



Mahabane, Zaccheus Richard

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1. Methodist Clergyman, twice president general of the ANC and an important figure in both the All African Convention and the Non-European Unity movement. Energetic, dedicated and diplomatic as a leader, Mahabane was at heart a moderate whose political philosophy was grounded in a hope that Christian ethics would eventually prevail in shaping South Africa's race policies.
2. Born in the Thaba 'Nchu reserve in the OFS in 1881, the son of a prosperous Sotho farmer. His parents were Christians. He studied at Morija in Lesotho and in 1901 qualified as a teacher.
3. He worked as a teacher and court interpreter and then began theological training in the Cape becoming ordained as a Methodist minister in 1914.
4. Posted by his church to Cape Town in 1916 he joined the local Cape African Congress in 1917 and in 1919 was elected president of the Cape Congress.
5. In 1924 he was elected president-general of the national ANC. In 1927 Mahabane was replaced by the more radical J.T. Gumede. Gumede favoured ANC cooperation with the Communist Party and Mahabane took a leading part in engineering Gumede's defeat and the election of Pixley Seme. From 1937 to 1940 Mahabane was again president-general and in 1940 was defeated for presidency by A.B. Xuma. Mahabane became Congress chaplain.
6. Mahabane's view on the franchise issue reflected the complexity of the African dilemma. As president of the Cape Congress and vice-president of the Native Voters' Convention in the period before 1936, Mahabane took the public position that a separate voters' roll for Africans could be acceptable if whites found the prospect of a common roll too menacing. Mahabane was a member of the delegation of the AAC that conferred with Prime Minister J.B.M. Hertzog prior to the submission of the separate-roll compromise to Parliament. Although he opposed the compromise bills in principle, Mahabane's earlier qualified support for separate representation undoubtedly weakened the strength of the delegation's position.
7. As a leading personality in both the ANC and the AAC he did his best to propote the reconciliatio of these organizations. Long a proponent of unity among South Africa's three non-white groups, Mahabane cooperated with Abdul Abdurahman in calling the series of non-European conferences that met between 1927 and 1934. Mahabane became president of the Non-European Unity Movement which was formed in affiliation with the AAC in 1943.
8. Mahabane tried to strengthen the Interdenominational African Ministers' Federation, founded in 1945. Within the Methodist Church he pressed for a larger role for Africans.
9. In December 1960 at the "All in" African leaders conference Mahabane was chosen to serve of the continuation committee to make preparations for the Pietermaritzburg "All-in" conference of early 1961. Perhaps because of his advanced age he was not arrested with other members of the continuation committee prior to the second conference. He died in 1970.

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reference. pages 65-66 "From Protest to Challenge Volume 4"
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