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The trade union movement and its role in the impending South African revolution - A Speech to the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress of South Africa, held in Lusaka, Zambia, from 27 to 31 August, 1971.

-By-

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Dear Comrade Chairman,

- 1) The seriousness of our revolution calls for a proper guideline paper, or what is commonly called, the " Basic Document " to reach participants in time in order to enable them to study and make a fruitful contribution to the discussion.
- 2) The important documents which are now being presented here, I think, should have been given to us at least two weeks in advance so as to allow us time to study and apply our minds on them.
- 3) Comrade Chairman, I am in no way trying to make a fuss, or an issue out of it but just wished to draw your attention on the problem of giving out documents at the last minute, because peoples' understanding of a given piece of writing or speech can never be the same, some are quick to grasp while others are slow. I belong to the slow ones.
- 4) In writing or in a speech, it may appear easy sometimes, particularly when the words used by a writer or speaker is saying. It is often not until you come to try to analyse exactly what he did say that you often realise that while your ears or eyes may have understood the words, your mind has not understood the sense. This kind of thing is dangerous for a revolutionary movement.
- 5) Now comrade Chairman, I want to make my humble contribution on the role of the trade union movement in our impending revolution, and briefly on the current developments at home and the Government's outward looking policy and the "dialogue issue".
- 6) Comrade Chairman, the trade union movement today anywhere, be it in free countries or countries that are still engaged in a struggle against oppressors, play a most vital and a most important role in the

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life of a society. They are a social force to be reckoned with; they tackle the most diverse and most complex problems; they have attained a level which makes them a redoubtable force not only in the sphere of defending economic demands, but also in the sphere of the future of society, of the establishment and reinforcement of democracy. The scale and character of their activities has changed substantially. Mass strike and demonstrations of workers today, even if held to back a particular economic demand, have become so important a factor of political development. The truer is this of nation-wide action in support of demands relating to the general socio-economic policy of the state - as witnessed in France and Italy in 1968, where 10 million workers in the former and 20 million in the latter went on strike demanding not only increases in their wages, but also other socio-economic ones.

7) The trade unions all-over the world, have joined directly in the political struggle. They take a stand and organise big campaigns on all major domestic and foreign policy issues; they influence the results of presidential, parliamentary, provincial and municipal elections.

8) In fact, Comrade Chairman, world statistics show that at the beginning of the present century, the number of industrial workers in the principal capitalist countries stood at 30 million. Today the working class of the world exceeds 500 million, and in a large group of countries, countries of SOCIALIST COMMUNITY, the working class is in power and is building a new society.

9) The role of the working class in the developed capitalist countries has also increased. The number of wage workers is growing rapidly. In 1900, they made up 53.3 per cent of the gainfully employed population; in 1920, it was 60.6 per cent, in 1940, 65.9 per cent, and in 1969 about 79.5 per cent. In some countries the proportion is higher still (91.6 per cent in the United States, 93.5 in Britain.) White-collar workers, technicians and other social groups are increasingly approximating in position to the industrial workers and coming into conflict with the monopolies and imperialist Governments. The Trade Unions are today many times the size of any other mass organisations

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existing in bourgeois society. In the developed capitalist countries they have membership of over 75 million, that is, about one-third of all wage and salary earners. This is the case, too, in South Africa. Mr. Vorster himself told the White South African population that as far as he is concerned, his Party and his Government, "know only one man, and one man only who keep the Government in power, and that one man are the White Workers of South Africa." We have an economically active population of more than 8 million of which the Africans alone comprise 5 million - a formidable army of true revolutionaries indeed.

10. In South Africa, too, as we all know, of the total working force in the country, Africans alone comprise 80 per cent.

11. The fact that they are not yet organised into powerful unions, is a serious indictment on us all, and not only on SACTU. The South African Congress of Trade Unions is a young organisation recently formed, and immediately after its formation, became a target of the Government. But within the short space of its legal or semi-legal existence, SACTU became one of the most popular national trade union centre in the country. She commanded the greatest influence among African working class in particular, and among all non-white workers in general. Even the enemies of SACTU were compelled to admit that SACTU was very influential among AFRICAN workers.

12) For instance this is what Mrs. M. Horrell had to say of SACTU in the 1960's in her book: "SACTU has a greater following among the Africans than it has among other sections of the population, many of its actions are motivated by the particular grievances of Africans, It is a young movement with dynamic youthful leaders who show less restraint than do those of older bodies with established status. It is more in the position than is the present day TUC of the early trade unions, in South Africa and elsewhere, which had to struggle for recognition and the organisers of which despaired of redressing members' grievances whilst working in the economic field alone. It has more far-reaching aims than the securing of gradual improvement in pay, hours of work, etc. It has become a participant in the general non-white emancipatory movement"... (Muriel Horrell, South African Trade Unions).

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13) The South African Congress of Trade Unions, believes that the battle the trade union movement is fighting today in South Africa, especially the African trade unions, represents something more fundamental than mere resistance to economic exploitation; the determination to assert the human dignity of all men. We believe that a trade union movement in a country like South Africa, where two-thirds of the country's population is nationally oppressed, the workers' struggle if it is to succeed, must not only confine itself to mere economic struggle but must take full part in the general liberation struggle. We believe that the genuine struggle of the workers begins when it goes beyond the narrow limits of defence of immediate interests and develops into a political struggle. This policy has succeeded in rallying the masses of the African working class behind our liberation movement, lead by the ANC.

14) In my report to the Seventh Annual National Conference in 1962, speaking as SACTU's General Secretary, I said the following:-  
"SACTU is a working class organisation representing the interests of the working people, more especially that of the homeless, voteless and landless masses of the working people of our land, whose daily lives are at the mercy of the dominating white minority. SACTU conducts a fierce struggle against exploitation. Capitalism thrives on profits derived from the workers; on the exploitation of workers and the deprivation of human rights. Such is the nature of capitalism and it holds no brief for the aspirations of the producers of its wealth. It rejects everything that stands in the way of profits and uses its power mercilessly to crush its opposition. The evils of capitalism, namely, poverty, illness, persecution and the lack of rights are felt more keenly today by the workers than in the past. It is the nature of capitalism to use many devices to camouflage its naked exploitation of the workers. In South Africa, the device used to create super profits is racial discrimination. White people are presented as superior to black people. They are granted privileges while the black people are subjected to the cruellest treatment. Through racial discrimination, employers maintain the cheap labour system. They know, as everyone of us knows, that the non-whites have the same talents as

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all human beings; that they aspire to the same heights as any other people in the world. But if they dare admit this will smash the whole edifice of their system. They perpetuate myths of superiority and encourage workers to remain divided through racial hatred".

(South African Congress of Trade Unions, VIIth Annual Report, JHB, 21-22 April, 1962). I stood by that then, and I stand by it now.

15) Political activities of SACTU at home: In the political front, the South African Congress of Trade Unions effectively, and selflessly played its role. In all the national "stay-at-homes conducted by the Congress Alliance, headed by the African National Congress, in the late 1950's and early 1960's, SACTU discharged its responsibilities to the call of the people.

16) The successes of our stay-at-homes during this period were marked more clearly in industries and factories which had SACTU unions than anywhere else. This was so because, all union members were directed by SACTU<sup>NEC</sup> to be the first at factory gates to explain to workers the meaning of the call or strike

17) In Johannesburg, the area I know very well, all members of the national Executive Committee of SACTU - from its President, comrade Leon Levy, the General Secretary, Mark Williams-Shope were directed by our N.E.C. to make sure that everyone of us must be at a factory gate long before the workers assembly to start work and speak to them. Our organising committees (Mines, Transport, Farm workers, and Engineering industry) were given similar directives by SACTU NEC and they carried out their work under great odds.

18) In June 1961, when Nelson Mandela gave his report and analysis on the results of the three-day-stay at home in May, to the Conference of the Congress Alliance, and asking the Alliance to review the policy of non-violent, the five SACTU delegates who were present, were the first to support Nelson's view. It is true that SACTU made no statement on this issue. This is understandably because, even now, SACTU can not make such statement. But who can deny that SACTU responded unhesistatingly to the call for armed struggle? SACTU functionaries and cadres from the highest official down to a shopsteward are to be found in the MK. We did so without officially committing

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SACTU. I know that some comrades in the ANC say that SACTU has never committed itself to the armed struggle. This, Comrade Chairman, is tommy-rote to me. We can not make public declaration but we have shown this by action and deeds. We are here with you as revolutionaries like every revolutionary in our country.

19) In the international world outside, SACTU played and continues to play an important role in our movement. We have done as much as any one organisation in drawing attention of workers of the world to the South African situation. This includes the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Organisation itself.

20. It was the activity of SACTU officials abroad which made it possible for the United Nations to create the Ad Hoc Working Group of Experts - in which a good number of South Africans, Zimbabweans, Angolans, Mozambicans as well as Namibians appeared and gave evidence. This Special Committee was created in 1967, in response to a complaint by the World Federation of Trade Unions on the infringement of trade union rights by the South African Government on March 3rd, 1966 to the Director-General of the ILO. This letter was passed on to the Social and Economic section of the UN for attention. The complaint was drafted by me and signed by the Head of Economic Department of the WFTU.

21. Comrade Chairman, I raise these questions because I feel that time has come for our movement to take the question of the organising of the African workers into trade unions very seriously. Analysis of ANC documents, speeches and policy statements show that only on very rare occasions does the ANC ever consider trade union movement in South Africa as important. Discussions on policy changes or other incidental matters are never officially being disclosed to us. Personally I get informations concerning the problems of our movement not officially but by some comrades who are not connected with the leadership. Perhaps the leadership takes it for granted that because Comrades Mabhida and J.B. Marks are in the NEC and therefore it is not necessary for the officials of the ANC to take us into their confidence on problems which face the movement.

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22. The truth of the matter comrades, is that, J.B. MARKS and M. Mabhida are not there in their capacities as SACTU representatives, but as ANC members, and that therefore, are not bound to give reports on ANC matters to SACTU. I hope our comrades will understand my point clearly.

23. Situation at home, Government "out-ward looking Policy and the Dialogue. Comrade Chairman, I have not got much to say on this subject, but believe the meeting here will sort of go a little deeper in analysing the current developments at home and make a guideline for the people at home. The comrades will recall that as far back as 1954, the Government of South Africa found itself faced with the need to make a choice between two diametrically opposed solutions - i.e. between accepting the increasing economic interdependence of the races, with all its possible consequences in terms of ultimate complete integration, and enforcing the complete separation of Europeans and Africans - the Government, on the basis of the recommendation made by the Commission for socio-economic Development of the Bantu Areas within South Africa (generally known as the Tomlinson Commission), opted for the second of these solutions, and thus started to create the so-called "Bantustans" and the creation of industries on the borders of these territories for the purpose of resettling a major part of the African population of South Africa.

24. Since then, the Government policy has been that of enforcing this policy of Bantu homelands. It should not be forgotten that at no time has the Government ever consulted or discussed these schemes with our people, but just forced them to accept. As far as I can see, no one in South Africa accepts Bantu-homelands, this includes the European population itself. But of course the Bantu homelands are now there, our people are participating in their operations. Through the years of the operation of these territories, the African people have come to realise that indeed the Whites do not want them and are now developing their own way of approaching the problems of South Africa purely from an African point of view. They are developing a "Black consciousness".

25. Here the organisation is faced with a vital task of giving our

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people political guidance. To explain to them what Bantu homelands really is, what is intended for and why the Government wants to talk with African states and not with them. South Africa wants Bantustans because it wants to maintain a cheap labour system, to make an African nothingelse but a labour digit, and also to create a home market for the expanding white economy. Bantu homelands are in fact intended to perpetuate and carry on the Government policy of apartheid, whose sole aim is the brutal super-exploitation of African workers, and the enrichment of the white property owners - a system of extra economic control over the African labour, designed to direct and limit their occupational geographic mobility.

26. This policy of Bantustans aims at the following: (a) to banish the unemployed African workers from the towns and cities while concentrating them in definite places (homelands) so that they are immediately available to employers in case of demand in future, (b) to release the large reservoirs of African workers up to now locked up in the white farms and make them available in those sectors of the economy where there are shortages; simultaneously to continue the land dispossession of the African, removing them from the land they have occupied for decades and depriving them of stock and agricultural land which they used to supplement their incomes, (c) to create conditions for the easier administrative, police, and army control of the African people. These are the aims and meaning of the policy of Bantu homelands.

27. Problem of dialogue with White ruled South Africa. The question of "dialogue" must be looked at from the background of South Africa's Government policy of "outward-looking" initiated by the Vorster regime a few years ago. As we know, for years, our organisation - the African National Congress, indeed the whole Congress Alliance and other progressive minded people of South Africa, advocated for it until as late as June, 1961. It was in June 1961 that we finally parted company with the policy of non-violence, after a thorough assessment of the previous decade had been fully analysed. This was the view adopted by the leaders of the African independent states when they met in Addis Ababa in 1963, to found the Organisation of African Union (OAU).



28. To understand the reasons behind the dialogue, we got to first look into South Africa's Economic development and the problems raised by it.

29. South Africa has freed herself from certain colonial ties by industrialising. She has done so at the moment in history when it is no longer possible for any country to talk of being economically independent of others. It is known that the developed economies of the world are increasingly tied together with growing flows of trade and capital, and South Africa is one of those countries which are highly dependent on the world economy.

30. South Africa is today passing **through** serious economic problems. And what are these problems? Basically these problems related to the balance of payments. Throughout the recent years of expansion, she has imported more than she can pay for by her industrial, agricultural and base minerals. The gap has varied from R300-million to R600-million a year, but in 1970 rose to a record of R1,008-million, and according to the preliminary statistics issued by the Department of Customs and Excise in January 1971, imports during 1970 amounted to R2,542.5-million while exports totalled only R1,534.5-million.

31. These figures indicate that South Africa has reached a crisis. South Africa normally bridges her trade gap with gold exports. Her gold production is at present worth about R800-million a year, and this figure is likely to go down in future, not up. Therefore if her economic expansion is not to be brought to a sudden halt, there will have to be a major increase in exports. The prospects of such an increase are not very bright. On the contrary, South African exports may fall over the next few years. It is now clear that if a few severe blows can be struck on the boycott front at this moment, she can be in serious trouble.

32. The success of her industrialisation policy has increased for South Africa the demand for new kind of goods and foreign capital while at the same time she is confronted with this serious balance of payments problems. As we have said above, the first and most obvious of these is the persistent trade deficit. We must also take into account foreign interests in the Republic, mainly the British and American ones.

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33. As is known, South Africa exercises a significant influence on Britain's Africa policy. It is an open secret that successive British Governments have pinned their hopes of settling the Rhodesian problem on what influence racist South African leaders can exert on Ian Smith in Salisbury. Confidential exchanges between London and Salisbury pass through Pretoria; at the United Nations the British delegation has often abstained or voted against resolutions hostile to South Africa and tried to persuade the United States and others to do the same.

34. British investment in South Africa total about £1,000 million, which is more than the combined British investments in all other African countries. Total British investment overseas is £11,00 million, of which some £5,000 million is in the commonwealth. In 1969 alone, Britain imported £302 million worth of goods from South Africa against £215 million from all Commonwealth African countries, and the only serious defence pact Britain has in Africa is the Simonstown Agreement with South Africa. Except for the military post in Kenya and the usual arrangements whereby British military assistance could be requested in time of internal difficulties, none of the 13 Commonwealth African countries is involved in any defence pact with any outside power.

35. I conclude by quoting from British Statesmen Harold Macmillan and Sir Charles Webster: "We refused absolute commitments to go to war for unforeseen contingencies. But we had always important treaty connections with the European powers. We carefully preserved for as long as possible our rights under the treaty of Vienna, Paris and Berlin. In addition we ourselves devised a number of treaties to associate other powers in the protection of areas where we considered we had special interests and which in all cases but one admirably fulfilled their purposes until 1914". "The oldest of these were bilateral only, those constituting the Portugues Alliance, which after some hesitation we again recognised in the 19th century as extending to the Portugues Empire. We have, indeed, today in theory, greater obligations towards Portugal than to the members of the Commonwealth. This connection undoubtedly preserved the Portugues Empire and, indeed, probably also saved Portugal herself, if not from conquest, at any rate

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from domination by her big neighbour. In return we got the use of the fine harbour of Lisbon.".....(Sir Charles Webster, "The principles of British Foreign Policy in the 19th and 20th centuries")

36. "In this country businessmen are no fools. The same instinct which made Churchill welcome Stalin as an ally against Hitler induced leading companies and individuals to retain the services of Cripps- in spite of the dislike and disgust earned by his political views - in private or corporate actions where large sums were at stake."

Harold Macmillan, memoirs.