

After the tribal wars and the loss of their country the African people became near slaves, living under the rule of the white capitalists and land-owners. As they and the other non-Europeans could never agree to being segregated and exploited in their own country, they began to organise for freedom. Their organisations were at first very weak, but as time went on they became stronger, as the people began to learn more about politics and as they gained more knowledge from their struggles.

The first step of course was for the non-Europeans to begin to understand that unity was needed. The African peoples were made up of different tribes, who had often fought with each other in the past. Zulu and Sotho, Pondo and Xhosa, Tswana and Pedi had to understand that they were all Africans, that they all suffered under the same land laws, pass laws, and so on, that they all had the same need for freedom. In the same way the Coloured people and the Indians had to understand that they too were oppressed by the same government and should make common cause with the Africans in the struggle for freedom. This unity is not yet complete, but already big steps have been made towards it.

The beginning of the African National Congress. This was the first real united political movement of the African people. It was started by P.Ka I Seme at Bloemfontein in 1912. Seme said: "The demon of racialism, the aberrations of the Xhosa-Fingo feud, the animosity that exists between the Zulus and the Tongas, between the Basuto and every other Native must be buried and forgotten. We are one people. These divisions, these jealousies, are the cause of all our woes and of all our backwardness and ignorance today."

The Congress took up the struggle against the Land Act of 1913. It organised deputations which went to London to ask the Government of England for help. They got nothing in London. The deputations at least did this much good. They proved that the English Government had no interest in helping the African; it had handed over South Africa to the white South Africans.

Against the Land Act the Congress could only pass resolutions. Thousands of African share-farmers were driven off the white farms and wandered about homeless and starving until they at last became wage workers on the farms and in the towns.

The Indian Passive Resistance. In the meantime the Indian people in Natal were showing how a people, without votes, could fight against a strong and powerful government and beat it.

The first Indians were brought to Natal in 1860 to work in the sugar farms. The sugar farmers brought in Indians because the Zulus were unwilling to come and work for low wages. In those days the pass laws, poll taxes and land laws were not as strong as today and the Zulus still had land on which they could earn a living.

By 1895 there were 80,000 Indians in Natal. Very heavy poll taxes were made for the Indians; every man, woman and child over 16 years old had to pay £3 per year. After 1893 Indians, though born in Natal, were not allowed to vote. In 1906 the Transvaal Government made a pass law for Indians and Chinese. It was against this pass law that the first Indian passive resistance movement began. It was led by Gandhi, a young lawyer who came out from India in 1893. Gandhi believed in non-violence (Satyagraha) and his followers were called Satyagrahis. Gandhi and thousands of Satyagrahis went to gaol for refusing to carry passes. In 1907, 13,000 Indians and Chinese were imprisoned in the Transvaal for refusing to register under the new law. In 1913 the Indian workers in Natal went on strike against the poll tax. Gandhi led two thousand resisters on a march to the Transvaal. As soon as they got to Volksrust they were all arrested. A number of white supporters of Gandhi were also arrested.

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The movement was too big for the Government to stop. Smuts, the Minister of Justice in the Union Government, was forced to give in. The £3 Indian poll tax in Natal was withdrawn, as was also the Indian pass law in the Transvaal.

The Struggles of the White Workers (1913-1922). The Government of Smuts and Botha which represented the interests of the mineowners and other capitalists, was engaged in struggles with the white workers from 1913 to 1922. When the white gold-miners went on strike in 1913 Smuts called out English soldiers (there were still some in South Africa at that time) and many strikers were shot in the streets of Johannesburg. In spite of this, the strike was successful. The Government prepared to crush the workers and when another strike started in 1914 Smuts at once arrested nine of the workers' leaders and deported them, without trial, to England.

Another big miners' strike took place in 1922. By this time many of the white miners were Afrikaners who had come to the Witwatersrand from the platteland. They were supporters of Hertzog's Nationalist Party, but they made common cause with the English-speaking workers, most of whom followed the Labour Party. The chief cause of the strike was the dismissal by the Chamber of Mines of some 2,000 white miners. The chamber also wanted to replace certain White miners with Africans.

For this reason many of the strikers took up the slogan of a "White South Africa", and there was much feeling against the African workers. The "left wing" among the white workers, who called themselves Socialists, were opposed to these attacks on the Africans. They said that agents of the mine-owners and the Government had encouraged the feelings of hostility against the blacks. They said the real enemy was the Chamber of Mines. However they said nothing about uniting with the African miners against the Chamber of Mines.

The strike ended in fighting between the police and the strikers and many were shot on both sides. The strike was lost, but after it was over the Nationalist and Labour Parties made a "pact" by which they promised to support each other in the next election. The election took place in 1924 and the Smuts Government was beaten.

Many African voters in the Cape voted for the Pact candidates. One reason was they were angry with the Smuts Government because of the way it had treated the non-Europeans. This Government had passed many bad laws, such as the Land Act and the Pass Laws, and also had shot down African people (Israelites) at Bulhoek in 1921, and Bondelswart Hottentots in South West Africa in 1922. The Israelites were religious people who settled on the commonage at Queenstown. They refused to go, saying it was their land. Smuts sent soldiers armed with machine guns against them and killed 163, wounded 129.

The Nationalist-Labour Pact Government passed the Colour Bar Act in 1926. This law makes it illegal for non-whites to do certain sorts of skilled work.

The Socialists. In the meantime there were some white people in South Africa who belonged to the "left-wing" of the workers' movement. These people believed in the unity of the workers and were opposed to any sort of colour bar or apartheid. Already in 1915 the International Socialist League, led by Sidney Bunting and Ivan Jones began to preach to the non-Europeans the message of socialism. Afterwards they formed the Communist Party, which included both Europeans and non-Europeans on an equal footing and which carried on this work. These people have done much to educate the non-Europeans politically and to help them build up trade unions and other organisations.

During the first World War many Africans were recruited in the "Labour Corps" and went to France where they found there was no colour bar. They came back to this country with new ideas. The rising cost of living caused many strikes. There was a "bucket strike" of sanitary workers in Johannesburg in 1918. The next year the African National Congress led a big pass-burning campaign - the first attempt by Africans to defy unjust laws. In 1920 came a strike of 40,000 Africans on the gold mines.

All these things helped to open the eyes of Africans to the need for trade union organisation and led to the next big movement - the I.C.U.

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The Industrial and Commercial Union (I.C.U) This was the largest organisation ever built by non-Europeans in South Africa. It was started by Clements Kadalie, following a successful strike of dock workers in Cape Town in 1919. In the same year Masabalala, the I.C.U. Leader in Port Elizabeth, was arrested, without charge and put in gaol. Thousands demonstrated outside the gaol and though there was no violence the police opened fire killing twenty-one persons.

The I.C.U. spread like a veld fire to all the corners of South Africa. In 1923, at Bloemfontein, there were more shootings of Africans by the police, helped by white civilians, but this did not stop the growth of the I.C.U, which moved its head office from Cape Town to Johannesburg in 1925. In 1926 Kadalie, who refused to carry a pass, was banned from entering Natal. He defied the ban and went to Durban where he addressed a meeting of 8,000 supporters.

By 1927 the I.C.U. had about 200, 000 members. Unfortunately its leaders did not understand the right way of organising trade unions. They did not organise branches, industry or take up the demands of special sections of the workers. They did not lead proper strikes but simply held meetings and collected money. Many of the leaders were too fond of their nice jobs and were not willing to sacrifice themselves for their people. The C.I.D. sent spies into the organisation to try to smash it from inside. The Government passed new laws to stop agitation - especially the Native Administration Act of 1927. The leaders began to preach "hamba Kahle" and a number of Communists were expelled from the I.C.U.

Because of these things, the I.C.U. broke up into a number of different organisations. Champion made a separate I.C.U. in Natal, and Keable Mote a separate one in the Free State. Kadalie left the old I.C.U. to W.G. Ballinger, and himself started the Independent I.C.U. The once strong I.C.U. was broken into many small weak bodies and the Government, which had been very frightened, was no happy again.

The start of real trade unionism. In 1918 a start was made with the building of real trade unions on the Witwatersrand. Unions started at this time were the African Clothing Workers, the Laundry Workers and the Furniture Workers. There were a number of strikes, which resulted in the workers in these industries getting better wages and conditions. There was a further growth of non-European trade unions before and during the second World War. Coloured and African workers were organised at the Cape and Indian and African workers in Natal. - In 1945 the non-European Trade Union Council claimed to represent over 150,000 organised workers.

The workers organised were practically all factory workers in the big towns, like Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Kimberley, Johannesburg and Durban. The farm workers and the mine workers remained unorganised. In 1930 the Cape African National Congress organised many farm workers in the Western Province, though not on trade union lines. The movement was important because of the unity that was achieved between Coloured and African workers on the farms. The chief leaders of this movement, Elliot Tongeni and Bransby Ndobe, were banned from the country districts of the Cape.

Organising the Miners. Many attempts have been made to organise the African mine workers. This is a very hard task because of the compound system. In 1941 the Transvaal branch of the African National Congress held a conference in Johannesburg to organise an African Mine Workers' Union. In spite of difficulties, the union, under the presidency of J.E. Marks, managed to enrol many thousands of miners. The Chamber of Mines refused to have anything to do with the Union or to listen to the complaints of the workers. In August 1943 at a meeting at Newtown Square, attended by over 1,000 delegates, the miners resolved on strike action. Twenty-one mines took part in the strike and some 75,000 workers were involved. The mine-owners, supported by the police, would not allow the workers to strike in the ordinary way. The police entered the compounds with guns and batons and the workers were clubbed back to work. Nine mine-workers were killed and the Mineworkers' Union suffered a set back.

This was the greatest strike by Africans the country had seen.

THE HERTZOG BILLS AND THE ALL AFRICAN CONVENTION.

Hertzog's bills, passed with the help of Smuts' United Party in 1936, were another step towards the enslavement of the African people. To fight the bills the need for some united organisation was felt. An All-African Convention was called at Bloemfontein. To it came the leaders of the different branches of the A.N.C., some of the different I.C.U.'s and many other organisations. Leaders who had opposed each other for many years made common cause against the bills which were known to be a threat to all Africans. Unfortunately, during all the time of quarrelling very little organisational work had been done and the leaders who met at Bloemfontein found that they had no followers to back them up. The All-African Convention did little more than pass resolutions against the bills. There were no big demonstrations by the people, no protest strikes nor any sort of defiance of the Government.

The Convention tried to keep going and to work out a programme which all African people could support. The programme of demands was good, but it needed the organisation of the people to back it up. The Convention leaders could not agree among themselves as to how the people should be organised. In fact it was the African National Congress which began once more the task of organising the people to defy unjust laws. Gradually the Congress won back its old position as the chief leader of the African people in their struggle for freedom.

Growth of Non-European Unity. UP to the time of the Second World War there had been little unity between the African, Coloured and Indian peoples. Each had fought its own fight in its own way. But from about 1939, with the outbreak of World War II the idea of the Non-European United Front began to gain ground. Unity between the different organisations became easier because more militant and radical leaders came to the front among the African, Coloured and Indian people. It began to be understood that all non-Europeans must together.

Unity became even more important when the Malan Nationalists beat the United Party at the General Election 1948. Smuts had beaten the non-Europeans with whips but the Malanites have beaten them with scorpions. All sections of the non-Europeans have been attacked. The attack on the Indians started again under Smuts in 1946 with the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Bill. In the fight against this Bill the old Hamba Kahle leaders of the Indian Congress were thrown out and militant leaders such as Dadoo and Naicker took their place. The Indians started once more their well-tried method of passive resistance. This campaign brought about the complete boycott of the representative machinery of the Ghetto Act and built the Indian Congress into a militant fighting organisation, capable of carrying on the political fight of the Indian people.

During and after the war a number of important African political struggles, some local, others national, took place and all helped to build the African political movement we see today, to develop the consciousness of the people and give them experience in organisation and struggle.

Among these campaigns were:

A WAVE OF STRIKES in different industries on the Reef and in other parts of the country (these during the war) when dissatisfaction with wages grew so intense the workers came out on spontaneous strikes.

THE ALEXANDRA BUS BOYCOTT occurred when in protest against increased bus fares the entire population of Alexandra Township marched in to work and home again for weeks, demonstrating the greatest unity of purpose and action Johannesburg has seen on such an issue.

THE SHANTYTOWN MOVEMENT. Thousands of sub-tenants in the locations, in protest against the critical housing shortage came out in a squatters' movement, erecting shacks on vacant plots in the locations and townships and administering their own independent communities until finally the Council was forced to

to build some houses and establish Moroka and Jabavu, with the promise of these camps being replaced by permanent housing in five years.

THE STRUGGLES OF THE PEOPLE OF WESTERN AREAS. In recent years the western areas have seen local peoples' struggles in a tram boycott movement (again in protest against increased fares) and in demonstrations against police methods in continuous raids for passes and liquor. On more than one occasion police brutality led to pitched street battles. Attempts to divert the people to anti-Indian methods were tried but on the whole they failed. Similar actions on local grievances took place at Krugersdorp and Randfontein and other Reef centres.

PROTEST ACTIONS ON MAY 1 AND JUNE 26. On these two days joint strike action of the African, Coloured and Indian people achieved new heights of non-European unity and in the struggle against oppression. In some areas almost complete strike action paralysed industry. At the time they occurred these strikes were the peak of peoples action against the attacks of the Nationalist Government.

All these actions and many more up and down the country (the bus boycott at Port Elizabeth; the successful action against the deportation threat against Dr. Dadoo in 1944; the Peoples' Assembly for Votes for All on the 1948 General Election; struggles in Springs and Pretoria; the Witzieshoek struggle against cattle culling and for more land; the campaign of the Coloured people against the Separate Representation of Voters' Act) have played their part in building the Congresses that today are conducting the defiance campaign.

DEFIANCE OF UNJUST LAWS In 1951 the African National Congress and the Indian Congress, together with the Coloureds made a united front to defy unjust laws. The campaign of defiance which began on June 26, 1952, when bands of volunteers entered Boksburg Location without permits.

The end of the defiance campaign is not in sight. Many hard struggles lie ahead. But the non-European people are on the march and on the road to freedom.

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TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961

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