

THE RISE OF AFRICAN LABOUR

By CLEMENTS KADALIE

DEDICATION

To the Dock Workers of Cape Town with whom I had
my first lessons in African trade unionism.

THE RISE OF AFRICAN LABOUR

BY GILBERT KADALA

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

When I began to write this book in 1942 I had little knowledge of authorship apart from what I had gained as editor of I.C.U. newspapers in the 20's and 30's. The original manuscript was passed to a number of critics and possible publishers and eventually came into the hands of Mr W. Ngakane, of the Bantu Welfare Trust. He consulted Mr, Oliver Walker and Dr, Edward Roux, both writers of some experience. These gentlemen expressed opinion that that manuscript had the makings of a very readable and ^c exiting story, provided it could be shortened and somewhat re-arranged. I then approached Dr, Roux, who agreed to help me. I travelled to Johannesburg in April, 1949, and he and I spent about two weeks getting the book into shape. During this period an office was placed at my disposal by the Bantu Welfare Trust. I am highly indebted to Dr, Edward Roux for his assistance. He asked me to state that his role has been exclusively that of literary editor and that, though he sympathised greatly with the struggles and aspirations of the African workers as depicted in these pages, he does not necessarily endorse all the opinions and interpretations of the author. For these I myself take full responsibility. I would like also to acknowledge publicly the help accorded to me by Mr George Findlay, K.C., of Pretoria, who, when in partnership with the firm of Messrs, Findlay and Némeyer, as the I.C.U. legal adviser, was kind enough to send ^{me} some files from that firm which enabled me to describe my arrest and acquittal in the Pretoria magistrate's court in 1928. Mr Henry Daniel Tyamzashe, an old colleague of mine since 1925, is another individual who rendered me much assistance during the early stages of my writing ^{of} this narrative. Of all the I.C.U. officials he has steadily remained loyal and co-worker with me to this day the story of the RISE OF AFRICAN LABOUR comes into print.

A year after the Pact Government came into power in 1924-to be exact-
on February 2nd, 1925, the I.C.U. was responsible ^{for} ^{ing} to have the Wage Board
sit in Bloemfontein.

U.B.

Should come before commencement of Chapter 5.

During negotiations between the European Mine Workers' Union and the

Chamber of Mines arising from the appointment of the Mining Regulations

Commission towards the end of 1923 in which the white miners demanded

the removal of all Coloured and ~~native~~ ^{both} native drill sharpeners and

their replacement by Europeans, also as to locomotives winches and

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K.B. 2000
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My Union strongly protests against your demands for the removal of all Coloured and Native drill sharpeners on mines and their replacement by Europeans, also as to locomotives, winches and pumps. Your action in the opinion of my union is widening racial strife between white and black workers. For traditional trade unionism my union requests you to withdraw this obnoxious and selfish demand.

To the president of the Chamber of Mines we despatched the following identical telegram:

w My Union strongly protest against demands of Mine Workers' Union for removal of all Coloured and Native drill sharpeners on the mines and their replacement by Europeans, also to locomotive, winches and pumps. According to such obnoxious and selfish demand, your Chamber becomes a party in widening racial strife between white and black of South Africa--strife that sooner or later must inevitably bring serious catastrophe.

As is recorded somewhere else in these pages this protest culminated in a huge meeting ever seen in Cape Town at the time on the Grand Parade organised by the I.C.U. where strong resolutions were unanimously adopted.

"That this Conference most respectfully requests the Government to reconsider its decision to exclude agricultural labourers and domestic servants from the scope of the Wage Bill, and to acknowledge the injustice of such exclusion and the overwhelming claims of agricultural labourers to the advantage sought to confer upon the workers in general under the Bill. Further, this conference submits that the agricultural labourer is the hardest worked servant in point of length of working day, and should therefore come first for consideration in any scheme for improvement of wages and conditions of employment. And further that this conference elect a Wages Committee to proceed to

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Summary

Approved
[Signature]

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Cape Town with a view to give evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Assembly, and that the Minister of Labour should be ~~approached~~ acquainted with this request.

"That this conference congratulates the Government on the introduction of the Wage Bill now before the Parliament and which augurs so well for the future of all industrial workers, but we would humbly suggest the necessity of so amending the provisions of Section (I) of the Bill as ~~to~~ categorically define industrial spheres to which the Act will apply and to insert an enabling section for the Minister to extend ^{its} ~~the~~/scope by an amending Act, thus affording an opportunity for full discussion of the merits of the measure from time to time in the interest of those concerned. Should the Bill become law in its present form, the conference fears that party political considerations may act as a brake upon the Minister in his exercise of the powers conferred by Section (I) of the Bill.

"That while fully realising that replacement of Natives by Europeans in State undertakings is the settled policy of the Government, and therefore without entering into any futile discussion of the pros and cons of the policy, this conference of organised African workers most respectfully submits to the Government that in the absence of a definite scheme of land settlement as a compensatory measure the enormity of injustice ^{is} inflicted upon the victims of this one sided policy is incalculable and will positively provoke a deep-seated sense of resentment which the country can ill afford to ignore.

/That

That this conference of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa, requests the employers of labour in the docks areas throughout the Union Ports to introduce a scale of wages with that which prevails in the Cape Town docks. Further, that employees in the docks be paid accordingly, since the custom at present in vogue of engaging labourers in the Cape Town docks and discharging them at any moment, and paid for hourly and one quarter day, is detrimental to the interest of the workers in these areas, whose work is mostly that of serving the general public, and that this conference authorises the Executive Council to approach the Minister of Labour with a view to obtaining his support in bringing about the proposed condition.

" [That this conference of organised Native and Coloured workers is of opinion that Passes, no matter what shape or form, are nothing more or less than an institution of the present capitalist system of Government to reduce the African workers to a state of abject servility so as to facilitate their utmost exploitation, and further, this conference condemns the proposals of the Joint Council of Europeans and Natives intended for submission to the Prime Minister, but in the opinion of this conference the only alternative is total abolition of the Pass System.

That this conference requests the Government to introduce into the House of Assembly a short Bill amending the Industrial Conciliation Act No. II of 1924 as to include Native Miners and Colliers
/in

in the definition of "Employee." Further, the conference considers it a grievous wrong to keep these workers entirely out of the pale of the Act while other classes of labourers are having the benefit of the machinery provided thereunder for consultation and conciliation and in the event of a clash of interest arbitration and mediation.

" That in view of the fact that there are so many complaints from the Natives about the Natives working under contracts on the Mines, the position of a recruited Native working under contract being no better than that of a convict who is not in a position to choose his working place, his class of work, his sleeping place, his kind and quality of food and his wages, this conference considers that the time has arrived when the Government should consider the amendment of The Native Labour Regulation Act, of 1911, in so far as it affects recruiting systems. This conference requests the Minister of Labour to arrange for a conference with the representatives of this Union with a view to arriving at a system by which the Natives should be enabled to reach the working centres, and further, this conference views with alarm the practice followed by the Mine Companies of compelling the voluntary Natives to work under contracts as though they were recruited workers.

" That while desirous to avoid embarrassing the Government in its laudable attempts to devise effective means of settling industrial disputes in times of emergency, this conference wished to call the attention of Parliament and the public to the fact that the powers conferred on the Minister under Section II (I) of Emergency Powers

Bill are constitutionally too enormous, and virtually obviates the necessity of an Indemnity Bill, which affords an opportunity, if not the only constitutional means known to modern democracies, of examining in detail the actions of a Parliamentary Executive on occasions of public disorders; indeed the section constitutes the sapping of the foundations upon which rests the constitutional doctrines of the rule of the law.

That this conference of organised Native and Coloured workers gratefully records its appreciations of the material improvement of compensation benefits to the Native mine workers contemplated under Section 35 of the Miners' ~~Bill~~ Phthisis Acts Consolidation Bill, but we wish to draw the attention of the Minister to the urgent need of increasing the amount of compensation payable on death from the paltry sum of £10."

~~p; ; ; ; ; When the report of the Credentials Committee~~

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came to be considered by the Conference, Mertens, as you will see from the Provincial Record, asked for information on the matter. The Vice-Chairman of the Credentials Committee (Tshourtechine) Serb-Croat-Sloven State) apparently did not understand the matter fully, and gave, as the reason for the non-appearance of Kadalie's protest in the report of the Committee, the fact that the I.C.U. was not registered. This complete mistake (which he corrected later in the debate) when he gave the true reason) provided an opening for a letter from Kadalie to which I shall refer in a moment. The result is that the protest of the I.C.U. leaves few traces in the official record, which is a pity, but being worded as it was, I do not see that the Credentials Committee could have taken any other action. In order to retrieve the position a little, and to secure an official declaration that racial questions had nothing to do with this action of the Credentials Committee, Kadalie wrote to the Director (in his capacity of Secretary-General of the Conference) asking for a re-opening of the matter, and an assurance that the question of race had no influence in the affair. He will, no doubt, show you the correspondence. I think the reply gave him considerable /satisfaction

satisfaction, and will justify him to his people. But in the event of a similar centretemps next year, I think he should be advised that any new protest should be drafted otherwise. It would be better, and certain in order, if his Organisation protested that the appointment made (Supposing, of course, that it is not one satisfactory to them) was not made "in agreement with the industrial organisation most representative of work people" (See Article 389 of the Peace Treaty, par.3) meaning by that, of course, the I.C.U." The outcome will in all probability be some compromise on the lines of the decision of the Permanent Court of International Justice on the question. If the white and black unions combine for the purpose of nominating delegates to Geneva, the whole business will become an internal matter for them, which they can settle as they wish. If they do not combine (as unfortunately seems more likely) the Government will no doubt be compelled to adopt some scheme of alternation between black and white. During a later discussion in the Conference, and appeal made by Giri (Indian Workers' delegate) to the South African Government drew a reply from Pienaar, the South African Government's delegate, which went much further than I personally should have considered probable. I give his remarks in full:

" I merely wish to make two remarks since South Africa has unfortunately again been mentioned. I wish to point out to the last speaker that the mode of representation is laid down, I believe, in the Treaty of Versailles, It has nothing to do with the proportion of races. The method laid down in the Treaty has always been followed in South Africa. If the coloured or other workers, are not sufficiently represented, they have themselves to blame. We can only apply the law as laid down in the Treaty of Versailles, and that we have done. The implications are clear enough; If the black unions become strong enough, the Government will not be able to overlook them in the matter of the nomination of workers /delegation

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From my own point of view (as responsible for the work being done on Native and Colonial matters) his visit has been very valuable. He has, so to speak, "dramatised" my work, and has given reality to the question of the representation of Native workers---always, so far, a more or less theoretical one, though one juridically speaking, easily realizable. This brings me to another point to which I should like to draw your attention. It is one which has become an issue as the direct result of Kadalie's visit, though it is not one which concerns the direct problem raised by his protest. It is the question of the representation at the conference of the workers of our own, the French and other Colonies, when matters affecting their interests may be on the Agenda. These Colonies, (unlike South Africa) have no direct representation in the Conference. It has been suggested that, e.g. the British workers' delegates might, under certain circumstances, be accompanied by workers from Jamaica, the Gold Coast, etc. etc., as technical advisers. I am given to understand that Poulton, the British workers' delegate at the present Session, is strongly opposed to this idea. Having had no opportunity of discussing it with him, I cannot say on what grounds he bases his opposition. I can, however, see no other way of securing the representation of Colonial workers, and should be glad if you could see your way to discuss the matter with your people, and, if you find it possible,

/to

the OFFICIAL REPORT: PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES: HOUSE OF COMMONS"

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appears the following report, which is reproduced here with pride since I was solely responsible for its representation to the British Labour Party which was then His Majesty's Official Opposition:

Mr Wallhead: There are some points on which I desire a reply if it is possible before the Debate concludes. I understand that in connection with the International Labour Office, a committee of colonial experts has been, or is being formed to look after native questions, particularly in relation to labour conditions. From a list submitted to me, I find that all kinds of officials persons are named in connection with that committee such as the Director-General administering the Colonies of Belgium, an official representative of our own and a representative of the Dutch East Indies, As far as I can see they are all whites and all officials. I suggest that some person should be included in that committee who is conversant with Colonial labour conditions from a working class point of view. The point of view

View of the white settlers and of the governors should not be considered exclusively and I hope that something will be done in the direction of appointing a member of this committee who is in direct touch with the labour side of these questions affecting the natives. Some time ago the hon. Member for the Attercliffe Division of Sheffield (Mr Cecil Wilson) asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies a question about a sentence of three years hard labour imposed upon Isa Macdonald Lawrence, a Nyasaland native for importing into Rhodesia six copies of the NEGRO WORLD, published in Philadelphia and two copies of the WORKERS HERALD published in Johannesburg. The reply was: "If this native has been convicted under the Seditious Publications (Prohibition) Ordinance of 1918, he would in the ordinary course serve his sentence in Nyasaland, and the question of deportation would not arise. The Seditious Publication Ordinance was not passed as a War-time measure, and the question of its continuance is primarily a matter for the consideration of the Governor of the Protectorate in the light of the local conditions. I shall no doubt receive a report from the Governor (Official Report, 29th November, 1926: col. 803. Vol.200).

I wish to know if a Report has been received about this matter because I understand that the judge responsible for this sentence has been transferred to another district. I should like to know why the Rhodesian authorities prevent the formation of branches of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union and why they take the line which they do take against allowing the

Natives to organise themselves in protective bodies in order to improve their conditions and standard of life. I wish to know if there is any chance of a revision of this sentence which seems to be particularly a harsh one for the offence of taking into this district a few newspapers."

offices in Transport House in Smith Square, London, S.W.I., I frequently visited where I contacted A. Creech-Jones, M.P. often, in connection with the revision of the I.C.U. Constitution and my mission generally.

Long before I went to Europe, I had already established some contacts with the American Negroes in the United States. As a journalist I contributed articles on South Africa to "THE MESSENGER" a monthly magazine which was ably edited by A. Philip Randolph in New York. In London I had already met two daughters of Dr W. B. DuBois, one of the leading Negroes in America who assured me that I would receive a great reception amongst the Negroes. At the time I saw a musical revue entirely run by an American Negro cast from the United States, in which the late Miss Florence Mills played a leading role. These two events chiefly influenced my decision to prefer going to America instead of Russia. On the 23rd June, 1927, Philip Randolph of New York; wrote me as follows: "Your proposition to come as our guest has been considered and we are in a position to make the following offer: We shall arrange a lecture tour for you, its length depending on the length of time you plan to stay. We can arrange a tour for one, two, three or six months. We shall offer you a flat salary of 100 dollars a week and pay your transportation. Some one of course will have to go along with you. Please let us know immediately the probable time of your arrival in this country in order that we make arrangements. Send us a good photograph of yourself and a brief biographical sketch for publicity purpose." On ~~the~~ July 23, 1927, I received another letter signed by George S. Schuyler, acknowledging receipt of my photograph, also suggesting that my tour should last for sixty days. "In other words," he wrote, "to end November, 15, 1927." The proposed tour of the United States of America was well advertised in advance both in newspapers and by pamphlets. I reproduce hereunder one pamphlet to show the reader the elaborate arrangements which were contemplated.

African Labour Leader coming to the U.S.A. To make national tour with G. S. Schuyler: Heads

Heads 100,000 African workers, New York, N.Y.

August 15th. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, national union of over 7,000 pullman porters and maids is bringing to the United States as its guest, Mr Clements Kadalie, national Secretary of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa and editor of the WORKERS HERALD, Johannesburg, South Africa. Mr Kadalie will arrive the latter part of August. During the months of September, October and November he will tour the United States under the auspices of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. He will lecture on the present status of the Natives in South Africa and adjacent Colonies. Clements Kadalie, a native of British Nyasaland, heads an organisation of almost 100,000 Negro, Coloured and Indian workers in South Africa, and has become internationally known because of his courageous fight for better economic and social conditions for the African Natives. The Union which he heads was founded by him in 1919, and has since grown very rapidly until it has become an important factor in South Africa. Recently it became affiliated with the Amsterdam Trade Union International, and through an understanding with white labour in South Africa, was able to have the pernicious segregation bills aimed at the South African blacks, indefinitely shelved by Parliament. For the past three or four months he has been in England and in Europe, lecturing in the interests of black labour in Africa. Accompanying Mr Kadalie on the national tour, and lecturing

/from

from the same platform, will be Mr George S. Schuyler, noted Negro journalist and critic, who is managing editor of THE MESSENGER a monthly magazine published in New York City, and a member of the editorial staff of the PITTSBURGH COURIER, prominent national Negro weekly newspaper. These two young Negroes representing the more advanced thought and opinion of Negroes to-day, will together present the point of view of the New Negroes in the United States and Africa." The cities visited will be New York, Brooklyn, Newark, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, Columbus (O), Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Louisville, Nashville, Atlanta, Birmingham, Memphis, St. Louis, Kansas City (Mo), Omaha, Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, Seattle, Portland (Ore), Oakland, Los Angeles, Denver, San Antonio, Houston, New Orleans, Jacksonville, Savannah, Durham (N.C.), Norfolk and Richmond.

This will be the first opportunity the American people have had to get first hand facts about the present and future status of the black people in Africa. A great dinner will be held for Mr Kadalie in New York upon his arrival at which the most prominent liberals and labourites of both races will be present."

On September 8, 1927, after I had booked passage on the "Berengaria" with passports arrangements in order, I received unexpected cablegram from New York which read "Lecture engagements herewith cancelled. Delayed arrival short stay impracticable!" I replied on the following day September 9th, 1927 as follows:

"Passage booked sailing tomorrow impossible cancel arrangements book whatever meetings possible. Meet Ellis Island." The cancellation of

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the American tour was the first blow the writer encountered since my landing in Europe. I had already taken leave of my hotel which was situated in the City of London where I stayed for long period. It was not so easy for an African or any Coloured person to get accommodation in the heart of the Empire. It was not so difficult in my case, at anyrate, because I had the help of the officials of the Independent Labour Party. When I received the cable from New York for cancellation of my tour, I rushed to the offices of the Cunard Company to ^{them} inform of the position. It was too late then to arrange for hotel accommodation. In the haste, one of the officials of the I.L.P. had managed to get me some accommodation in the vicinity of the Crystal Palace outside the city. I was given the address of the hotel which was supposed to accommodate students from the Colonies and India. As directed I took train, but to my sorrow, I was unable to find the hotel in question. I walked up and down the street which was too long, striking matches to look at the street numbers. I carried my suit case with me which was getting heavier as I strolled up and down until close to midnight without avail. I was mindful in case I was accosted by a gang of robbers. About one o'clock towards morning I found myself back at the railway station where I had alighted early in the evening from the city. A friendly railway porter relieved me of the suitcase which he stored in the cloakroom. I was feeling very tired as a sequel of walking up and down half of the night. After having ascertained the time of the train to take me back to the city, the friendly porter, on my request, took me to a hotel where we had some drinks together, which gave ^{me} some relief. About 3 a.m. I boarded train to the city after warmly thanking the friendly porter with some tip. On reaching the city another kindly porter helped me with the luggage. We visited many hotels for accommodation, but I was refused admission. Finally, we passed through the City's huge General Post Office, not far from St. Paul's Cathedral, ^{near which} where accommodation was found. I stayed at this hotel until my departure back to South Africa. While resident at the Manchester Hotel, another African was admitted to it. He was a

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