

470 ~~3A~~

326:329(68)

F(6)



**CHIEF A. LUTULI**

**speaks to**

**White South Africans**

MAR 1 6 1958

**“Freedom is  
the Apex”**

*This speech was delivered at a public meeting organised by the South African Congress of Democrats to enable Europeans in Johannesburg to hear Chief Lutuli speak. The theme of his address was "Our Vision is a Democratic Society", and the purpose of the meeting was to allow the President General of the African National Congress an opportunity to give his perspective of what the African people are striving for.*

*The audience of over 300 people expressed such great appreciation of the views and sentiments put forward by Chief Lutuli that we felt that his message should be preserved and should reach out to as many white South Africans as possible. A tape recording of the speech was made and it is reproduced here almost verbatim.*

[1959?]



# Chief Lutuli:



Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, someone has said a man really has only one speech to make. He may clothe it in different words, but in essence it is the same speech. Those of us who are in the freedom struggle in this country have really only one gospel. We may possibly shade it in different ways, but it is a gospel of democracy and freedom.

If we are true to South Africa that must be our vision, a vision of S.A. as a fully democratic country. It cannot in honesty be claimed that she is yet really democratic, when only about a third of her people enjoy democratic rights, and the rest — notwithstanding the fact that they constitute the majority — are still subjected to Apartheid rule. I emphasise the words *are still*, because I do believe firmly that it is not a state that can be perpetuated. Apartheid rule is the antithesis of democracy. Apartheid — in theory and in practice — is an effort, to make Africans march back to tribalism.

## A Deceitful Concept

Sometimes very nice and pretty phrases are used to justify this diversion from the democratic road. The one that comes to my mind is the suggestion that we Africans will: “Develop along our own lines”. I do not know of any people who really have developed “along their own lines”. My fellow white South Africans, enjoying what is called ‘Western civilisation,’ should be the first to agree that this civilisation is indebted to previous civilisations, from the East, from Greece, Rome and so on. For its heritage, Western civilisation is really indebted to very many sources, both ancient and modern.

There is really no possibility of anyone developing “along his own lines”, as is often suggested. But in practice “developing along your own lines” turns out not to be development along your own lines at all, but development along the lines designed by the Government through the Native Affairs Department. Even in determining the laws that govern us and our development, there is no attempt to consult those who are affected. There is no contact between the governor and the governed at the present moment. “Developing along our own lines”, has come to mean “Developing along *their* lines — the Government’s lines.”

*The essence of development along your own lines, is that you must have the right to develop, and the right to determine how to develop.*

*Its essence is freedom and — beyond freedom — self-determination.  
This is the vision we hold for our future and our development.*

## **Freedom is the Apex**

One might ask, "Is this vision of a democratic society in South Africa a realisable vision? Or is it merely a mirage?" I say, it is a realisable vision. For it is in the nature of man, to yearn and struggle for freedom. The germ of freedom is in every individual, in anyone who is a human being. In fact, the history of mankind is the history of man struggling and striving for freedom. Indeed, the very apex of human achievement is FREEDOM and *not* slavery. Every human being struggles to reach that apex.

X It is sometimes suggested that people are "incited" to struggle for freedom. One wonders what that means. I admit that circumstances from time to time make it necessary to remind people of what lies at the apex. Naturally if I find a man in the mud, it is my duty to uplift him and remind him "You are not of the mud." If there be human beings who, for some reason or other, have forgotten their rights and wallow in the mud, it is the duty of all who see, to say to them "Don't wallow in mud. Try to reach up to the apex." And the apex of human achievement and striving, as I have said, is freedom X

## **Let Us Share Responsibility**

It is often said that the Non-European people merely strive for the good fruits of South African citizenship and not for its obligations. But that is not the aspiration of Black South Africa. We would like to share in the privileges and rights that go with democracy. But at the same time we are ready to carry all the obligations which flow from being part of a democratic country. I hasten to say that we do not approve of the state of affairs which obtains now, when on the basis of apartheid, it is said, "Where social services are directed to you or for you, *you* alone should bear the expense." That we do not agree to. We feel that we should enjoy the rights which are enjoyed by all South Africans, and equally bear the obligations. But that is far different from saying to the poorest section of the community "If you wish to enjoy any social services in South Africa, pay for it yourself." That policy at present being carried out in so far as non-Europeans — particularly Africans — are concerned, is a policy of denying us the privileges of freedom, while saddling us with more than our share of responsibility.

## **Emergent Africa**

The yearning for freedom is not peculiar to South Africa. The whole of Africa is emerging into Freedom. We live in the midst of what has rightly been described as "Emergent Africa". Why should it be



thought that Africans in this part of Southern Africa are different from Africans in Ghana? Africans in Ghana have received full democracy. In Nigeria they are about to receive full democracy. How can it be suggested that the Africans in the Union of South Africa will not yearn, like their brothers in the North, for freedom. The very fact that Africa is emerging to freedom should be a sign to all of us that our vision of democracy, is coming and *will* be realised.

The African isn't the only one who has struggled for full participation in a South African democracy. Our people have been much impressed by the struggle of the Afrikaner in this country. He too struggled — in fact, in affairs less justified than our's, for he did enjoy a certain amount of freedom while we enjoy none. But he felt he did not enjoy it fully. It should be unnecessary to remind Afrikaner South Africans, that nothing could stop their struggle until they got a full share in democracy for themselves. Should they not realise that this same truth applies now to the struggling Africans, who cannot be denied the privileges of democracy for ever?

### **We are a Multi-racial Community**

I believe that our vision of democracy in South Africa will be realised, because there is a growing number of people who are coming to accept the fact that in South Africa we are a multi-racial community — whether we like it or not. I am not prepared to concern myself with such questions as “Where have you come from?”, “Do you come from the North?” or “Did you come from Europe.” It is not important. What is important for our situation is that we are all here. *That* we cannot change! We are all here, and no-one desires to change it or should desire to change it. And since we *are* all here, we must seek a way whereby we can realise democracy, so that we can live in peace and harmony in this land of ours. More and more people are coming to accept that and to work for it.

Sometimes it would seem that the more apartheid is intensified, the more freedom lovers come together to oppose it. It is an encouraging feature, demonstrated by the fact that there exists today not only the Congress of Democrats under whose auspices you are meeting here, but also the Liberal Party, the Labour Party, the Black Sash, and many Church leaders who have seen and followed their duty to their fellow men.

### **Cherish Human Values**

Man must participate in all the aspects of life, political, social and religious. A man is not whole if he is deprived of participating in some aspects of life; he will grow to be a lopsided man. It is not our aim to produce among Africans lopsided citizens of South Africa. It is my

firm belief that more and more South Africans, regardless of colour, will come to see the justice of our cause, because it is not just *our* cause. It is a human cause and, I would say, a divine cause to try and build a climate in South Africa where human values will be respected.

X We often hear the cry that if we extend democratic freedom to non-Whites we shall be surrendering our heritage. But I would like to suggest that you cannot preserve your heritage by isolating yourself, or by isolating other people; you can only preserve human values by propagating them and creating a climate where these values will flourish. Apartheid does not furnish that kind of climate; for the values which we cherish, can only develop to the full in a climate of peace and equality, where brotherhood is respected. In such a climate as that, these values will grow. We must deliberately propagate these values if we wish to maintain them. That is the only way of saving white civilization! Propagate it! Don't hoard it! For if you hoard it, it is going to shrivel with you. But if you propagate it, more people will develop these values, preserve them, and prevent their dying out. We are interested in the preservation of those values, for they are eternal values. Man throughout the ages, has striven for these values. Why should it be thought that we in South Africa, we blacks in South Africa, strive less? X

## World Opinion

Encouragement for those whose vision is a democratic South Africa, lies in the fact that today there is self-questioning within the apartheid camp. When people begin to question their own policies, there is some hope. A sinner who does not realise that he is a sinner, is not very far from damnation; the hope for man is greater when he begins to question. Now I say their questions may not amount to much, but certainly it is a hopeful sign that they now begin to question and wonder at the efficacy of apartheid. There is hope there, just as there is hope to be drawn from world opinion being in favour of democracy. (Applause). However badly our country fails to live up to democracy, world opinion is in favour of democracy. The whole world stands up and says "We stand for this cause." I don't think that we ourselves really believe that South Africa can remain isolated from the world. Otherwise we will find ourselves a colony of slaves, isolated and cut off from the rest of the world — slaves of our own making.

To me democracy is such a lovely thing, that one can hardly hope to keep it away from other people. Could anyone really successfully shield off beauty. We don't live in Parktown, but we appreciate the beauties of Parktown. We do. And as we move round Parktown from the townships we pause and admire the beauty. I do. I am not a Johannesburg man, but I pause to see the fine gardens, the beautiful



houses and the surroundings. I stop and admire beauty. Can you everlastingly cut off a human being from beauty? And as you move about in some of these palatial places, and the scent of the flowers comes to you, can you really stop another from smelling that scent? (Laughter and applause). Can you ward others off? Can you really successfully do it? I suggest that democracy, being the fine thing it is, the apex of human achievement, cannot be successfully kept from the attainment of other men. I say not.

Yes there are difficulties on the road, and various blocks. But the biggest block is "apartheid", making it difficult for us to realise the vision glorious of a multi-racial democratic South Africa. But despite the blocks let us strive to develop this democracy.

### **A New Pattern of Democracy**

It is often suggested, quite rightly, that democracy was developed in homogeneous communities — in Europe, possibly in Asia to an extent — in communities that were homogeneous in colour. Here in South Africa we are not a homogeneous community, not as far as race and colour are concerned nor possibly even in culture. It is suggested that people in homogeneous communities can very well speak of democracy being shared; but in a community like ours, diverse in very many respects, you can't hope to share democracy. But I personally believe that here in South Africa, with all our diversities of colour and race, we will show the world a new pattern for democracy. I think there is a challenge to us in South Africa to set a new example for the world. Let us not side-step that task. What is important, is that we can build a homogeneous South Africa on the basis not of colour but of human values. After all, we all admire our colour. I often say my black colour is proof of sunshine and is due to heat. (Laughter). I admire my black colour — I should. But in trying to build a new homogeneous democratic South Africa, colour and race should not come into the scene. It should not come into the scene in any part of the world; for men should be bound together by certain values which they cherish.

I may have more in common with you here than, possibly, with the less fortunate of my African brothers who are still in the Reserves, who have not had the privileges of civilization which I have had. I don't know whether you like that — I don't want to annoy you — but to me that is a pointer to the fact that we can build a new type of homogeneous society — new in South Africa and in any part of the world. The main thing is that man is my brother not by blood, but because we cherish the same values, stand for the same standards. (Applause). I believe personally that, notwithstanding the fact that our cultures are diverse, we come to live together and in the process of our coming together, I will come to admire, certain aspects of your culture,



others I will reject. But I think also you will find that there will be aspects of our culture which are good. And so can develop a true South African culture, built up of the best of all our cultures.

### **Our Guarantees**

White people often ask us "What guarantee have we that you will not swamp us by your numbers?" I think that in a sense I have already replied to that by saying that some of us are not interested in numbers. I think that very stress on numbers is harmful. The criterion should rather be "Do we wish for democracy?". To this question Africans have already given an answer. What more proof do you want that Africans long for democracy, when in fact they are already making sacrifices for it. They are willing to preach and struggle for democracy to the extent that sometimes they become the guests of Her Majesty. (Laughter). But I would like to take you further back. When they first came into contact with Europeans, our forebearers saw there some values which they liked.

Even in the wars between the English and my people I don't remember that missionaries, or even traders — excepting those who were found to be traitors — were ever molested. So I suggest that our people have given sufficient proof that they yearn for democracy; the question of numbers doesn't count, particularly *if we set them on the right road!* What the apartheid rulers have said does not lead people on the right road! If the Africans don't seem to be getting to democracy it is not their fault; go and blame apartheid! If you should feel you are in danger, it isn't because we seek to endanger you, but because we are not given the opportunity of developing fully along the democratic road.

How can you truly expect that democracy at its best can flourish in slums? How can you expect that democracy shall flourish in insecurity, when people do not have the wherewithal to live? Where Africans work in towns, it is admitted, that their wages are low. In Reserves from where they come, the holdings are so small that people can hardly make a civilized living. Now Prof. Tomlinson assures me that, having worked fairly hard in the reserve I can expect to get £66 per year from my holding. And he says "Now if you work your holdings scientifically I promise you £120, or £150. He promises me that. In seriousness can anybody raise a family, on this basis, at the civilized standards we should aspire to? — Can you raise a family on that basis?

### **Bantustan — a Negation of Democracy**

Can you really develop a democratic people upon the lines of the so-called "Bantu Authorities" — where we will not participate in the ordinary machinery of Government, but will revert to a perverted form of tribalism? For "Bantu Authority" is the exact antithesis of demo-



cracy; it is a rule by some kind of council appointed even without consultation with the people, by the sole decision of the Chief and the N.A.D. — a Council in which the people have no say at all and which they can never change even if they wish to. Such a system can not lead to democracy; it does not even respect Bantu custom. For while we may not have been democratic in your sense, yet in past times, our tribal authority was not autocratic. I dispute the theory that African chiefs were autocratic. As in all communities, you occasionally get a dictator, like my own Chaka who was undoubtedly a dictator but not typical even of the Zulu chiefs. I don't think that you would suggest that Napoleon was a sample of the best in Europe. Incidentally he a Chaka were contemporaries; it seems that it was an age when dictators were produced.

But in Bantu practice, the King or Chief sat with his Council and debated an issue; and all of the leading men in the tribe had a say in decisions. And therefore all this talk of earlier African chiefs being dictators — as is said by the Department of Native Affairs to make present chiefs into dictators — is contrary to our traditions. But it is in line with the "Bantu Authorities Act". Our chiefs are being made minor dictators — I needn't mention who is the senior dictator — contrary to their traditions and contrary to democracy. Our development is thus being sidetracked into new autocratic institutions that are now being imposed not only on the African but also on white people. As long as my people are forced to follow this road of Bantu Authorities — they will not learn democracy.

### **Go Forward in Faith**

How can you breed a democratic people along such lines? This is a challenge to all of us who are here. I will not concern myself with your political views whether you are United Party, Congress of Democrats or Liberal. All I see here is white South Africa and black South Africa. I see people who are interested in the welfare of South Africa. And if you are interested in South Africa as a whole you should do your best to work for the realisation of this POSSIBLE vision. It is, possible, this vision of a multi-racial democracy in South Africa. The difficulties may be great, but nothing has beaten man if he has striven. Man is striving to go to the moon. If he can do this, can anyone suggest that man cannot evolve a system in South Africa that will make our society a democratic, multi-racial group? There is a challenge which you and I must meet. We cannot dodge it.

We often say that what we are doing, we do for posterity. It is a very dangerous claim to make because posterity may think quite differently from us; we may find posterity spitting on our grave. Let us not claim the authority of posterity for our failures to strike out on the road of democracy. I think it is Jan Hofmeyer who said "Having

planted go in faith". Don't be worrying about other things. Go in faith and believe in the sanity of posterity. There is in the bible a verse which says that all those who are cowards, all those who grow apathetic because of the difficulties before them and run away from the struggle, — that they shall not be able to reach that Glorious place. It also says that the cowards will be together with all evil doers.

I cannot believe that all of us who are here will fail South Africa because we are cowards and apathetic. I believe we all will do our best — whatever the difficulties are — for the realisation of this glorious democratic South Africa we dream of.

## APPLAUSE



The Congress of Democrats

- FOR THE STRUGGLE FOR
- TO THE FREEDOM CHAIRS
- COUNTER ATTACK
- FIGHTING TALK

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT US

Issued by the S.A. Congress of Democrats, P.O. Box 4088, Johannesburg, and P.O. Box 4552, Cape Town, and printed by Prompt Printing Co. (Pty.) Ltd., P.O. Box 2225, 11 Harris Street, Westgate, Johannesburg.

