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Textos e documentos

A Message to Every Voter from the African National Congress, April 1958¹

(This message was published early in April 1958, before the general elections)

Sir or Madam,

You may be surprised to receive this message from the African National Congress: surprised because this is something unusual and because you have no connexion with the African National Congress. The African National Congress is the oldest and the biggest and most representative organization of Africans. For many years we have addressed protest, petitions, memoranda, deputations and other memoranda to the Government. These appeals have fallen upon deaf ears. Today we are addressing ourselves directly to you, to voters, who in the last resort are responsible for the Government.

On April 16 you are going to exercise your right to vote for your representative in Parliament. You may perhaps ask what this has to do with us, who have no votes. It has a great deal to do with us. Parliament makes laws which govern non-whites as well as whites. We have to obey those laws - which always bear more severely upon us than upon anyone else - though we have never been consulted about them, or given any say in choosing those who make them.

Frankly, we are by no means satisfied with this state of affairs. We consider it neither fair nor just, and we shall never rest content until the democratic principle which is conceded for Europeans is extended to include the entire population.

But so long as this unfair position continues, and our people are excluded from the franchise, have we not at least the right to state our views? And have not you, the voter, a solemn duty to consider those views carefully and without prejudice? We are sure that we have that right, and that you have that duty: a duty to remember that you vote not only for yourself but also on behalf of many fellow-South Africans who are denied the franchise.

Neither the Nationalist Party nor the United Party represent or are supported by the African National Congress. They both stand for a narrow policy of racialism and racial domination. We who stand for a broad and true South Africanism extending to all in our country, irrespective of race or colour, can never accept or support the policy of either party.

But we must say that never since Union have our people suffered such hardships, humiliations, and sheer brutality as we have had to undergo during the past ten years of

¹ <http://www.liberation.org.za/collections/anc/people/lutuli/lutuli1.php>

Government by the Nationalist Party. Both in the towns and in the rural areas we have known no peace; people have been removed in their thousands and in their tens of thousands, their homes and their families broken up. While prices have gone up, our wages have been pegged down and our poverty has become desperate.

Every door through which we might have sought advancement, culture and a higher civilization has been slammed in our faces. Our schools are being turned into schools for ignorance, tribalism and servitude. The universities are being closed to us. Any sphere of employment other than ill-paid unskilled labour is being closed to us. Every means of legitimate national expression and protest is being closed to us. Our leaders and spokesmen are arrested banned, deported and silenced.

Where can this road lead our country, South Africa? We see the crime rate rising day by day. Savage punishments, whippings and floggings will not stop it rising - for the crime has its roots in the slums and the poverty, the hopelessness and frustration in which the people are living.

We see unrest and disturbances occurring more and more widely and frequently. It is not the African National Congress or the "agitators" which are responsible for these things, nor will more repressions, bannings and police terror prevent them. They are signs of deep discontent, of something profoundly wrong in the way in which our people are treated.

You may have been led to believe that our Congress is anti-white, that it is a reckless organization out to stir up racialism. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are a serious and responsible minded body of men and women, and our aim, as we have stated many times, is neither White supremacy nor Black supremacy, but a common South African multi-racial society, based upon friendship, equality of rights and mutual respect.

The Nationalist Party, with its policy of blatant oppression and racialism, is however, creating a legacy of bitterness and hatred which, if it is allowed to continue, we shall all of us live to regret. And it is not only as Africans, but also as fellow-South Africans, deeply concerned with the future of our country and all who live in it, that we speak to you on the eve of this crucial election. We trust most earnestly that you will heed our message.

Yours, in the service of South Africa.

A.J. LUTULI
President-General
African National Congress