

SOUTH AFRICA FREEDOM DAY

Ruth First

IN May 1948 the Nationalist Party swept to power in South Africa. Led by Dr. Malan, they preached Afrikaner nationalism, anti-communism and a policy which has since become a byword for racism throughout the world—apartheid. Nazism had been crushed in Europe, but in South Africa it found a second home.

The implications soon became clear. The Suppression of Communism Act was tabled in parliament. It was to give the Government sweeping and arbitrary powers to ban individuals and organisations, to outlaw opposition and intimidate critics—all in the name of anti-communism.

The liberation movement was not deceived by the red bogey. The threat to communists was real, but so was the threat to all democratic non-racial opposition. The mass organisations of the African, Coloured and Indian peoples, the progressive trade union movement, radical youth organisations and moderate church groups—war was declared on them all. A massive campaign of resistance was called, culminating in huge demonstrations on May Day 1950. The Nationalist Government responded in a way that foreshadowed the massacre of Sharpeville ten years later. Eighteen Africans were shot dead—and the fruits of fascism lay on the ground for all to see.

The call went out for a national work stoppage, a day of mourning for the dead, of unity and solidarity and of rededication to the struggle for freedom. Thus was born the most important day in the political calendar of the South African revolution: June 26.

Every year since then, the African National Congress and its allies have commemorated South Africa Freedom Day. In 1952 it was the start of the famous defiance campaign when thousands of volunteers deliberately defied unjust laws and went to prison in protest against the apartheid laws. The defiance campaign lasted until the end of the year, and in the course of it over 8,000 men and women of all races were convicted. For a moment, white supremacy was stopped in its tracks. Nothing like it had been seen before on so vast a scale. Then, true to their ideology, the fascists resorted to violence and further repressive legislation.

In 1955, after months of wide and careful preparation, three thousand delegates from all parts of the country and all sorts of

organisations of the oppressed peoples came together at Kliptown in Johannesburg, on June 26, to adopt the Freedom Charter. It gave the democratic alternative to apartheid, counterposing non-racialism to racialism, equality to discrimination, democracy to fascism, and economic self-determination to exploitation.

The Freedom Charter is an historic and living document of the South African revolution. Born of the daily experience of thousands of men and women, and fashioned in the course of militant mass struggles, it set the course for the future of a free South Africa. Its clear and eloquent prose matches the maturity of leadership and popular consciousness which it expresses. Today, when dozens of 'freedom programmes' of the Third World and the period of decolonisation are forgotten except by archivists and scholars, the Freedom Charter stands as the essential spirit of the South African nation.

To the Nationalists it was all treason. They went so far as to arrest 156 leaders and charge them with treason. And though the trial dragged on until 1960, the mass campaigns continued, and June 26 became rooted in the minds and hearts of all who were fighting against racism.

The International Conference of Solidarity with the people of Southern Africa held at Khartoum this year in January called upon all supporters of the liberation movements to show their solidarity by commemorating the national day of each of the countries of Southern Africa. Progressive forces in Britain will have at least two chances to do this in 1969. On July 6 an important conference will be held in London. Organised by the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the conference will examine 'Liberation in Southern Africa and Guerrilla Warfare'. A special section will be devoted to the role of the British militant in supporting the revolution in Southern Africa. On June 28, a demonstration will march from Tower Hill through London to expose British capitalist collaboration with fascism in Southern Africa.

The Conference, referred to in the above article, on 'Liberation in Southern Africa and Guerrilla Warfare', will be on Sunday, July 6, from 2 p.m. to 6.30 p.m., at the Round House, Chalk Farm Road, London, N.W.1. Representatives of the ANC (South Africa), SWAPO (South-West Africa), ZAPU (Zimbabwe), FRELIMO (Mozambique) and MPLA (Angola) will be present, and speakers will include Basil Davidson, Ruth First, Stuart Hall and Ronald Segal. The demonstration on June 28 will leave Tower Hill at 2.30 p.m. and is being organised by an *ad hoc* committee. Further details can be obtained from the Committee, c/o Free Assembly, 41 Cecile Park, London, N.8.