

# THE GREAT SMEAR : COMMUNISM AND CONGRESS IN SOUTH AFRICA

DUMA NOKWE

*Secretary-General of the African National Congress at the time of its banning in 1960.*

AN attack in the March 1961 issue of the Washington-based 'Africa Report' is but one out of many that have—with more passion than accuracy—been time out of number levelled at the South African Congress Alliance, and the African National Congress in particular, for the influence supposed to be exerted on Congress by members of the now illegal South African Communist Party. This recurrent campaign enjoys the support of the strangest collaborators—a few liberals and respectable experts on race relations, an eccentric selection of overseas journalists, and the present Nationalist Government in the Republic of South Africa. The allegations constituted the crux of the Crown case in the South African treason trial which opened in December 1956 and ended so abruptly in March 1961. During the five years of trial, the prosecution employed an eminent professor of political science to scrutinise every document that had been published by the African National Congress and its allies—the Congress of Democrats, the South African Congress of Trade Unions, the South African Coloured People's Congress and the South African Indian Congress—for traces of communist influence.

No one can reasonably maintain that Professor Murray of the University of Cape Town did not apply himself with diligence and with zeal to his task. Not one word escaped his search for communist colouring. He placed the results of his efforts squarely before the special court, and the court held—in dismissing all charges of high treason against the accused—there was no proof whatsoever that the African National Congress was communist controlled or that the communists had ever widely infiltrated into it.

The relevant issue of 'Africa Report' states that: "In South Africa, the communists have in fact controlled most of the key positions in the oldest and most respected African organisation, the African National Congress, at least since the early 1950's"

and that "communist control of the African National Congress has been achieved through infiltration rather than ideological pressure—60 to 80 per cent. of the African National Congress Executive are dedicated communists". Here follows a chart of the African National Congress National Executive from 1949 until the banning of the organisation in 1960.

### A.N.C. NATIONAL EXECUTIVE 1949—1960

1949—1952	1952—1955	1955—1958	1958—
<i>President-General:</i>			
Dr. J. S. Moroka	Chief A. J. Lutuli	Chief A. J. Lutuli	Chief A. J. Lutuli
<i>Secretary-General:</i>			
W. M. Sisulu	W. M. Sisulu	O. R. Tambo	D. Nokwe
<i>Treasurer-General:</i>			
Dr. S. M. Molema	Dr. S. M. Molema	Dr. A. E. Letele	Dr. A. E. Letele
<i>National Executive Committee:</i>			
Rev. Calata	W. Z. Conco	W. Z. Conco	W. Z. Conco
W. G. Champion	<i>Tloome Dan*</i>	A. Hutchinson	L. Massina
<i>Tloome Dan*</i>	A. Hutchinson	J. Mafora	Z. K. Matthews
<i>Moses Kotane*</i>	J. Mafora	L. Massina	C. Mayekiso
<i>J. B. Marks*</i>	L. Massina	P. Mathole	P. Malaoa
Z. K. Matthews	P. Mathole	Z. K. Matthews	O. Mpeta
V. T. Mboobo	Mr. Mayekiso	Mr. Mayekiso	T. Mqota
A. P. Mda	Mrs. L. Ngoyi	Mrs. L. Ngoyi	Mrs. L. Ngoyi
L. K. Mhlaba	J. Nkadameng	J. Nkadameng	Mr. Nyembe
Dr. J. Z. L. Njongwe	D. Nokwe	D. Nokwe	A. Nzo
G. M. Pitje	Mr. Rakaooana	Mr. Rakaooana	R. Resha
Rev. J. Skomolo	R. Resha	R. Resha	G. Sibande
O. R. Tambo	G. Sibande	G. Sibande	O. R. Tambo
A. B. Xuma	O. R. Tambo	T. Tshume	
	M. B. Yengwa	M. B. Yengwa	

\*Names in italics denote former members of the banned South African Communist Party.

Throughout that period, only three former members of the South African Communist Party were members of the National Executive and—as may be seen from their italicised names—none enjoyed any key position at all. In addition, men like Moses Kotane, Tloome Dan and J. B. Marks were members of the African National Congress since the early 1930's and did not 'infiltrate' into the A.N.C. after the Communist Party was banned. Moses Kotane, who was for many years Secretary-General of the South African Communist Party, served on the African National Congress National Executive from the early 1940's. He was a co-signatory with the staunchly anti-communist

Dr. Xuma in 1943 of a policy document, based on the Atlantic Charter, called 'African Claims'.

Instead of promoting, let alone encouraging, infiltration into the African National Congress, the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act specifically debarred former members of the South African Communist Party from any association with organisations named by the Minister of Justice in banning notices. Former members of the Communist Party—as well as many others, 'named' as statutory communists by virtue of convictions during the 1952-53 Defiance Campaign—were compelled to resign from the African National Congress altogether.

Under the terms of the Suppression of Communism Act, the Minister of Justice is authorised to appoint a 'Liquidator', whose function it is to 'name' as such all persons known to him through his investigations to be communist. The South African Government is not vulnerable to the charge of lacking energy or will in its frantic search to uncover communists. None of the names on the African National Congress Executive chart produced above—except for the three italicised—has since 1950, when the Act was passed, been so named by the Liquidator.

Most observers of the South African political scene have assiduously emphasised the non-communist character of Chief Albert Lutuli, A.N.C. President-General. This has, however, far too often been done in order to imply a vivid contrast with his colleagues in the organisation. Since it is equally admitted that the ordinary members of Congress, in city and on farm, are non-communist, the evidence of communist infiltration must accordingly depend upon a study of the organisation's National Executive. Yet where, in such a study, is there any evidence at all of communist infiltration or influence?

Revealing an even more blatant effrontery is the accusation that Chief Lutuli has been used as a sort of 'front man' by the communists and remains captive to their wishes. It is strange that those who level these accusations express their supreme confidence in Lutuli himself and their great admiration for the policies he follows. They seem supremely unaware that, in their medley of accusations, they condemn one of the greatest political figures in Africa to being either a fool or a peculiarly astute hypocrite. Is it really necessary to say that Chief Lutuli is neither?

Before his election as President-General of the African National Congress in December 1952, Chief Lutuli was A.N.C. President in Natal and Chief of a tribe in the Groutville mission area.

Summoned by the Secretary of Native Affairs and expressly asked to choose between remaining Chief of his tribe or a leader of the African National Congress, Lutuli refused to withdraw from Congress and refused to resign his chieftainship. He was immediately deposed, but his refusal to surrender had enormously enhanced his reputation throughout black South Africa. When he was proposed for the Presidency-General of the African National Congress in December 1952—by known non-communists like M. B. Yengwa and Dr. W. Z. Conco of Natal—he received the overwhelming support of the National Conference. Since then he has become the symbol, both in South Africa and the outside world, of the militant struggle against racialism of all kinds in his country. His devotion to non-racial democracy has led to exile, bannings, assault and persecution. To suggest that he has required any 'build-up' from anyone—communist or anti-communist—is an injustice that would be cruel if it were not funny. Support for his receipt of a Nobel Peace Prize is world-wide. How odd an award for a dupe.

The Special Correspondent, who made his revelations in '*Africa Report*', advances to his own impression of the Congress Alliance, that working association of the A.N.C.—until its banning in 1960—with the white Congress of Democrats, South African Indian Congress, South African Coloured People's Congress and South African Congress of Trade Unions. "This Alliance, which plans joint campaigns, functions through a committee on which the much larger African National Congress holds equal representation with four other participating groups—minor front organisations in which the communists have considerably more certain control than in the A.N.C."

The policy of allying itself with other organisations possessing similar objectives has been followed by the A.N.C. since its inception in 1912. In that year and during the years that followed, it allied itself closely with the African People's Organisation led by Dr. Abdurahman, a movement which was the ancestor of the present South African Coloured People's Congress.

In 1946 Dr. A. B. Xuma, President-General of the African National Congress, Dr. G. M. Naicker, President of the Natal Indian Congress, and Dr. Y. Dadoo, President of the Transvaal Indian Congress, signed a formal pact of alliance to co-operate on issues of common interest. It was as a result of this alliance that the African National Congress and the South African Indian

Congress—the two Indian organisations, both founded by Mahatma Gandhi, having formed a national movement—organised the 1952-53 Defiance Campaign, in which some 10,000 Africans, Indians, Coloured and Europeans participated. Indeed, one of the significant aspects of the Defiance Campaign was the participation by members of all racial groups in a campaign against apartheid. It was to give organisational form to this co-operation that the Congress of Democrats was founded as a movement for democratic whites in 1953. And it was, incidentally, the African National Congress itself which was responsible for the establishment of C.O.D. The South African Coloured People's Congress—then called the South African Coloured People's Organisation—was formed by a convention of Coloured leaders from various Coloured organisations on a programme similar to that of the A.N.C. and S.A.I.C., adopting as its policy one similar to that which had been followed by the African People's Organisation. Charts of the National Executives controlling these different organisations would indicate as little communist 'infiltration' as does the chart of the A.N.C. National Executive.

The development of the non-racial South African Congress of Trade Unions is to be found not in communist intrigue but in the character of organised trade unionism in South Africa. Up to 1953 nearly all trade unions were affiliated to the South African Trades and Labour Council; in that year, however, the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act was passed in order—to quote the then Minister of Labour—"to bleed native trade unions to death". It was followed in turn by the 1956 Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act, which imposed apartheid upon those trade unions which had European, Indian and Coloured workers. The issue that then faced the South African Trades and Labour Council was whether to accept trade union apartheid upon the lines dictated by the government or to come out squarely against racialism and government interference in the trade union field. A split developed within the Trades and Labour Council; those who accepted apartheid formed the Trade Union Council, while those who rejected it founded the multi-racial South African Congress of Trade Unions. By its very stand against apartheid in trade unionism, S.A.C.T.U. found it natural to associate itself with the Congress Alliance.

A union of organisations, all possessing a common objective and enemy, is not peculiar to South Africa. And it is certainly

not peculiar to communism. If it were, this would be a scathing commentary upon the common sense of many millions of men. Nor is an alliance *with* the communists in itself something sinister or unprecedented. It was not so long ago, after all, that a relationship of unembarrassed warmth existed between the Western allies and the Soviet Union in their common cause against Nazi Germany. There is nothing sinister in the existence of democratic movements in South Africa which contain former members of the Communist Party. There is no witch hunting in the Congress movement. The individual members of groups in the Congress Alliance are accepted in terms of the loyalty they give and allegiance they profess to the principles of the organisations themselves. Nor is there anything sinister about equal representation of small and large organisations on a committee, the purpose of which is to resolve common problems on the basis of a mutual respect for the independence of each constituent organisation. Was there not equal representation of the Allies at the numerous conferences held during the second world war to work out common problems and strategy? Is the United Nations General Assembly not in this sense composed of equal partners?

The Congress Alliance was also the subject of a searching examination in the treason trial, and despite Professor Murray's attempts to uncover communist intrigue, the special court found the Alliance a common-sense form of organisation, adopted by numerous political movements ranging all the way from the extreme right to the extreme left. The special court also found that the A.N.C. was clearly "the senior and dominant partner" in the whole Alliance.

There is another assertion published in '*Africa Report*' and frequently promoted by those whose anti-communist hysteria leads them on all occasions to prefer that organisation which shows most energy and diligence in attacking communism. It is these people who have so shrilly maintained that the Pan Africanist Congress—the group which split away from the A.N.C. in 1958—is more 'powerful' more 'dynamic' and more 'militant' than the A.N.C. According to '*Africa Report*'—"the A.N.C. under Lutuli has been a very peaceful organisation, a group whose leaders would not take stands that would send them to jail. Since the Defiance Campaign of 1952-53, it has done very little indeed".

It is difficult to understand the accusation in '*Africa Report*'

that the South African communists are 'moderate' and have been influencing the A.N.C. against taking militant and revolutionary action. One would have thought that the South African communists, like communists everywhere, would have been feared and attacked by those like the Special Correspondent of '*Africa Report*'—not because they were meek and fearful, but because they were on the contrary violent and destructive. Certainly the South African government in its treason trial argued that the A.N.C. was communist and for that very reason was planning, conditioning and preparing the people for a violent overthrow of the state. The court dismissed this allegation as total invention. After listening to communist classics quoted interminably during the treason trial on the militancy of the Communist Party, I must personally confess to finding the particular accusation of communist meekness made in '*Africa Report*' somewhat startling.

The A.N.C. has from its inception believed in organising the mass of the African people throughout the country, in the confidence that effective action is possible only with the widest popular support. This is peculiarly significant to the degree that the success of A.N.C. campaigns has always been judged—by friends and enemies alike—not by what it has achieved in isolated areas, as has been the measure of success for the P.A.C., but what the response has been throughout the whole country.

Until 1949 it is reasonable to hold that the A.N.C. had no real programme of mass militant action. It relied by and large on deputations to the government, resolutions and petitions interspersed with mass action, in the hope that the government could be persuaded toward reform. Indeed, while discriminatory legislation steadily increased, the hope remained that this was a temporary trend which might be reversed. In 1948, however, the Nationalists came to power and made it clear that they intended to keep the African firmly in his place. The A.N.C. swiftly responded by adopting a "programme of mass action", and it became finally clear that any fundamental change in South Africa would be brought about by mass action and not by supplication. This programme of action included all forms of mass extra-parliamentary activity short of violence. It specified civil disobedience, strike action and non-cooperation.

On 26 June 1950, the A.N.C. called a one-day strike throughout the country in protest against the Suppression of Communism Act and against the shooting and killing of 18 Africans

by the police on 1 May 1950. On 26 June 1952 the A.N.C. and S.A.I.C. together launched the Defiance Campaign, during which some 10,000 people went to jail. As a result of this campaign a substantial number of leaders in Johannesburg, Kimberley and Port Elizabeth were arrested and sentenced to some nine months imprisonment; in all some 60 were convicted. Although the sentences were suspended, conviction in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act made the leaders statutory communists and enabled the Minister of Justice to order their resignation from the A.N.C., their confinement to a single magisterial area for a specified period, and a prohibition against their attending all gatherings for up to five years. The majority of the convicted were so proscribed, and the A.N.C. was accordingly deprived of its most experienced leaders. In addition, the government passed in 1953 both the Criminal Laws Amendment Act and the Public Safety Act. The first made defiance of the law by way of protest punishable by up to three years imprisonment and/or whipping and/or a £300 fine, while the second gave the Minister of Justice power to declare a State of Emergency. Banning orders and deportations meanwhile thinned the ranks of the Congress leadership.

At the end of 1953, the A.N.C. adopted the proposal of Professor Z. K. Matthews—one of Africa's greatest academics and as far from being a communist as General de Gaulle—to convene a Congress of the People, where delegates from all over the country would discuss and resolve the type of society that they wanted South Africa to become. The proposal so stirred the government that the head of police at once declared it treasonable to organise such a congress. Extensive and repeated raids were conducted by the police on the homes of Congress members, and on offices and meetings of the Congress Alliance, with the statement that charges of treason were contemplated. The Congresses, however, continued to organise the Congress of the People, which was attended by over 3,000 delegates just outside Johannesburg on 25 and 26 June 1955. Seized by the police, the Freedom Charter adopted at this meeting subsequently formed the basis for the treason trial. In the face of such persecutions and bans, banishments and threats, the claim that A.N.C. leaders "would not take stands that would send them to jail" is grotesque.

On 5 December 1956, 156 leaders of the Congress Alliance were arrested and charged with high treason. A.N.C. leaders



continued, however, their political resistance. On 26 June 1957 they called upon the country to observe a national stay-at-home, despite the fact that it is a serious criminal offence in South Africa to incite Africans to strike. In 1958 the movement called for a three day stay-at-home during the general elections. Many A.N.C. leaders were subsequently arrested, convicted, and served sentences for incitement. At the same time the A.N.C. was organising extensive resistance to the pass laws among women throughout the country. Were the 20,000 women who went in protest to the Union Buildings in 1957 fearful of imprisonment, or the 2,000 in Johannesburg who defied the pass laws in 1958? Were the 1959 demonstrations throughout Natal, which made headlines in the world press, an indication of timidity?

One must try—difficult as it seems to be for many observers of the South African scene—to separate claim from accomplishment. The P.A.C. defiance campaign of 1960 was sensational enough—in Cape Town and in Sharpeville. Some 100 people were killed. Yet the major centres did not respond at all. The Reef, which is the industrial heart of South Africa, Durban and Port Elizabeth, the best organised and most militant areas with the largest concentration of Africans, ignored the call. When in 1958 the A.N.C. organised its three day stay-at-home, it was a real success only in Sophiatown in Johannesburg and was immediately written off as a failure. I agree that it was a failure. A call for national action must receive a national response. A vivid contrast with both the 1960 P.A.C. campaign and the 1958 stay-at-home can be made by the call of Chief Lutuli on 28 March 1960 for a nation-wide stay-at-home as a day of mourning for the victims of the Sharpeville massacre. There the response was magnificent and nation-wide.

In the context of the May 1961 anti-Republican demonstration, the militancy of the P.A.C. is altogether open to dispute. The representatives of the organisation refused to participate in the All-In African Conference at Pietermaritzburg which demanded a National Convention to resolve a democratic constitution or, if this were refused by the government, a campaign of non-cooperation launched by a three-day general strike. The P.A.C. not only opposed the demand for a National Convention, on the grounds that Africans alone could determine their future, but openly opposed the strike call. Pamphlets bearing the name of the P.A.C. were distributed in various

areas of the country towards the end of May, calling upon Africans to ignore any call to stay at home. This act of political sabotage may well have endeared the organisation to elements outside of Africa; it has eroded whatever support the P.A.C. might have had both within South Africa itself and in other parts of the African continent.

The policy of the A.N.C., as the largest, oldest and most powerful African political movement, has consistently been and will unswervingly remain the forging of a real unity among all Africans, irrespective of tribe or ideology, and of all organisations, irrespective of colour or race, which accept the objectives of a democratic South Africa. In the great struggle to isolate white supremacy both inside South Africa and internationally, in the context of legal and illegal campaigns against apartheid, the leadership of the A.N.C. considers no sacrifice too great. Nevertheless, we have a responsibility to our people and we have never equated recklessness with militancy. We have so far consciously avoided a violent clash, because we have felt so far that suicide is no substitute for victory. The African National Congress has survived some 50 years of attack by the armed forces of race rule in South Africa. It will survive also the attacks of those who proclaim their friendship only to disguise their enmity.

