

Birth pangs of an ideology

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THE fifties were a rowdy decade, though not without re-deeming features. Amid the din of contending schools of thought the beginnings of meaningful political action began to take shape. The famous Programme of Action had been piloted through the ANC conference at the end of 1949, though no one outside the pressure group in the ANC Youth League showed any real interest in its implementation.

The Old Guard balked at its radicalism, and the White-inspired multi-racialist element in and outside the ANC shied away from the African Nationalist fervour which permeated the Programme. Thus the stage was set for the noisiest controversy ever to hit the National Liberation Movement, culminating in a convulsive tremor of a split towards the end of the decade.

By 1958, when the split occurred, certain rival trends of thought had begun to crystallise from amidst the confused ferment. With rival groups opposing one another often at the wrong time and place and for the wrong reasons, and the racist regime taking repressive measures against all of them for equally wrong reasons, the controversy frequently bordered on the tragic-comic.

Just as often, no sooner had the warring elements thrown verbal bricks at one another than they were compelled by their common enemy to close ranks --- on object lesson in dialectics.

The complexity of the issues involved in the differences between the various elements in the National Liberation Movement was aggravated by some tragic misunderstandings due to lack of facilities for public debate.

Without adequate means of communication in which views could be aired freely, people tended to misunderstand each other's motives. Because of the country's racial laws and the customary practices of racial segregation, suspicion was a complicating factor amongst the races, which lived in watertight compartments.

As a result, there developed a crop of political split personalities who were one thing in presenting themselves to their White friends and quite another to their own people. This was frowned upon by a new breed of impatient young men in African politics whose role was bound sooner or later to set off far-reaching social explosions. And this was precisely what was to happen in the years to come.

The first rumblings were heard in 1950. At the 1949 conference Dr J.S. Moroka had replaced Dr A.B. Xuma as President-General of the African National Congress. Looking for a candidate who would accept their Programme of Action, the Youth League had in desperation turned to a man outside the ranks of the ANC whose qualification could not have been much more than the fact that he could have his name prefixed with the title doctor.

Fifteen years previously Dr Moroka, as a member of the All-African Convention, had featured in an all-party deputation which saw the Government to express opposition to the notorious 1936 Hertzog Bills which sought to intensify the political segregation of

the races. The fact was overlooked by the Youth League that in spite of his early opposition Dr Moroka had permitted himself to participate in the segregated institutions created under the same laws which were now to be the targets of boycott in terms of the Programme.

Having borrowed this non-collaborationist policy from the AAC, perhaps the youth felt it expedient to "borrow" an AAC man for its implementation. His election was on the understanding, implied rather than expressed, that he would spearhead the implementation of the Programme of Action. Such an undertaking had been declined by Dr Xuma who would not be "dictated" to by the youth. But if Dr Moroka had deliberately set out to sabotage the programme in the next three years he could not have done it better, as we shall see.

For implementing the programme a Council of Action was created, and its job was to draw up plans and select targets and spheres of action. By some curious oversight the Council never selected for boycott the Native Representative Council (NRC) or other similar institutions created by the White rulers for retardation of African political advance.

Dr Moroka himself served on the NRC together with other leading lights of the ANC such as Prof. Z.K. Matthews and Chief Albert Luthuli. In spite of the fact that the programme laid down boycott of the NRC and other similar bodies not only as its main target but also as a priority, the Council of Action was not in a hurry to direct its attention to them.

These segregated bodies were sometimes referred to as "Dummy Institutions," as in a baby's dummy --- a label which was pungently descriptive of their role vis-a-vis the White power structure. You pushed a dummy into the mouth of a hungry baby. The baby sucked the dummy, from which it gained nothing to satiate its hunger. But it stopped crying! The label originated in the All-African Convention, then a federal organisation.

The White rulers themselves regarded these bodies in no other light. As Prime Minister, General Smuts was candid enough to refer to the NRC as an outlet through which "the Natives can let off steam". In it our status-starved intellectuals and aspirant petty bourgeoisie, moulded in the image of their masters and hankering for approval by them, were distracted from organising resistance while engaged in futile endeavours to soothe the irrational fears of the Whites and to "prove" to the unbending White supremacists that they too could govern if given the opportunity.

With considerable aplomb, year in and year out they brought motions and made speeches at NRC sessions, often with an eye on the press gallery, anxious to earn some favourable comment in the White press for "political maturity", "moderation" or "responsibility" --- wonderful qualities these, presumed sparse

among slaves from a despised race.

However, Dr Moroka, who had accepted nomination and election as ANC President-General on a platform of militancy, was compelled to at least make a gesture of willingness to implement the Programme of Action. But there were many difficulties. The programme contained elements which could set off explosions in the community, knocking the lid off the pent-up emotions of a long-suffering people.

He was very conscious of what was expected of him the other side of the colour line, of what the White "friends of the Native" expected of him as a "responsible leader". He was also conscious of his responsibilities as President-General of an organisation that had built up a reputation for reasonableness and moderation. So were many of his colleagues.

They decided to try out civil disobedience. If they carried it out the Mahatma Gandhi way, it was just possible they could pull it off with the least possible risks. And amongst them Gandhi became the most avidly read of the leaders of the Colonial world. They decided to put the people to the test by calling on them to observe a day of prayer marked by a general stoppage of work on June 26 1950.

Trouble soon broke out. The Youth League complained bitterly that the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) had set out to pre-empt the ANC campaign by organising a one-day general strike for May 1 1950. The CPSA then loathed the ANC and much that it stood for, especially the 1949 Programme of Action and its policy of African Nationalism. The Youth Leaguers argued that a workers' day was, in the South African context, only of secondary importance, since the workers were oppressed not so much because they were workers as because they were African. It was as Africans that the people suffered oppression in South Africa, as a nation rather than as workers, they maintained.

Their renewed, poorly-circulated mouthpiece, the African Lodestar, arguing for an African Nationalist approach to the struggle, lambasted communism, ranking it amongst other reactionary creeds which it described as "foreign ideologies", adding that it was "clear that the exotic plant of communism cannot flourish on African soil". But the main bone of contention had nothing to do with the merits or demerits of Communism. What the youth were concerned with was a defence of African Nationalism.

South Africans on the whole have been starved of Socialist literature. Their only introduction to Communism, apart from the propaganda of the racist regime's pathological anti-Communism, was through the hostile, non-Marxist attitude of the multi-racialist, White-led CPSA towards African Nationalism. Many youth leaguers dismissed the CPSA as "Communist quacks".

Whatever its motives were, the CPSA's insistence on the May Day demonstrations was unfortunate. It served to strengthen the impression amongst youth leaguers that it was less concerned with promoting the interests and working-class consciousness of the workers than with its fear of African Nationalism as adumbrated on the Programme of Action. The situation was not helped by the CPSA's failure to campaign amongst White workers as well as it did among the Africans.

It was later to give youth leaguers even greater reason for being hostile when its publications advocated a policy that favoured participation in elections to Advisory Boards, which were listed among so-called "dummy institutions". In further violation of the terms of the Programme of Action, the CPSA encouraged Africans to participate in elections to the handful of "Native seats" (filled by White candidates) in the House of Assembly and Senate, and itself fielded candidates to perpetuate the fraud of "Native representation".

Instead of educating White workers to realise that their interests were interlaced with those of the African workers and thus

promoting working-class solidarity, the major part of CPSA activity consisted of offering unctuous advice to African political organisations which it contrived to guide along multi-racialist lines. Its preoccupation with politics rather than working-class multi-racialism has always been a curious feature of South African politics.

The Youth League felt very strongly about the action of the CPSA in calling a general strike only a few weeks before its own programme was due to be tried out. It is possible that the CPSA felt just as strongly about an AMC programme which carried all forms of White leadership or influence, claiming in word and deed the right of self-determination for the African people.

Otherwise one cannot understand why the CPSA insisted on its demonstration in spite of the risk it involved of splitting the people. That the people would be divided was quite clear early in the campaign. Youth Leaguers were busy breaking up meetings organised by the CPSA in preparation for May Day, and advising the people to ignore the strike call.

But the Youth Leaguers could not match the campaigning efforts of the CPSA, because the latter controlled the sole formal mass media of the National Liberation Movement. Half the number of workers in the Johannesburg area responded to the strike call on May Day. Police made the event memorable by using force in breaking up meetings on that day. Eighteen people were shot dead and 30 injured.

Police brutality enraged the African public and the Youth League was compelled to change tactics and join with the CPSA and others in protest demonstrations. It was not to be the last time that Government bungling succeeded in uniting the warring elements in the liberation struggle. The ANC's own call for a general stoppage of work was hence-forth approached in a spirit of unity and was joined by all the forces.

In another example of Government bungling, two weeks before the stoppage of work Minister of Justice Swart announced, with a feigned "feeling of trepidation", to an engrossed House of Assembly that there was "a secret organisation amongst the natives" under communist leaders which, on a particular day, would "poison the people's water supplies" and "murder people".

Swart leavened his announcement with a fictitious tale about some "Cheesa-Cheesa" (Burn-Burn) plot, in the grand style of the Reichstag fire episode, concluding his harangue with an anti-climax: "The last thing I want to do is to make the people panicky."

What did he want to do, then? Swart was preparing the ground for the passage in the settler House of Assembly of that draconic, all-embracing measure, the Suppression of Communism Act, which was to scare the CPSA out of existence even before the Bill became law. This law affected all the liberation organisations in the country, Communist or non-Communist.

The first major attempt to implement the Programme of Action was made in 1952. In the meantime Dr Moroka and other leaders continued to pore over Gandhian literature. For a while it seemed as if they intended to make Christian martyrs out of themselves and the mass of the people: at least their speeches implied it. They called for disciplined volunteers who, as Dr James Njongwe of Port Elizabeth put it, would "submit to arrest willingly and with gladness in their hearts, knowing that ours is a fight against malnutrition, high infantile mortality, landlessness, deprivation, humiliation, oppression, and against destruction of family life and faith in Christianity as a way of life."

Moroka said: "There is a crying need to evangelize the Europeans." He also said: "Our struggle is a mortal one, but it is waged on the principle of non-violence."

The people responded magnificently to the call to defy unjust laws. But by its very nature, and because of its non-revolutionary ideological base, the campaign was extremely limited in

scope. The leaders had reposed all faith in moral persuasion where revolutionaries would have also aimed at economic disruption. To that extent the leaders were guilty of sabotaging the Programme of Action, which called not only for civil disobedience but general strikes.

Altogether more than 8,000 volunteers took part in the campaign before it was allowed to fizzle out by the leaders who got cold feet as the Government prepared to take retaliatory action. While the 8,000 volunteers had stood trial and gone to prison in a spirit of defiance and without legally defending themselves, leaders who were arrested for instigating the campaign obtained legal defence (to the dismay of the people), though the law under which they were charged was one of those listed as unjust laws.

Dr Moroka not only obtained the services of his own counsel but entered the witness-box to narrate a sob story and plead for mercy. He told of how he, far from being guilty of any tinge of hostility against the oppressors, had made funds available for the education of the poor among them. He also recalled that he had condemned the outbreak of violence among the people.

It was of course true that Moroka had rebuked the people, telling them that the ANC wanted no Mau Mau in South Africa. That in every case the people had been provoked to violence by the police seemed to be of no consequence to this leader.

In December the same year Moroka was relieved of the reins, and was succeeded in the saddle by Chief Albert Luthuli. A greater misnomer than Moroka's jaw-breaking middle name could hardly have been conceived by his parents. He was great grandson of Chief Moroka of Thaba Nchu who had sold out to the so-called Voortrekkers. His middle name --- Sebeuijwasegokgobontharile --- meant "I have come last, having been criminally enslaved, but will bring rain, peace and freedom to my people."

Luthuli's reign has been marked by the ascendancy in South Africa of the creed of multi-racialism. A "Congress of the People" was called to adopt a "Freedom Charter". The Charter was said by South Africa's Pan-Africanists to have been drawn up in the fashionable suburbs of Johannesburg where the White multi-racialists lived among other rich Whites, conceived in the "vodka cocktail parties of Parktown and Lower Houghton."

Whatever the truth was, the Charter is certainly an ingenious device guaranteeing the protection of the disproportionate interests and privileges of the Whites. Among the signatories, apart from the ANC, are the White Congress of Democrats, a later front organisation of the CPSA, and the South African Indian Congress, which for a long time was representative of the Indian merchant class in South Africa.

Those three, together with the now dissolved South African Coloured People's Congress, formed what was then known as the Congress Alliance, now defunct.

The Charter's two most significant submissions are worth close examination. These are "All national groups shall have equal rights" and "The land shall be shared among those who work it .." The first of the two makes the following provisions:

"There shall be equal status in the bodies of state, in the courts and in the schools for all national groups and races; (2) All people shall have equal right to use their own languages, and to develop their own folk culture and customs; (3) All national groups shall be protected by law against insults to their race and national pride; (4) The preaching and practice of national, race or colour discrimination and contempt shall be a punishable crime; and (5) All apartheid laws and practices shall be set aside."

Elsewhere I have written on the above provisions as follows: "With the exception that this policy does not envisage --- not expressly --- the balkanising of the country on national or racial lines, it is not different from Dr Verwoerd's plan for the

separate development of the races. It panders to racial bigotry no less than do the men of apartheid."

Indeed, any policy that seeks merely to abolish (purportedly) apartheid inequality while deliberately setting out to perpetuate the existing national or racial distinctions and cultural or language differences, cannot be viewed otherwise than as a form of glorified apartheid. The policy of "separate but equal" has long been discredited even in the United States of America.

Always with their ears cocked to Moscow but their hearts in the privileges they enjoyed as Whites, the confused authors of the charter, in this dichotomy, went to the ludicrous length of adapting the Stalinist policy of cultural autonomy for the different republics in the USSR to the multi-racial composition of South Africa, and transformed it into a political concept.

It is not only in relation to cultural and political questions that the Charter so clearly bears the imprint of its authorship origins in the White suburbs of Johannesburg. It is also --- and particularly --- so in economic matters.

It is in dealing with the land question that the charter is even more disturbingly reactionary, more blatantly anti-Socialist, and more unashamedly pro-White. "The nationalisation of the land is the heart and core of a communist programme for agrarian reform. But the Charter envisages not nationalisation but continued private ownership of land..." (From "The African National Congress - Excerpts from Policy and Programme")

The charter begins by repudiating the African Nationalist slogan Africa for the Africans, saying "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, Black and White," and then proceeds in abstract terms to blame a "form of government" for robbing the people of their "birthright to land". It thus calculatingly conceals the embarrassing truth that the people have been robbed of their land not by a form of government but by the White oppressors.

The White people of South Africa, who constitute one-fifth of the population, occupy 87 per cent of the land surface. Scores of individual Whites own large tracts of farmland under freehold tenure. This has been effected through large-scale usurpation of African land over a period of more than three centuries. Yet the charter now affirms their ownership of this land, since the country "belongs" to them, too.

Under a policy of private ownership of land, such as is advocated in the charter, the people will be free to buy land where they wish. We are assured by the charterists that "All shall have the right to occupy land wherever they choose ..." and that "Restrictions of land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended."

But mere removal of restrictions on land ownership on a racial basis does not automatically make land available for sale. A mere declaration that a man is free to buy land wherever he chooses does not invest him with the wherewithal to pay for it. Even granting that the state would be in a position to raise the enormous sums that would be involved in a land-purchase and resettlement scheme, there is no guarantee that the White farmers would be willing to sell.

Viewed from any angle one darned well chooses, the charter is nothing but a gigantic swindle. Under freehold tenure, those who at present batten on the fat of our land will, if the freedom charterists have their way, continue in effective occupation of the usurped land, while the vast majority of the people are offered freedom to starve, overcrowd and wallow in the slums of 13 per cent of the land.

This diabolical document was foisted on a vast, ideologically-amorphous multi-racial assembly styled Congress of the People, held on June 25 1955 in Kliptown, Johannesburg. It marked the highest point in the ascendancy of the doctrine of multi-racialism. With it the ideological battle in the ANC took its sharpest turn, leading to the breakaway of the Pan-Africanists

at the end of 1958 and their establishment of the Pan-Africanist Congress early in 1959.

At its inception the PAC wrote Socialism into its constitution and into its other basic documents, envisaging complete expropriation of the usurped land and nationalisation of all the means of production, distribution and exchange. A recent codifying statement is even more explicit on this vital question. It says:

"Political democracy is meaningless unless it is accompanied by economic democracy. This means nothing less than the transfer to the people as a whole of the means of production and exchange, namely the factories, the mines, the land, the transport system and the banks.

"Such a radical programme alone can restore, at a higher historical level, the communalism practised by the African tribes who have been so ruthlessly expropriated by sword and fire.

"Committed as we are to a non-racial socialist democracy, we are resolutely opposed to a multi-racial South Africa on the morrow of the revolution. The equal treatment of all the liberated people as members of one nation rules out at once the recognition of so-called minority rights and interests with claims for special protection.

In his inaugural address Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe, the President, issued the following warning against the multi-racialist doctrine:

"Against multi-racialism we have this objection, that the history of South Africa has fostered group prejudices and antagonisms, and if we have to maintain the same group exclusiveness, parading under the term multi-racialism, we shall be transporting to the new Africa these very antagonisms and conflicts . . .

"To us the term 'multi-racialism' implies that there are insuperable differences between the various national groups here that the best course is to keep them permanently distinctive in a kind of democratic apartheid. That to us is racialism multiplied, which probably is what the term truly connotes."

Yet it was the multi-racialist charter which led to 156 people being arrested on the capital charge of treason in the madhouse that is South Africa. The Africanists held their breaths in utter disbelief. There followed a long-drawn-out Treason Trial based on a charge of Communism which must have made Marx turn in his grave. It was the Government's biggest blunder yet.

The hearts of the whole world stretched out to the victims of a governmental act of thoughtlessness which --- against the apartheid regime's own interests --- aroused the sympathy of people of goodwill everywhere and rallied world-wide support for the freedom struggle in South Africa.

What followed might have put into shade the best of Shakespeare's comedies were it not so tragic in its callous disruption of the lives of 156 people who for so many years endured the shadow of the gallows. What was brought to trial was multi-racialism, not Communism --- not even South Africa's statutory Communism.

The absurdity of the charge had been underlined in an earlier trial on charges of furthering Communism involving some of the present victims. Then Mr Justice Rumpff had declared in his judgement that the charges had "nothing to do with communism as it is commonly known" but found the accused guilty on the basis of what is defined as Communism in the statute books. He had then imposed a mild suspended sentence because, he had said:

"I accept the evidence that you have consistently advised your followers to follow a peaceful course of action and to avoid violence in any shape or form . . ." This was the case in which Dr Moroka and others featured as a sequel to the 1952 Defiance Campaign hardly three years before the treason arrests.

It is arguable that in the latter arrests the treason charges were trumped up by the police out of sheer pique. The trial ended (To be concluded.)

in ignominy for the state: all accused were eventually discharged. There had been moments of drama during the trial as the prosecution suffered legal defeat after defeat: charges quashed and doggedly reformulated, men freed halfway through the trial, and finally the ignominious collapse of the Crown case.

For the Africanists, who condemned the charter as a reactionary document, the trial aroused both sympathy and anger --- sympathy for the victims in their pitiable state of innocence, and anger mixed with sadness because they regarded the Government action against the freedom charterists as an uncalled-for political build-up for the latter.

In an analysis of the charter written in 1959 and published in *AFRICA SOUTH* at the beginning of 1960, Peter Nkutseou Raboroko, the PAC's Secretary for Education, depicts African Nationalism as a social force which upholds the interests of the indigenous African people against oppression at the behest of foreigners, and posits Africanism as the non-racial social force of the future, upholding the interests of the individual irrespective of race, colour or creed.

His submissions are based on the 1959 Pan-Africanist Manifesto. He writes: "And therefore we, the people of South Africa," proclaims the ultimate clause (of the charter), "Black and White together --- equals, countrymen, and brothers --- adopt this Freedom Charter . . ."

"To them master and slave --- the exploiter and the exploited, the oppressor and the oppressed, the degrader and the degraded --- are all equals. To them the indigenous African nationals and immigrant European foreign nations --- the dispossessed and the dispossessors, the victims and the robbers --- are all countrymen. For them the progressive and the reactionary --- the African subject and his foreign overlord, the African Nationalist and the Colonialist or White supremacist, the liberationist and the collaborationist --- are all brothers.

"The problem of the synthesis of opposites cannot be resolved by the wave of a magic wand. It is only after all these sets of antithetical categories have been duly reconciled that we can reach the final categories --- equals, countrymen, and brothers --- which betray no instability.

"Such reconciliation is possible only in Africanism, the final synthesis of these categories which the Africanist Manifesto defines as "social force which upholds the material and spiritual interests of the individual. " " (My own emphasis).

Indeed, it is true the fifties were rowdy, but the noises you heard represented the pangs of a sub-continent in labour: the birth-pangs of a new philosophy and ideology --- a clearing - ground for revolution.

Heralding this new era in an entry in his diary in 1962, Nelson Mandela wrote: "The PAC has started off with tremendous advantages ideologically, and has skilfully exploited opposition to Whites and partnership . . ." He also referred to the past and said regretfully:

"In the PAFMECSA area the Nobel Peace Award to Chief Luthuli has created the impression that Luthuli has been bought by the West . . . Luthuli's book and some of his statements have been extremely unfortunate and have created the impression of a man who is a stooge of Whites."