

LANDLESSNESS IS A MEANS OF EXPLOITATION

I.B. TABATA

(A Lecture to a meeting of the New Era Fellowship in Cape Town, 1951)

The basis of the economic structure of South Africa is the African population. This is not only because it is numerically the predominant section, but because the African is the direct producer in agriculture and in the mines, and also, though to a lesser degree, in industry generally. Almost all the labour on the farms is performed by the agricultural African labourer. (Official figures for 1937 gave the total number of farm labourers as 31,102,000. Of these, only 6,000 were White farm labourers, less than 2%) These figures give you some idea of how agriculture in this country is carried on the backs of the Africans.

In the gold, coal and other mines, as well as on the alluvial diamond diggings, the African plays by far the greatest part in productive labour. In other industrial enterprises, as well as in commerce and transport, the African worker is playing an increasingly important part. With the growing rationalisation of industry, stimulated by the second world war, the practice of substituting unskilled and semi-skilled for skilled labour is continually extending and this is bound to lead to an even greater prominence of the African worker both numerically and as a producer.

The process must proceed despite the sporadic outbursts and the intervention of reactionary politicians who seek to impose artificially their ideas of a "civilised labour policy" on the natural development of the economic processes, i.e. keeping Non- Whites at the level of a cheap labour force, and paying Whites according to their race.

The main feature of the South African economic system is the exceptionally low level of wages of the semi-skilled and unskilled workers on the one hand and the comparatively high wages of the White labour aristocracy, which has an exclusive monopoly of the skilled jobs.

The prime consideration of the South African State is to satisfy the needs of these two industries, namely mining and agriculture in their order of importance; 1st the mines, 2nd the White farms. To put it another way, the real rulers of the country are the mine-owners and the big White farmers, in that order. Any Government that comes into power, be it the United Party (pro British), or the Nationalists (representing the Afrikaners - Dutch), must regard as its first task the supply of labour to these concerns in order to keep the State machinery running and to maintain what they call a sound economic basis for the country in which gold-producing is the pivot of the economy.

Here is a country rich in mineral deposits, with large arable and pastoral land, all owned by a handful of White people, who belong to a minority section, the White herrenvolk. Industry and commerce are still young, but growing. On the other hand, there is a large mass of Black men and women, disfranchised, without any political power, and therefore without any say whatever in the Government of the country. They have been allocated tiny strips of land known as the Reserves. (Less than 13% of total land area.)

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE RULERS?

The Government in power must see that the State machinery runs smoothly. In this country this means that the mining industry must be kept in perfect running order; the farms likewise must be well manured and kept running; secondary industry, too, must be kept in a good state of repair, and lastly, the electorate, i.e. the White voting population, must be kept in a tolerable state of satisfaction. This is done by supplying each group in order of its importance with cheap Black labour. All of them live on Black labour.

Every law in the statute book is directed against the Black man and you will find that it contributes its quota in the process of squeezing the African off the land and driving him into one or other of the two channels, i.e. leading to the mines and the White farms. Take, for instance, the disfranchisement of the African people (1936 Slave Acts). This law was passed in order to deprive them of the rights of citizenship. One of its main purposes was to make it impossible for an African to buy land. You will remember that the 1913 Land Act forbidding the Africans to buy land could not be operated in the Cape where the people had the vote. They

had first to deprive them of the semi- franchise before they could stop them from buying land. But now the possession and occupation of land is the very root of the problem. As long as the African had land to subsist on, he could not be driven, helpless, into the labour market.

Regulation framed under the Urban areas Act are complimentary to the Rehabilitation Scheme.

(a) Housing Schemes - Locations. (b) "Regulations for the protection and control of "Natives in Town..." This means a pass system.

1. What is a location? A means to deprive an independent man of his vote... a compound.

2. You may not live where you like, i.e. in town, therefore a pass system is imposed. You must carry one or more of 5 passes. In this way people are docketed and those who are regarded as REDUNDANT fall into the hands of the Native recruiting Corporation.

Now let us examine the situation from the point of view of the oppressed. The first question to ask is "What is the problem?"

The surface area of South Africa is about 140,936,000 morgen. Of this 124,186,000 morgen are occupied by White farmers and 16,750,000 morgen by Africans. In 1946 the European population is given as 2,372,690 of whom less than 700,000 (actually 653,352) are in rural areas (farming). In the same year the number of Africans is given as 7,805,592, of whom 6,011,380 are in rural areas. Now there are 3,106,000 Africans in the "Reserves". If we deduct this number from the total in the rural areas we are left with 2,905,380 Africans, the bulk of whom must be in European-owned farms. Thus we find that there are nearly 3 million Africans on the land, but owning no land at all. Of this number, some have become the agricultural proletariat in the sense that they live on what must be termed wages (for lack of a suitable word. The average wage is anything from 10 shillings to 30 shillings a month for males and 5 shillings to 15 shillings for females.) This section, however, is a very small one. Most of them receive only patches of land on loan which they plough for themselves in their spare time, when they have finished working for the farmer. They are in effect landless peasants.

Now to come to the "Reserves". Here again we find the same picture of a peasantry without land. By this I mean enough land to enable a peasant family to make a living. In the Transkei, for instance, the density of the population was 79 per square mile in 1936; in the Transvaal it was 57.5 per square mile and in Natal 132.33 per square mile.

Only one third of the African population live in the urban areas. Among this number are included hundreds of thousands of migrant labourers and seasonal workers whose roots are in the country. In addition to this there are large numbers of Africans who are permanently employed in towns and who still have connections with the country and still speak of their homes being in the country. Thus we find that a large number of the Africans employed in towns are peasant in outlook. They regard themselves as peasants without land.

This brings us to the core of the social disease suffered by the majority of the South African population, namely, LAND HUNGER.

The problem, then, is; equitable distribution of land among the peasant population of South Africa. In other words, our problem in this country is an agrarian problem. To solve this problem, to effect an "equitable distribution of land", would imply a radical re-adjustment of the whole political, economic and social set-up in this country.

First of all it would imply a full participation in the Government of the country of the majority who are now the oppressed Non-Whites. But they are nationally oppressed and excluded from the Government of the country on the grounds of race. The Non-Whites therefore would have to be first politically liberated. Thus we see the direct connection between our national, political liberation and the solution of the basic problem, i.e. the agrarian problem. This connection we must always bear in mind in all our political activities.

The Non-Whites are composed of an extremely small group of the merchant-class, a small section of petit-bourgeois intellectuals - the professional class; then a bigger section, the working class, but small compared

with the whole; and lastly comes the overwhelming majority, the peasantry. This means that any Non- White liberatory movement must recognise that it is the majority class, the peasantry, that will carry the main weight of the struggle. What I want to emphasise is that there can be no Non- European movement worth considering in this country without the peasantry. It is our task to draw them into our political movement.

The peasantry are usually the most backward section of the population. Their mode of existence separates them from current ideas. It has been found in other countries that although they were oppressed both as peasants and as nationalities, they did not on their own link up the two aspects of oppression. When the intelligentsia brought them the slogan: "Land and Liberty!" the peasants for a long time accepted only the first part of the slogan. They did not grasp the connection between the two. The result was that for a long time the peasant stood aloof from the national political struggles. It required decades of agrarian unrest and the influence and action of the intelligentsia and the workers to enable them to connect the slogans. They had to learn that they could not solve their agrarian problem independently of the political problem.

Our propaganda must first of all flow from the slogans of the agrarian question, "in order that, step by step, on the basis of the experiences of the struggle the peasantry may be brought to the necessary political conclusions."

TRADE UNIONS

The problems of the worker in town cannot be solved independently of the peasants. The working-class of South Africa has been cleft in two. The White worker has been brought over to the side of the herrenvolk and things have come to such a pass that the White workers can no longer tolerate sitting in conference side by side with Black workers. Hence the revolt of the extreme reactionary wing of the trade union movement and the consequent breaking up of the South African Trades and Labour Council. Today the slogan of "Workers of the World Unite" has no meaning in South Africa in so far as it is not directly practicable. The Non-White workers who have been kicked out of the Trade Union Movement have to take stock of their previous activities and seriously examine their whole course of action. In the past they were tied to the apron strings of the White labour bureaucracy, which in turn tied them to the enemy class. They had to knuckle under to such treacherous slogans as: "No politics in the trade unions". Such slogans gagged and bound them hand and foot, leaving them prostrate before the enemy class.

As long as the Non-White workers were under the bureaucratic leadership of the labour aristocracy, it wasn't possible for them to throw their weight into the national liberatory movement. If the Non-White trade-unions are to survive they have to live up to the tasks for which they were created, namely, the defence of the rights of the workers. But the rights of the workers are determined by their political position; their inferior economic position, (their inferior pay) flows directly from their inferior political status. The trade unions will have to enter politics and throw in their lot with the liberatory struggle or remain entirely ineffectual.

The Trade Unionist must broaden his outlook and realise that the LAND PROBLEM OF THE PEASANT IS HIS PROBLEM. It affects him both directly and indirectly; directly in so far as the unorganised peasant constitutes a threat to his wage level; indirectly in the sense that his own national political struggle can never progress as long as the peasant has not begun to see his struggle as a national struggle for liberation. What could be more suitably designed to fight for the liberation of the oppressed peoples in South Africa than the federal organisation, the Non-European Unity Movement within which there is room for every kind of organisation, if its object is the fight for full equality for each member of the State and equal opportunity for all. In such an organisation you have the worker standing side by side with the peasant and the intellectual, each learning to appreciate the problems of the other and thus broadening his own outlook and realising more strongly the interdependence of one class upon the other. What is more, in this way the various sections will begin to see their community of interest and realise that oppression is indivisible and that all their problems cannot be solved independently of one another, but only together.

.....

THE AGRARIAN PROBLEM

I.B. Tabata

An address to the Society of Young Africa, May, 1954.

(SOYA is affiliated to the Unity Movement and consists mainly of young urban workers and intellectuals.)

Some of you may have come here expecting an exposition of the day-to-day problems and difficulties of the peasantry on the land. But I do not intend to deal with them to-day. Let us deal with the fundamentals. We have first to understand the nature of the problem itself. Many people engage in politics without having a clear idea of where they are going. They have no fundamental theses to serve as a touchstone in all their activities, to use as a test of the correctness of their lines of action. Quite often they throw themselves enthusiastically into some activity, only to find that at the end of it all they are further off than ever from their goal. Lacking a clear understanding of the problem, and therefore a clear policy, they live a hand-to-mouth existence, veering now towards the policy of one group and now towards another. Such people are prone to indulge in one venture after another, leading to the inevitable result - frustration, despondency and disillusionment. Thus it is important for us at the outset to have an overall picture of the problem before us, the forces at our disposal, the method of struggle and our goal.

There are two main problems that lie before us and require immediate solution. They are the agrarian problem and the national problem. It is our task to examine them and show their interconnection. The one is intimately related to the other and their solutions are likewise closely linked together. First of all, let us examine the distribution of the population and the type of work the people are engaged in. South Africa is still predominantly an agrarian country. The bulk of the population is to be found on the land engaged in agriculture. But the overwhelming majority of the people are African peasants, who own no land at all. Thus the problem for this country is the land or agrarian problem. To see our problem in all its acuteness, let us look into the distribution of the land. With the exception of 2,071,551 urbanised Africans living in locations. (segregated city slums: Ed.) The rest are peasant in character, notwithstanding the fact that they are forced to go and seek work in the towns for shorter or longer periods. On the white farms the number of Africans employed as labourers is 2,528,214. These live in virtual serfdom. The remaining 3,935,576 are overcrowded in the Reserves". It must be borne in mind that, out of the so-called urbanised Africans fully one third are miners living in (segregated) compounds. They are migrant labourers that is, peasant, recruited under contract for limited periods and living apart from their families.

According to the statistics in a government paper, every white man, woman or child in the rural areas owns on the average 177 morgen of land, while every African in the Reserves occupies (not owns) on the average 2- 1/2 morgen. And this is not the whole picture; for all the Africans in the towns and on the farms are by law regarded as living there temporarily only for as long as they are employed, since their home is presumed to be in the Reserves.

The agricultural census figures are illuminating. They show not only the poverty of the Blacks as compared with the Whites, but also the poverty of a large section of the Whites in the rural areas as against the few rich farmers in whose hands the bulk of the land is concentrated. (*Details of census omitted. Ed*) The figures make it clear that the fundamental problem in this country is the agrarian problem. Furthermore, they reveal an important fact that must not be lost sight of, namely, that a section of the white farming population suffers from land-hunger. It is in their real interest to have an equitable redistribution of the land. And in fact land-hunger cuts across the colour pattern. This brings us face to face with the real and fundamental divisions in society, namely, the rich and the poor. All colour divisions in this or any other sphere are a superimposition calculated to blur the real dividing line of classes and to reinforce it.

The agrarian problem is not the only one facing us. We have also National Oppression. The Non-Whites are without political rights; they are excluded from parliament. All legislative, executive and judicial power is in the hands of the small minority of Whites, who use this power for the domination of the Blacks in order to facilitate their exploitation. Thus all the Non-Whites are nationally oppressed. The two problems are interconnected and their solutions are bound together.

Let us now examine the consequences of the appalling distribution of land. From the outset I shall state categorically that landlessness is an instrument for economic exploitation and national oppression. It is the

cornerstone of the whole economic edifice of South Africa.

From landlessness flows a train of evils - the migratory labour system, which sends the African like a shuttlecock from the starving Reserves to the mines and back again; the forced labour system on the farms; and depressed wages in every sphere. We must not be deceived by those who shed crocodile tears over the evils of migratory labour and suggest all sorts of palliatives to alleviate the lot of the black man. Such people are either well-meaning fools or hypocrites who would pour ointment on a cancerous sore. They tinker with the superficial effects of the evil without ever getting down to the core. We must know that no amount of talk or goodwill can ever induce any herrenvolk (ruling class) government in South Africa to alter the distribution of land in order to relieve the position of the black man. Land shortage is necessary and fundamental to the whole economic structure of South Africa. The oppressed and exploited people alone can and will alter that situation.

(Ed's. Note: The speaker demonstrates how the system of racial legislation channels African landless peasants into the white farms and the mines. (see also Chapter 3 Section 4.))

As a result of this dammed up African labour there have arisen certain characteristic features in the South African economy. The main feature is the great gap between the wages of the unskilled and the skilled workers. In this country this means the gap between the black workers and the white labour aristocracy, which has an exclusive monopoly of skilled jobs. The ratio of skilled to unskilled wages over the whole range of industries is 4 to 1. In the mining industry, taking all types of mining, it is 8 to 1, but in the Witwatersrand gold mines the ratio is 10 to 1. In South Africa super-exploitation is made possible because all political power is in the hands of the employing section and all Non-Whites are without political rights. It is possible, also, because of the acute land-hunger of a whole people herded into the Reserves.

When we have understood the underlying motive for all the oppressive legislation and administrative measures against the Non-Whites, it becomes clear to us what our attitude must be. It becomes obvious that no amount of pottering with them or improving them will altar the fundamental position. Those who want to improve these laws are our enemies; for they, in effect, want to perpetuate the status quo. Our demand is for the total abolition of all discriminatory laws, a full and equal franchise, an equitable redistribution of the land for all men and women, irrespective of colour, religious creed or "race." Anybody who falls short of these demands must be seen as an enemy who wants to come close to us in order the better to divert the struggle from its purpose.

Let me repeat once more; the agrarian problem is the fundamental problem in this country. It is the pivot and axis of the national movement. The intellectuals and petty shopkeepers must be made to realise that the agrarian problem is their problem. Whoever flounders on the agrarian question is lost. Such a man will inevitably attempt to lead the movement into the swamps of opportunism. We must guard the movement against such individuals.

Our immediate objective is to create a machinery that will be capable of measuring up to the gigantic task of re-organising the whole of the political and economic structure of South Africa in such a way that the people are assured of getting Land and Freedom. This means that we have to set the whole of society into motion. This is a mighty task. The question is: how is it to be done? What is the political programme necessary for this purpose? And what is the organisational structure most suited to the task? There is a direct connection between the programme and the form of organisation.

We already have our programme, the Ten-Point Programme. Its first point is a demand for full and equal franchise. Point seven demands the abolition of serfdom and the right of every citizen to acquire land anywhere in the country and to live wherever he chooses.

What we need is to work out a method of putting this programme into action. We have to link up the agrarian aspirations with the national aspirations. We have to arouse the peasantry throughout the country through their demand for land. In order to draw the landless peasantry into the movement we must unreservedly throw in our lot with them in their struggle for their right to the land. At the same time we must teach them that the national, i.e., the political question is the key to the solution of their problems. In the given conditions of South Africa these two questions are inseparably bound together. For the landless peasantry are by and large the same people who are nationally oppressed without any political rights. The two problems

must be solved together.

On the question of the form of organisation, we have already evolved the structure which we consider the most suitable for the task. If we think of gearing the whole of society into motion, we must find channels that will penetrate all the layers of society. No single political party can carry out this tremendous task. As we know, there are in existence numerous little organisations representing many different interests at all levels. Each one works in isolation from the rest. Our task is to get to the people through these organisations and draw them into the main stream of struggle. We have to give these organisations a new political content, and that content is the Ten-Point Programme. By these means we can unite the population; the organisations in the country will unite with the organisations in the towns. We shall then be able to build a truly national organisation which will reflect the aspirations of the country as a whole. What I would like to bring home to you is the magnitude of the task confronting us. We must not think in terms of our own little local organisations. We must learn to think in terms of the movement as a whole. In all our activities we must continually keep before us the larger issues involved. Whatever we do must be calculated to bring nearer the solution of the agrarian problem and the national problem. This means Land and Liberty for the people.

NON-COLLABORATION IN ACTION

(Editor's note: At the 1946 National Conference of the Unity Movement, Tabata, after reviewing the national situation and moving a resolution for the adoption of the policy of non-collaboration, said:

"It is the duty of Conference to give directives that are in line with the Ten Point Programme. The Conference should adopt the policy of non-collaboration with the oppressors. Let us make a clean break with the past, cut the umbilical cord that ties us to the oppressor and wrench off the intellectual and political influences of the herrenvolk which have so long dominated us. Let our policy be non-collaboration with the oppressors in our fight for full democratic rights." Subsequently he stated: "This policy provides a sharp line of demarcation between the genuine fighters for liberation and the many compromisers and opportunists, the wolves in sheepskins.")

PEASANTS USE BOYCOTT WEAPON

"With the challenge of the boycott we opened up a new era of struggle." (From *"The Awakening of a People"* Chapter 9.)

Having defined its tasks and formulated its programme, the Convention was in a position to carry its new policy to the masses. The reaction of the people was a measure of how well it had given expression to their needs. Years of bitter hardship and deep disillusionment had convinced them that their old leaders had led them into a political swamp. With a perception sharpened by experience they recognised that the new policy answered their needs and aspirations. This did not mean that they fully understood what the new road of struggle would involve. They had to learn the meaning of the new policy in the day-to-day struggles. Concretely it meant in practical politics the application of the policy of non-collaboration.

In 1945 the African people in the Reserves were presented with what was called the Rehabilitation Scheme., described 'by the Secretary for Native affairs as "Ensuring a better life for the inhabitants (peasants) in the future". The Convention published a pamphlet, *"The Rehabilitation Scheme: a New Fraud"*, which places the Scheme' against the background of the whole "Native Policy" of the rulers, with its system of laws for the regimentation of African labour. The people themselves did not find it difficult to realise that when the scheme had been put into full operation, many families would be landless and driven out of the places of their birth...The root of all this destitution of man, of beast and of the soil itself was land hunger.

The majority of the people of the Transkei - where the scheme was first applied - opposed it. The acceptance of the scheme by the Bunga (council of chiefs) more than anything else opened their eyes to the function of these institutions in collaborating with the government. By this time the leading organisations in the Transkei were members of the All-African Convention. They took the opportunity of explaining to the people that segregatory institutions like the Bunga should be rejected, not only because they had accepted this particular scheme but because they are foreign to a democratic system of government. They were part of the system of trusteeship and in this sense were instruments of oppression.

The resentment of the people mounted as the Rehabilitation Scheme was more and more applied. All over

the Reserves the people resisted with a stubbornness which was new and all the more significant coming from the section of the population which was traditionally regarded as the most backward. In the Transkei the Amaxesibe, in the district of Mount Ayliff near Pondoland, threatened to take up arms in defence of their stock. The majority of the people, too, repudiated those chiefs who had accepted the Scheme. They held meetings in the hills under their newly-formed organisation, the Kongo. The following year a member of the Convention was arrested and charged with inciting the peasants against the Rehabilitation Scheme. In Pondoland the people were strong in their protest against their chief, while the surrounding villages totally rejected the Scheme. In the Middledrift and Debenek districts in the Ciskei a number of villages repudiated the claim that they had accepted the Scheme and strenuously resisted its imposition. A number of arrests were made. In some villages the people formed their own People's Committees and collected money for the defence of the arrested men. All over the country resistance goes stubbornly on. It is a grim fight whose story has still to be told.

.....