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BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN FORCED BACK HOME

By

RICHARD LINCOLN.

Dr. Z.K. Matthews, a hero of South Africa's resistance against racism and tyranny, left New York last week for his native land - although he wanted to remain here at least a few weeks longer. But South Africa would not approve an extension of his stay. In South Africa, Dr. Matthews faces possible imprisonment, loss of job and almost certain harassment and restrictions by the Union government which is pledged to keep the African "in his place."

Dr. Matthews spent nearly a year in this country as Visiting Henry Luce Professor of World Christianity at the Union Theological Seminary. He is also the Cape Province prodicent of the African National Congress which led a year-long peaceful defiance campaign against South Africa's "unjust laws" of extreme segregation. Some 8,000 Africans were arrested in the course of the campaign, including Dr. Matthews' own son, Joseph.

While on our shores, Dr. Matthews and his wife have brought the point of view of the African people to may thousands of persons in hundreds of meetings throughout the Eastern states.

Although reportedly harassed by South African diplomats (and finding no comfort among US officialdom), Dr. Matthews left with a very warm feeling towards the many people he has met here, and was especially gratified to see the growing interest of American Negroes in Africa's struggle for freedom.

"People here are much more concerned than their government realizes," Dr. Matthews said, in his parting words.

Speaking sometimes two or three times a day to church groups, clubs and students or in university workshops, Dr. Matthews found that attitudes had changed considerably since he was last in the United States as a student at Yale University 20 years ago.

"I found nothing then like the interest in African Affairs as I discovered when speaking this time. Twenty years ago, despite the vise of Hitlerism and worldwide depression, the prevailing attitude was one of isolationism". He continued:

"Now the average Americans have not just an interest, but a deep sense of responsibility for the world leadership they believe has been thrust on them, along with a sense of inadequacy for this responsibility.

"The rest of the world is looking at this American interest with mixed feelings of fear and hope - fear that the USA will succumb to a new imperialism and opportunism and hoping that it will not."

Despite the growing concern of Negro Americans for African freedom struggles they are "not interested enough in terms of the importance of these struggles for the Negro people here," Dr. Matthews said.

"To the extent that Africans receive recognition of their just claims, the position of Negroes in the United States will be definitely influenced," he added.

Africans, according to Dr. Matthews, are very conscious of the American Negro people "and still regard them as a part of Africa."

"Africans will never disown the American Negro. For us he will always be of African descent."

Among Negroes most well-known to the African people, he said, are Booker T. Washington, mainly due to "missionary influence;" George Washington Carver, Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois, Jesse Owens, Paul Robeson, principally as a singer, and Joe Louis.

"When Joe Louis was going to fight, Africans would get up early in the morning so that they could hear it over the short wave radio," Dr. Matthews related, "and Africans knew very well the records of American Negro athletes in the Olympic games.

In analyzing differences and similarities between African and U.S. Negroes' campaigns for equality and freedom Dr. Matthews took sharp issue with a statement by Dr. Max Yergan recently in the magazine "U.S. News and World Report."

Yergan claimed that there is no similarity between the two problems because Negroes in the United States are a minority and Africans a majority. Therefore, the whites in South Africa are more dominated by fear of being surrounded by a "Black sea" than are white Americans.

"Yergan is very much mistaken," Matthews asserted. This is a moral and not an arithmetical problem. There have been terrific struggles in America for instance, despite the Negro's minority status. And in the last 20 years, the Negro's position has improved - but not because of a decline in numbers.

"In Hawaii, on the other hand, where non-whites dominate the population, there has not been a bad racial situation. White supremacy is a matter of indoctrination, there is no inevitability to race conflict.

"On the contrary, in South Africa, Afrikaans literature, history books and propaganda must constantly put the fear of the "black menace" before the public. If the issue was not constantly raised by those who profit from it, the white and black population would undoubtedly get along."

In comparing the two problems, Dr. Matthews thinks that the American Negro has a number of advantages over the African in his fight for full freedom:

1. They all speak the same language.
2. They are, in the main, Christian.
3. All are "Western" culturally, and therefore easier to "weld into a fighting group."

4. All are considered "Negroes" and are not divided by the country into castes.
5. They have the advantages of education and Constitutional citizenship; therefore the fight for equality can be based on the Constitution for its implementation.

Africans, on the other hand, Dr. Matthews said, speak various languages, have different religions, cultures and tribes. What is more, they are officially divided as to "Natives" and "Coloureds" (of mixed origin) with different rights and restrictions.

Africans must also fight the Constitution itself, which is based on the denial of rights to non-whites. In fact, he pointed out, as opposed to the situation in the United States, every amendment to the South African Constitution has been to take away rights from the Africans.

Africans, for instance, had the right to vote in the Cape Province from 1854 to 1936 when that right was taken away. Now the Cape Coloreds face the same fate.

Nevertheless, Dr. Matthews believes that Africans "are more politically conscious and more united in their struggle for freedom than American Negroes," who "because of the level of rights they have attained have tended to break up into individualists.

"With the Africans, no matter what individual attainments might be, they are treated just as other members of the group and this has strengthened their solidarity and made them a better fighting force than American Negroes."

Africans have the advantage, he said, in:

1. Fighting in their own homeland;
2. Never having actually been slaves;
3. The fact that their cultural and language background - though diverse - has never been lost, and that the histories of great men, such as Chaka and other chiefs, and the struggles against invasion operate as a "tremendous cohesive factor."

Dr. Matthews intends to resume his teaching post at the African Fort Hare College in Cape Province where he is a professor of social anthropology, native law and administration - if he is allowed to.

He also hopes to take up his duties as president of the Cape Province African National Congress, premier African organization, and principal organized force against the hated South African "apartheid" system of extreme segregation.

Judging from the threats and harassment he has received even while here, however, Dr. Matthews may very well face extreme punitive measures from the South African government.

He may, like other non-Communist African leaders be "listed" by Malan's administrators as a "Communist" and be banned from attending meetings, be restricted in his movement, and be required to resign from all organizations.

If he should refuse, he could be tried under Malan's sweeping Suppression of Communism Act - affecting all who do not agree with Malan's "apartheid" policies - and be sent to prison.

Most of the African leaders, including Matthews' son, have been tried and convicted under this act, which defines advocacy of any political, economic, social or industrial change, or any relaxing of the color bar, as evidence of "communism".

Dr. Matthews' harassment by authorities while in this country revolved mainly about a request that he testify at the United Nations on the Union's repressive "Apartheid" policies.

Last July, the African National Congress wrote to the UN Secretary-General asking for an opportunity to place their grievances before the world body. Dr. Matthews who was at that time in New York, received a cable from the General Secretary of the Congress authorizing him to testify before the UN, should the occasion arise.

In October, after the question of South Africa's racism was placed on the UN agenda through the request of 13 African and Asian delegations, the Rev. Michael Scott, long a spokesman for the African people, wrote the world organization asking that they hear Dr. Matthews testify on "apartheid".

When the South African delegate to UN saw Rev. Scott's letter, he immediately jumped to the conclusion that Dr. Matthews had suggested the idea and "tackled me about the matter," Matthews said.

A South African delegate, A.A. Roberts, visited Dr. Matthews and warned him that to testify "would ruin your chances for leadership of your people."

"I replied to him, "Dr. Matthews said, "that I think the confidence of the people is more important than the confidence of the government."

The next day, the ambassador himself, G.P. Jooste, sent his car to the seminary to fetch Dr. Matthews.

Like Roberts, Jooste wanted Matthews to issue a statement declaring that he would not testify at the UN under any circumstances. "Acceptance," Jooste told him, "would be regarded as a hostile act against the Union of South Africa.

"If you appear, you will in fact be joining the enemies of South Africa," Jooste insisted.

Jooste also insisted that it was illegal for the UN committee to invite him as an individual to speak, and that previous testimony by the Rev. Michael Scott was "Not a precedent."