

SOCIALISTS

AND THE

NATIONAL

MOVEMENT

IN SOUTH AFRICA

An analysis of certain
Errors and
Distortions

Recently the Education Committee of the South African Communist Party prepared an analytical review of a document "Ten Years of Stay-at-Home" issued by the Socialist League of Africa". It is felt that this review is of wide interest among supporters of the democratic and working class movements, and it is accordingly being published in its present form.

ON THE DOCUMENT : "STAY AT HOME. A CRITICAL DISCUSSION. ISSUED BY
THE 'SOCIALIST LEAGUE OF AFRICA.'"

This document starts off as a discussion of the general strike as a means of a struggle. It has two quotations, one from a German paper, Neue Zeit, the other from a PAC spokesman. The German quotation (the period is not given) says the general strike tactic is only of major value when "it is the opening move in a general rising." The PAC man says that the general strike will bring the "whole structure falling down." One might have thought that the document would proceed to discuss the contradiction between these two theses, but it does not do so. Most of it is devoted to a potted version of the history of the national liberation movement since the second world war.

a quotation used by Trotsky 1905.

It is in reading this "history" that we see the significance of the subtitle -- "A Critical Discussion". The slant given is consistently "critical". The Congress leadership is described on various pages as

- "Evacillating" (1950 dealing with the May day strike)
- "a middle class leadership which places no reliance on the masses" (1952, the defiance campaign)
- "The class composition of the leadership has led it to prefer methods of moderation at every stage.. reflecting the mood of the most conservative elements of the middle class. They have kept away from mass action wherever possible and have preached a strictly pacifistic 'non-violence'.. They prefer the methods of conciliation and negotiation." (1954-56, Congress of the People and Freedom Charter.)
- "Out of contact with the new mood in Johannesburg.. failed to give any real guidance ... eager to compromise" (Alexandra bus boycott, 1957.)
- "Complete lack of initiative in providing a lead ... unable to offer a solution and direction out of factional bickering.."
- "Over-enthusiastic" (both 1957.)
- "The (women's anti-pass campaign) was suddenly called off by the national leadership .. we can only assume that Congress was not prepared to embark on a militant struggle over this issue." (1957, women's anti-pass campaign).
- "The leadership of Congress had transformed an essentially working class campaign into a broad political front and placed at the fore a false slogan... The ANC refused to put its name to the call for a stay-at-home... April 15 was a complete fiasco... An ANC official called off the whole campaign which was scheduled for 3 days." (1958, general election stay-at-home.)
- "We must state explicitly that they (the peasants) have never been organised by Congress... and that these events took the ANC by surprise." (Zeerust and Sekhukhunieland disturbances, 1958).
- "From the beginning this campaign can only be described as phoney - because there was no campaign." (Anti-Pass Campaign, 1959.)

It is not only the national leadership of the ANC which falls under the lash of the "Socialist League of Africa." We are told that SACTU "made little effort to explain the reasons for failure" (of the 1958 stay-at-home).

Some of the bitterest epithets are reserved for "a group inside Congress who profess to be Marxists." This group we are told

"concealed all their ideas behind the front of democratic demands,"

"never played an independent role... opportunistically shielded their ideas behind talk of national unity, of broad democratic struggles, etc... Surrendered the working class to the mercy of a middle-class leadership and abdicated the right of the worker to his own independent organisation..."

"A clique of careerists who sully the name of Communism."

Most of the document under review, over nine-tenths of it, consists of this version of "the past period of South African history." A better or rather more accurate heading for the whole thing would be "An Attack on the Congress Leadership."

Of course it is perfectly in order for criticisms to be made of the Congress alliance. Any public organisations must expect criticisms. But when criticisms are made of a national liberation movement by people who profess to be in sympathy with its aims - more, who even claim to be socialists - one is entitled to expect something more than mere name-calling and wholesale condemnation. Otherwise the critics may lay themselves open to serious charges of malice and disruption.

This is particularly the case under present conditions in South Africa where the organisation mainly criticised, the A.N.C., has been banned and driven underground, and its leaders jailed, restricted from public activity, in exile or facing a charge of high treason, and otherwise precluded from engaging in debate.

It is possible that in making such an unfair attack on the Congress alliance, the Socialist League of Africa relies on the hope its readers are young people, or persons not well versed in the history of the national liberation movement. But they should not presume too much on the supposed ignorance of their readers.

The record of the African National Congress and its allies, after all, is not a private affair. In broad outline, it is a matter of public knowledge, of considerable pride to the people of South Africa, and of admiration throughout the world. Surely those who read this travesty presented by the S.L.A. cannot help asking themselves, after reading the sorry record of blunders, and worse, committed by "the most conservative elements of the middle class," how it comes about that this self-same leadership has:

x won the respect of all decent people, at home and abroad, by its courageous campaigns in the teeth of a vicious autocracy?

/ x adopted

Set of principles - not a "Programme" & therefore the main weakness of the Charter as an 'organising weapon' ??

- 3 -

- ? x adopted a Programme (the Freedom Charter) far in advance of that of any national liberation movement outside the socialist countries and Guinea, which even the highly biased critics of the S.L.A. have to concede, grudgingly enough, as "of a radical character ... readily accepted by Socialists."
- ? x built an alliance of national liberation, democratic and trade union organisations which has withstood every effort of the reactionary ruling classes to destroy or disrupt it? questionable
- x consistently followed a line of policy, at home and in international affairs, which has bluntly rejected Red-baiting and anti-Communism, and stood up for consistent democracy and world peace?

Of course it would be ridiculous to pretend that in the past ten years of many-sided activity and struggle all over South Africa the African National Congress and its comrades-in-battle have not made any mistakes. The only people who make no mistakes are those who never do anything... except criticise. But even to one who knows little of the facts, the picture of the Congress leaders, whose uncompromising and unyielding struggles against apartheid and white baasskap have made them the symbol of the South African Resistance - and the chief victims of Nationalist persecution - this picture of timid middle-class, conservative "compromisers and conciliators", of moderate pacifists, shrinking from mass action, as presented by the S.L.A., is too much at variance with the facts for even the most naive newcomer to South African politics to swallow. The malice is too blatant; the distortion too gross. Certainly correct of the S.A.

It would be tedious to recount all the departures from truth and distortions of history which appear in this document. We may content ourselves, here, with a few examples.

(1) May Day, 1950.

We are told that "the ANC now under new leadership, called on the people of Johannesburg to observe May 1st 1950 as a day of protest and stay-at-home..."

The document has just said that the ANC had, under Youth League influence, elected a new leadership. The impression is given that it is this new leadership which called the May day 1950 strike, though why it was then limited to Johannesburg is not explained. The facts:

- (a) The May day 1950 strike was not called by the N.E.C. of Congress but by a united front committee, representing:
- The ANC (Transvaal)
 - The Transvaal Indian Congress
 - The Johannesburg District Committee of the C.P.S.A.
 - The Transvaal Council of Non-European Trade Unions.

/ (b)

- (b) The Youth League did not support the strike but actively opposed it.
- (c) It was not a mere protest strike, but called around positive demands, including abolition of passes, higher wages, land, and votes for all.
- (d) It was not called as a "stay-at-home". Originally it was planned as a day of a great central demonstration to be held in Johannesburg. The demonstration was only called off in the face of a ban on all meetings by Swart, coupled with a massive police mobilisation.
- (e) This ban was imposed before May Day, and not as the document states, after the May Day shootings --- which, incidentally, took place mainly in Alexandra, not in Sophiatown, as stated.

Now, in any serious discussion of the general strike in South Africa, May Day is of absolutely seminal importance. It was the first successful use of this weapon by the non-white working class, combined with a hartal by Indian and other non-White shopkeepers. It had a profound effect on the Youth Leaguers, who proved that they had the sincerity and flexibility of outlook thoroughly to absorb and learn from this landmark in our history. It marked a dialectical leap forward in the development of the united front-in-action which revolutionary democrats and socialists in this country had long been advocating and working for, and which, in the shape of the Congress Alliance, has since written so many glowing chapters in the history of this country.

One would expect that a 10,000-word "discussion" on this theme would have more to say about May Day, 1950 than a cursory paragraph filled with gross inaccuracies and vital omissions. If these were due merely to ignorance or sloppy scholarship, one might content oneself with the comment that the 'Socialist League of Africa' should get down to some diligent research before committing its lack of knowledge to paper. But, in the context of what amounts to a lengthy "indictment" of the people's leaders of South Africa, the S.L.A. cannot get away with a minor charge of ignorance. These are deliberate falsifications.

(2) June 26, 1950.

"The ANC called for a new protest and June 26, 1950, was set aside as a day of mourning for the dead. Once again the people of the Witwatersrand responded, and... there was a large-scale stoppage of work. However the response was uneven and demonstrated that Congress was organised only in isolated towns..."

Again the treatment of this historic strike, which differed from May Day because the call was this time a national one to the whole country, is so cursory as to constitute a most serious distortion.

- (a) It was not the ANC alone which called the strike. The decision was taken at a national emergency meeting, convened by the ANC, and comprising the National Executives of:

The African National Congress
The Communist Party of South Africa
The S.A. Indian Congress
The African People's Organisation.

- (b) The expression "called for a new protest" ignores the immediate cause of the protest - the Suppression of Communism Act then a Bill before Parliament.

Now a good deal more could be said about the shoddy way in which this document deals with the 1950 Freedom Day strike, as, for that matter with every other historical event which it touches on. But it will be more useful to pause at this stage, to consider the pattern that is beginning to emerge from the S.L.A. statement, and the reasons which lie behind its remarkable omissions and distortions.

The Suppression of Communism Act one would imagine would be of more than passing interest to any socialist. It is a piece of Nationalist blanket legislation, and has seriously hampered and injured not only Communists but all opponents of race discrimination. Under it even such doughty believers in, and practicers of, capitalism as Dr. Moroka have been convicted of "Communism".

But there is no doubt that the main target of the Act was the Communist Party of South Africa, the revolutionary socialist organisation which for thirty years had fought in the vanguard of the workers' and democratic struggle in this country, and which was dissolved upon the third reading of the Act in Parliament. In terms of this law the mere advocacy of Marxian socialism is made a criminal offence, punishable with up to ten years in jail.

Why does this Socialist League not mention that the 1950 Freedom Day strike was called by the ANC together with the Communist Party against this very Act?

Is it not because this very fact destroys at one blow the whole picture which the document is trying to present of the Congress leadership as a typical bourgeois-nationalist, right-wing, "conservative" movement, afraid of mass action? Where in the world has one ever found such a leadership joining with the Communists to call the masses into strike action in defence of the Party of the working class?

The writer of this "critical discussion" is obviously not concerned with presenting a true or balanced picture, but with his own special version for his own special purpose. And if historical facts do not fit in with his version... "then, so much the worse for the facts."

Again, we must note that, as in the case of May Day, the writer has omitted to mention that it was not Congress alone which called the 1950 June 26 general strike, but that it marked a further important stage in the growth of the united front. This omission, also, is not accidental. We shall deal with its significance presently. But let us turn, for the moment, to the treatment of

(3) The Defiance Campaign of 1952.

The Defiance Campaign of 1952 is labelled and identified as "passive resistance." The assumption is made that its aims, outlook and methods were identical with those of Gandhi in India, based on his own philosophy and that of Tolstoy. On the basis of this bland assumption, the document then proceeds to state:

"Passive resistance stems from the religious philosophy that there can be a moral awakening of the rulers, and it calls in effect for negotiations and concessions that exclude the broad mass of the people. As such it is a class tool of a particular stratum of the oppressed - and we must clearly designate a class that thinks this way as being the aspiring bourgeoisie."

Again: "The tactic assumes that it can lead to a change of heart on the part of the ruling class."

And the writer cites Palme Dutt on Gandhi's movement in India, as saying that it (passive resistance) "served as a means of tying down or restraining the mass movement of workers and peasants."

In identifying the 1953 campaign of defiance of unjust laws with Gandhi - and passive resistance, the document under review commits the same blunder as the bourgeois liberal Professor Leo Kuper in his book "Passive Resistance in South Africa." Both are completely unjustified. It is no doubt true that some of the Natal Indian Congress leaders who took part in the campaign were followers of Gandhi. But the character, content and aims of the campaign were completely new and different from those of the classical "Gandhi-ite" concept of satyagraha.

Nowhere in any of the official statements of the campaign (a good collection of which has been assembled in Kuper's book) is the term "passive resistance" used. This was obviously not accidental but deliberate.

Nowhere in any statement or document of the campaign is there the slightest foundation for any assumption that the aim was to change the hearts or the moral character of South Africa's ruling classes. In fact the aim was very different.

The purpose of Gandhi's volunteers was to go to prison, in the belief that their suffering and sacrifice would in itself effect changes.

The purpose of the defiance volunteers was to break the laws, in their belief that their example would inspire a spirit of defiance and resistance among the masses.

Hence while in India volunteers pleaded guilty and gladly accepted prison sentences, in South Africa they pleaded not guilty and vigorously defended themselves, using the courtroom as a forum to attack the wicked and unjust laws against which they were fighting.

/ In fact, ...

In fact, the 1952 defiance campaign was not a carbon copy of Gandhi's tactics at all, but a brilliant new, specifically South African method of action, designed to fit the specific needs of the Congress movement in this country in the circumstances that prevailed in 1952.

It is characteristic of the "socialist" doctrinaire that he likes to consider "methods of struggle" in the abstract, without consideration of the complex and infinitely varied circumstances, conditions and needs of a real mass movement operating in a real world. It is absolutely irrelevant to quote what Palme Dutt wrote about the Indian passive resistance campaigns of the twenties and thirties as a stick to beat the completely different South African campaign of the fifties.

We cannot leave this section of our commentary without drawing attention to a remarkable contribution to socialist theory on the part of the "Socialist League of Africa." They have discovered a new class - the "aspiring bourgeoisie." This is, clearly, a "class" of people who are not capitalists but would like to be capitalists.

Now it is well known that there are individual workers, professional people or peasants who "aspire" to be socialist theoreticians.

But the term "class" is well established (and very important) in scientific socialist usage. It means something quite specific, and completely unrelated to individual aspirations or any other subjective factor. We have workers, peasants, capitalists and certain intermediate groups. hand Their class is defined not by their feelings or how they vote in elections, but by their relationship to the means of production and to other classes in society. If a man owns a factory and makes his living by employing workers and extracting profit from their labour-power, he is a capitalist, and even if he is an active supporter of the labour movement he remains a capitalist. If a man owns nothing but his labour power and has no means of livelihood but to sell this to an employer then he is a worker, and remains a worker even if he longs to be a factory-owner and votes for the Nationalist Party.

In inventing a "class" of "aspiring bourgeoisie", the "S.L.A." is therefore guilty of a gross theoretical blunder. It is not difficult to see the chain of false reasoning that has led them into this blunder.

First they start by wrongly equating "defiance campaign" with "passive resistance". Secondly, their mechanical and doctrinaire view of Marxist theory leads them to the proposition "passive resistance is the weapon of the bourgeoisie." Now they are dying to add the third part, the conclusion, to this chain of bogus "logic" - namely, "therefore the leadership of the African National Congress is bourgeois."

But here, unluckily for them, they bump up against well-known hard facts. African capitalists play a very small part, either in the economy or the politics of this country. The reason is obvious: the privileged White group has greedily seized a monopoly of every position of economic advantage in the country, in industry, land, mining, commerce, etc.,

/ extending

extending even to professions and skilled work. There is only a handful of small-scale African businessmen and they are too busy battling to overcome the innumerable disadvantages in their path to have emerged as anything like a serious political force. As for the petty bourgeois African shopkeepers in the townships, battling with their one-man or family businesses, many are no doubt good Congress members, but it would be absurd to pretend that either as individuals or as a class they exercise any predominating influence on Congress policy. (If they did, they would be far more likely to back the PAC brand of race-chauvinism - "Africans buy from Africans" - than the broad non-racialism of the ANC.)

Neither in policy nor in composition, can the ANC leadership be described as "bourgeois", as the "SIA" want to label them, without offending against the well-known South African facts of life. Indeed, one would be hard put to it to find any but the tiniest number of Africans whose economic status and living standards do not fall well below those of practically all Whites, including wage and salary earners.

When Comrade Dutt spoke of the bourgeois character of the satyagraha movement, he had in mind the great industrial monopolists such as Birla and Tata who, as was well known, backed Gandhi and Gandhism in the Indian National Congress. But no such group can be pointed to in South Africa.

That is why the "Socialist League of Africa" had to invent a new "class" the "aspiring bourgeoisie," to adopt subjective instead of objective standards of assessing class forces, and thus, incidentally, to expose their abject incompetence and poverty as socialist theoreticians.

"The 1952 campaign," says the "Staty-at-Home" document, "was bound to fail."

Did it indeed fail?

It is true that it did not get rid of the seven unjust laws. Indeed many laws of even greater injustice have since been added to the statute book, including the Criminal Laws Amendment and Public Safety Acts, specifically introduced to put an end to the Campaign of Defiance of Unjust Laws.

In the same way one can, if one studies history, come across innumerable struggles and campaigns of one sort or another which "failed" in their immediate objectives. The Spartacus rebellion in Rome did not abolish slavery. The Chartist movement in England did not, at that time, win universal franchise. The 1905 Revolution in Russia did not overthrow Tsarism.

But he would be a poor "socialist" indeed who would dismiss these and many other great historic struggles as "failures". Scientific socialism teaches us that every Progressive movement which stirs the masses of the people, even if it does not meet with immediate "success", and even if it is crushed by violence and repression, is nevertheless no "failure" if it has enlarged the political consciousness of the masses, strengthened their organisations, and deepened their determination and confidence. It is the struggle itself which educates; and many an "unsuccessful" struggle is, in fact, the stepping stone and the rockbreaker for victory.

/ Let

What about capitalist ideas & working class ideas?

Good.

Let us look, rather, then, at the real and positive achievements of the 1952 Defiance Campaign.

More than any campaign up to that time it established the African National Congress as the premier and leading organisation of the African people. It revived the people's confidence in Congress, and showed them that its members were not mere windbags and platform orators but men of action who meant business, and were not afraid to face the consequences of their actions.

It revived the spirit of militancy and courage among the people. It showed them that unjust laws could and should be defied; that the State was not all-powerful; that freedom could be won by men and women who had organisation, courage and readiness to sacrifice, should sacrifice be called for. It is precisely that revival of militancy and courage which has been at the heart of every mass campaign ever since, up to and including the heroic struggles of March and April 1960.

Above all, the Defiance Campaign was an organisation-building campaign. Even the author of "Staty-at-Home" has grudgingly to concede that "Although there were only 8,000 arrests in the entire campaign, Congress won the support of many young people and many of their active members of today entered the political movement during this period."

Lead
In fact to organise "only" 8,000 volunteers prepared, in disciplined manner, to court arrest, to look after their defence and their dependents, was a tremendous achievement in the conditions of 1952, with a Congress which up till then had been little more than a talking-shop. It was an achievement which transformed Congress. It not only led to an unprecedented increase in Congress membership; it raised the whole concept of a Congress member, from that of a person who paid dues once a year and attended an occasional meeting to that of a disciplined soldier in the cause of the African people. It raised the whole concept of Congress from an amorphous society of well-intentioned people, whose whole emphasis was on the Annual Conference at Bloemfontein, to that of a live, modern political organisation, based on a nation-wide network of active branches, meeting regularly, ceaselessly inspiring, educating and organising the people around their everyday needs and grievances.

Looked at from the historical and dialectical point of view the Defiance Campaign was far from being the depressing failure depicted by the author of this truly miserable document. In fact it was a splendid and enduring achievement of the Non-White peoples of South Africa and their chosen leaders; a major contribution to the liberation of South Africa.

The Defiance Campaign was the worthy and historically necessary forerunner of the stirring struggles of the years that followed, for without its experiences the movement would not have been capable of leading and conducting those struggles. And the defiance volunteers were the heart and soul of every great campaign of the 'fifties - campaigns that won the whole-hearted admiration of progressive people and democrats all over the world.

BELITTILING AND SNEERING.

All over the world... But not from the pundits of the "Socialist League of Africa", who turn a jaundiced, belittling and sneering eye on everything the Congress Alliance has done.

The Congress of the People: "an excellent project, but it never came to fruition... Several thousand Congress supporters met at Kliptown (Johannesburg)."

The Freedom Charter: "A mixture of demands taken over from a large number of ideologies. The economic demands were a mixture of 'welfare state' concepts and very ordinary capitalist demands such as the 'right to trade'. The political demands, on the whole, did not exceed those that are common to every Western capitalist society... the demands of a rising nationalism... Nowhere in the Charter is there any indication of how we are to fight."

And so the document goes on, page after page, finding fault everywhere, imputing evil motives, mixing each occasional justified criticism with a dozen twisted distortions, slanders and outright lies. And all of it directed at the unfortunate Congress leadership, so that at the end of it all the bewildered reader will be left wondering how on earth such a collection of blundering incompetents, sell-outs and tame reformists ever managed to win the respect of the best part of the nation and a world-wide reputation as resourceful, daring, revolutionary fighters against apartheid.

It is not, as we have said, our purpose here to refute all the venomous misrepresentations of these twisters of history. To do so, indeed, and to set matters in their true perspective, would require a full-scale review of the whole struggle of the past decade as seen from the viewpoint of militant democracy, of the Congress movement. That would be a job well worth doing; it would make a proud and fascinating record indeed. But those most competent to do it are either in prison or else occupied at present with the making rather than the writing of history.

We have said enough, we hope, to show that the sort of criticisms levelled by the SLA are the kind intended to destroy rather than to help a people's movement; they are, whether their author realises it or not, of the same kind as the "criticisms" levelled against the Congress Alliance by the PAC.

Correct

No healthy people's movement can live and develop without sound and fair criticism and self-criticisms. By these means it eliminates defects and perfects its work and organisation. But this sort of unfair and irresponsible "criticism", which relies on distortions and lies, is the enemy of true criticism. When malicious and untrue attacks are made on an organisation and its leaders, the natural reaction of all loyal members is to spring hotly to its defence. So doing, they may tend to overlook real defects and weaknesses in their movement.

/ Every

Every Congress member and supporter is well aware that there are many weaknesses in the organisations, and all must think and work hard to overcome them. But we shall not be helped at all in this task by the attacks of these self-proclaimed "socialists" -- they are meant not to build up Congress but to tear it down.

A WORD ON THE COMMUNISTS.

We have pointed out above that, in their reckless allegations against the Congress leadership, the "S.L.A." resemble the hostile critics of the PAC rather than honest and well-disposed critics.

There is another remarkable point of resemblance.

Every hostile critic of the Congress movement, ranging from Professor Murray to Messrs. Raboroko, Leballe, Ngubane and Patrick Duncan, have made anti-Communism the absolute centre and spearhead of their attacks. Frenzied attempts have been made to create divisions between Communists and non-Communists in the national liberation and trade union movements, and, when these failed, to label the entire movement as "Communist-controlled" and to smear the Communists themselves.

Despite its claim to be "socialist" and its ostentatious use of "Marxist" and "revolutionary" terminology, the "Staty-at-Home" document places itself in the same company with its cheap and unworthy digs at the Communists in the democratic front.

Correct

It says nothing of the magnificent contributions of the former Communist Party of South Africa to the cause of working class solidarity, democracy and socialism in this country, right up to the passing of the Suppression of Communism Act.

Not the point as I see it

It says nothing of the tireless and courageous work of many former members of the Party in the years that followed, despite every sort of ban and persecution, in building the people's mass organisations and trade unions, the outspoken democratic press, in setting the example and the pace in every militant struggle against apartheid tyranny, and thus pioneering the road towards democracy and socialism.

Not individual courage, bravery, but organisation work

Why is it that despite every effort and pressure the combined forces of reaction have never managed to create a split between Communists and non-Communists in the liberation and democratic trade union movements? It is because every honest Congressite, whatever his own political outlook, has learnt that the Communists are true sons and daughters of the working class, loyal and staunch members of organisations to which they belong, foremost, together with non-Communists, in volunteering for every difficult and dangerous job that has to be done. That their Marxist training has made them wise, well-balanced and experienced in the struggle; and their tradition of discipline has made them refuse to take part in the petty personal intrigues and factionalising that have sometimes disfigured the movement.

/ The

The "Socialist League of Africa" is silent about these proud achievements. It describes as a "clique of careerists" those who have found their "careers", in an endless round of persecution and banishments, in major and petty acts of victimisation these many years. It chooses to say of those who have defied every effort of the class enemy to "destroy Communism" that they "sully the name of Communism".

It would rather be true to say that they have added new lustre to that name; that they have made Swart's register of the "listed" a roll of honour; that they have made the name Communist a title of honour, hated and feared by the reactionary ruling classes, but loved and respected by the masses of freedom-loving people of this country.

"Stay-at-Home" says that the "group who profess to be Marxists" "opportunistically shielded their ideas behind talk of national unity, of broad democratic struggles, etc." It repeats this in other words when it says they "concealed all their ideas behind the front of democratic demands."

Let us examine these grave and serious charges a little more closely.

First of all that the Communists "shielded" or "concealed" their ideas.

Now it is a remarkable thing, but you can read through the whole of "Stay-at-Home"s" ten thousand word effusion without gaining any understanding of the specific terms of the Suppression of Communism Act as they affect Marxists and Communists. The author even mentions the Act, and this is what he says:

"(It) defined communism in such a way as to effectively outlaw any movement that proposed change in the form of government in South Africa."

To start with, this is not true, otherwise the Nationalist Party would be outlawed for proposing a republic, and the Congress movement for proposing the Freedom Charter. (Its leaders are being charged with treason, not with infringing the Suppression of Communism Act.)

More important, "Stay-at-Home" does not tell us what the Act did outlaw: namely, the Communist Party and the advocacy of Marxism-Leninism.

If "Stay-at-Home" means when it says that Communists "concealed their ideas" that they did not get up on the City Hall steps and preach Communism, knowing that this would bring an immediate jail sentence, then it is perfectly correct.

The question is whether it would have been at all sane and responsible for them to do so.

The South African Communists cannot be accused of lack of courage, of undue fear of reprisals against them by the ruling class. Many of them were among the first volunteers in the defiance campaign, and hundreds of them have suffered in various ways for their part in the common cause.

If the Communists of South Africa did not openly defy the Act, it was not because of cowardice or opportunism, nor out of respect for a viciously undemocratic law. It was because as responsible members of working class, democratic and liberation organisations they realised

- (a) That open defiance of the Suppression of Communism Act by all Communists would be a reckless act of mere bravado; which would effectively deprive the workers and oppressed people of many of their most advanced, militant and capable leaders; it would have isolated the Communists from the rest of the democratic and labour movement.
- (b) That there were many duties towards the working class which in spite of the Act, Communists could continue openly and legally to perform.

*but?
as individuals
or organisationally??*

These duties, we maintain, the South African Communists, in unity and harmony with radical democrats of different viewpoints, have honourably discharged to the best of their ability. In so doing they were guided by the well-tried experience of the international working class movement. "Victory is impossible," wrote Lenin ("Left-Wing" Communism) without having learnt both how to attack and how to retreat correctly ...

"The Bolsheviks achieved this (orderly retreat) only because they ruthlessly exposed and expelled the revolutionary phrasemongers who refused to understand that it was necessary to retreat, that it was necessary to know how to retreat, that it was absolutely necessary for them to learn how to work legally..."

*But
as a C.P.
not as individuals!!!*

But, of course, if the Communists found it was illegal to go further that did not mean that they would tamely abide by the law. The reactionary bourgeoisie in many countries have vainly attempted to "outlaw" Communism - - the reaction of the Communists has been to find new, underground, illegal ways of organising the party of the working class and conveying the truths of Marxist-Leninist theory to the most advanced and revolutionary elements among the workers.

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This has been done in South Africa as well. Some of the Communists have found the means, working with patience, caution and resourcefulness, to overcome the exceptional difficulties of the Suppression Act (which meant, it should be remembered that every known Communist was listed, known and watched by the special branch of the police) and to build the new South African Communist Party. A Party which replaced and carried on the best traditions of the former CPSA, while possessing the ability, which the former Party lacked, to survive and carry on under conditions of fascist-like dictatorship.

*a gross
error of
the old
C.P.S.A.*

*known only
to whom?
(in terms of
activity etc)
Was the S.A.C.P.
looked to
as the C.P.
for a lead,
or guidance,
or were
individuals
looked to??*

Of course this necessarily meant, if you like, working in secrecy; "hiding", "shielding", "concealing" and so on. It is not pleasant for Communists to have to have to conceal either themselves or their views; they prefer proudly to announce them to the world. Yet in the conditions of imperialist "democracy" it has often been their unpleasant but honourable necessity to work underground; self-proclaimed "socialists" should be the last to reproach them with it.

Secondly, let us deal with the charge of "Stay-at-Home" that the Communists not merely "hid" away, but that they did so "behind talk of national unity, of broad democratic struggles." and "behind the front of democratic demands."

This can only mean, and is intended to mean, that the Communists do not really believe in democratic unity, democratic demands and a national front of oppressed people for national unity, but that they only pretend to support these things as a "front" behind which they pursue some sinister, hidden aims of their own.

This lying slander is only too familiar; it has been repeated ad nauseam by the State Department and its thousands of gramophones, paid propagandists and hangers on, ever since they took over the shabby banner of anti-Communism from Hitler and Mussolini.

That it should be repeated, hereby, by these alleged "socialists" is not only contemptible, but also betrays their lack of understanding of elementary socialist principles.

Let us try to make the position very clear.

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Communists support and fight for democratic demands because they are genuine believers in democracy. They fight for unity in the struggle for national liberation because they are convinced opponents of imperialism, colonialism and race discrimination.

Certainly they look beyond the limitations of bourgeois democracy to the more genuine freedom of proletarian democracy, to the rule of the workers and peasants - and still beyond that to the abolition of all class rule of the State itself, under Communism. Certainly they look beyond formal political self-government to economic freedom, to the establishment of socialism, the abolition of capitalism and human exploitation.

But that does not make the Communists any the less sincere and determined fighters in the broad people's struggle for immediate democratic gains, for the abolition of colour and race discrimination, for peace and national liberation.

On the contrary, ardent and unreserved participation in such struggles is obligatory upon every Marxist-Leninist; it is a part of the Marxist philosophy of historical development. And this has been the case ever since modern scientific socialism first was formulated by Marx and Engels, to the present time.

"The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims of the working class," declared the 1848 Communist Manifesto... "They labour everywhere for the union and agreement of the democratic parties."

/ And

And the more recent Soviet textbook Foundations of Marxism-Leninism states:

"It would be wrong to regard the democratic movements as a simple means for bringing the masses to socialist revolution... they are of tremendous importance as independent movements for the people in general and for the working class in particular".

Nor is it necessary to turn to Marxist texts to prove the devotion of the Communists to the struggle for freedom and democracy. They have proved it themselves on a hundred battlefields and in thousands of prisons and concentration camps in every corner of the world.

They have proved it, time and again, in South Africa as well, and their position is well understood by everyone in the democratic and working class camp.

Everyone, that is, except the armchair-socialists of the "Socialist League of Africa" .

IS SOCIALISM OUR IMMEDIATE AIM?

Let us turn, with some considerable relief, from the squalid mud-slinging which occupies by far the greater part of this supposed discussion of the general strike as a means of struggle, to the scanty positive ideas which appear in its few remaining pages.

The document starts off with a restatement of certain propositions which are quite acceptable to any socialist or communist. That the Non-White, especially the African, working class is the major force in the struggle for freedom and democracy, and should be the leading force, is an observation which if not exactly original will nevertheless bear a good deal of repetition. It makes a further sound point: that the events of March and April, with their stormy general strikes in a number of the bigger towns, emphasises this crucial and dominant role of the working class.

But "Stay-at-Home" then goes on to introduce an argument which is quite staggering in its non-consequence. First of all it states, clearly and correctly, that the March and April "events centred around an anti-pass campaign and drew in the entire African township population," so that it would "appear" that "This is a national struggle." And then it goes on to say that because this was predominantly a working class struggle, using a characteristically working class method (the strike)..

Theory of Permanent Revolution?

"the aims of this struggle must be for the realisation of working class demands. This must be for SOCIALISM" (Capitals in original, our underlining.)

Correct, but what follows is also "wrong" in certain respects.

What is wrong with this slick, but fundamentally wrong and superficial piece of reasoning? It overlooks a number of essential points.

1. That the chief sufferers and victims of national oppression (specifically such aspects as the pass laws and the extra-low

/ wages ...

wages that result from their colonial status as oppressed people) are precisely the African working class.

2. That, consequently, the chief aim and desire of the African proletariat at the present time (and, we would add, the condition for the further advance to socialism) is specifically the abolition of the fierce national oppression which holds the workers back both as individuals and as a class, and the winning of equality and democracy.
3. That it is in the direct and immediate interest of the proletariat not to fight alone, but to draw in the rural workers and tribal peasantry, the middle class traders and professional Non-White people, who suffer in varying degrees from national oppression, as well as others including democratic Whites, who, for one reason or another, are prepared to join the struggle for liberation, as allies and partners.
4. That it is therefore the bounden duty of the advanced, socialist leaders of the working class to build as wide as possible an alliance in the common struggle; a united patriotic and democratic front -- more particularly when faced with so powerful, ruthless and determined an adversary as the White Supremacists of South Africa and their imperialist backers.
5. That the only sound and enduring basis for such a united front is a common programme of aims and demands.
6. That since the other classes and groups in the alliance do not accept, and cannot be expected at this stage to accept, Socialism, for the class-conscious workers to insist on a Socialist aim in the common programme would be to disrupt the united front, to set back the struggle, to postpone the advance to democracy -- and thus to socialism as well.

"Stay-at-Home" comments disapprovingly: "This programme (the Freedom Charter) was not socialist, nor was it ever represented as such."

Of course it was not socialist. Socialist workers were strongly represented at the Congress of the People, and it is conceivable that they might have there succeeded, had they attempted it, in imposing a "socialist" programme on the movement as a whole. But they did not attempt it, and they were quite correct -- for had they done so they would have disrupted the alliance instead of cementing it, and inflicted a serious setback on the workers' cause.

Let us view the matter from another aspect. The Freedom Charter was a synthesis of demands taken, not as "Stay-at-Home" says "from a large number of ideologies", but in fact from a very large number of meetings held prior to COP throughout the length and breadth of the land.

What of the 'New Democratic Revolution' - the ideological weakness of the Congress?

The great majority of these demands were framed by urban, particularly African workers. And, overwhelmingly, they were not demands for socialism but for the sort of radical, national-liberationist changes which make up the Charter itself.

In this, there is an important lesson for all socialists who are capable of learning. The African worker is interested at present in the grim fight against oppression, which weights most heavily upon him. He is prepared to fight against pass laws and for liberation, but not for abstract calls for socialism which appear to him now to have little meaning for him.

*a bad word
Socialism
is never
an abstraction
for workers.*

There is no shortage of people who are prepared to declare themselves "socialists" these days. Nehru is a "socialist" though India's economy remains dominated by monopoly-capitalist enterprises closely linked with imperialism. Nasser calls his bourgeois-feudal state "a socialist republic". Even Mr. Sobukwe of the PAC says he is "also a socialist".

Revolutionary scientific socialism consists not in making such empty declarations. It consists in thoroughly understanding and absorbing the outlook and the method of Marxism-Leninism, and applying this method to the practical realities of a given situation.

Abstract, doctrinaire "socialists", unable to understand this vital essence of revolutionary Marxism, are impatient with this necessity to study concretely the actual conditions, the real needs of the people. They are unable to understand the obligation of the Marxist to identify themselves with great historical movements such as those for peace, for democracy and for national liberation.

"We start from our realities and in the light of our means and our objectives we draw up our programme of action", correctly says Sékou Touré. (Présence Africaine, No. 29.) And, again:

"In Marxism, the principles of organisation, democracy, control, etc... everything which is concrete and concerns the organic life of given movements, may be perfectly well adapted to present conditions in Africa. But we should have failed ... if we had shut ourselves up in an abstract philosophy." (Ibid.)

MARXISM AND NATIONAL LIBERATION.

"Neither in theory nor in practice is there any basis for the allegation that there is some sort of clash or incompatibility between the aims and activities of African communists and those of other patriotic Africans seeking the emancipation of Africa from colonialism and racial discrimination, and the advance of her peoples to unity and equality among the nations of the world.

Certainly, Communists are internationalists, looking forward to a future of brotherhood of man all over the world. But that does not mean that any Communist who is a member of an oppressed nation can for one moment be indifferent to the sufferings and humiliations of his fellows, who daily feel the brunt of discrimination, and the denial of democracy and human rights. On the contrary, he will participate,

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