

BULLETIN

AMERICANS FOR SOUTH AFRICAN RESISTANCE

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NOTE: Two highly significant and very moving letters from a participant in the civil disobedience campaign in South Africa have just come to us. In this Bulletin they are being used anonymously for obvious reasons. I hope that the readers of this Bulletin will note particularly toward the end of the letter of September 16th the sentence about the need for funds.

George M. Houser
October 8, 1952

September 3, 1952

I just do not know how to transmit to you the mood of the country just now. We are in the midst of a decidedly revolutionary situation, and the ANC [African National Congress] has not only maintained its initiative but has gained ground in the past few days. . . .

The organizational lessons [of the Campaign] are being passed on to every branch, and we are already a mass organization run on efficient lines. The longer the Campaign goes on, the greater becomes our skill in administration, propaganda, etc. To give you an idea of the strength of the movement, I give you the figures for the membership of the ANC apart from volunteers in the Port Elizabeth area. In that area alone the membership is 21,000. This excludes the surrounding branches.

In Grahamstown the people have forced the Council to close down the beer hall. For days the people stood in front of the beer hall praying and singing the African national anthems until the place was shut up. It was built at a cost of 8000 pounds and brought the Municipal Council a revenue of 240 pounds a week. That is one good by-product of the Campaign: it has dealt a death blow to hooliganism and drunkenness, thereby bearing out the contention that it is the conditions under which the people live which cause these things.

The rural areas are ready for action, and will begin from this weekend. Given time we will win the battle from the reserves. The ANC is capable of bringing the country's economy to a standstill, and yet the ANC has not promised the Africans anything but liberty. We have told the masses to expect death, hunger, difficulties perhaps for years, and in spite of this they are giving themselves as a sacrifice willingly and in such huge numbers. It is an indication of the absolute failure of white rule that so many people should have reached a point where all these difficulties do not deter them from making a determined effort to get freedom. The most remarkable thing is the near unanimity of the African people.

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On Tuesday, August 26, the biggest demonstrations ever took place in Johannesburg against the arrest of the party leaders. The courts were absolutely jammed, with 2,000 people inside the building. Outside, thousands more gathered on an open square just a few hundred yards away and a meeting began which lasted until 6:00 p.m. that day. Inside the court the "unprecedented" happened, according to an

Afrikaans newspaper, when the court was adjourned for 15 minutes to allow Dr. Moroka President-General of the ANC, one of the defendants at the request of the prosecutor to address the people. The courtroom door was opened, and, accompanied by court officials, Dr. Moroka appeared amid shouts of "Africa!" He stood on a chair and asked the people to leave the building quietly so that the case could go on. They left immediately in perfect silence. They went and joined the crowd outside in a meeting which was orderly throughout -- a lesson to the whites, who seem incapable of having orderly meetings these days.

Whilst the preparatory examination was going on, 461 volunteers went into action in various centers of the Union. An important batch consisted of women who went to defy permit regulations at Germiston. . . . These 461 were put in following the meeting of the National Executive on Sunday the 24th, which decided to intensify the Campaign and to extend its scope. The total number of people arrested since June 26 is 3,200. According to an item in the NEW YORK TIMES of October 7th the total has now reached 5,264. To this number must be added 116 who went into action yesterday at East London, and also the distinguished batch which went into action in Natal, when 21 defied railway apartheid regulations at Berea. The group when it went into action was watched by thousands of Africans who shouted "Africa" and marched from Berea to the offices of the ANC to volunteer. I am quite sure that in the long run Natal will beat everybody in the response they get. I only hope it will be possible to keep down the spirit of Chaka a great Zulu military leader of the last century and infuse the spirit of Gandhi into the Zulu masses, who will experience a great spiritual release as a result of the Campaign. . . .

This weekend we had the pleasure of hearing the Cabinet on the defiance Campaign. Malan's was the voice of despair. He appealed to white South Africa and warned them of the danger presented by the ANC. The Congress, he said, aimed at supplanting white rule. In the interests of the Africans themselves, he said, he could not hand them over to a group of unscrupulous politicians. He traced the history of British rule in India and the Gold Coast, and said that this could not be allowed here. He made a statement to the effect that the Indians wanted Natal for themselves. The way he said this evoked comment from the Foreign Office in Delhi, which said that Malan's intention was to make Africans in Africa suspicious of India. Naude, the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, could only point to the fact that white girls were walking with Africans when the students of the University of Witwatersrand Johannesburg demonstrated on August 26 against the arrest of Mji and Motlana, two African medical students. Students of the whole University held a demonstration.

The United Party is confused. The Natal leader, Mitchell, said that if the defiance Campaign was successful the whites would stand with the Nationalist body. On the other hand, Strauss, whilst he deplored the Campaign, blamed the government for it and demanded their resignation. What is probably happening is that the United Party are debating among themselves regarding the strength of the movement. If they think the movement will only be strong enough to force the repeal of the pass laws, the Group Areas Act, etc., they will take advantage of it. If, however, they think the momentum of the movement will threaten white rule, they might rush to support the Nats Nationalists. There is a group whose ideas were ably put in an article in the press by Lewin Julius Lewin, a liberal white. He thought that some significant concession should be made whilst the moderates were in control of the movement. He advised South African Europeans to revise all their ideas about the Africans. The white press has the most amazing suggestions. SABRA South African Bureau of Racial Affairs says the Africans are now ready to rule themselves but are not yet ready to rule over Europeans. Therefore there must be apartheid, with the Congress ruling over African areas. The way in which this idea is being repeated in pro-government papers gives one the impression of government inspiration.

September 16, 1952

As far as the defiance Campaign is concerned, we have every reason to feel gratified at the success so far achieved. Up to now over 4,000 volunteers have been arrested in the Campaign. The area of operation has been considerably widened, and in the future will be extended to cover even more areas. The rural areas have come into the picture, and they have come to stay. It has been my belief that when aroused the rural areas will provide the bedrock on which the solid movement will be based. For a passive resistance movement we need people whose way of life is peculiarly suited to this form of struggle. The African rural man is excellent material, and he has good reasons for disliking the present system.

Natal is in action and promises to be in the vanguard of the movement very soon. The Cape has been in the forefront so far, both as regards political tactics and action and tenacity in the face of prison prosecution. In the Cape the movement has become one in which the masses themselves are participating and are producing their own leadership. Last week the government made a swoop on the Cape leaders. . .

The charge is based on the Suppression of Communism Act. The bail was fixed at 100 pounds. All are to appear at Port Elizabeth on the 25th for a preparatory examination. The alternative charge is incitement to commit public violence. The arrest [of the leaders] was celebrated by the going into action of 350 volunteers. It is interesting that those volunteers went into action with all the leaders in jail. In other words, the new commands took over efficiently in a few hours. That should serve as a warning to the government. They must realize that here they are not dealing with an artificial protest organized by a few "Communists" as they would like all of us to believe, but with a mass movement based on real grievances of the people. Needless to say, we are not in the least perturbed. The Campaign will unfold itself as planned, surely, efficiently, without excitement, without sensations. . .

From a legal point of view the government hasn't got a case at all, but this is a political case and one can expect anything. We have decided to engage a number of senior counsel. Over the weekend 10,000 pounds have been collected for the case. We are of course not placing much reliance on the legal battle. Our safety lies in the people, and we have complete confidence in them, especially our masses, both rural and urban. We have plenty of reserves, and, last, we have a healthy respect for the resources at the disposal of the government. We have a feeling that they have a Herrenvolk contempt for ours. They are in for a surprise. . . [We are building] the Campaign on a basis of full recognition of the consequences, and [explaining] carefully to the people the issues involved. The whites are under the mistaken impression that the Africans are tools in the hands of agitators and that they will soon return to normal. One would have to be here to realize what is happening. The most tremendous thing that has happened is not that any definite advantages have already been gained -- that is, material advantages -- but that there has been a transformation in the way of thinking of the Africans, a revolutionary transformation that can not be experienced by anyone not actually present in the country. The Africans are all on the march, and whatever the result of the present defiance Campaign, even if it ends in total defeat at the hands of the government, the country will never be the same again.

The government has no solution to the crisis presented by the defiance Campaign. In the last week four Cabinet ministers have made statements about the defiance: Strydom, Donges, Verwoerd, and Schoeman. These men all had the same attitude: their line is that there are two alternatives. One is negotiation, and the other is to fight the Campaign to the bitter end. Negotiation they say is impossible because the leaders of the defiance Campaign are demanding unconditional surrender by the whites and complete equality. This is unthinkable, and therefore the other

alternative is the only possibility. You can see here the Afrikaner tendency toward oversimplification at work: namely, to present two alternatives, one of which can not be tolerated. . . They would not like it to be known that the African National Congress demands the repeal of five Acts, especially the notorious pass laws, which are merely a liability on the progress of the whole country. At any rate, the Nats have a policy toward the defiance Campaign: namely, to smash it or be smashed by it.

The ideas of the Opposition in Parliament are pitiful. Strauss (the leader of the Opposition) is apologetic about opposition to the Nats and he deplores the defiance Campaign. With a naivete that can only be matched by an infant politician, he tells the Africans that the laws they do not want were passed by Parliament and that they can only be repealed constitutionally; therefore the defiance Campaign must be called off. He promises that if elected at the next General Election, which will take place in May, 1953 he will meet African leaders. He does not say which African leaders. I think he would like to sidestep the Congress and manufacture some good boys outside the ANC. At least, the Nats recognize Congress politically, although they would be the last to admit it. . . Donges says there can be no negotiation because there is no representative group among the Africans. The Torch Commando National Executive has passed a resolution asking the government to meet the ANC before it is too late. The Opposition is in a state of utter confusion. A great deal of what the Nats say about the UP United Party is true. It has no leader and no policy. At the beginning of this Campaign I predicted that the country would gradually divide up into reactionaries behind the Nats and progressives of all shades behind the ANC. That is now a reality, or almost a reality. The whites will have to form a party that is prepared to make definite changes or join Congress. . .

The twenty leaders that is, previously arrested have been committed for trial after the examination, which lasted a week. The date of the trial has not yet been announced. We need plenty of funds, as you can see. Our budget is becoming bigger every month. The action of the Asian natives (in bringing the matter before the UN) will have tremendous effects. The West has to make up its mind on the question, of course.