates to the Union when we have proved ourselves worthy of this stewardship?"

I make no apology for making this long quotation; for it demonstrates what other sensible people are thinking both in this country and overseas. And it is desirable for us, when we meet here in this uniquely representative fashion, to teach each other some of the fundamental facts that form the background to our present semi-slavery condition under the policy of the Union Government. Remember that the Union Government is now an out-and-out independent country from England. It is able to do just what it likes with us without being answerable to England. It has full power to dispossess us of our vote, as it did last year; to alienate our lands; to remove us from anywhere to anywhere; to deprive us even of freehold right to land, as it is now doing at Port Elizabeth; to maintain, as it does through the Pass laws, a constant state of martial law; to curtail our liberty of meeting and speaking, as it does through its Native Commissioners; and to exercise over thirty other laws in its colour-bar catalogue. In granting this unlimited freedom to the Union Government, England acted magnanimously, in the belief that this sacred trust would be used in a Christian manner, but was manifestly outwitted by the superior political adroitness of our local politicians. The result we all know to our cost. Nevertheless the present demand by South Africa for the Protectorates, gives England the privilege to examine and approve or castigate the Native policy of the Union Government, because if the Protectorates are handed over, the Native chiefs and their people will automatically lose their present freedom of ‘Indirect Rule,’ lose their rights of owning the land they dwell on, fall under the notorious 1913 Native Lands Act with its harrowing horrors, be forced to undergo the repressive Transvaal Pass Laws, be subjected to the Native Servants’ Contract Laws, and many other unpleasant and humiliating ordinances that England knows nothing about. The Europeans in the Protectorates will be exempted from all these laws because they are colour-bar laws, and therefore their opinion is of no importance either way, for the local opinion that counts is that of the indigenous Africans who will forego their freedom and
lose heavily by transfer to the Union Government. Our lot is an unhappy one in all conscience, but we do not wish to see our brothers and sisters in the Protectorates dragged into it against their wish.

The proposed transfer is a question of urgent importance to all Africans and people who sympathise with our aspirations; because it is symbolic of what may possibly happen to all other territories governed by Europeans in Africa, if the morality of white South Africa is to be allowed to lead Europe. Our efforts in this connection must not fail; otherwise all Africans will ultimately be doomed to conditions tantamount to slavery. That is the significance of this Convention. Upon our success or failure depends probably all Africa South of the Equator, while Africa North of the Equator is equally interested, as is also the rest of the non-white world. We have to think in terms of the international situation throughout the world and link ourselves up with other non-white and white organised groups that respect human personality as something sacred. We need a wisdom based both on a liberal education and a proper acquaintance with our tradition of loyalty to authority and leadership.

Towards the end of last year, one famous West Indian Negro remarked:

"The leadership of the race all over the world today should concentrate on Education as the primary factor in preparing the Negro for his new defensive position. The political situation is grave. Geographically, he has no foothold. He has become the ward of a suspicious, malicious and heartless civilisation. In every section of the world where he finds himself, he is hemmed in with a limit on his movements. He can go thus far and no farther. Everybody's eyes are upon him. If he walks the streets he is watched; if he rides in the car he is watched; if he stands still he is watched; whatever he does, he is watched; he simply must not pass; that is the ultimatum of his surrounding world. Now, how can he get out of this? It is not by foolishly fighting back, to be clubbed to death economically and politically, but by diplomatically manoeuvring himself out of the situation with credit to himself. This can only be done through a better education. Every Negro in his sphere must have himself educated in the superior fashion, so as to be able to deal with his prejudiced competitor on the spot. If the Negro is more intelligent than his competitor, he can handle him. Therefore it is the duty of the Negro to develop a high state of intelligence superior to his adversary's and use that education for the means of extricating himself from the hole in which he is placed."

Further, I may add, we need to be educated or trained to help our local masses; to understand the power and influence of our headmen and chiefs for we cannot get at the masses except through the ohiefs; we need to know the mentality of our townspeople; to know their longing to be freed from the yoke of injustice; to know that some do not want this freedom unless it comes through their own leadership, because they prize leadership higher than freedom from misery; to know that some are still slaves to tribal prejudice; while others slavishly follow the latest "ideologies" of the European, like a reed blown by the wind; and others are slaves to negative criticism of every constructive effort, answering to the proverb: "Those who can, do; those who can't, criticise." In short we need to know our strong points as well as our weak ones.
To make a success of this Convention we have to cultivate the golden qualities of honesty, character, mutual respect and unity. Upon these we can lay a true foundation for our succeeding generations to build the salvation of Africa. We have a noble objective set before us, for we demand equality of treatment, equality of justice, equality of recognition as human beings made by God of one blood for to dwell on the face of the earth, capable of developing upward to the best of what other nations on the globe have achieved. We cannot compass this destiny without starting at the bottom with stable local organisations which need true leadership and sacrifice of money, effort and time.

Your Executive Committee has done its best to provide guidance in this direction for the Convention.

May we at this session continue the good work for the benefit of all Africans in particular and in general for the advancement of the forces of justice among all nations in the whole world.