

Completers' Social: Dr. Mangaliso R. Sobekwe's Speech.

21 October, 1969.

Prof. Dent, Ladies and Gentlemen, I intend to follow in my opening remarks the conventional pattern. And for that reason I will give a very brief review of our doings within the College this year. We saw at the beginning of the year the implementation of the Students' Constitution, whereby six members of the S.A.C. were elected by secret ballot at a mass-meeting of the students and whereby also certain were delegated to the Council. Of that arrangement the worst I can say is that it seems to be working well. We witnessed also at the beginning of the year the promotion of Prof. Dent to the position of Principal of the S.A.C. He was succeeding a man who was highly esteemed, Dr. Kerr. But I do not think we lament the change, for we are concerned not with personalities, but with policies, and there has been no change in this respect. Moreover, however much we may disagree with Prof. Dent on certain issues, we cannot say that he has ever refused students a chance to state their case. And I believe it is due to this fact that there has been no trouble in the College this year. After all, even the minor demonstration we had last term was not a reaction against the administration of the College. The stimulus came from outside. But that does not mean that all is well in the College. I had occasion last year and also at the beginning of this year to comment on some features of our structure of which I do not approve. It has always been my feeling that if the intention of the trustees of this College is to make it an African College or University, as I have been informed it is, then the department of African Studies must be more highly and more rapidly developed. Fort Hare must become the centre of African Studies to which students in African Studies should come from all over Africa. We should also have a department of Economics and of Sociology. A nation to be a nation needs specialists in these things. Again I would like to know exactly what the College understands by "Trusteeship." I understand by "Trusteeship" the preparation of the African ward for eventual management and leadership of the College. But nothing in the policy of the College points in this direction. After the College has been in existence for 30 years the ratio of European to African staff is 4 to 1. And we are told that in ten years time we might become an independent University. Are we to understand by that an African University predominantly guided by European thought and strongly influenced by European staff I said last year that Fort Hare must be the African what Stellenbosch is to the Afrikaner. It must be the barometer of African thought. It is interesting to note that the theory of "Apartheid" which is today the dominating ideology of the State was worked out at Stellenbosch by Eiselen and his colleagues. That same Eiselen is Secretary for Native Affairs. But the important thing is that Stellenbosch is not only the expression of Afrikaner thought and feeling but it is also the embodiment of their aspiration. So also must Fort Hare express and lead African thought. The College has remained mute on matters deeply affecting the Africans, because, we learn, it feared to annoy the State Government. What the College fails to realize is that rightly or wrongly the State believes that the Fort Hare staff is predominantly U.P. So that whether we remain mute or not the government will continue to be hostile towards us. So much for the College.

Sons and daughters of Africa, harbingers of the new world-order. What can I say to you? As you see, for the first time since the practice was started, we do not have the nurses with us on this

momentous night - Completers' Social. And the reason? The battle is on. So the struggle at the Hospital is more than a question of indiscipline in inverted commas. It is a struggle between Africa and Europe, between a twentieth century desire for self-realisation and a feudal conception of authority. I know, of course, that because I express these sentiments I will be accused of indecency and will be branded an agitator. That was the reaction to my speech last year. People do not like to see the even tenor of their lives disturbed. They do not like to be made to feel guilty. They do not like to be told that what they have always believed was right is wrong. And above all they resent encroachment on what they regard as their special province. But I make no apologies. It is just that we speak the truth before we die.

I said last year that our whole life in South Africa is politics, and that contention was severely criticized. But the truth of that statement has been proved in the course of this year. From the pulpit in the U.S. we have heard responsible and respectable preachers deplore the deterioration of race relations in this country and suggest co-operation as a solution. Dr. Bruce Gardner and Rev. Mokitimi are but two of a large number. Professor Macmillan and a number of speakers in our Wednesday assembly, have condemned this "naughty spirit of Nationalism and non-cooperation" and have told us of the wonderful things that have been done for us, forgetting, of course, that what they say has been done for the Africans the Africans have achieved for themselves in spite of the South African Government. The point I am trying to make is that that was politics, whether we loved it or not. So that we can no longer pretend that there is a proper place and a proper occasion for politics. During the war it was clearly demonstrated that in South Africa at least, politics does not stop this side of the grave. A number of African soldiers were buried in the same trench as European soldiers. A few days afterwards word came from the high command that the bodies of the Africans should be removed and buried in another trench. "Apartheid" must be maintained even on the road to eternity.

The trouble at the Hospital then, I say, should be viewed as part of a broad struggle and not as an isolated incident. I said last year that we should not fear victimisation. I still say so today. We must fight for freedom - for the right to call our souls our own. And we must pay the price. The Bureau have paid the price. I am truly grieved that the careers of so many of our women should have been ruined in this fashion. But the price of freedom is blood, toil, and tears. This consolation I have, however, that Africa never forgets. And these martyrs of freedom, these young and budding women will be remembered and honoured when Africa comes into her own.

A word to those who are remaining behind. You have seen by now what education means to us; the identification of ourselves with the masses. Education to us means service to Africa. In whatever branch of learning you are, you are there for Africa. You have a mission; we all have a mission. A nation to build we have; a God to glorify, a contribution clear to make towards the blessing of mankind. We must be the embodiment of our people's aspirations. And all we are required to do is to show the light and the masses will find the way. Watch our movements keenly and if you see any signs of "broadmindedness" or "reasonableness" in us, or if you hear us talk of practical experience as a modifier of man's views, denounce us as traitors to Africa. We will watch you too. We have been reminded time and again that fellows who, while at College, were radicals, as soon as they got outside became the spineless stooges and screeching megaphones of "White Bernequillism" or else became disgruntled and disillusioned objects of pity. My contention is: these fellows

never were radicals. They were anti-white. And as Marcus Garvey says: "You cannot grow beyond your thoughts. If your thoughts are those of a slave, you will remain a slave. If your thoughts go skin-deep, your mental development will remain skin-deep." Moreover a doctrine of hate can never take people anywhere. It is too exacting. It warps the mind. That is why we preach the doctrine of love, love for Africa. We can never do enough for Africa, nor can we love her enough. The more we do for her, the more we wish to do. And I am sure that I am speaking for the whole of young Africa when I say that we are prepared to work with any man who is fighting for the liberation of Africa WITHIN OUR LIFE TIME.

To the completers among whom I number myself, my exaltation is BRUSHING AFRICA! I thought last year that the position was bad. I realize it is worse this year. This is a difficult period to analyse. It is a confused period, such as only a Nkharri, or Herong, or Dickens could describe. We are witnessing today the disintegration of old empires, and the integration of new communities. We are seeing today the germination of the seeds of decay inherent in Capitalism; we discern the first shoots of the tree of Socialism. In married life we see a reversal to what the Missionaries condemned when they first got here - Polygamy. But this time it is not the African who is the culprit, and the third party is not a second wife, but a mistress. We are witnesses today of cold and calculated brutality and bestiality, the desperate attempts of a dying generation to stay in power. We see also a new spirit of determination, a quiet confidence, the determination of a people to be free whatever the cost. We are seeing within our own day the second rape of Africa; a determined effort by imperialist powers to dig their claws still deeper into the flesh of the squirming victim. But this time the imperialism we see is not the naked brutal mercantile imperialism of the 17th and 18th centuries. It is a more subtle one - financial and economic imperialism under the guise of a tempting slogan "the development of backward areas and peoples." At the same time we see the rise of uncompromising "Nationalism" in India, Malaya, Indonesia, Burma, and Africa! The old order is changing ushering in a new order. The great revolution has started and Africa is the field of operation. Allow me at this juncture to quote a few lines from the Methodist Hymn Book:

"Come to every man and Nation
 Come the sinner to decide,
 In the strife of truth with falsehood
 For the good or evil side.

Then to side with truth is noble
 When we share her wretched crust,
 Ere her cause bring fame and profit
 And 'tis prosperous to be just.

Then it is the brave man chooses
 While the coward stand aside,
 Till the multitude make virtue
 Of the faith they had denied."

The cowards are still standing aside and the brave have made their choice. We have made our choice. And we have chosen African Nationalism because of its deep human significance; because of its inevitability and necessity to world progress. World civilization will not be complete until the African has made his full contribution. And even as the dying so-called human civilization received new life from the barbarians, so also will the decaying so-called western civilization find a new and purer life from Africa.

I wish to make it clear again that we are anti-nobody. We are pro-Africa. We breathe, we dream, we live Africa; because Africa and humanity are inseparable. It is only by doing the same that

the minorities in this land, the European, Coloured, and Indian, can secure mental and spiritual freedom. On the liberation of the African depends the liberation of the whole world. The future of the world lies with the oppressed and the Africans are the most oppressed people on earth. Not only in the continent of Africa but also in America and the West Indies. We have been accused of blood-thirstiness because we preach "non-collaboration." I wish to state here tonight that that is the only course open to us. History has taught us that a group in power has never voluntarily relinquished its position. It has always been forced to do so. And we do not expect miracles to happen in Africa. It is necessary for human progress that Africa be fully developed and only the African can do so. We want to build a new Africa, and only we can build it. The opponents of African Nationalism, therefore, are hampering the progress and development not only of Africa, but of the whole world. Talks of co-operation are not new to us. Every time our people have shown signs of uniting against oppression, their "friends" have come along and broken that unity. In the very earliest days it was the Missionary (we owe the bitter feelings between Fingoes and Xhosa to the Christian ideals of the Reverend Shute). Between 1900 and 1945 it has been the professional Liberal. Today it is again the Missionary who fulfills this role. After maintaining an unbroken and monastic silence for years while Smith was starving the people out of the Reserves, the Missionaries suddenly discovered, when the Africans unite that the Africans have not had a fair deal. In the same stride, so to speak, they form a "Union wide Association of Heads of Native Institutions" for the purpose of regismenting the thoughts of the students. A Missionary Hospital closes even though the people are dying in its neighbourhood, and there is a dearth of Nurses throughout the country. I am afraid these gentlemen are dealing with a new generation which cannot be bamboozled. "What you are thunders so loudly that what you say cannot be heard."

Let me plead with you, lovers of my Africa, to carry with you into the world the vision of a new Africa, an Africa re-born, an Africa rejuvenated, an Africa re-created, young AFRICA. We are the first glimmers of a new dawn. Ad if we are persecuted for our views, we should remember, as the African saying goes, that it is darkest before dawn, and that the dying beast kicks most violently when it is giving up the ghost so to speak. The fellows who clasped Nehru in jail are today his servants. And we have it from the Bible that those who crucified Christ will appear before Him on the judgement day. We are what we are because the God of Africa made us so. We dare not compromise, nor dare we use moderate language in the course of freedom. As Zik puts it:

"Tell a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm; tell a man moderately to rescue his wife from the arms of a ravisher; tell a mother to extricate gradually her babe from the fire into which it has fallen; but do not ask me to use moderation in a cause like the present."

These things shall be, says the Psalmist: Africa will be free. The wheel of progress revolves relentlessly. And all the nations of the world take their turn at the field-glass of human destiny. Africa will not retreat! Africa will not compromise! Africa will not relent! Africa will not equivocate! And she will be heard!
REMEMBER AFRICA!

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