

HISTORY OF THE LIBERATORY MOVEMENT *By L. Forman*

ENTER THE SOCIALISTS

MILITANT working-class ideas, and rudimentary socialist ones had already begun to make their appearance in South Africa in the 1890's, but many years were to pass before any names were to stand out bold for their contribution to the liberation movement.

The reason for this is obvious. Conditions in South Africa were such that no indigenous socialist movement was yet conceivable, and the early socialist movements were not made up of South African socialists but of men who were already socialists when they came to South Africa and whose political understanding had been formed in a society completely different from that here.

In addition the workers who emigrated from Britain to South Africa did not as a rule come from the settled workers, the most advanced of the trade unionists, but from the adventurous spirits and fierce individualists who hoped to make their fortunes abroad.

It was in Cape Town, immediately after the Anglo-Boer war that the socialist movement began to surge forward.

In May 1904, from the foot of the Van Riebeeck statue in Adderley Street, Cape Town, Wilfred Harrison (later to be a foundation member of the Communist Party) announced to the world the aims of South Africa's first significant socialist body, the Social Democratic Federation:

"The abolition of Capitalism and Landlordism, the socialisation of all means of production, distribution and exchange, that is, the ownership and control of all the means by the people for the people."

Cape Socialists

A little later the S.D.F. established its headquarters on the second floor of Chames Buildings, 6, Barrack Street, Cape Town. South Africa's first socialist newspaper, the Cape Socialist was issued in 1904 (from the same offices as *New Age* is today).

A terrible depression had followed the Anglo-Boer War, and the militant policies of the S.D.F. were gaining support. The Federation staged a number of unemployment demonstrations. A photograph of a 13-man S.D.F. and trade union deputation to Parliament shows that one of its members was a Coloured leader, John Tobin, who later became a shameless renegade.

It was at the height of this campaign in 1906 that, for the first time, South African Socialists found themselves jailed for their beliefs.

"Cape Socialist" editor, A. Needham, and N. B. Levinson, a Committee member, were charged with incitement and held without bail.

Defence Funds were set up in Durban and Johannesburg where, the S.D.F. minutes record condescendingly, "there were a good number of socialists, but no aggressive public propaganda work was being done." Even the mayor of Cape Town contributed £2.2.0 to the Defence Fund, and with the triumphant acquittal of the accused the S.D.F. found popularity greater than ever. A steady flow of recruits was drawn in.

By 1906 the Socialists were holding meetings using no fewer than four languages: "Dutch, Malay, Kaffir and English," and

Coloured socialists were taking part in Committee discussions.

Relations with APO

The APO and the Socialists were on the friendliest terms, not only in Cape Town but also in Kimberley, where the Labour leader Trembath had been supported by the APO in the municipal elections. The crucial 1909 conference of the APO at which the Draft Act of Union was discussed, was held in the Socialist Hall in Buitenkant Street, Cape Town.

And, when the Socialist leader Tom Mann visited South Africa in 1910 the APO backed his "vigorous appeal to all wage-earners to organise and present a united front to the power of capitalism which ever sought to enslave the wage-earner. We are pleased to see indications here and there throughout the Coloured world of the superlative need of organisation being gradually recognised by wage-earners; but in South Africa there is little evidence of any such desirable lesson being learnt.

"Instead of that, we notice increasing tokens of division, distinct sectional hatred and antagonism. Added to all the ignorance that prevails amongst even skilled white artisans as to the necessity for integrating all their unions, there is a strong prejudice against their Coloured co-workers . . . It is time that the white labour leaders told their rank and file that the driving of white and Coloured people into separate kraals will play into the hands of their enslavers."

Who was South Africa's first prominent Non-European Socialist? Almost certainly Dr. Abdurahman.

In October 1911 a white Socialist, Arthur Noon, addressed an APO meeting on "Socialism and the Native Question" and the APO reports Dr. Abdurahman's contribution to the discussion as follows:

"As a public man he could not help being Socialist, for all men who read and thought and endeavoured to improve the position of the lower classes of society were inevitably driven to Socialism. The condition of the working man today seemed to him to be worse than that of a slave, for the Coloured workman was not only virtually a slave of the capitalist, but had in addition to look after himself, whereas the health and condition of the slave was always a matter of serious concern to the master. Yet the workmen had in their hands the best possible weapon for bettering their condition, viz.: co-operation. With co-operation the Native and Coloured labourers of South Africa could bring the white capitalists to their knees within 48 hours."

But although the conditions existed for the establishment at this early stage of close links between the national movement and the most militant white socialists, the white socialists failed badly.

Labour Racialism

From the Transvaal white Labour Party came a blast of the most vile racialism in no way distinguishable from modern Nationalist Party propaganda. Instead of turning from this in disgust and seeing that no party whose spokesman utilised the crudest racialism could have anything in common with Socialism, those who were opposed to racialism decided to remain loyal to the Labour Party.

The close relations developing between white Socialists and the

Non-European liberatory organisations disappeared overnight with the decision of white Labour throughout the new Union to follow the leadership of Transvaal Labour and accept its colour bar policies in the first general election of 1910.

Labour won no Cape seats in that election and Maginess, the President of the Cape Labour Party, complained bitterly at an APO meeting the following year: "It was largely due to their President (Dr. Abdurahman) that the Labour Party of that Province was unrepresented in the Union Parliament."

This APO meeting revealed that there were those present who had a far deeper understanding than Maginess. The Coloured workers mocked Maginess's praise for Smuts with whom Labour was in alliance, and explained to him that Smuts was by nature a capitalist. Dr. Abdurahman summed up his feelings in the words "the whole Labour Party and the white workers on the Rand are about the most selfish lot I have heard of." (Applause.)

War Split

It was the war of 1914-1918 that gave the white socialists the necessary stimulus to new ways of thought.

The second Socialist International to which the S.A. Labour Party affiliated in 1913, had at its Basle conference the previous year adopted an anti-war manifesto in the drafting of which Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg had been dominant figures. The S.A. Labour Party had endorsed the anti-war resolution without reservation.

In 1914 the Great Powers went to war and the leaders of the socialist parties everywhere turned their backs on the Basle resolution. All over the world, the Marxist minorities in the socialist movements adhered to the International's resolution, and split from, or were driven out of the Labour Party. The splinter groups formed their own parties and these in time formed the basis of the new Communist Parties.

That was the exact pattern followed in South Africa. On August 2nd, 1914, after the fighting between Germany and France had begun, but before Britain had declared war, the South African Labour Party Administrative Council, of which Bill Andrews was chairman, adopted a resolution in which it condemned "a war which can only benefit the international arms manufacturer's ring and other enemies of the working class and appeals to the workers of the world to organise and refrain from participating in this unjust war."

Similar resolutions were adopted by the S.A. Industrial Federation, (predecessor of the Trades and Labour Council), the Social Democratic Federation (of Cape Town) and the Social Democratic Party in Durban.

In their approach to international affairs therefore, the S.A. Labour leaders had a more advanced outlook than those of most of the Western countries, the leaders of which hailed the war from the start.

But just as was the case all over the world the great majority of the workers responded to the war hysteria and flocked to the colours, ready to die in battle against the workers of other countries in a cause which was in no way their own.

This was not confined to the whites. The ANC, the APO and the Indian organisations expressed their indignation at the fact that not enough opportunities were

being given to Non-Europeans to go out and die in battle.

Within two months the Industrial Federation had rescinded its anti-war resolution and branch after branch of the Labour Party had rejected the Administrative Council's stand.

War on War

The advance guard of the Labour Party, however, fought hard. In September, they launched the War on War League. The first issue of the League's paper "The War on War Gazette," a printed four-page weekly, appeared on September 19, 1914.

Labour's pro-war stand probably did more than anything else to ensure that the party would never again be a force even among the white workers in South Africa. It amounted to an abandonment to the Nationalists of the Afrikaner workers who were gradually entering the labour market and who were very soon to dominate it.

"Can't you see that in a year's time having come out as you must in comparison with the Unionist and even Nationalist second best in the "patriotic game" you will be bankrupt with nothing to recommend you?" S. P. Bunting, treasurer of the League, asked the paper.

A special Labour Party conference called in August 1915, on the eve of the country's second General Election, decided to require its members to sign a pledge "to support the Imperial Government wholeheartedly in the prosecution of the war," and in a very short time all the leftists had been expelled or had resigned.

For them there was a new beginning. They formed an International League within the Labour

Party (shortly afterwards to become the International Socialist League) and on September 10, 1915, the first issue of the *International* appeared as their organ, replacing the *Gazette* which had been censored out of existence. An editorial in the third issue of the *International* marked the first bold step towards a truly Socialist policy. Though unsigned, it bears the clear stamp of the style of David Ivon Jones, the most dynamic and clear-sighted of the Socialists.

"An internationalism which does not conceive the fullest rights which the Native working class is capable of claiming will be a sham. One of the justifications for our withdrawal from the Labour Party is that it gives us untrammelled freedom to deal, regardless of political fortunes, with the great and fascinating problem of the native.

"If the League deals resolutely in consonance with Socialist principles with the native question, it will succeed in shaking South African Capitalism to its foundations. Then and not till then, shall we be able to talk about the South African proletariat in our international relations. Not till we free the native can we hope to free the white."

In a news round-up on the back page, Jones drove home his point. A feature of the League's Sunday afternoon meetings on the Market Square, he reported, "is the little knot of interested natives and Coloured men always there. Some buy the *International*. Let who will sneer, nothing convinces us of the universality of our appeal so much as this. We shall never be on bed-rock until we can command the attention of the dark-skinned proletariat of South Africa."

UP MY ALLEY

I WONDER how many of the 3,000 odd voters who put "Onse Abe" Bloomberg into Parliament are company directors or have shares in high finance, but if there are any I guess they are probably satisfied with their representative's speech on their behalf in the House.

"Onse Abie" seemed to be beside himself with congratulations for Tom Naude's budget. No increases in company taxes. Bravo!

But what about the thousands of Coloured people who are not company directors? "Onse Abie" seems to have forgotten the

BOAST OF THE FACT THAT THE BOSS WAS A DIRECTOR OF SIXTY-ODD COMPANIES.

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WELL, here we are back in the Golden City, and all future despatches will be coming via Pretoria, which they tell me is a suburb of the Voortrekker Monument.

When I first saw that block of stone I was told that it had been put there to commemorate the historic achievements of Afrikaner chauvinism. One of the things the plasterer who designed it left out was the notches on the guns of the Voortrekkers, used as a record of the Africans they shot en route.

BUT THEN THE VOORTREKKERS COULDN'T BE SHOWN OFF IN TOO BLOOD-THIRSTY A LIGHT . . . AFTER ALL THE DESCENDANTS OF THE "KAFFIRS" THEY ROBBED OF LAND ARE ALSO ALLOWED TO COME ALONG AND SEE THE MONUMENT . . . ON WASHING DAYS!!!

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AND now it's time to sign off with thanks to the folks back in C.T. for the send-offs we had when we had to pull out, the fish supper and the jam sessions and the parties I wasn't able to keep track of. And hallo to the folks of the Ou Transvaal, and some more suppers and jam sessions and parties I won't be able to keep track of.

I'M SURE THE LIFE OF A TREASON TRIALIST HAS BECOME ONE OF ENDLESS PARTINGS AND WELCOMES. IT'S GETTING SO THAT WE DON'T KNOW WHETHER WE'RE COMING OR GOING.



By ALEX
LA GUMA

people who put him into Parliament the minute the election results were announced. No criticism of the effects the Budget would have on the ordinary Coloured man. Oh, no! Nothing about those already living below the bread-line. Oh, No! Nothing about millions spent on apartheid and very little on the people's welfare.

Well, what are voters for? I hope they'll remember Abie's budget speech the next time he comes around to put them to use again.

BUT, I FORGOT. ABIE'S ELECTION HELPERS DID

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