

AFRICAN POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

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Two facts need to be remembered in any discussion of African political movements. The first is that this is a subject which receives little or no attention in South African history books. As a result, European opinion is very largely unaware of the attitudes which have been shaping in the African mind within the last fifty years. This is unfortunate because it leads to unilateral solutions which only complicate the race problem on the one side, while on the other it denies very many White South Africans acquaintance with developments which wield a decisive influence on the relations between Black and White.

The second point is that the history of African political movements is, in fact, a record of specific ideas moving in the direction of finding a workable solution to what is, in African eyes, the White problem. This process dates from the time when the African came in contact with the White man.

For purposes of this article we shall confine ourselves to the most important movements which have arisen since Union.

The most important political organisation in this period was the South African Native National Congress, now the African National Congress (ANC), founded in 1912. An outline of the circumstances which produced it will shed light on its ideals, its history and its impact on both South Africa and the world.

Enlightened Africans at the turn of the century believed that Union was desirable because the African, the Boer and the Briton would survive and prosper only if they abandoned the path of racial isolation and pooled their resources in a bigger, united community. The African had the labour; the Boer controlled the gold-bearing reefs of the Transvaal while the Briton had the capital and the technology.

These Africans realised that if labour, natural resources and capital were harnessed together, the various races which had made this country their home could all look to the future with confidence. Such harnessing, however, was possible only where the racial groups concerned were united. The concept of united nationhood, then, came to be seen as the only effective and lasting guarantee of a

fuller life for every South African regardless of race, colour or creed. From this perspective the African saw implied in Union the rejection of the idea of separate destinies for each of the principal racial groups into which the peoples of South Africa were divided.

The prime movers behind the march to Union were, of course, White. But the unity they forged and expressed in *ex unitate vires*, our national motto, was an organic unity; something which would grow and expand and in the process embrace and benefit all who had made South Africa their home.

At the same time a sharp distinction was drawn between the *ideal of Union* as outlined above and what would be the possible *fact of Union*. There was widespread fear that Union attained on the terms of the Boer republics of the Free State and the Transvaal would, in fact, be a triumph for the temper of the slave-owner. The Boers were, of course, no longer slave-owners. But their long tradition of slave-owning and its impact on their history had left an indelible mark on their attitude to the man of colour. In African eyes, while they had abandoned slavery they had retained the temper of the slave-owner. This handicapped them gravely in their approach to the relations between Black and White.

Against this background the African naturally approached Union with mixed feelings.

The decisions of the National Convention (which brought about Union) confirmed the worst fears of the African people. The temper of the slave-owner scored a major victory against both Cape liberalism and British diplomacy. The Act of Union made it plain that the African was not to be accepted as a citizen in the new Union. Race and colour were to be absolute and permanent criteria by which to assess human worth.

This gave Union the character of a White united front set up to keep the African in permanent subjection. It created the need for an African united front to protect the Black man against the dangers inherent in a society where the temper of the slave-owner was the dominant influence.

Dr. Pixley ka Isaka Seme, a barrister from Inanda, Natal, called together a conference of African chiefs and leaders from all the provinces. This unique gathering met at Bloemfontein in 1912 and bound all the African peoples of the Union in one racial, cultural and political front.

The delegates agreed to give up being narrowly Zulu or Xhosa or Suto or Shangane. They decided to emerge as a new people in history—the African people. To perpetuate these ideals they

brought into being the South African Native National Congress which later became the African National Congress.

From the statements of its leaders, press reports and its own declarations, the policy of the A.N.C. can be summarised as follows:

- (a) To unite the African people for purposes of using the strength of their numbers to ensure respect for their wishes;
- (b) To win over the White South African to the interpretation of the ideal of Union described above;
- (c) To awaken the world to the dangers inherent in a society where human values are assessed on the basis of race.

The S.A.N.N.C. was liberal-democratic in outlook and nationalistic in motivation. Its diplomacy was aimed, not at turning the African against the European, but at using the pressure of African numbers to convince an increasing number of Europeans that the values of life they (the Europeans) cherished were safest in a society where they were the common property of the largest number possible of all South Africans and not parts of an alien culture which could thrive only on the oppression of the man of colour.

The Congress faced its first real test in 1913 when the Land Act of that year was passed. This measure introduced rural residential segregation. This meant that large numbers of Africans who had lived off the land would be uprooted and ruined financially. That was bad enough. But the Congress saw in the Act an important step in the direction of barring every door to citizenship against the African.

A nationwide protest campaign was organised and when that proved of no avail, the Congress decided to place the matter before the bar of world opinion. A strong and representative deputation was sent to England in 1914. Needless to say it returned empty-handed.

After the war a second deputation was sent to England with instructions to proceed from there to Versailles if necessary. At Versailles they found themselves in the queue with General Hertzog who had come to plead for an Afrikaner republic. While it was hoped that the victorious powers might be interested in the Africans' case one motive in sending the deputation was to start working world opinion against evaluations of the human personality based on race.

Like most countries South Africa found herself in the throes of economic upheaval after the first world war. As happens when

that is the case, feelings between Black and White became strained. Need was felt for a more effective means of pressing for reforms than the conciliatory policy of the Congress.

A few African dockers started meeting in Cape Town. In 1919 they broadened the scope within which they were to work and formed themselves into the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (I.C.U.). The moving spirit here was the late Clements Kadalie who had originally come from the Nyasaland Protectorate.

Unlike the A.N.C., the I.C.U. was nationalistic in both outlook and motivation. It spoke a different language and employed different methods. It placed little or no reliance on petitions, protests and resolutions as the A.N.C. did. It was defiant and militant, often used the strike weapon and readily went to Court against any White employer who cheated his African servant of his rights under the law.

The I.C.U. was just the organisation to fill the vacuum created by the collapse of the A.N.C.'s policy of conciliation and the progressively repressive nature of the laws passed by the Union Parliament. But before its leaders knew precisely what was happening, the I.C.U. found itself the spearhead of the emancipation movement. The process of transition from a trade union to a political party had been so swift the leaders of the I.C.U. had not had the time (and possibly the inclination) under the pressure of events to remember the importance of principle in a political organisation.

The I.C.U. can be said to have set out to test the efficacy of the weapon given the African by Dr. Seme. Its initial successes awakened the African people to a new consciousness of their powers.

This awakening produced two reactions from the White side which have an interest all their own. On the one hand General Hertzog and Dr. Malan, then leaders of Afrikaner Nationalism, were looking around for allies against the so-called British jingo. Both saw in the rising African giant a promising ally. General Hertzog sent a donation to the I.C.U. with this message: ". . . It is for us, by our common endeavours, to make this country, that we both love so much, great and good. In order to do that, we must not only ourselves be good and great, but we must also see that there is established between the white and black Afrikaner that faith in and sympathy with one another which is so essential for the prosperity of a nation. It is my sincere desire that that faith and sympathy shall exist and to that end I shall exert all my influence. . . ."

Dr. Malan telegraphed a message to an African gathering at

Queenstown which read: "No race has shown greater love for South Africa than the Natives. Therein he, the Native, assuredly is a pattern of true patriotism and is entitled to take his place side by side with the Nationalists in the common political arena."

From the extreme Left came another reaction. The response of the African people to militant leadership and the growing contradictions in the Union's economy convinced a few Left-wing thinkers that South Africa would be fertile ground for a revolutionary party. As a result a number of White socialist groups came together in 1921 and formed the Communist Party of South Africa.

The Communist Party was started as a White man's Party. From 1921 to 1924 it had its own colour bar and did not admit African members. This policy was changed in 1924.

In the meantime the government had got Parliament to pass the Native Affairs Act of 1920 which set up what were called Native Conferences. These were gatherings of chiefs and African leaders who met the heads of the Native Affairs Department from time to time to air the grievances of the African people. When they started showing signs of independent thinking, they were stopped by the Nationalist Government.

Then came the Rand disturbances of 1922. These sharpened racial tensions on both sides of the colour line to points of unparalleled bitterness. Afrikaner Nationalism got added impetus as a result. In the general elections which followed the strikes, the Communist Party brought out a manifesto in which it supported the Nationalist Labour Pact against the Smuts government. That gave Afrikaner Nationalism a push forward. The Smuts government fell and Hertzog took over.

The Nationalist Labour government was no friend of the African. Poor Whiteism had for a long time given the leaders of Afrikaner Nationalism very many sleepless nights. Following his civilized labour policy, Hertzog threw large numbers of Africans out of jobs to make way for the poor Whites. If this widened the gap between Black and White it also roused the interest of some of the leaders of the Congress in the Soviet Union as the friend of the oppressed. The late Mr. James T. Gumede, then President-General of the A.N.C., travelled to Europe and thence to the Soviet Union where, in his own words, he was fêted as though he was the Prime Minister of the Union.

He was a keen advocate of the Soviet system when he returned. Although he was thrown out of the presidency-general for his new sympathies his return marked another turning-point in the march

of ideas in the African community. The conciliatory policy of the Congress and the militancy of the I.C.U. had not succeeded in bringing the African nearer his goal. He was looking for allies elsewhere.

The Communist Party had by then long abandoned flirting with the Nationalists and the Labourites. Its new friends were the leaders of the Congress. Just about the time Gumede returned from Russia the Communist Party came out with a manifesto advocating a Black Republic. Hertzog produced his notorious Black Peril manifesto. That sent the Nationalists galloping to Parliament with a comfortable majority of their own.

Once in power General Hertzog struck to left and right against African political organisations, crushing the I.C.U. and crippling the Communist Party. The Congress was largely paralysed for action.

With his political opponents either immobilised or gaoled or exiled, General Hertzog thought the stage was clear for his Bills, one of which removed the Cape Africans from the common voters' roll and set up the ill-fated Natives Representative Council (N.R.C.).

Like the 1913 Land Act, the Hertzog Bills were not only one more rejection of the ideal of united nationhood; they were one more decisive step in the process of barring the doors to citizenship through peaceful evolution. This created a vacuum in which need was felt for a new organisation to co-ordinate African opposition to the Hertzog Bills. Thus was born the All-African Convention.

Where the Congress had spoken of a united African front and the I.C.U. of militancy and the Communist Party of a proletarian revolution, the Convention spoke a new language—the language of non-collaboration. The underlying theory here was that the African is oppressed by consent. That consent took the form of collaborating in making the machinery of race oppression work. If he refused to co-operate, the entire superstructure of segregation would collapse.

Differences developed quite early in the Convention over this issue and in the end led to the A.N.C. walking out of it.

Some members of the Congress decided to co-operate in making the Hertzog experiment work—as proof of the African's desire to collaborate in genuine endeavours to solve a manifestly tangled problem. They stood for election to the N.R.C.

The N.R.C. had not been long in existence when the second

world war broke out. The conservatives in the Council decided not to embarrass the Union government by pressing the claims of their people too far during the war. Unfortunately for them this provoked two reactions from the African community. On the one hand a section of the people came together and formed the African Democratic Party under Mr. Paul Mosaka of Johannesburg. The A.D.P. opened its doors to Black and White alike.

On the other, the younger men in the Congress established the Congress Youth League which was anti-communist, demanded positive action against race oppression and advocated an ambitious programme of constructive work in the African community.

These events happened against the background of developments in India where Gandhi had demanded a clear declaration of Britain's war aims and had been willing to be gaoled for this.

It was against the background of these events that what happened after 1948 must be seen. In this year Dr. Malan's Nationalist Party was returned to power by the White electorate. African opinion saw in this a final rejection by the majority of White South Africans of the ideal of united nationhood and the repudiation of the spirit of Union as expressed in South Africa's national motto. The African acted accordingly.

The annual conference of the Congress decided to take positive action in protest against what was regarded as a fatal triumph for the temper of the slave-owner. Apartheid's success at the polls was seen as the gravest menace that has ever threatened the existence of the African people.

The crisis into which the African was thrown as a result called for a new outlook and for new methods of struggle. New alliances were to be sought and friendships built with those willing to reciprocate inside and outside South Africa. In his choice of friends the African was no longer to confine himself to that White community which had returned to power a political party pledged to an ideology he regarded as threatening his very existence.

It was in these circumstances that the African launched the resistance movement. Its declared aim was to get six specified laws repealed. But in a country where the African does not enjoy freedom of speech beyond a certain point, the motivating urges which gave the resistance campaign its peculiar hue have an importance all their own.

The first of these urges was the desire to invite the White democrat to cross the colour line and join hands with the African democrat in the fight to defeat apartheid and return South Africa

to the ideal of united nationhood and the spirit of Union as expressed in *ex unitate vires*.

Secondly, the African sought to awaken the world to the dangers for internal and world peace inherent in the apartheid philosophy. The third motive was to demonstrate African solidarity with the ex-colonial peoples of Asia and to assure them that never again would the African side with the race supremacist in efforts to drive the Indian out of South Africa.

The campaign met with both failure and success. It did not get the six laws repealed. But it split the White community in two and created an atmosphere in which the White democrat discovered that the values of life he cherished were safest where the African majority regarded them as part of its own heritage and not portions of an alien and hostile culture. The healthy result was the formation of the Liberal Party of South Africa and the "liberalisation" of the Race policies of the Labour and Union Federal Parties.

Secondly, it swung world thinking overwhelmingly to the side of the African—as witness the voting in the United Nations and the general state of world opinion.

Thirdly, it awakened the peoples of Asia to the need for closer bonds between themselves and the people of Africa. This, in turn, set in motion a series of events which culminated in the Bandung conference at which the African National Congress was represented.

Lastly, the campaign gave the African the initiative to choose the direction of his political progress. The White supremacist was no longer to say what the status of the African would be in the future. This development made all talk of White baasskap meaningless. The bans on African leaders are a desperate effort to wrest this initiative from African hands.

With African States coming up on the continent the African progressively sees the race problem from wholly different perspectives. It would not be surprising if, under the impact of apartheid, he one day came to the conclusion that if Black and White can live together in this country only on the basis of master and servant and not as equals, then South Africa is the wrong place for the White supremacist to be in.

One conclusion emerges from all the foregoing: apartheid or any policy of race discrimination is no answer to the Union's race problem. The first great need of our times is a brand of statesmanship which will make our various peoples realise that salvation

for them lies in their standing together in the defence of a Union which shall symbolise their being heirs with an equal title to a tradition of freedom for which all have fought valiantly ever since Black and White met in this part of the world.

The second most important requirement is that we, Black and White, all need a powerful ideal which will bind together our peoples as against the influences which divide them. That ideal is the goal of a Greater South Africa where colour shall be no criterion by which to assess human worth; where Black and White shall be conscious, not of their skin colour but of the things they shall have in common; where no racial group shall feel threatened by any other and where each shall see in the security and prosperity of the others the only permanent guarantee of its own survival. This is the goal towards which the majority in the African community have been moving since Union.

PASSIVE RESISTANCE

PATRICK DUNCAN

It is becoming clear that our country has only one future—a non-racial future. Once the social and economic forces begin to act strongly in any situation, then he who defies them does so at his peril. I was moved to read the summing up of Hitler by that simple man, his interpreter, Paul Schmidt. After watching human affairs at the top level for twenty-five years Schmidt's judgment is that there are at work in the world irresistible moral and economic forces, and that although dictators can construct false moralities and phoney economics which have dazzling short-term success, yet in the end such people are crushed and their systems with them. Now these social and economic forces are at work with great strength in South Africa, working for change in the direction of greater equality and of democracy. However great the will-power may be that attempts to dam them it will not succeed, and resistance will hurt mainly those who resist. The doctrine of White supremacy, as thinking men even on the Nationalist side know, is doomed. There are no social and economic forces strengthening it. We hear wild talk of the time coming for another "Blood River". There will be no second Blood River, and for this reason. In 1838 the Boers carried with them the