

TELEPHONE NO: 6889

602, CLIVE COURT,
MAIDA VALE,

LONDON W.9

12th August 1957.

12.8.57

Dear Lionel,

Greetings:-

1) I enclose copy of letter I received from Gerald Gardiner Q.C. for your information. Please treat it confidentially.

2) John Calder has received a letter from his representative in South Africa in which the latter states, quite wrongly in my opinion:-

a) That our book will not be allowed into South Africa.

b) That at all events it will take at least 3 months before the Minister gives a decision.

John Calder and I are anxious to have a large sale in South Africa. I do not suppose there will be any strong objection to that from your side. Incidentally, his representative also mentions that booksellers will be frightened to handle the book because of contempt of court. In all the circumstances I would like you to give careful consideration to the following proposal:

a) Get some of the senior counsel to go through the M.S.f which no doubt you have a copy now, for contempt of court, libel etc.

b) Eagle Press has done quite a good job of my book "Garment Workers in Action". See my brother Benny, whom I dislike intensely, about getting Eagle Press to publish the book in South Africa - or rather to print it. Any other printer who will undertake the job will be okay with me.

c) 5,000 copies could be printed at about 3/6d to 4/- per copy, which means an investment of £1000.

d) I think that with the help of the various organisations, and more especially the Legal Defence Committee, since the profits will go to the fund, at least 5000 copies, possibly 10,000, could be sold at 7/6d or 10/-, which would help us, the fund and the cause of freedom.

e) With the proofs already corrected, it should not take very long for a printer to get the book out.

f) If you cannot raise enough funds to cover the printing of 5,000, perhaps you might consider printing 2000 or 3000.

g) All that John Calder would expect is the imprint of the firm plus a percentage of probably 6d or 1/- per copy to reduce the cost of printing here.

Can you give this matter your prompt attention and let me have a prompt reply? Failing that can you get one or more booksellers to place substantial orders. We would allow 50% or 60% discount.

I.

Read and destroy

I was practically born in the Socialist movement, and spent nearly 40 years studying the history, philosophy and tactics of the struggle for human freedom. I studied the Masters with the same thoroughness as a competent conscientious barrister studies a brief. The overwhelming majority of South African lefts have picked up their knowledge like a blind hen picks up stray corn. I joined the I.S.L. in 1917 and was later active in the Young Workers' League which I helped to form. In 1925-26 I spent six months in Moscow and saw the people who made the revolution.

2.

Little is known about the factors which led to my expulsion from the C.P. in September 1931. Before my expulsion I was a member of the C.C. and of the P.B. of the Party. The first time I learned of my expulsion was when the resolution expelling me, Andrews and others was published in "Umsebenzi". There were no political differences, no charges, no hearing. I was frantically busy with my trade union work and everything was done behind my back. The principal expellers were (a) Lazar Bach, a shrewd Yiddisher boy from Latvia who wanted my job as secretary of the G.W.U. (which I did not want). A few years later this gentleman was liquidated in Moscow. (b) Douglas Walton, who now leads a very respectable life in the North of London, no connections with the labour movement. (c) Eddie Roux, who is a vicious enemy of the U.S.S.R. (d) Albert Nzulu (he played a minor part) died in Moscow. The Party was in a very poor state in 1931 with no funds and no membership. Of course it was the period of ultra leftism, although policy had little to do with my expulsion.

3.

After 1931 the Jewish Workers' Club took over the C.P. and I must frankly confess that I have always had a profound contempt for the revolutionary phrasemongers from Houghton, Doornfontein and Yeoville. I could not get on with the Snitchers, the Sackses (Cape Town), the Findlays, the Buirskis, with the Joffes and Harmels. With the late Bill Andrews, with the mass of workers, white and non-white, I got on very well. Ray Haermel was more than a friend with Lazar Bach and when she became Mrs. Harmel she rubbed in the dirt for me. Ruth's mother, Mrs. First and I have always enjoyed a mutual loathing and that did not help matters either. I know that I have committed many blunders - only the phrasemongers and the dead are "pure" but the vendetta against me was almost entirely personal. I was a ruthlessly efficient trade union secretary and when you read the records of the T.L.C. Congresses between 1925 and 1952 you will see that the G.W.U. conducted a consistent progressive policy. In my own little world I was a success and this caused much

jealousy. If Wolfson, Kalk, Fleet, Betty du Toit (all people of the past) will tell the truth, they will agree with me. I always hated sloppiness, unpunctuality and inefficiency and made many enemies. I am a professional "society changer" and have utter contempt for amateurs and people who think that practical political problems can be changed by uttering revolutionary phrases.

4.

I have always argued my point of view, passionately and with vigour but quite frankly, never claimed divine guidance. Somehow I could never find comrades in S.A. with whom I could discuss seriously theoretical problems. I was always treated to endless phrases or to endless abuse. The theoretical differences I seem to have had (at least I think so) arise from the following:

(a) I believe that the next stage in the development of South Africa is the bourgeois democratic revolution. This is not the final stage - the final stage is socialism. But I know the difference - not only theoretically but practically - between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the B.D.R. To use left jargon in S.A. (B.D.R) would frighten people, so I always employed the term "progressive capitalism" which frightened and antagonized my left friends. But the B.D.R. is "progressive capitalism". The countries of Western Europe, and the U.S.A. have had their B.D. revolutions. Progressive capitalism means a relentless struggle against feudalism, colonialism, racial intolerance and general backwardness, and that is exactly what the B.D.R. means. You draw into the struggle all forces which want to see Bourgeois democracy established. The African Coloured and Indian people are not fighting for socialism and that is made abundantly clear from the provisions of the freedom charter. Yet I am called all sorts of names because I proclaim that we are fighting at present not for socialism - that is our ultimate goal, but for the Freedom Charter. And even to get B.D. in S.A. you will have to fight like hell.

I may be wrong and I am quite prepared to be convinced that I am, but I want logical political arguments not the phrases of a Socialist Sunday School.

(b) I had many differences with Wolfson, Kalk and Ray Alexander on the line to be adopted in the trade union movement and today I feel convinced that they have committed not only blunders but crimes. Since 1925 my policy was by: all means fight racialism in the official trade union movement, fight for recognition of African workers under the I.C.Act; but that is secondary. The primary duty is to organize the African workers, build a strong African trade union movement. When the Africans are well organized they will receive all the recognition they need and the White workers will be anxious to cooperate with them. Wolffson,

Kalk & Co. insisted that everything must be done through the T.L.C. through Downes & Co. I led the fight against the reactionaries, and traitors in the T.L.C. but Wolfson & Co. sided with Downes. I could see that the industrial development of the country was leading to a position where the White workers will play a secondary role and in 1944 the G.W.U. voted hundreds of pounds to organize African workers. Wolfson accused me of wanting to split the T.L.C. and he and the other lefts sabotaged our efforts. The only Europeans who did a practical job of work to organize Africans were the mad Trotskyist Max Gordon, Ray Alexander in the Cape only and later Mike Muller.

Had the "left" not been confused we should have had today a national trade union centre composed of (a) 100,000 coloured workers in the Cape, Natal and the Transvaal. (b) At least 100,000 African workers; (c) probably about 30,000 Indian workers and (d) possibly about 30,000 white workers. In short a real C.I.O. with sufficient strength to negotiate with a conservative A.F.L.

Instead, we had the crook Stuart leading the Coloured workers of the Cape and "Mr" Bolton, the coloured Indian and African workers in Natal, With the mass of African workers left in the lurch. Today the position seems even worse. The overwhelming majority of the organized Coloured and Indian workers and many thousands of African workers are in the S.A. Council of Trade Unions or cooperate with that body which has no guts. The mass of white workers who in my time did show some opposition to the Nats is today completely apathetic. The past is gone, but even now everything possible must be done to organize African workers and the ultra left diatribes against the S.A. Council of Trade Unions will not help the African workers. The 5000 militant African women and men in the clothing industry and the 10,000 militant coloured workers are led by Johanna Cornelius, not by progressives. If I could solve my financial problems I would take a trip to the Far East and West Africa and raise £25000 for the S.A. Congress of Trade Unions. Of course the swines from the T.U.C. have sabotaged my efforts but I am still carrying on the fight.

And please remember you cannot carry on trade union organization with revolutionary phrasemongering.

5.

Parallel Branches: I was not the architect of parallel branches in the G.W.U. In Port Elizabeth workers of all races belonged to the same branch, but in Johannesburg the overwhelming majority of the members who were white in years gone by insisted on forming separate branches but having one Union. Many wanted the exclusion of coloured workers altogether. I often told the workers that should they introduce a colour bar in the Union they will have to ~~work for~~ another secretary.

find

Should I have resigned because they insisted on separate branches?. I don't know.

Singularly enough many "lefts" adopted the policy of parallel branches. (e.g. N.U.D.W., Sweet Workers etc). Even in the political field you have the S.A. Congress of Democrats which is only another name for a parallel organization. Yet I was the "traitor". I have never been able to find out exactly what the left wanted me to do in this matter.

6.

The Role of European Workers in S.A. I have faith in my philosophy and in the workers, no matter how much confusion reactionary politicians cause in their ranks. I am convinced that the white workers and white poor farmers and even white industrialists have a progressive role to play. But because I tried to lead white workers away from the Nationalists the ultraleft phrasemongers have always flung it into my face that I ignore the role of the Africans. I have never been criticised by the Africans or Asians in S.A. or in Britain. I know that the people who suffer racial oppression are always grateful to whites who fight against white reaction. The Houghton revolutionaries make me sick. I have little or no contact with the A.N.C. or the S.A.I.C. or with any other non-European political organization. I was a trade union secretary of a Union which up to 1944 was overwhelmingly white and in that union I tried to give a progressive lead. Hundreds of thousands of non-European workers admired me but a handful of middle class mostly Jewish boys and girls hated me. The "Daily Worker" and the French Left press wrote very friendly reviews of my first book "The Choice Before South Africa". The only snotty reviews I got was from the "Yorkshire Post" and Brian Bunting in the "Guardian". Many leading Africans and Asians here in London and many real left whites have lauded my second book "Rebels Daughters" to heaven, but some shitpot (no doubt from Houghton and does not carry a pass) engages in the most venomous attacks upon me. These malicious diatribes are not based on what is in the book, but only what is in a mind poisoned with personal hatred and with revolutionary phrasemongering.

I have outlived a whole bunch of middleclass scum who found delight in hurling abuse at me, and I am not particularly worried what C.B. writes in "Fighting Talk" about me, nor will I be particularly upset if "New Age" follows Ruth First, Why should I deprive my left friends from some emotional satisfaction which they have derived for years from abusing me? - and their own justification

But how will the cause of African freedom be served by some lefts venting their spleen against me?. C.B. attacks me for not dealing with the broader problems of African trade unionism. Apart from the fact that I wrote a story covering a limited objective and publishers also have some say regarding size of books, what useful purpose would

have been served if I had denounced the confused "militant" phrasemongers who did so much harm to African trade union organization? I sent a reply to Ruth but do not know whether she will publish it.

(See my letter in New Statesman of 10/8/57).

7.

It is difficult to carry on a lengthly polemic in letters. I am always prepared to listen to reasoned argument no matter how strongly it is put. Socialist Sunday School stuff bores me (and I am not sneering at S.S. Schools, I rather enjoyed them). This is 1957, not 1905 or 1917, and Johannesburg is not Moscow or Leningrad. The African people are awakening rapidly. Even the Europeans are beginning to feel a "little" doubtful about Baaskap. For the first time in the history of South Africa we see a mass movement swinging into action. There was a time when it did not matter a damn what "revolutionary" nonsense the left uttered, no one took any notice. The time has arrived for clear political thinking, for concrete political activity, for proper leadership and tactics. We must know when to attack and when to retreat, how to gain friends and how to split enemies. Victory is not round the corner yet. The real struggle has only just began. The people who matter are not those who develop a sort of fatalistic faith in ultimate victory but only those who with stout hearts and clear minds, learning from the experience of the international labour movement, work for victory.

(1) Get seven of the best to represent the Africans and Coloured people in the Assembly and also good Senators. They must work with the Congress and carry on the fight inside and outside of Parliament.

(2) A hundred thousand African trade unionists by the end of 1957 and a quarter of a million by end of 1958. Use "official" T. U.'s and even employers and employers' associations to further African trade union organization. Get all African and Coloured Unions to affiliate to the S.A.C.T.U.

(3) We must create a progressive literature for all sections, English, Afrikaners, African, Coloured, Indian people, history of their struggles, novels, poems, plays, possibly even films.

(4) Help to build the Labour Party without in any way weakening the S.A.C.O.D. Get Afrikaner workers, also English workers who are inclined to support the U.P. & join the L.P.

(5) The front against reaction is spreading. Don't disrupt it with revolutionary phraseology.

(6) What do you think of organizing a boycott of S.A. goods and ships in the event of any of the accused being convicted and sentenced?
