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African National
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c/o J. M. Pennington
5, Elm Street
Houghton, Johannesburg
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Institute of Current World Affairs
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New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

It was getting hot in the dingy back room of a little Indian shop on a side street in Stanger and I was tired of looking at the sides of soft drink cases, piled against the wall, and tired of reading, over and over again, "South Africa is Lion Country" on a Lion Beer advertising calendar. I had been sitting for three-quarters of an hour on a compound-fractured chair that was very definitely straight up and down and flat of seat. It was 11:45 and the man I had arranged to meet was supposed to have arrived at 11. I knew he was busy--the close police check on his movements would force him to lie low at home for the next few days and it was essential that he get all of his business out of the way as quickly as he could.

The old Indian in the fez who ran the shop stuck his head around the corner of the door. "He should be here very shortly," he said in pacifying tones. "Perhaps you would like something cool to drink? I have soft drinks on the ice."

"No, thank you," I answered. It would do no good to talk with the old man--he would say whatever he thought you wanted to hear and although he served as contact man for the fellow I had come to see, he didn't have the kind of information I wanted. The head withdrew and I was alone again. But not for long. In the front of the shop, over the babble of buying and selling, I heard a respectful salutation, then footsteps coming my way.

Through the door came the big man himself. Even though I had seen him once before, I couldn't help feeling surprised all over again. No one with a reputation like his could appear so un sinister, I told myself. He had grey, curly hair, and a ponderous smile and walk that fitted his easy-going bulk. As he entered the room he looked quickly at me, then glanced around the room.

"This won't do," he said. "Do you have a car?" I said I did, and he turned and walked out through the shop again. When we reached the front door he poked his head out and looked, first right, then left. Then we went out, walking quickly to the curb where the car was parked. When we got in I started the engine. "Better head straight out of town," he said. "I know a place where we can park and talk." About a mile from town he pointed to a side road and we bounced into a grass-grown gravel pile and stopped. When I cut the engine he listened for a minute, then peered around to see if anyone was lurking nearby. We were in an overgrown quarry. "Well," he said, satisfied we couldn't be overheard, "how can I help you?"

All this cloak-and-dagger business is intentionally over-dramatized to emphasize the atmosphere that is built up when an American INOWA associate keeps an appointment with P. J. Lituli, president of the African National Congress. Lituli, a 56-year-old father of seven children, was educated at Adams College, an American-supported teachers' training school for Africans. He describes himself as a peasant farmer, a politician and a merchant. When I first met him he was serving in the latter capacity, pushing packets of Sunlight Soap and Bear's Silver Cloud smoking tobacco across the counter at the Nondhlevu Trading Store. Actual ownership of the store, which is in a native reserve close to a sugar mill, is a mystery, but I gathered from Lituli that there are several

partners. "I run the store," he told me, winking, "because I am in the District more than any of my partners."

The wink was significant. Lituli has been ordered by the Minister of Justice, Mr. Swart, to confine his movements to the Lower Tugela Magisterial District and to avoid all public meetings according to the provisions of the Riotous Assemblies Act. He had been served with a previous notice, prohibiting him from entering any of the larger South African cities, but this new notice limits his movements even further. The Lower Tugela Magisterial District runs north and south along the coast of the Indian Ocean for 30 miles and runs inland 20 miles from the shore at its widest point. It is just north of Durban, spread around the largish village of Stanger.

In its attempts to keep Lituli from causing the trouble expected of all African National Congress presidents, the Special Branch of the Criminal Investigation Department keeps a wary eye on him, checking on who he sees, where he goes and with whom he enters into correspondence. According to Lituli, they tap his telephone and examine by means of strong lights the mail he receives.

As a result all appointments must be made through Lituli's Indian friend, the fez-wearing confectionary manager, who takes telephone messages and passes on mail. Meetings are arranged (as mine was) in the back room of the shop. All through our talk in the quarry Lituli kept glancing about, evidently expecting that we had been followed. He would look up sharply at each car that passed us on the road about 100 yards from where we were parked.

He explained, as I knew he would, that he was so late because he had so much business to take care of before the weekend (we met on a Wednesday) when he would be forced to stay at home because of the Zulu celebration in Stanger to mark the 125th anniversary of the death of Tshaka, the great warrior king of the Zulus. He explained that a very close watch would be kept over him during the celebrations because there would be about 10,000 Zulus in the neighborhood, presumably in a very elated condition brought on by beer and the memory of Tshaka's bloodthirsty impiis (regiments).

Stanger is in the middle of a heavy sugar cane-growing area and there have been many destructive, incendiary fires in the District in the past few months. The C.I.D. Special Branch is quick to blame the fires on "Shisa! Shisa!" ("Burn! Burn!"), a secret arson organization which is supposedly sponsored by the African National Congress. Many planters believe that there are more fires in the Lower Tugela Magisterial District than elsewhere (this is true) because of the presence of the president of the African National Congress (this is not capable of proof).

My first question, naturally, concerned the ban that limits Lituli's life to a world 30 miles long and 20 miles wide. How did he feel about it? I asked.

Lituli smiled. "It could be worse," he said. "At least I was not named a Communist. - If that had happened, I would have been forced to resign as president and I could not have attended any meetings, public or private. As it is, I may not attend any public gatherings, but I can hold committee meetings and conferences of the ANC. It's expensive---all the committee meetings must be held in the Lower Tugela Magisterial District. But I may remain as president and in that I am fortunate."

"Just what are the aims of the Congress?" I said. "Are you working for votes for everyone regardless of education or property qualifications? Or are you trying to start another defiance campaign? Just what is it you want?"

Lituli closed his eyes as he began to answer, a conversational device he used several times during our talk. I think he was trying to convey acute concentration. It was effective the first few times he tried it, but as the novelty wore off it gave him the look of a man with a migraine headache.

"We are not working for votes--we are agitating," he said, his eyes closed. He opened them quickly, as though to check the impression he had made on me--then shut them again and said, "We do not mind being called agitators. It is the policy of the ANC that we believe the African people can use a vote intelligently even though they have not reached matric' (graduation from high school). Of course, almost every European, United Party or Nationalist, will say that the traditional way of African life is a dictatorship under the chief and that the average Bantu cannot understand votes. This is nonsense. Even Tshaka, tyrant that he was, did not think of ruling without a council of chiefs to advise him.

"We might settle for less than universal adult franchise," he went on, opening his eyes and grinning slyly, "but there are no Europeans among the United Party or the Nationalists who are willing to sit down and talk to us about it. So our policy is rigid--votes for all Africans."

"How strong is the ANC?" I asked.

Lituli thought for a moment. "It's hard to say. When we conducted the defiance campaign a few years ago we had 100,000 active members. But membership in the ANC must be renewed each year--a membership fee must be paid and a card issued--and that causes the total to vary. But our strength does not lie only in active members. You must remember that the ANC is the only organized African political group in South Africa. It is like the United States when I was there in 1948--not everyone was an actual member of the Republicans or the Democrats, but most people were strongly in favor of one or the other. I think that most Africans who have any knowledge of politics support us."

"How about the rest--do you claim to represent all Africans? Garden boys and cane cutters as well as those who are educated?"

Like a mask, a mournful expression dropped over Lituli's face. He closed his eyes wearily and rubbed his hand over his head. "We become very tired of that accusation," he said. "It is always made to visitors by Europeans who try to minimize the desire of all Africans to have a voice in the government. I say yes, we do represent all Africans. To say that we do not just because our leaders are educated men is foolish. I'm sure the United Party believes that it represents lorry drivers and locomotive firemen even though there are no lorry drivers or locomotive firemen on the U.P. executive. Many Africans in the reserves are not politically conscious, but that does not mean that they require a voice in the government any less. We represent them, even though they are not aware of it."

"If the Africans were given control of the country," I asked, "would they return to the way of life they had before the Europeans came or would they run the country on European lines?"

"What a question!" Lituli said, looking at me closely to see if I was joking. "Even if we wanted to return to our old way of life we couldn't--too many of us have seen the benefits of western civilization to ever return. And we have lost

much of our tribal law and custom. The best idea would be for us to keep the best of tribal law and add to it the best of western civilization. Do not misunderstand me--I do not mean the trappings of western civilization like European clothing and ballroom dancing. I mean the rights of free men and the dignity of the individual.

"And I must point out that it is wrong for Europeans to claim western civilization as their own and refuse to let us share it. It belongs to all people--to us as much as to you. We would like to work with Europeans. Perhaps, after so many years of repression there might be some anti-European legislation passed by an African parliament at first, but that would not last long and I'm sure we could manage the country as well as the Europeans."

As I was about to ask another question, Lituli broke in abruptly. "You realize, don't you, that all this talk means nothing? We haven't any chance of achieving any of these things that we claim as our rights. The Nationalists are getting stronger all the time and the United Party is getting weaker. It will take something revolutionary and completely unexpected--an unpopular war or a serious depression--to get the Nationalists out of power. There is much talk about the possibility of trouble in the Nationalist Party when Malan dies or retires, but I don't believe it. And if the United Party got in, it would not mean much of a change for the African."

"Only once in the past year and a half have we had any reason to be happy--when Professor Fourie talked about economic integration. Of course, he was not talking about anything new, but it forced poor Mr. Strauss to think about United Party Native policy. I sent Professor Fourie a telegram to congratulate him, but I have a feeling that nothing will come of it this November at Bloemfontein. They will go back to the Smuts policy of 1936--strictly limited African representation through an African Representative Council--and we cannot accept that. I do not believe that we can count on the United Party, even its liberal wing, to help us."

"How about other methods?" I prompted.

Lituli looked at me sharply. "What do you mean, 'other methods'?" I mentioned the strong economic position of South African Natives. "We could do very well along those lines if we were allowed to organize," he said, "but there are dozens of laws which prohibit us from organizing. You can see that a strike would be successful if it were well-organized and the strikers were able to hold out against force and hunger. To try to organize such a strike would be impossible. We would all find ourselves in jail in a short time."

"There are many Africans who feel the only way left to us is armed rebellion. And, if the day came when armed conflict began, I would go to lead my people, even though I am sure that a revolution would fail. The Europeans would have no hesitation in using poison gas or tanks or even atom bombs to put a stop to it. I am not a pacifist, but I can see clearly that we would accomplish nothing but our own destruction if we used guns."

"To my mind, the only thing that will work is passive resistance. It would take tremendous self-discipline, strong leaders and good organization. It will take a long time to develop and it may never develop but it is better than having to rely on the United Party or resorting to force. At the same time we must continue educating the Africans in the reserves that they are being deprived of rights. The time will come when we will achieve our aims in spite of apartheid."

As we drove back to Stanger from the quarry, Lituli talked of the opposition put up against the African National Congress. "You will hear many things about the ANC while you are in South Africa," he said. "You will hear that we are all Communists, you will hear that we are supported by Indians and you will hear that we are behind secret organizations like 'Shisa! Shisa!'"

"We are not all Communists. There are a few among us who are, and many of the Europeans who help us are Communists. It is not because we are naturally anti-capitalists. It is because the only Europeans who treat us as equals and who try to help us in our fight are Communists. It is also true to say that of the Europeans who are willing to teach in Bantu schools, many are Communists. The surprising thing is that there are not more African Communists than there are.

"And although we have cooperated with Indian organizations in particular campaigns, we are not supported by Indians. We support ourselves with membership fees and public donations. From time to time I have made soliciting trips with the president of the South African Indian Congress, but it was to support programs in which we were interested jointly, like the defiance campaign.

"I'm not even sure," he went on, grinning, "that 'Shisa! Shisa!' exists. The first time I heard of it was when a C.I.D. Special Branch man came to ask me if we had anything to do with it. I know no one who is a member and I do not know of any fires that have been set except by local cane workers who had a grievance against a European farmer."

We parked in front of the Indian confectionary. "Many times I have been discouraged and asked myself whether I was accomplishing anything. The answer has always been yes. Someday we will be strong enough to accomplish something. I hope it will be by passive resistance--a racial war with guns would be suicidal and brutal. I don't think it will come soon--the Africans are not yet united. But as long as we keep organizing and teaching, it is sure that we will help change the situation one day."

We shook hands, then he looked cautiously up and down the street. He got out of the car quickly, slammed the door and hurried into the shop without looking back.

I could not help wondering, as I drove away, just what Lituli, with his dreams of votes, political power and passive resistance, would accomplish in the end. If he presses forward too swiftly there might be a bloody conflict which he would be powerless to control. If he moves too slowly there is a good chance of the entire organization falling to pieces through sheer inertia, as so many other Native organizations have done. It seemed to me that steady progress--seizing opportunities for advancement when they arise, curbing young hot-heads and keeping enthusiasm as keen as possible--are called for now.

No one can say whether it will be the African National Congress or a later African organization which will eventually lead the South African Natives to a responsible place in the government. Whichever it is, I'll remember the day I sat in a quarry with Lituli, talking about a movement which could not be turned back.

Sincerely,



Peter Bird Martin

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