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B.N 18 I

The question we, as trade unionists, and all the people of South Africa have to answer, is which side are we on?

Are we on the side of those few unscrupulous politicians who are busy erecting a terrifying pyramid of racial hatred, depriving all the citizens of the country of the last vestige of liberty, employing the sovereignty of Parliament to destroy representative government?

Are we on the side of those who treat the constitution of the country with the same contempt as Hitler treated peace treaties, who want to destroy the trade union movement and leave the masses of workers defenceless?

Or are we on the side of those who want to see liberty and democracy preserved and extended and South Africa a great democratic nation?

Men and women throughout the ages and in all countries have fought, suffered and died for those very elementary liberties of which the present Government is depriving the people.

The whole of human history is a struggle for human liberty and for human progress. Ten thousand noble South Africans found heroes graves in distant lands and many millions of others gave their lives only recently to rid the world of the very tyranny which our present government is inflicting upon the people. Five years ago, at the end of a terrible war, it seemed as if South Africa was entering upon the stage of great national progress. The ordeal of war, the defeat of the Nazis, brought a spirit of hope, confidence and tolerance to the mass of the people.

Three years of Nationalist Government rule has transformed the country. Instead of hope, confidence and tolerance, despair, fear and hatred stalk the land. Almost everyone hates and is being hated by someone in turn. Everyone is afraid.

The ten million Non-Europeans are full of hatred and fear; hatred of oppression, and fear of what further oppression will be inflicted upon them.

Hundreds of thousands of workers are full of fear of what may happen to their wage standards, to their trade unions, to their rights as workers. The two and-a-half million European people are filled with fear. They feel instinctively that the policy of the Nationalist Government will lead to inevitable disaster. Ordinary peaceful citizens fear their passports may be taken away, their homes be searched; the Minister of Justice may at any moment dub them "Communist" and ruin them.

Even the Nationalist Government itself is full of fear. It knows that its policy of ruthless oppression is creating a volcano on the African Continent which will one day erupt. Mr. Barnard himself is full of fear. I remember distinctly the speeches he made on the platform of the City Hall, Johannesburg, together with the late Mr. Hofmeyer - quite different in tone from the speeches he makes now.

Yes, the Government, spurning reason, logic and all human decencies, having no constructive policy to put before the people, exploits ignorance and thrives on fear. Mr. Swart, to get his monstrous law through Parliament spoke of the communist plot to poison the wells of the country. That was a despicable attempt to instil fear and cause confusion. All knew the story was pure invention. Yes, there has been poisoning - mass poisoning - in South Africa, the poisoning of our entire national life not by communists but by the disciples of Hitler.

What has all that to do with trade unionism, one or two delegates asked. I will tell you! Those of you who know anything about trade unionism, about trade union history, will know that trade unionism can only exist and thrive in a democratic society where people are free to meet and express their opinions freely without fear of the policeman's knock, or of being deprived of their liberty without even the semblance of a trial.

The reactionary apprehensive policy of the Nationalist Government is not only a threat to our liberty; it is a dire threat to the future of our children, to the future of South Africa. You, fellow delegates the whole trade union movement, must choose. Are

- 3 -

we going to become a miserable bunch of hands-uppers, of cowards, of traitors and bring untold suffering to hundreds of thousands of workers and misery to the whole country? Are we going to follow the miserable example of those so-called leaders of the workers who, inspired by the ignoble spirit of cowardice and treachery, are trying to split the workers and only to save their own skins? Many such leaders in Germany, Italy and other countries travelled the same sordid path and met with miserable ends.

Or are we rather going to draw our inspiration from the countless heroes, martyrs who readily fought, suffered and died for human liberty and human progress?

The issue before us is not whether some people should be made to suffer for their political beliefs, but whether South Africa shall become a Fascist Police State. No sacrifice on our part will be too great to build South Africa into a proud, beloved and great democratic nation.

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TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961

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