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The Black Worker and the demands of our time

As South Africa moves inevitably to its waterloo, as the country led by people who elected themselves and without conscience continue not only to elect themselves, but also continue in deciding almost every facet of the lives of the unrepresented, unfranchised, and unconsulted black masses, there comes a time when voices must be heard, where concerned institutions and their leaders must awaken from slumber to address themselves to the demands of our time.

The changing economic and political patterns in South Africa today, based on an economic system which is exploitative in nature, a system which in South Africa tries to resuscitate an almost dead system of tribalism as witnessed in the co-called national states, a system which breeds a social cancer, in the form of migratory labour, which system has placed the black man below the very dust as far as human dignity is concerned. A system which created fearful monsters of labour camp in the form of Soweto with its high death rate, high rate of rapes, muggings and general hooliganism.

It is blatant lies upon which this system is based that necessitated the current "total onslaught" call emanating from certain quarters who are bent on frustrating legitimate attempts by the Christian fraternity and the whole oppressed people to break the fetters of perpetual subjugation.

It is the very system that gave rise to the current black workers consciousness as manifest in the hundred and one trade unions whose emergence is a constant feature and characteristic of the South African labour situation.

As South Africa moves towards her "baptism by fire", the astronomical trade union membership and the amount of labour strikes, accompanied by detentions, intimidation and police harassments are the hall mark that accentuates the antagonistic interests between the haves and the have nots, between non-owners and the owners of the means of production. In short the contradictions between labour and Capital.

The above facts are characteristic of an inhuman and exploitative system. The bearers of this exploitative system function pursue certain ends, namely, to expand value, to subordinate enjoyment, and to accumulate. Each exploiter is forced to continue extending his riches, because of competition with other exploiters, making it impossible for the producers of labour power to benefit from their production. It is an obvious fact that the expansion of profits through accumulation is antithetical to the interests of those who produce labour power.

Under such a system of exploitation, anything that increases the proportion of exchange value which goes to the employer must reduce that which the worker receives. Notable in the South African exploitative system is that when the richness increases so does poverty to the opposite extreme.

A classical example witnessed is the recent boom of maize production and gold prices on the international market. Sharply contrasting these reports are the announcements by the farmer's association that maize prices were going up and the reports of kwashiorkor and malnutrition cases in the Voice Newspaper of 29 April - 5 May 1981. These are lamentable contradictions within a system maintained and supported by multinational companies in South Africa.

Today we have gathered here as Christians ostensibly aiming at finding ourselves and the role which the church as the servant of God and the oppressed people must inevitably play. The Church may, like Pontius Pilate, be at a decisive moment of truth, where it must take a stand between what is evil as represented by oppression, and what is good as represented by freedom, justice and human dignity. A challenge indeed!

If the church fails to recognise the brutalities of June 16 1976 and the subsequent bloodshed as witnesses in South Africa, the church will be failing 80 percent of its membership in South Africa at the critical hour of need.

If the church of God conives at the brutal system of migrant labour, based on gigantic lies and myths that the black people will attain political emancipation in gloomy economically unviable barbed wire apartheid, called Bantustans - euphemistically referred to as National States, the church will be failing Christ as a servant of the poor, the suffering and the downtrodden people.

If the church of God in South Africa today closes her eyes to situations such as those at number 80 Albert Street in Johannesburg where job-hungry and willing men cannot find employment because of the whims of minority people deciding who is to work, where and when, then the Church of Christ and its leaders will not be heeding the call of Christ when he said of St. Peter: "Upon this rock I shall build my Church."

If the church of God in South Africa today can remain unconcerned about the plight of the blacks in situations of rising rents and the high rocketing cost of living which are not commensurate with wages, resulting in evictions and object poverty as manifest in high mortality rate of infants, and, the general physical and mental disabilities that follow such cases, and also noting that all these happen in a country endowed with rich mineral resources that benefit only a few, then the Church of God will be unresponsive to the harsh realities experienced by its own followers.

The challenge of the Church is to address itself positively to the anguish of its black followers as pointed out above, lest it tanshes its image, and perhaps excise that umbilical cord that connects it with its followers in South Africa today. Perhaps that cord may be cut and never to be rejoined in the future Azania, unless the church and its leadership take a positive stand on these issues.

Having experienced an unfortunate and sordid chapter in our history in South Africa, as workers, Christians, students, women's organisations and political organisations, a chapter characterised by treachery and betrayal, greed, hypocrisy and blunder, a united front becomes an imperative in our chief endeavours to meet the demands of our time. Unless the church develops in unity with the oppressed masses as a bastion for action, and unless all strata of the oppressed unite to develop this bastion for action, the progress

of our liberation struggle will always be militated against by the exploitative system and its kindred forces.

The broad front envisaged here is the major challenge of the day, and can be persued in the following manner:-

By formulating initially an Adhoc Committee consisting of all social, political, religious and cultural organisations from all sections of the oppresses masses. It must be noted that here we are thinking of political bodies, sports bodies, churches teachers' organisations, workers, nurses associations etc.,

We mention the following few organisations as an example:-

Azapo
Azaso
Committee of 10 and SCA
Mwasa
TAC
Mdale
Cosas
Taverns Association
RMWU etc.

The purpose of the Adhoc Committee would be to consult in order to formulate and adopt similar stances on national issues like commemorations, boycotts etc. It would serve to create a dynamic system of co-ordination and communication between the organisations and the masses and, amongst the organisations themselves, resulting in a mass based programme of action at all times of need.

The time has come for all the oppressed people of South Africa to address themselves to the objective conditions, the realities of our situation, to move out of gambling houses of self-seeking and careerism and submerge their dichotomous attitudes for the sake of progress. Ideological differences, if any, should not bar the way for a common programme of action. This is very simple indeed. The black people are oppressed collectively as a group. This is the main factor in common to all strata of the oppressed.

Noting that we are faced with a powerful and united oppressor, our salvation equally lies in our unity. This united front would enable us:-

- (1) To embark on a broad front based programme of exposing political careerists, selfseekers, quislings and sellouts who daily help the oppresseive structure to realise its aims.
- (2) To heighten political activity aimed at exposing the evil machinery that perpetuates our servitude.
- (3) To formulate a broad opposition structure aimed at galvanising the masses against their common anguish.
- (5) To route the system and its agents who operate within liberation movements and black organisations.

In conclusion let us embark on a programme that will create a distinct distance between this conference and the next one, so that as workers in Christ we must proudly say with St. Paul, "I have run a distance what remains is the crown for salvation".

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