

THE OLD AND THE NEW AFRICA

By CLEMENTS KADALIE

(National Secretary, Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of
South Africa.)

[We are very glad to print the following article from Mr. Kadalie as a representative of the African Workers' trade union. At the same time we must frankly state that British Workers have been unfavourably impressed by some of the actions taken by this trade union. One point in this connection is taken up by Mr. Roux in this number. A further article on South Africa will appear in a forthcoming issue.—ED., LABOUR MONTHLY.]

FIVE months ago I was commissioned by the Annual Congress of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa, an organisation with a membership now of close on 100,000, of which I have been National Secretary since its formation nine years ago, to bring to the knowledge of the Labour Movement in Europe and of all believers in democracy the story of the struggles of the African workers for economic salvation and a decent standard of life. Although we live thousands of miles away, we have watched the development of the trade union movement here, and our infant movement in South Africa is being built closely upon the model of the British trade union movement.

We quite realise that a large proportion of the British working class have but little knowledge of the existence of any trade union movement amongst the African workers, and the reason is not very far to seek. Until quite recently there has been practically no communication between the British trade union movement and ourselves, and the fact that our organisation has not been allowed to affiliate to the South African Trades Union Congress has prevented news of our development reaching the Labour Movement here through the ordinary international channels. Most of the information that has reached this country in the past will have come through the capitalist Press, in whose interest it has obviously been to assume the black workers to be members of an inferior race, who have to be treated as children, unfit for responsibility or the ordinary rights of civilised human beings.

Some very short summary of the history of the opening up

of Africa by the white races is essential for an understanding of the present position in Africa.

Old Africa

About four hundred years ago, a pastoral people lived in the so-called Dark Continent. They had their own primitive forms of government ; and, primitive though they were, in comparison with European civilisation to-day, they did at least ensure that every man, woman, and child had enough to eat. There were no class distinctions. Our kings helped build huts, and our queens could be found among our women folk, working as they worked. It is true that in some parts of the continent we had our tribal wars, but they were not one millionth part so destructive as your gigantic wars of modern western civilisation.

I was born an African. I have lived in Africa all my life, and I have studied my history well. The most certain thing in the history I have learned is that my forefathers had of themselves no desire for white civilisation. The white men came to Africa of their own free will, and told my forefathers that they had brought with them civilisation and Christianity. They heralded good news for Africa. Africa must be born again, and her people must discard their savagery and become civilised people and Christians. Cities were to be built in which white and black men might live together as brothers. An earthly paradise awaited creation. And after death there was a heaven for all well-doers in which there was no colour bar !

The strangers were allowed to settle on African soil. Our chiefs were powerful, and very easily those first white people could have been exterminated. But they were made welcome, and our people laboured mightily to help in the creation of the new world. They cut down great forests ; cities were built, and while the Christian churches were spreading the gospel of universal brotherhood, the industrialisation of Africa began. Gold mining was started, and by the close of the nineteenth century European capitalism had made its footing firm in Africa.

Law and Order

The churches still preached universal brotherhood, but capitalism has very little to do with the ethics of the Nazarene,

and very soon came a new system of government for Africa, with "Law and Order" as its slogan. Police and prison systems were introduced. In old Africa there had been no necessity for police. Tribal law had been obeyed unquestioningly, and our chiefs had not needed to be guarded when they appeared in the streets. They neither oppressed nor starved their subjects, nor did they rob them of their land, and therefore they had no fear for their safety. Our chiefs, although they had not read the Old Testament, believed that the land belonged to a Supreme Power. Private ownership was outside their philosophy, and they held all land in trust for the tribe.

The new civilisation, however, was founded on no conviction of inherent safety, which can be secured only by justice and brotherhood. To maintain itself it knew that it had to employ force.

In 1909 Great Britain granted self-government to South Africa—a Government of white men, who refused to allow the natives of the land to take part in their political councils.

The Empire

We had now become members of a great Empire, but, as Keir Hardie prophesied in the House of Commons, in the debate on the South African Act of 1909, we soon had to abandon all hope of sharing in the privileges and fruits of that Empire, and of the new civilisation in Africa which we had helped to build. The way to political freedom was barred against us, and industrially we were oppressed and exploited. Nowhere were we paid wages that touched subsistence level, but indirectly capitalism, in allowing us to be employed in the various industries, was itself showing us a new road to freedom. With the white workers we toiled in the bowels of the earth, and with them we worked on the farms and in the various other industries of the country. We found that we were fully as capable as the white men of carrying out most of the processes of this new civilisation. We watched the machine at work, and learned how it was made.

Then came the Great War, and we were called upon to fight to make the world safe for democracy and to defend the rights of small nations. And from the Great War we emerged, dis-

illusioned as to the fulfilment of the things it had promised, but fully conscious of our rights, and trained to fight for our humanity.

The Formation of the First Native Trade Union

The beginning of 1919 witnessed the formation of the first Trade Union for African workers. It was formed at Cape Town with a membership of twenty-four, and was called the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa. I do not propose here to give its history in detail, but you must know that just as the pioneers of English Trade Unionism have gone through fearful things to make possible the strong and powerful movement that is in existence to-day, so our officials have been gaoled, our members have been shot and victimised, and every possible obstacle has been put in our way. But we have not been discouraged, and from the struggles and victories which have been passed through and won by the Trade Union Movement in Europe, we have found our inspiration.

It is of paramount importance that the Trade Union and Labour Movement here should know what this new trade unionism in Africa stands for. It has been alleged in South Africa that we are advocating other things than trade unionism—that we are promoting racial hatred and want to turn the white man out of Africa. A Bill known as the Native Administration Act has recently been passed by the Union Government, with the implicity understood, though not explicitly stated, object of suppressing our organisation altogether. But I want here to state quite definitely that we feel no racial hostility. We are not so stupid as our rulers, who have not only advocated, but are actively carrying on, both class and racial war. (This latter is a grave charge, but can be substantiated by a study of the Statute Books of South Africa. The Colour Bar Act, which prevents Africans from using any type of machinery, is one of the many obvious examples of racial tyranny and oppression.)

We are not fighting the white man as a white man ; we are fighting for elementary political and human rights for ourselves and our children. We want adequate wages for the work we do, social status, opportunities of education, and the ordinary privileges of humanity, which the white man takes as a matter of course.

At the moment our activities are confined to the industrial side of things, but it is certain that in these days of world-wide democracy, we cannot confine our movement very long merely to industrial issues. But when the time comes for us to agitate for our political rights, we are not going to follow the narrow path of nationalism. We shall be guided by the spirit that permeated old Africa, of accepting every man as our brother. We are utterly opposed to nationalism. Our goal is international Socialism.

Attempts to Co-operate with White Labour in South Africa

During the nine years of our existence, we have endeavoured to influence the growth of our movement in this direction. We have sought the co-operation of the white workers, but in the past they have not responded to our appeal for solidarity. Our 1926 Congress approached the South African Trades Union Congress to receive a fraternal delegate from our organisation, or to authorise one of its officials to open our Congress ; but we met with emphatic refusal. The repeated rebuffs we have received from the white workers, however, have not discouraged our belief in co-operation. Again this year our Congress, which met at Durban in April, demonstrated its belief in co-operation between the white and black workers by passing the following resolution :—

That in the opinion of this Congress we consider the time has arrived when both white and black workers of South Africa join in one national Trade Union Movement, with a view to presenting one united front against a common enemy—namely, the arbitrary and unlimited power of capitalism—and that this resolution be telegraphed to the South African Trades Union Congress, now in session at Cape Town.

I am glad to report that the white workers responded to this gesture of our desire for solidarity, and passed the following resolution in response to ours :—

That this Congress instructs the incoming National Executive Council to invite all workers' organisations, irrespective of colour, to affiliate to the South African Trades Union Congress ; and

That Congress instructs the National Executive Council to arrange a meeting with the Executive of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa for the purpose of discussing matters of mutual interest.

Affiliation with the I.F.T.U.

Not being fully versed in the international Trade Union Movement, our 1926 Congress passed a resolution seeking

affiliation with the British Trades Union Congress. The Congress advised us instead to apply for affiliation with the International Federation of Trade Unions, which body has now accepted our affiliation.

Already we have done practical work, which will demonstrate that we are inspired by a genuine conviction of international solidarity. During the British Seamen's Strike of 1925 many of our branches opened funds to assist the strikers; during the General Strike last year special efforts were made to raise funds for the miners, and we were willing to instruct our members to handle no coal which was to be shipped to England. When we approached the South African Trades Union Congress with a request to co-operate with us in this latter direction, however, our request was turned down, and we were advised that the only possible way the South African Movement could help the miners was by raising funds.

The Native Administration Act

Notwithstanding our record, we have been maliciously misrepresented in South Africa. During our nine years' existence we have suffered every form of persecution, but we have won through triumphantly so far. Last year the Government planned a big attack on the organisation, choosing me as the scapegoat. My free movements were restricted, and I was forbidden to move about the country. We fought the ban. I disregarded it, and was convicted in a magistrate's court. But I appealed to a higher court and won my case, and my victory dealt the Government a heavy blow.

The Government was determined to avenge its humiliation and to make another and more successful attack on our organisation, and to this end it has recently passed the Native Administration Act (with the support of the Labour Party, who form part of the Coalition Cabinet) empowering the Governor-General to deport any Native from one town to another, and to define Pass areas, outside which no Native is allowed to go without a special permit (which permits can be refused on purely arbitrary grounds, or on no grounds at all, and will obviously not be issued to I.C.U. officials). The Act is aimed directly at Native Trade Unionism,

and under it a new era of Native slavery will commence in the British Empire.

A Two-fold Battle

We have, as Africans, a two-fold battle to fight in South Africa. We are not only struggling against British Imperialism, but we have also a tremendous uphill fight against the prejudice of the South African Labour Party. I am reluctant to say anything against the South African Labour Party at this juncture, for immediately before I left South Africa, it seemed, from the fight they put up on the Native Administration Bill on our behalf, in Parliament, that a change had taken place in their attitude. I cannot claim a full knowledge of the development of events since I have left, but it is absolutely certain that, in spite of their original attitude, all but three members of the Labour Party finally voted for the Bill in a form differing very little from the original, and the following resolution, passed by the Executive of the Party, has just reached me :—

That the British Labour and Independent Labour Parties be advised not to interfere with or express uninformed opinions upon the burning question of colour in South Africa. After years of struggle, the South African Labour Party has succeeded in establishing the principle of acceptance of the Coloured Man on terms of equality with whites (that is, equal work, equal pay). The Native, however, who is still in a state of semi-savagery, has not yet been so accepted, and any outside interference will be, we are sure, a great hindrance to any forward march, and no help to the Native or Coloured man, but will tend to excite feelings that are undesirable.

The resolution undoubtedly refers to my presence in this country. I came here to arouse the International Trade Union and Labour Movements to a sense of their responsibility towards the Native races in the various colonies in Africa. While Britain has two-thirds of the African Continent under its dominion, I consider that it is the British Labour Movement, political and industrial, that must take the initiative in demanding the liberation of the Native workers from political and industrial slavery. The British Labour Movement has a great responsibility to the people of the British Islands, and also to the millions of people of subject race under British rule.

International Trade Union. Unity

I am still a student in the Trade Union Movement, but notwithstanding this fact, I cannot help but emphasise again and

again the factor in modern civilisation which is exerting the most radical influence in world politics to-day, and which the International Trade Union Movement seems to me to ignore a great deal more than it can afford to do—the fact that capitalism recognises no frontiers, no nationality, and no race. I have attended two Trade Union Congresses in Europe—one national and one international—and I could not help but feel profoundly disappointed at the spirit and prevailing tone of these assemblies. The workers' leaders are attacking one another; they are pinning their faith to such impossible doctrines as that of "co-operation in industry"; and they have not the international mind. They are still thinking in terms of outworn nationalism. And, besides all this, there are two Internationals in Europe. How in the name of heaven can the workers of the world be effective in their struggle against world capitalism while they are under dual leadership? The Red International, though we may not care to think about the fact, has done a great deal to encourage the organisation of coloured workers in Asia and America, and has given them financial and moral assistance, while the I.F.T.U., to which my organisation has recently become affiliated, has made in the past no concrete effort to assist the coloured workers of the world. Let me make the position of my organisation clear. We joined the I.F.T.U. with the specific object of advocating within it one Trade Union International.

Although the Edinburgh Congress has given no definite lead in this direction, it is hoped that the General Council will, nevertheless, lead the agitation for a World Workers' Trades Union Congress. Time is pressing. War mongers are at work in Europe, China, and Africa. During my travels in Europe and England, I have discovered everywhere among the rank and file the realisation of the urgent necessity for an all-inclusive International and a World Congress. The workers are ready for it; only leadership is wanted. Cannot the British Trade Union Movement—the oldest in the world—lead the way to a World Trade Union Congress? The new Africa is ready to follow courageous leadership, and to fall wholeheartedly with any movement that will mobilise the workers of the world to fight world capitalism.