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R2/17

Monty

On the afternoon of May 23, I arranged a discussion with some Africanists in order to debate some of the aspects of their policy. Present were: Robert Sobukwe, Zef Mathopeng, Myrtle and Berman (discussion was at their home) ~~xx~~ B.M. Hirson and myself. The discussion generally was rather diffuse, but the main points were:

1) Monty asked Sobukwe what part he thought Trade Unions would play in the aims of the Africanist movement. Sobukwe replied that he regarded the struggle as a national and not a class one. Therefore while their attempts at organisation ~~xx~~ would not be based on the Trade Unions, they would certainly attempt to recruit members among them. Monty said that the Africanists already held a strong position in the African Clothing Workers' Union. He asked whether in the case say of the Laundry Workers' Union, which operated in an industry in which the largest bulk of workers was African and which had built itself up over the years, whether the Africanists would attempt to build up their own rival trade union, at the risk of disrupting the already established organisation. Of ~~xxxx~~ course, replied Bob Sobukwe, why not? Monty - and Hirson - both criticised the Africanists for this, saying that SACTU (South African Congress of Trade Unions) was slowly ~~build~~ building itself up and was becoming an increasingly effective force. He was rather annoyed when I ~~pooh-poohed~~ this and also when Bob referred to SACTU being ~~dominated~~ dominated by the ANC and its allies. No, said Monty, the situation is changing, and SACTU is increasingly adopting a more independent line. Hirson looked at him in surprise and said that he did not think that it had gone as far as that. Monty reiterated that it ~~had~~ most certainly had.

Bob agreed with me when I said that accepting that the Africanists were waging a national struggle, as most of the ~~lowly-paid~~ ~~African~~ workers were in fact African they would naturally come into the Africanists' movement because of the appeal to their nationalist feelings. If needed, separate campaigns would then be launched within the framework of the Africanist organisation to include the aspirations of the working elements. When the parallel example of Afrikaner nationalism was ~~quote~~ - by me, Monty and ~~Hirson~~ Hirson tended to agree also with this view.

2) Questioned by Monty, Bob said that he was socialist in outlook. He was, however, rather hazy on this point, speaking rather in terms of a planned economy and of equality of income. From this, Monty and Hirson both attacked him, asking him how he reconciled his acceptance of Socialism, which was an internationalist outlook, with his national consciousness. Bob gave no answer to this, speaking rather in terms of it being necessary for the Africanists to make a nationalist appeal, this being essential in order ~~xxxx~~ to rise above tribal loyalties and to bind the African people as a nation. Myrtle charged him with being unprincipled and acting purely because of expediency, adding that this was acceptable, as long as one did not attempt to maintain that one was being completely expedient. We all hammered away at Bob and Zef on this point, but nothing clear or satisfactory emerged. They simply ~~continued~~ continued to reiterate that in the circumstances it was necessary to pump the ideas of nationalism.

3) The discussion swung round ~~xxx~~ when Myrtle raised the question of cooperation with other groups. She said that whatever the Africanists might feel about the other racial groups in South Africa, they needed them. They needed assistance in matters which they could not handle themselves, and this did not mean White ~~leadership~~ leadership.

She wanted to know why t Africanists ~~wixnt~~ did not thro open widetheir membership to all persons, adding tt if they did this, they would at least gain a big victory over t ANC, which spoke of multi-racialism but did not practise it. She asked whether t Africanists suffered from such an inferiority complex tt they were unable to face t prospect of a small number of other races being in their organisation without these people taking over control. She herself had more faith in t abilities of t present Africanist leadership. She pointed out tt after all, only a small number would be willing to come in - a handful of Whites and Indians mainly. Monty also entered t discussion saying tt there were things for which expert knowledge was ~~ne~~ needed and some Whites could assist in this respect. He said tt when t "Defiance Campaign" was launched Walter Sisulu was at his house t day before t campaign started. Monty offered his services saying tthe was prepared to defy whenever t ANC called upon him to do so. T offer was never taken up and it was only ~~much~~ later tt Whites entered t campaign. It was as a result of this tt COB was formed. He also said tt if it came to any kind of an armed struggle someone like himself who had had experience of driving a tank would be able to give advice on what to do to counter tanks. What did t Africans know about anything of this kind? Hirsch also pointed out tt in any event a change in South Africa's society by violent means was out of t question. Tt sort of this went out with t French Revolution, he said. Myrtle added tt economic pressure was t only answer, but even then, one would have to face t possibility of t ~~white~~ authorities deliberately seeking opportunities to cause violence.

Monty then turned to Bob and Zef, and asked for their answer should he offer ~~them~~ his services, on t basis tt he agreed wholeheartedly with their outlook, and had no desire to be a leader. Bob carefully replied tt personally he understood Monty's outlook, and could ~~nt~~ accept him as a person, but tt Monty was part of ~~his~~ a group, and it was impossible for him to divorce himself from t interests of tt group. He ~~felt~~ he ~~wixnt~~ should perhaps work among his own group. Monty replied strongly tt because of his particular outlook he was practically an outcast from his own group, and tt in any event-t-interests of a group went beyond simply being able to live fairly well because one had a White skin and was therefore in a position to acquire t material aspects of ~~life~~ life. To which both Bob and Zef ~~xxx~~ after some dithering had reluctantly to agree.

Bob said tt t whole question of relations with other groups was very thorny. He and Zef tried to maintain tt eventually t Africanists felt tt there would be no distinctions between groups, but tt t differences had to be maintained in t meantime. ~~his~~ was practically howled down. Bob then said tt recently t Africanists had decided tt t Coloureds should be included with t Africans as t indigenous members of t country and continent, because t Coloureds had their roots fully in t country. "Why not their fathers as ~~white~~ ~~well~~?" asked Monty, adding tt he regarded himself as being an African with his home and his roots in this continent.

I pointed out tt there was a clear contradiction between t Africanists' hazy picture of a future non-racial South Africa and their present attitudes which in hard terms amounted to racialism. I added tt I had raised this same question with Bob almost a year ago, and I had always been disappointed to find tt there had been no real attempt to study t question with a view to examining t validity of their outlook. Both Bob and Zef were now obviously feeling very unhappy. Bob said tt t decision to include t Coloureds with t Africans had not been taken easily. There had, he said been some disagreement on t executive about it, and

even after the members of the executive had agreed to the proposal, it had taken some hard work in the branches to obtain full acceptance. Bob and Zef said that they would have to go into the matter of Whites and other groups - they promised that they would do so. Bob said that if necessary he would take the matter further.

COMMENT: A most interesting discussion this was. I think that the argument over the question of the status of Whites might just lead to some fundamental rethinking by the Africanist leaders. I have long felt that while their ideas were well-developed in some fields, in other aspects, there were matters that had never been properly considered and that this was one of them. The fact that they have apparently altered their previous attitudes towards the Coloureds is at least some indication of their willingness to change if ~~it~~ they consider that they should. Although the Whites represent a far thornier question, perhaps they will change, in which case, an entirely new movement must come about. Although I would like to believe that this will happen I cannot say that I really think that it will come about: the Whites, to the Africans, are not only the tangible sign of oppression but are the oppression ~~itself~~ itself. I feel that the last thing the Africanists will do is to accept the few sympathisers ^{among the} Whites as blood-buddies. Rather, they will openly state that their policy is one of sheer expediency for the moment and leave it at that. At the same time, this rethinking may possibly lead to a softening of attitude in regard to general cooperation with other groups, including Whites, as distinct from the matter of total assimilation and acceptance.

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