The African Communist
NUMBER 44 1ST QUARTER 1971

NASSER by ALDRIDGE
PRICE PER COPY

AFRICA : 5p (1 shilling)
ELSEWHERE: U.K. 15p (3/-) U.S. 50 cents

SUBSCRIPTION

AFRICA : 20 p (4 shillings) AIR MAIL £1. 10. 0.
U.K. & EUROPE
1 year (four issues) 60p (12/-)
2 years £1.
U.S. & CANADA
1 year $2.00 (Airmail $4.00)
2 years $3.50 (Airmail $6.00)
STUDENTS : 25% discount on
Surface mail subscriptions.

AGENTS

Usual trade discount (one-third of
retail price) to bookshops and
sellers ordering 6 or more copies

EDITORIAL

Articles, letters, material for articles
and comments are invited on all themes
of African interest, but payment is by
prior arrangement only.

ADDRESS

All correspondence to the distributor:
Inkululeko Publications
39 Goodge Street
London W1 England

THE AFRICAN COMMUNIST

Published quarterly in the interests of
African solidarity, and as a forum for
Marxist-Leninist thought throughout
our Continent, by the
South African Communist Party

No. 44 First Quarter 1971
no strict or legal barriers to prevent an exceptional person from a tribal background from crossing the line and being accepted into the ranks of the elite. ‘Under the Tubman regime,’ writes Liebenow, ‘the elevation of persons of tribal origins... has been remarkably accelerated.’ He does not give any figures of the number of ‘assimilados’ thus promoted, but obviously it must be relatively small.

A ‘Unification Programme’ has been launched, and the franchise amended to provide a certain measure of indigenous African representation.

These changes are more of form than of substance. The reins of power are still tightly in the hands of the ‘hereditary aristocracy.’ But they have vitally important consequences and implications. They have enabled Liberia to play an important part in African affairs as a respectable member of the OAU. This part has almost invariably been highly detrimental to the African Revolution and the African people. It is an outpost of US imperialism. Liberia is the only African state to maintain, in defiance of the OAU Charter, a military alliance with the USA. It harbours a powerful ‘Voice of America’ radio station designed to reach the entire continent. Liberia is practically the only African state to support US aggression in Vietnam. In return the US has flooded the country with dollar loans and handouts, and ‘technical advisors,’ peace corps ‘volunteers’ (carefully vetted by the CIA) and agents in every shape and form.

Since he successfully sabotaged Nkrumah’s plans for African Unity at the Saniquellie meeting in 1966, Tubman has used what Liebenow calls his ‘remarkable talents in international diplomacy’ to back Tshombe against Lumumba and Gizenga, to strengthen ties with Banda and Bouriba, and ceaselessly to oppose progressive African countries, ranging from the Nkrumah government in the sixties to the governments of the United Arab Republic, Algeria, Tanzania and Zambia today.

Liberia, it is true, has persistently criticised apartheid and the ‘Rhodesian settlers’ rebellion, though its actual contribution to the liberation movements falls far short of that of countries with far less resources. And it is clear that, despite all the analogies which will have been in the mind of the reader of this review, there are important differences with the white settler regimes. Lacking a developed industrial base, the Liberian bourgeoisie is of the parasitical comprador type, far removed from the multi-millionaire monopoly bourgeoisie which the white settlers have produced in the South, able to sustain such a formidable military police machinery and an imperialist state threatening its neighbours. It is this factor, this weakness, more than any accident of origin or colour, which has differentiated the theory and practice of apartheid in Liberia; their flexibility is derived from the axiom that ‘what can’t bend must break.’

The great merit of Mr. Liebenow’s book is that he has turned the bright light of truth on the unifying Liberian scene. The book has its faults. It is occasionally repetitive and it seems to have been compiled in too much of a hurry. But the writer has done his homework. He hasn’t perhaps drawn all the conclusions, or necessarily the correct ones. But he gives you all the facts on which you can judge for yourself.

A. LERUMO

KADALIE OF THE ICU

My Life and the ICU by Clements Kadalie.
Frank Cass & Co. London. 42s.

The history of the African working class in South Africa during the 1920’s is dominated by the spectacular rise and fall of the Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union. It began with a small meeting, mainly of Cape Town dockers, on January 17 1919, at which 24 members were enrolled. Following a strike on the docks the movement spread ‘like a veld fire’ throughout the country and even in neighbouring countries, to embrace a quarter of a million members of town and platteland. (See The I.C.U. by Teresa Zania, African Communist No. 38, 1969). It then disintegrated almost as suddenly as it had appeared, but not without leaving a deep impress on our country’s history.

Much - though by no means all - of the ICU story is now available as seen through the eyes of Clements Kadalie, its first secretary, and dominant personality. His autobiography - written in 1946 but only published for the first time in 1970 - is an extraordinarily, often unconsciously, revealing document.

It was quite by chance that Kadalie entered the trade union movement. An immigrant from Malawi (then the British Protectorate of Nyasaland) he worked at home as a teacher, then on various jobs, in Mozambique, Rhodesia and Cape Town. Here he happened to meet A.F. Batty, a Labour Party candidate for the dock area, who persuaded him to begin organising the Non-European dockers (qualified Non-Whites at that time enjoyed the right to vote though not to stand for Parliamentary elections).
Nothing in Clements Kadalie's background or outlook at that time could have marked him out as the future leader of Africa's biggest workers' organisation. The mission-educated son of an Askari chief, he qualified as a teacher at the age of sixteen.

In his first job, to be sure, he showed a rebellious streak. But his reason was interesting: 'I was of the royal blood and was brighter than the head teacher, who belonged to an ordinary family......I refused to take orders from the head teacher, whom I looked upon as not my equal educationally, while inherently he belonged to an inferior class'.

His rebellion was successful. 'I won my first strike single-handed', he writes, and was given a headmastership elsewhere, where he was much influenced by his uncle, Rev. Y.Z. Mwasi, 'a very powerful emotional speaker.........With him I gained much experience as a preacher on the pulpit'.

In Rhodesia, and later in South Africa he met the usual humiliations and indignities of Africans, especially the minority who have acquired some education and have mastered English. He left his job as a mine clerk to enlist in the army, but did not carry out this resolve. Certainly he protested at various injustices inflicted upon him in one job after another, and writes feelingly about the cruelty of a cotton planter in Mozambique who 'daily sjambokked labourers for petty offences' and even shot at them. But until he chanced upon Batty there was no indication of any interest on his part in political or trade union organisation. In 1920, after his election as full time secretary, 'it dawned on me that I had a big part to play in the trade union movement. I therefore decided to equip myself intellectually'. His way of doing this was to join a private commercial college, 'especially taking lessons in the art of public speaking.'

Powerful Orator
This was indeed an art in which Kadalie excelled. His book is replete with such naive remarks as 'A powerful oration was delivered by me'. (p.143.) 'For two hours I held the huge audience spellbound'. (p.71.) 'I spoke for nearly two hours without interruption for my oratory had apparently captured the audience,' (p.90.) 'I delivered one of the best speeches on the (European) continent, which made a big impression on the audience.' (p.131.) But in fact these self-recommendations are not necessary for there was hardly anyone who heard and saw Kadalie on the platform who did not pay tribute to his powerful oratory and magnetic personality. Looking back on the history of the I.C.U. it is clear that it owed a tremendous amount to the presence and articulate-ness of its principal evangelist and propagandist.

But it was not only the platform ability, it was above all the content of what he had to say which drew the masses. Clearly, the African and Coloured workers who flocked in their hundreds of thousands into the ICU in the early and middle twenties were not the dupes of a charismatic personality: they joined the ICU and gave it their allegiance because they believed its message.

The great mystery of Kadalie's book is the absence, to a very large extent, of the content of that message, and therefore of the real reason for the spectacular growth and development of the ICU. And yet, to the perceptive reader, the book itself contains the answer to that mystery.

During its earlier years the ICU adopted an extremely radical and militant policy; in many respects a revolutionary policy. There were the years of post-war disillusionment, of broken promises, of crisis and unemployment. They were the years when the masses, following the impact of the October Revolution, were moving everywhere to the Left. This mood was reflected in the propaganda and actions of the ICU, with its message of working class internationalism, of militant anti-colonialism and anti-racism.

It was in fact not mainly Kadalie himself, though he often gives that impression, who moulded the original ideological and organisational pattern of the ICU. Among its earliest members and most devoted leaders were the South African Communists who in 1917 had anticipated the ICU with the IWA (Industrial Workers of Africa). Kadalie himself pays tribute to the outstanding role played in the building of the ICU by such Communists as James la Guma, the general secretary, E.J. Khalle, T. Mbeki, Johnny Gomas and de Norman, many of whom were forced to resign in the witch-hunt of 1926.

I find it impossible to believe that close association with men such as these, veterans of the class and national liberation struggles, armed with Marxist understanding, did not play a tremendous part in influencing, moulding and training the brilliant agitator and people's tribune Clements Kadalie as he was at the height of his powers. An influence far greater, let us say, than his lessons in public speaking at the Efficiency Institute. It must have been a revelation, a transforming experience and a turning point for the young ex-teacher from Malawi, to know and to work with such men.

Yet of all this Kadalie chose to write nothing in his autobiography.

Key to the Mystery
In addition to his great talents and achievements there were serious
weaknesses in the character of Clements Kadalie, which the enemy and its agents well knew how to make use of. Both Stanley Trapido, who writes a scholarly introduction to the present edition, and Will Stuart, M.P., who contributed a Foreword to the original manuscript, remark on his vanity and egoism. He saw the ICU not only as a means of raising the wretchedly-paid and oppressed masses, but also as one of giving him personally the status and respectability he craved. He wanted - an impossible dream in white-dominated South Africa - the sort of public esteem symbolised by the elevation of trade union officials in Britain to the House of Lords.

A number of passages in his autobiography quite unashamedly reveal this streak of careerism and make him esteem the occasional crumbs of recognition from the class enemy above the love and confidence of the working people who had raised him to his position and made him what he was. His court victories, his meetings with General Hertzog, Minister Madeley, British Dominions secretary J. H. Thomas and other notabilities are highlights.

During a general strike in East London which brought the town to a standstill over a wage issue, Kadalie was arrested. He immediately called the strike off on the grounds that he had to concentrate on preparing his case in Court. He records the court proceedings in detail, but not a word about what happened to the workers and their demands. And all this with an air of satisfaction which reveals an absence not merely of self-criticism but even of a consciousness that such conduct is unforgivable in a leader. Truly, this book needs to be studied by African trade unionists not so much as an example but also as a warning!

It was precisely this weakness which the enemy and its agents were able to make use of to undermine, to split, to emasculate and ultimately to destroy the ICU.

Kadalie had an ambivalent attitude towards the Communist Party and its members in the ICU. Quite obviously their work played an indispensable part in the building of the organisation. Their drive and selfless devotion, their high level of political consciousness, their collective experience of organisation helped enormously to make the ICU what it was. But equally obviously, they were, from the point of view of a man like Kadalie, a great nuisance as well, ever demanding militant and dangerous action, opposing autocratic and arbitrary methods, calling for democratic control over decisions and especially of funds - one of the rocks on which the organisation eventually foundered. (Readers are referred to Teresa Zania’s article cited above, for details).

Also, Clements Kadalie as he shows time and again in his book was mortally afraid of being smeared as a Communist. When Tom Mann as a veteran British trade unionist came to address the January 1923 ICU Conference in Cape Town, the bourgeois press ‘exploited his presence to the full and later for a long time the ICU was suspected of Communist tendencies....... This diabolical misrepresentation’ he continues ‘culminated’ when the visit of himself and James La Guma to Lovedale Missionary College was headlined in a newspaper as ‘Bolsheviks Visit Lovedale’.

It was partly such factors which led to Kadalie’s break with the Communists and the splitting of the ICU. But, as he himself admits ‘there were other factors behind the scenes’. There were, ‘certain European women’ (he mentions, among others, Ethelreda Lewis, the novelist, Winifred Holtby and Margaret Ballinger) ‘whose advice and help led me to adopt a middle course’ (i.e. to drive Communist Party members out of the ICU leadership). A resolution was steamrollered through the National Council in December 1926 precluding Party members from being officials of the ICU, whereupon Jimmy La Guma, the assistant general secretary, J. Khailie, financial secretary, and others resigned.

‘The decision of the National Council’ wrote Kadalie, ‘was communicated to the daily press, receiving a good reception. The Communist press thought otherwise. It heralded the news as the road towards the disappearance of the ICU from the political scene....... Instead of the ICU heading towards its doom as foreshadowed by the Communists...... the ICU went from strength to strength’.

It seems incredible that Kadalie could have written that comment in 1946. For as he himself records, the ICU, fragmented by inner disputes, lay in ruins by 1928.

Kadalie says that the Communists were trying to ‘capture the ICU’, though throughout his narrative he brings not a jot of evidence to substantiate the allegation. It seems much more true to say that persuaded by his European lady advisers and others, he had become convinced that to break with the Communists and cut down the ladder by which he had ascended would ensure him and the ICU of respectability and recognition. In the event it did neither, but broke the ICU as an effective force - and Kadalie too.

Kadalie’s refusal to face this harsh fact is the key to the extraordinary lack of real political drive and conviction in this book. He has consciously or unconsciously censored the record, emasculating it of its dynamic and revolutionary content to conform with the later image, advised by the liberals and later by the Scottish ‘adviser’ William Ballinger, sent out
by the British ILP to preside over the death-agonies of the ICU, the image of a non-political British-type respectable trade union exclusively concerned with the daily bread-and-butter problems of its members.

Despite all that I have written, Kadalie's own story reveals him, all in all, as a most remarkable and engaging personality. He is without malice. He has not a single criticism to make of his African and other non-white Communist colleagues in the ICU. Even the 'white Communists' here and there referred to as sinister influences, emerge when dealt with as individuals, as highly estimable men and fighters for the working class, Bill Andrews and Sidney Bunting, he writes, 'gave selfless help' to the ICU, which regarded Andrews as 'a great trade unionist who knew no colour bar.' Bunting and Eddie Roux often used to address ICU meetings in Johannesburg; 'these two men did a lot for individual African leaders.'

Kadalie was by no means, as his book so disarmingly reveals, the ideal workers' leader. He lacked the total dedication and toughness, the depth of political understanding and emancipation of spirit. Apart from his egoism, he never truly broke free from the prejudices and indoctrination of his background and education. Yet during his finest years he rose above these limitations. He became the instrument of the masses, voicing their anger and their aspirations, as no other man of his time could do. Those were the years for which South Africa will remember and honour Clements Kadalie.

A. LERUMO.

HEROIC EPISODE


"Hilferding rightly notes the connection between imperialism and the intensification of national oppression. 'In the newly opened-up countries, (he writes), the capital imported into them intensifies antagonisms and excites against the intruders the constantly growing resistance of the peoples who are awakening to national consciousness; this resistance can easily develop into dangerous measures against foreign capital. The old social relations become completely revolutionised, the age-long agrarian isolation of 'nations without history' is destroyed and they are drawn into the capitalist whirlpool. Capitalism itself gradually provides the subjugated with the means and resources for their emancipation and they set out to achieve the goal which once seemed highest to the European nations: the creation of a united national state as a means to economic and cultural freedom. This movement for national independence threatens European capital in its most valuable and promising fields of exploitation, and European capital can maintain its domination only by continually increasing its military forces." (1).

This paragraph provides us with the clues necessary for a correct appreciation of the place of the Bambatha Rebellion (the subject of the book under review) in the struggle for national liberation, not only in South Africa, but also on a world scale.

The rebellion was inevitable. It was the outcome of the "intensification of national oppression" characteristic of imperialism; of the intensification of antagonisms by the capital imported into South Africa.

Shula Marks has done a very useful job in documenting the background to the Bambatha Rebellion in the first 168 pages of her book. This is the story of the defeat of the Zulu people by the Boer and British colonisers. It tells of the raping of the land of the Zulus by the "intruders"; the subjugation of their chiefs and government by the colonial power. It tells of the revolutionisation of "the old social relations", with increasing numbers of the Zulu people forced to work in the mines, in industry and as domestic servants, turned into an agricultural proletariat or tenants paying rent to white landowners, compelled to pay the Poll Tax which "was oppressive" (p.143), their chiefs forced "to call out labour for the roads and public works of the colony....." (p.43). The Zulu people were brought face to face with the full might of the bourgeois state, with its instruments of repression, the army and the police, the judges, the magistrates and the law courts.

(The book also contains an interesting chapter on "The Missionary Factor" with useful information on the birth of independent African churches. Here we also meet with names such as John Dube, Saul Msane, Josiah Gumede etc., founders of the Natal Native Congress, and later, the African National Congress. Elsewhere in the book the activities of these patriots are also discussed.)

Defeat Inevitable

Inevitable as the armed uprising was, inevitable also was its defeat. This is so because it came before its time. Its weaknesses and mistakes