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Internment of Anti-Fascists

Open Letter to General Smuts

Communist Party Presents Its Case

The Prime Minister,

Sir,

- ¶ **THE INTERNMENT** of anti-Fascists and active trade unionists for the alleged reason that they are "Communists" and responsible for the publication of "Communist" propaganda has raised the whole question of the South African Communist Party and its work.
- ¶ **THE COMMUNIST PARTY** is a legal political party. It is a party that advocates and works for Socialism. Freedom for all national groups, justice for the people regardless of race, colour or religion, have always been the policy of the Communist Party.
- ¶ **BECAUSE** the Nazi and Fascist systems deny freedom and justice, because they perpetuate and intensify the exploitation of man by man, the Communist Party has always shown unrelenting hostility to Fascism and Fascist tendencies in our country.

WHY ARE ANTI-FASCISTS INTERNED?

- ¶ **YET** it now becomes clear that those who actively support such a policy are, in the eyes of your Government, subjects for internment.
- ¶ **WE REFER**, in particular, to the recent internment of Dr. Max Joffe on the alleged grounds, according to a statement made by the Chief Control Officer, Colonel Theo. Truter, that he was (1) a leader of the Communist Party; and (2) responsible for the publication of "INKULULEKO", an official organ of the Communist Party.
- ¶ **NO AMOUNT** of juggling with words can reconcile this attitude of your Government with the repeated declaration by your spokesmen that the Union Government stands for democracy, justice, and a "better order".
- ¶ **MR. LAWRENCE**, your Minister for the Interior, has stated that even anti-Nazis and anti-Fascists will be held guilty of "subversive conduct" where they "have used the present war circumstances for the purpose of attempting to exploit the Native community against the Government and its war policy." ("Cape Argus", 11/12/40.)

¶ **WE ARE NOT AWARE** of the existence of any law that makes criticism of your war policy a crime. If such criticism were a crime, then clearly a very large section of our population, including the official Opposition in Parliament and their followers, are guilty of an offence.

NON-EUROPEAN RIGHTS

¶ **BUT** Mr. Lawrence specifically mentioned the Africans in this connection. What he meant by "exploiting the Native community against the Government and its war policy", he explained further in a subsequent statement to a deputation of the Civil Liberties Association.

¶ **IN REGARD** to the so-called "agitators" among the non-Europeans, he had said that any persons working among non-Europeans, who exploited the Natives against the Government, or caused them to concentrate on economic issues to the detriment of the Government's war effort, would be regarded as subversive.—"Guardian, 27/12/40."

¶ **YOUR GOVERNMENT**, therefore, has decided that not only a Communist, not only an anti-Fascist, but also any other person who attempts to organise any section of the non-Europeans for higher wages and improved economic conditions will be held guilty of "subversive" conduct and liable to be interned.

A THREAT TO WORKING-CLASS ORGANISATIONS

¶ **ON THE PRETEXT** of the war situation you have introduced a principle which carries with it a threat of internment to all leaders of working-class organisations which refuse to renounce the right to criticise your policy and which maintain their right to press forward for higher wages and other trade union demands.

¶ **AT BLOEMFONTEIN** you said: "It is our solemn duty to see that there is justice in South Africa—that the poor man is given social security and just as much consideration as any other class."

¶ **IF** you were serious when using these words, how can you justify the persecution and internment of people who are trying to obtain justice, social security and consideration for the great mass of people of South Africa?

COMMUNIST PARTY POLICY

¶ **WE PROTEST** most strongly against the use by your Government of the internment powers vested in them to suppress ordinary trade union activity and to deprive the majority of the population of ordinary democratic rights.

¶ **WE AFFIRM** the right of the Communist Party and of other organisations of the working class and of the non-European peoples to continue to put forward their claims to the betterment of their lot and to persist in efforts to achieve genuine economic and political democracy.

¶ **WE MAINTAIN** the right to advocate and make a reality of those ideals for which your Government claims to be at war.

¶ **NAZISM AND FASCISM** are systems of government which attempt to silence the cry of the people for social justice. If your Government continue to misuse their powers in order to silence this cry, they cannot claim to be different in essence from the Nazi and Fascist dictatorships.

¶ **WE DEMAND** the right to criticise your Government's policy and to carry forward in South Africa the fight for bread, freedom, and fraternity based upon equality.

CENTRAL COMMITTEE,
COMMUNIST PARTY OF SOUTH AFRICA.