

# THE A.N.C. AND NATIONALISM

—by RO. NGUBENGOUKA

**T**HE Programme of Action passed by the Annual Conference of the African National Congress in Bloemfontein in December 1949 has a history that should serve as a source of tremendous inspiration to all those who are genuinely interested in the liberation of the toiling masses in this country.

From its establishment in 1912 Congress has sought to unite all Africans in the country under one political organisation and advocated somewhat vaguely for some democratic form of government in which Africans would be fully represented. Though there were stubborn and spirited skirmishes now and again its policy was based upon the mistaken belief that by lodging protests, by passing resolutions and by sending deputations across the seas to interview British monarchs, the governing circles of the day could be induced to surrender political power to Africans. Its demands were couched in moderate resolutions requesting concessions and privileges, pointing out to the Government the respects in which the administration was defective and suggesting reforms here and there — all based upon the erroneous belief that if white South Africa could be fully informed of the difficulties under which the African is forced to live and his desire to have an effective voice in the government of his country, the white man would change heart and confer freedom upon the sons and daughters of the soil without any serious political struggle being undertaken.

For more than three decades Congress faithfully pursued this policy and such draconian measures as the Land Act of 1913, the Natives Urban Areas Act, the Native Administration Act and the 1936 Hertzog legislation which legalised brazen plunder and spoliation and despotism and the violation of human rights of all those whose colour is black, failed to bring about any fundamental changes in the policy of Congress. This was due to the fact that the leadership of the Congress was at the time in the hands of middle class people who regarded the organisation primarily as a debating chamber and not as an instrument to prepare the masses of the people for decisive battles against the repressive policies of the Government.

But a time was bound to come when the potentialities of a purely constitutional and reformist agitation would be played out and Congress would have to break new ground and challenge reaction in a more positive and effective manner. This was one of the issues that faced delegates at the Annual Conference of the Congress in September 1949.

## MILITANT ACTION

That Conference resolved on a programme of action whose preamble asserted the right of the African people to self-determination and which adopted African Nationalism as the basis of the struggle. It included the

following important matters: the total and complete boycott of the elections under the Natives Representation Act of 1936, the bungas, local and district councils, the advisory boards and similar institutions.

It made provision for the appointment of a Council of Action whose duty was to carry out the programme of action. The Council was expressly instructed to employ the boycott weapon, strikes, nonco-operation, civil disobedience and to work for a national stoppage of work.

It was at this Conference that Congress decided to employ non-collaboration and civil disobedience as weapons of the struggle against racial discrimination. Non-collaboration meant the refusal by Africans to cooperate with the Government in its repressive policies. Provided the objective conditions are correctly gauged in each specific case, non-collaboration can be a very effective weapon since the government of this country depends to a large extent on the co-operation, willing or unwilling, of Africans themselves; and if this co-operation were withdrawn and the boycott pressed forward, it is possible both in theory and in practice to undermine the whole policy of colour discrimination and to render it unworkable.

The Programme marks a stage in the development of the Congress when it ceased to be a talking shop for middle classes and when it began very largely to assume the character of a mass movement and in whose fold there is no place for those who show contempt for the masses of the people. In adopting it Congress renounced and discarded the futile policy of appeasement it had so zealously pursued for thirty-seven years. It had absorbed the vital lesson that no ruling power could ever be induced to part with power through the policy of pleading for concessions and reforms. It had now realised that the only guarantee for the final triumph of the democratic forces in the racial turmoil that is corroding the very life of our country was to mobilise the vast masses of the people and to condition them for a militant and uncompromising struggle against racial inequality.

The Freedom Day Strike of May 1950, the National Day of Protest during June of the same year and the Defiance Campaign of June 1952 were all in the spirit of the Programme of Action and they gave tremendous impetus to the liberation movement in this country.

More than that, these events revealed the powerful resources that lie untapped and the inexhaustible strength and initiative the movement can gain, if correct forms of struggle are employed. Despite its political significance, however the Programme was not meant to be and is by no means a panacea for all our problems and cannot be applied blindly without regard to objective conditions.

For example, the boycott of the statutory bodies referred to above might have been correct tactics during the time of the Smuts Government, whose policy was to give these bodies more powers in order to divert the people from their political organisations and thereby to undermine the people's struggle for democratic changes. But the policy of the Nationalist Government is altogether different. They are scrapping these bodies and replacing them with backward and reactionary tribal authorities. Under such circumstances the boycott become meaningless and nonsensical.

The Programme has frequently been cited by certain cliques and individuals to justify their opposition to the Freedom Charter. They maintain that the Charter is in sharp conflict with the provisions of the Programme and should on that ground be rejected by Africans.

A study of both documents shows, however, that this criticism is wrong and foolish and that it emanates from those who are ignorant of their contents. Far from being diametrically opposed, the two documents are in fact complementary. The former is primarily concerned with the forms of struggle to be employed by the Congress in its fight for democratic changes and the latter defines the future South African society the Congress movement wishes to establish. As a matter of fact it is inconceivable that the democratic changes envisaged in the Charter can be won unless the Congress movement makes full use of the weapons of struggle outlined in the Programme together with such other weapons as concrete conditions might from time to time dictate.

At the Special Conference of the Congress held in Johannesburg in April this year the point was made that the Charter conflicted with African Nationalism as set out in the Programme and as propounded by the African National Congress Youth League. Africanists harped monotonously on this theme.

One of them disagreed with the Charter because of its declaration that South Africa belonged to all who live in it. According to him this country belonged to Africans only. Another said that the Charter was a negation of the slogan "Ma-yibuye i Afrika" and that the question of alliance between the African people and the other racial groups could come only after freedom had been won.

Support for these contentions was sought for in the Programme of Action and in the Basic Policy of the League. In point of fact neither of these documents support the claims of the Africanists. It is of course true that the Programme does not discuss the precise meaning or scope of African Nationalism but the history of Congress both before and after 1949 clearly shows that Congress policy has nothing to do with the rabid racialism advocated by the Africanists. As far back as 1946 Dr. A. B. Xuma, then president of the Congress, signed a joint declaration with the leaders of the Indian Congress and the African People's Organisation in which they announced a policy of co-operation between their respective communities on matters of common interest — a declaration which was hailed throughout the country as the most significant development at the time in the history of the liberation movement in South Africa. Since then Congress has consistently declared itself in favour of democratic unity and implemented it in the course of many campaigns.

When, therefore, the Africanists maintain that the question of alliance can come only after freedom has been won, they do so in the perfect knowledge that the views they propagate are in conflict with the settled and well-known policy of the Congress.

The Basic Policy of the League was published in 1946. In terms of this Policy the aim of African Nationalism is the creation of a united African community out of the numerous tribes of this country, the freeing of the African people from foreign domination and leadership and the creation of conditions which can enable Africa to make her own contribution to human progress and happiness. It advocated for the achievement of true democracy in South Africa. In such a true democracy all nationalities and minorities would have their fundamental human rights guaranteed in a democratic constitution. It called for the redivision of land amongst the farmers and peasants of all nationalities in proportion to their numbers.

It demanded the abolition of the colour bar and other discriminatory measures so that the workers of all nationalities should be able to do skilled work. It declared for a national economy which would embrace all people and groups in the State and which would eliminate discrimination and ensure a just and equitable distribution of wealth among the people of all nationalities. It reviewed the forces in the liberation movement and expressed itself specifically in favour of co-operation on matters of common interest between the national organisations of the African, Coloured, Indian and European people. On page five it warned genuine African Nationalists about pseudo-nationalists and fascist agents in the following manner:

**"African Nationalists have to be on the lookout for people who pretend to be Nationalists when in fact they are imperialist agents, using Nationalist slogans in order to cloak their reactionary position. These elements should be exposed and discredited. . . . Still another group that should be closely watched and wherever possible ruthlessly exposed is that section of Africans who call themselves African Nationalists but who are in fact agents of Nazi and Fascist organisations. Genuine African Nationalists should be vigilant and spare no efforts in denouncing and eventually crushing these dangerous vipers."**

The Policy of the League has been explained and developed in numerous addresses and articles by A. P. Mda, one of the founders of the League, a former national president and its leading theoretician. In the 1949 Conference of the League he expressly denounced chauvinism and pleaded for a broad and progressive nationalism. In a Political Review delivered on his behalf at the historic 1951 Conference of the Congress which adopted the resolution to launch the Defiance Campaign, he positively advocated the unity of the democratic forces in our country.

## **AFRICANISTS AND NATIONALISM**

From what has been said it will be clear that the Africanists are a new and separate organisation with a distinct policy of their own and in no way connected either with the Congress or the League. It will further be clear that the Nationalism referred to in the Programme as well as that discussed in the Basic Policy of the League have nothing to do whatsoever with the confused and rotten doctrines preached by the Africanists. The former is a progressive nationalism whose aim is the elimination of racial discrimination, the extension of democratic rights to all people irrespective of their colour or creed and the removal of the causes of racial strife and dissension in the political life of the country.

The Africanists fight for exactly the opposite viewpoint and merely use the Programme and the name of the League to conceal their true aims. They fight for the replacement of the racial policies of the Government with a new brand of South African racialism. They demand political and economic power for Africans not for the purpose of achieving true democracy and the maximum happiness of all the people of South Africa but in order that this power might be used for suppressing and exploiting the non-African sections of the country's population. If their viewpoint were to prevail and become the official policy of the country it would mean in effect that Coloureds, European and Indians would be discriminated against, denied rights, subjected to every kind of insult and humiliation and hatred

and contempt fostered against them. None of the basic contradictions and evils of our society would be solved. In a world that is rapidly revolting against all forms of human exploitation and reaction such a development would be harmful to the true interests of Africans themselves.

It is precisely because of this fact that Congress has repeatedly and most emphatically rejected these pernicious views of the "Africanists" for the people know that to win the demands set out in the Charter is the only sure road to the future South Africa of their dreams.

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## **THE TRANSKEI TRAGEDY**

**Continuing a detailed study of effect of the Bantu Authorities Act in the Union's biggest Reserve.**

—by **GOVAN MBEKI**

**T**HE fundamental economic problem of the Transkei, as of the other Reserves, is not difficult to state, or once stated, to solve. The land area is far too small and infertile to support the population. Therefore, in order to end the terrible poverty, malnutrition, famines, suffering and misery of the Reserves, it is necessary to allocate much more land for African peasants. But this statement of the problem, and its obvious solution is by no means agreeable to the rulers of South Africa, and never has been. The *wealthy farmers have no intention of parting with the land that was taken by conquest long ago.* And, in fact, a condition of poverty and near-starvation in the Reserves is welcomed by the mining-magnates, the farmers and other employers of African labour, who regard hunger and destitution as their main allies and recruiting agents for a bigger and cheaper supply of labour-power.

In the first three months of 1956, the Transkei supplied 44,500 able-bodied men to employers outside the territory. According to figures released by the Labour Bureaux, this total was composed as follows:—

Mines: 28,000  
Farms: 9,300  
Secondary Industries: 7,200.

At any given time about 80 per cent. of the able bodied men between 18 and 44 years of age are away from home working on the white man's mines, farms and industries.

Only if we constantly remember this terrible truth and seek its reasons and implications can we begin to understand the Transkei.

It is not for the love of glittering prizes on the mines that the menfolk leave the Reserves. Just as in the twenties and thirties thousands of Boer youngsters who had grown up on the platteland and had known and desired no other way of living were forced into the cities through economic pres-