

TUNIS DIARY

An impression of the second All African Peoples' Conference held in Tunis between 25th and 31st January, 1960

CATHERINE HOSKYNs

Our Special Correspondent at the Conference

Saturday

FOR the last two days, by the spasmodic planes from Paris, Rome and Cairo, delegates from the political parties and trade unions of Africa have been arriving for the second All African Peoples' Conference. Coloured streamers in Arabic, French and English announce the conference in all the main streets; the solid bourgeois Tunisians, coming into the hotels for their mid-day drinks, are taken aback at the profusion of colour and language. The stark, white conference hall, shaped like the segment of a circle, buzzes with journalists, delegates and administrators. The boys of the Youth Brigade (known unofficially as Bourguiba's children) in red and white track suits carry messages at a brisk trot. The administration is efficient. Delegations are settled in their hotels, assigned cars and drivers and given meal tickets exchangeable in some of the best restaurants in the town.

On the surface all is excitement. For many delegates this is the first visit to an Arab or French-speaking country and tentative contact is made across linguistic and cultural barriers. The mayor of Dar-es-Salaam talks easily to the Tunisians in Arabic. A Kenyan and a trade unionist from Guinea find that they have a little Swahili in common.

Behind the scenes there is some strain. Not everything has gone smoothly since the Accra conference established the organisation and set up a secretariat in Ghana to work for freedom and unity throughout the continent. The appointment of Abdoulaye Diallo, Guinea's Minister in Ghana, as secretary-general was by no means unanimously approved; the death of George Padmore leaves a gap which will be hard to fill. The proposal to form an All African Trade Union Federation has divided African trade unionists in bitter dispute. Tom Mboya, the chairman of the first conference, has clashed so fiercely with the Ghana-Guinea element that, at a meeting of the steering committee in October, the position of chairman was demoted and he himself virtually suspended. It is unlikely that he will

attend as the Kenya constitutional conference is in progress in London, but the delegates from Kenya and from the strong Pan African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa (PAFMECA) are already mutinous and on their guard.

Nor have the ambitious proposals for political union in Africa, set out in the Accra resolutions, quite materialised. The Conakry Declaration, signed in May by Ghana and Guinea, announced twelve basic conditions for a union of independent African states. When these seemed to find little favour in West Africa they were quietly replaced by the Saniequellie Agreement signed by Ghana, Guinea and Liberia, which recommended a *community* of independent states, each member maintaining its identity and constitutional structure. Clumsy pressure has made Nigeria in particular suspicious of the whole Pan-African idea.

Will the Tunis conference smooth over or accentuate these differences?

Sunday

It is inevitable, at this stage, that the keenest advocates of Pan-Africanism should be those who have most sharply fought the battle against colonialism, and those who are still fighting. So the strongest delegations are from Ghana, Guinea, the United Arab Republic, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Kenya and the Congo. Everyone wants to see Kojo Botsio, Ghana's Minister of Economic Planning, Ismael Touré, Sekou Touré's half-brother, and Fouad Galal, Nasser's shrewd and friendly expert on African affairs. Of the other independent states there are delegates from Ethiopia and Liberia; no one from Libya or the Sudan.

The exiles, Joshua Nkomo and Kanyama Chiume, are representing Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Mainza Chona, the excitable representative of the United National Independence Party, has flown in from Northern Rhodesia. Three Nyasas are said to have been refused passports. It is hard for anyone to come direct from South Africa, but Tennyson Makiwane and Patrick van Rensburg who have been in London organising the boycott of South African goods will speak for the African National Congress and the Liberal Party. There are two delegates from 'the African Revolutionary Front Against Portuguese Colonialism.' They keep themselves to themselves and work behind the scenes.

The biggest gaps are in the representation from the countries on the verge of independence. Only Chief Anthony Enahoro of the Action Group has so far arrived from Nigeria. No one

expects the Northern Peoples Congress, but where is Dr. Azikiwe's party, the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons? There are no delegates at all from the governing parties of the French Community; Leopold Sedar Senghor's Parti de la Federation Africaine was expected, but the leaders are in Paris negotiating Mali's independence. Representatives of the Togoland opposition have come with the Ghanaians in a specially chartered aeroplane.

Lobbying is beginning—particularly over the crucial question of whether the member unions of the proposed African trade union federation shall be allowed to retain affiliations with international bodies such as the ICFTU and the WFTU. The difference on this cuts right across the natural linguistic and geographical divisions. Ghana, Guinea and Morocco assert that Africa's policy is neutralism and that these affiliations involve her in the ideological struggles of Europe. Tunisia and the East and Central African countries value the aid they get from the ICFTU and warn that Africa should not become isolationist.

Monday

The official opening. The flags of the independent states flutter a little in the breeze; the Tunisian guards in flowing robes line the approach to the conference hall. Everyone awaits President Habib Bourguiba; he arrives and stands, a small, erect figure, before the Tunisian flag while the national anthem is played.

Inside he speaks first in Arabic and then in French. There is direct translation and the English-speaking delegates plug in their earphones. His attitude is that of an elder brother. We have been through all this, he seems to say, take our advice. One wonders what he will say about the methods of revolution. With the Algerians at his elbow, can he do anything but endorse violence? He is unequivocal: personally, he says, I prefer to use pacific means, but all roads that lead to liberation are equally valid and equally respectable. It is the result that counts.

About African unity he is realistic—the road is long and scattered with pitfalls. Experience teaches that it is best to proceed by stages. When the effects of colonialism are eradicated, and difference, ignorance, superstition overcome, something real will have been contributed to the unity of the continent.

Bourguiba is an orator and the delegates love him. He leaves to a storm of cheering and to the music of the Neo-Destour song

of revolution. Everyone cranes to see the Algerian leaders, Ferhat Abbas and Krim Belcaceem, who stalk out after him. The secretary-general makes his report. This is in general terms. There is no account of the activities of the secretariat; no analysis of how the Accra resolutions have been implemented.

This is Bourguiba's day. In the afternoon 100,000 people—a quarter of the population of Tunis—gather in the square to protest against the Sahara bomb. In the background the cream-coloured buildings stand out against a blue sky and placards in pale blue and red are interspersed among the crowd. Bourguiba speaks for nearly two hours in Arabic. The delegates are ranged behind him in tiers. Most of them do not understand a word but no one dreams of moving. Afterwards the crowd protests in orderly fashion outside the French Embassy and then quietly disperses. Bourguiba has issued an ultimatum to the French: they must evacuate their base at Bizerta by February 8.

Mallam Aminu Kano, of the Nigerian Northern Elements Progressive Union, and an NCNC delegate arrive. The latter claims that his invitation was deliberately sent late as an insult to Nigeria. He is trenchant and angry. News of the Algiers insurrection filters through. The Algerians use its propaganda value to the full.

Tuesday

The conference has appointed as chairman Ahmed Tlili, leader of the Tunisian delegation and, significantly, deputy president of the ICFTU. A praesidium of five is elected to assist Diallo and Tlili on the running of the conference. The members are Ismael Touré (Guinea), Ahmed Boumendhel (Algeria), Fouad Galal (UAR), Kojo Botsio (Ghana) and Anthony Enahoro (Nigeria). The PAFMECA group complain that it is weighted in favour of French-speaking and independent Africa. They are overruled. It is decided that heads of delegations shall address the conference for two days in open session, and that then the conference will break up into three committees and go into private session. The committees will prepare resolutions on independence, unity and economic questions.

The speeches begin; they are couched in inflammatory terms. Two things are noticeable; first the natural concentration on the situation in Algeria, and second the attack not so much on direct domination but on the economic control maintained by the ex-imperialist countries even after political independence is achieved.

The atmosphere changes when Boumendhel, the leader of the Algerian delegation, mounts the rostrum. He is well known from Accra—a big, unpretentious man with a deep and single minded passion. His speech is eloquent and specific. He makes four demands:

That all independent states should recognize the provisional Algerian government;

That they should contribute directly to the Algerian budget;

That a volunteer brigade should be formed to fight first in Algeria and then wherever it is required;

That action should be taken to prevent the West from supporting France.

He receives a standing ovation.

He is followed by the Nigerian, Anthony Enahoro, who makes a speech equally direct but on very different lines. I am assuming, he says, that we are all against colonialism. Then he gets down to business. He criticises the secretary-general for not preparing a proper report. He asks why certain of the Accra proposals have not been implemented. He suggests that the ruling that no money should be received from countries outside Africa has not been scrupulously followed. Finally he asks the conference to agree as a matter of principle not to interfere in the internal affairs of an independent country or support one African politician against another. He is clearly referring to the public support which Felix Moumie, the exiled leader of the outlawed Union of the Peoples of the Cameroons, has been given by the conference—support which has alienated not only the government of the Cameroons Republic, but also the British Cameroons and Nigeria. Enahoro receives surprisingly warm applause and walks out of the hall, massive, self-confident and impenetrable.

Alioune Diop, the editor of *'Presence Africaine'*, arrives and begins to distribute English editions of the writings of Sekou Touré. English-speaking Africans are deeply impressed by the ideological framework in the political thinking of French Africans.

Wednesday

Mainza Chona of Northern Rhodesia speaks during the morning. His awkward vigour is delightful. "We're used to monkey tricks from the British," he says, "but now look what we are getting—Monkey Commissions." The South African

delegates speak, but neither makes much impression. The conference is orientated towards Algeria and finds it hard to look down to the South.

By the evening the East and Central African delegates are getting restive. This is the last day of speeches and, of all of them, only Chona has been called. They have complained to Enahoro and it is rumoured that he has threatened to resign from the praesidium. After some dispute Tlili rules that the work of the committees shall be postponed and the speeches continued on Thursday.

Thursday

Suddenly the air has cleared. Tlili's decision seems to have broken through the hostility and disbanded the cliques. The announcement that the Congo is to be independent on June 30 dissolves the conference in frenzy. Kanyama Chiume and Joshua Nkomo speak at length and receive applause. The Central African situation comes vividly to life. The theme of neo-colonialism is pursued. Suggestions that Africa should do without aid of any kind rather than prejudice her freedom are tempered by the knowledge of just how much Africa needs the investment and the teaching facilities of the European world. The general feeling is that Europe owes Africa aid, that it is not charity and should as far as possible be distributed through international agencies rather than through bi-lateral agreements.

Friday

The committees begin to sit. Will Boumendhel get his volunteer brigade? Will the conference split over the trade union resolution? In view of Bourguiba's remarks, what will be resolved on African unity?

Everyone waits for De Gaulle's speech and Bourguiba invites the Algerian leaders to dinner so that they may listen to it together. An immense amount of literature about Algeria is circulating among delegates and the enormity of the Algerian situation is the chief subject of conversation.

Saturday

The committees are still sitting and the closing session has been postponed until Sunday. There is deadlock on the trade union issue. The PAFMECA countries have threatened a walk-out if anything is passed to prevent an international affiliation. Ghana is ready to force the split. Only Diallo Seydou, the active

secretary-general of UGTAN,[†] seems interested in achieving a compromise.

At a press conference Bourguiba says that a brigade is a good talking-point, but that he would not welcome it on Tunisian soil. There are rumours that the FLN has agreed to send four guerilla leaders to Leopoldville after Congo independence to assist the Angolan nationalists.

Sunday

At the closing session the resolutions are read by Ahmed Boumendhel. Africans everywhere are asked to intensify the struggle and a committee is to be set up to co-ordinate aid from the independent countries to the nationalist movements. The word 'non-violent' has been quietly dropped. The economic resolutions reflect the concern of the conference with neo-colonialism and urge leaders to "wrest their respective states from economic dependence on the ex-imperialist countries". Independent states are asked not to enter into any undertaking which would prejudice the move towards liberty and unity in Africa.

Diallo Seydou has made his point and the trade union resolution is a compromise. The formation of an African trade union federation is recommended, but all details are left to the trade union conference which is to meet in Casablanca in May. The resolutions accept the Accra decisions, but go on to emphasise the need to break down the barriers between the various countries by the exchange of teachers, students, technicians and doctors. They ask for the abolition of visas and the formation of an African Transport Company.

There is a specific resolution about each country. Boumendhel gets his brigade but it is to be formed only to fight in Algeria—the suggestion that it should be a permanent unit has been rejected. Most of the resolutions follow usual lines: the French Community is condemned, Kenyatta should be released and the Central African Federation broken up. The surprises are the Cameroons resolution (which—after Enahoro's remarks—has been couched in wide, mild and extremely general terms) and the resolution on Somaliland, which definitely and categorically recommends a Greater Somalia union. There is some doubt as to whether, in the face of Ethiopian pressure, this resolution would have been accepted had there been more time for discussion.

[†] The Guinea Trade Union Federation

Monday

The new steering committee has been elected. It is big and fully representative. After some dispute Tom Mboya has been chosen in absence to represent Kenya. The tact of Fouad Galal has been rewarded. The conference in 1961 is to be held in Cairo.

Delegates are leaving. It remains only to try to sum up. In what directions is Africa moving? What has the conference achieved? Comparison with Accra is inevitable and there are some obvious changes. First, the whole attitude is more militant and more uncompromising. Africa is no longer prepared to wait. Independence is her right, and she will take it if necessary by force. The powerful oratory of the Algerians and the proximity of an African army have had a profound effect. At the same time Africans have moved from a simple demand for political independence to an awareness of the problems that face an independent country and the difficulties of finally extracting Africa from a dependent position. (The emphasis on this is indicative of the growing influence of French Africa.) Finally, African leaders seem sensibly to have come to the conclusion that political federation is the last and not the first step in unifying the continent. The urgent priority is to facilitate contact from one region to another.

Achievement is harder to assess. The conference did not split, as seemed possible at one time. It ended in a better humour than it began. In many ways the administration was more efficient but little time was left for discussion in the committees. The Accra procedure, which allowed the committees to sit all through the week, produced more considered decisions. The most important results, however, of a conference of this kind come not from the resolutions and their implementation but from the contacts made and the impression of vigour given both to the outside world and to the Africans themselves.

More thought is needed over the construction and organisation of the conference itself. At the moment it is too easily dominated by one country or one group of countries. The dangers of this were in the end avoided at Tunis, but another time it may not be so easy. If the conference is to be effective it must draw in those who now stand outside, not force out those who are already in. Much depends on the effectiveness of the steering committee.