

(2) CONGRESS REPLIES

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One of the 91 still standing trial on charges of High Treason*

It is a pity that one has to take the Africanists so seriously. Left to their prose, they inject an element of unconscious comedy into a political struggle that stays uniformly savage, very much as though a one-act Victorian melodrama were being performed in the middle of a battle. Yet it is seriously that they must be taken. Though they claimed at their inaugural Congress in April last year that they would have 100,000 members by July, they have succeeded to date in recruiting some 2,500; so that it is clearly not in the power of their popular following that they merit attention. It matters, of course, that they should exist at all, that the poisonous and sterile racialism that they often expound should find the shaky support of even 2,500 converts. For this, of course, the bludgeons of white supremacy are alone to blame. The intransigence of apartheid must inevitably lead to a black intransigence equally demented. Yet it is that the reaction should be so minute that is perhaps the most significant aspect of the Africanist phenomenon. The 2,500 odd members who belong are important precisely because they are only 2,500; because, in the face of every incentive to political distraction, to the convulsions of a meaningless race arrogance and hatred, Africans maintain and indeed persistently expand their allegiance to the democratic, multi-racial character of the Congress Movement.

Mr. Raboroko claims that the difference between the Congress Movement and the Africanists is ideological; he states—with some aplomb—that: “The Charterists have yet to understand that politics is a matter not of race or colour, but of vital material and spiritual interests”. In the very next paragraph of his exposition, however, he continues: “The crucial issue today is whether the interests of the five million Europeans throughout Africa must continue to dominate over those of the two hundred and eighty million Africans, *or whether the reverse process should obtain*”.

Only the Africanists can reconcile the patent contradiction in the two paragraphs; and one must leave the independent reader to discover the meaning of the more abstruse passages,

unintelligible to me, such as: "The problem of synthesis of opposites cannot be resolved by the wave of the magic wand. It is only after all these sets of antithetical categories have been duly reconciled that we can reach those final categories—equals, countrymen and brothers—which betray no instability. Such ultimate reconciliation is possible only in Africanism, the final synthesis of these categories which the Africanist manifesto defines as 'the social force which upholds the material and spiritual interests of the individual'."

What exactly *is* the policy of the Africanists? And why on earth can it not be simply stated? In one paragraph, they apparently reject all concepts of race and colour; in the next, they argue for the domination of the Europeans by the Africans; later still, there seems to be a sudden and inexplicable reconciliation of the interests of Africans and Europeans alike. Are they generating these deliberate ambiguities in order to seem anti-white to the Africans and non-racialist to the whites? A striking feature of their policy is its silence on the fundamental political and economic rights of the people. Do they accept the principle of adult universal suffrage? Would they distribute the land and wealth of South Africa to all? Or do they believe that only the Africans, as indigenous, are entitled to fundamental political and economic rights? Do they avoid any concrete policy on these questions precisely because they refuse to be committed one way or the other?

For the Congress Movement, the choice confronting South Africa has never been between the political domination of the nine and a half million Africans by the three million whites, and the absolute reverse. On the contrary, the African National Congress has, since its inception, struggled for the extension of basic political and economic rights to all persons; and has constantly condemned all forms of racial discrimination.

The Africanists are not, of course, the first to attack the alliance of the African National Congress with the Indian Congress and representatives of other racial groups. In 1950, a group led by the late Selope-Thema was ultimately expelled from Congress for its sabotage of the multi-racial alliance. Forming themselves into an organization called the A.N.C. National Minded Bloc, they attacked the leaders of the African National Congress as "paid agents of the Indian merchants". Very little is heard of the National Minded Bloc these days; towards the close of his life, Selope-Thema joined Moral Re-

armament. Then there was the Bantu National Congress of Mr. Bhengu, which called for a purified "Bantu" organization and no co-operation with Indian and other racial groups. After a few weeks, Bhengu announced a following of 2,000,000 and promised to represent the Bantu at U.N.O. Then, shortly afterwards, he was convicted of a non-political offence, and his Congress disintegrated. Finally, there was the Supreme Council of African Organizations, a body with uncertain aims but clear-cut strategy—it persistently issued propaganda hostile to Congress campaigns. It also called upon the Africans to renounce the "Indian-directed" Congress Movement; it also is heard of no more.

The Pan-Africanist Movement cannot, of course, be a resurrection of these political caricatures, for many of its present leaders joined us in condemning the empty bigotry of these various organizations at the time. Have they forgotten? Have they forgotten the part that they themselves played in forging the multi-racial structure of the Congress Movement?

In 1946, five years before the Africanists allege that the A.N.C. was buried in the multi-racial alliance, Dr. A. B. Xuma (then President of the African National Congress) entered into an agreement with Dr. Y. M. Dadoo (then President of the Transvaal Indian Congress) and Dr. G. M. Naicker (President of the Natal Indian Congress) by which the African and Indian Congresses would work together on all matters of common concern in their fight against white domination. This agreement is commonly known as the Dadoo-Xuma-Naicker Pact, and it was confirmed at the annual conference of the A.N.C. in 1946. At no stage have any of the Africanists questioned this pact; nor have they asked the A.N.C. to repudiate or rescind it. They themselves claim credit for having given to the A.N.C. "the famous programme of action from which the historic Defiance Campaign flowed". Yet it was this very African-Indian alliance, established by the 1946 Pact, that led to the Campaign and developed the multi-racial Congress Movement.

The fundamental feature of the Defiance Campaign was precisely its multi-racial character. The whole plan out of which it developed was prepared by a Joint Planning Council consisting of representatives from the A.N.C. and South African Indian Congress (S.A.I.C.); and the plan was then approved at the Bloemfontein Conference of the A.N.C. in December, 1951. In its preamble, the plan categorically states that South Africa

belongs to all who live in it; and before and during the Campaign itself, A.N.C. and S.A.I.C. alike invited all who loved democracy, irrespective of race or colour, to participate in the defiance of unjust laws. Indeed, those Africanists who proudly claim to have participated in planning and organizing the Campaign were working in close and constant co-operation with Indians and Europeans all the time, defying the laws together with members of these communities. Neither during nor after the Campaign did any of the Africanist participants condemn the preamble to the plan or the prosecution of the Campaign in alliance with other racial groups. At that stage, they were apparently unaware that the alliance was a "betrayal of the material and spiritual interests of the Africans", a "multi-racial liberalism" which sacrificed African interests for the "Indian merchant class and the ruling class". How much they have forgotten, or conspire to hide!

Distortion by omission reaches the abyss when the Africanists criticise the Freedom Charter in these terms: "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 indigenous African nationals and immigrant European foreign nationals—the dispossessed and their dispossessors, the victims and their robbers—are all countrymen". We will let the Preamble to the Charter answer for itself.

"We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know:

That South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white; and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people;

That our people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality;

That our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities;

That only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief;

And therefore we, the people of South Africa, black and white together—equals, countrymen and brothers—adopt this Freedom Charter. And we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing neither strength nor courage, until the democratic changes here set out have been won".

The Charter then details the aspirations of democratic South Africa, in terms very like those of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, concluding with the dedication:

“These freedoms we will fight for, side by side, throughout our lives, until we have won our liberty”.

For the Africanists to smear those who subscribe to such a Charter as “self-confessed lackeys and flunkeys of the white ruling class and the Indian merchant class” is an indication not so much of incoherent political hysteria as of a virulent black fascism. The Africanists employ the word ‘Charterism’ as a term of abuse. It is, assuredly, a badge of pride for all those whose dedication is to democracy.

For some reason, the Africanists boast that out of the 91 standing trial at the moment for High Treason, one or two are Africanists. Yet the accused are drawn from all the different racial groups in South Africa—Indians, Coloureds, Africans and Europeans—and belong, almost all of them, to the very organizations which the Africanists deplore. More significantly even, for the present issue, the period of the indictment covers the activities of the organizations from October 1, 1952 to December, 1956—the period during which the Africanists allege that the Congress Alliance was a “betrayal of the material and spiritual interests of the Africans”. Indeed, the Freedom Charter and the Congress of the People which subscribed to it feature prominently in the indictment and in the Crown’s case against the accused. Whichever of the accused bear the banner of Africanism at the moment are on trial precisely because of their participation in the policies of the A.N.C. and their adoption of the Freedom Charter.

The Africanist charge that the leadership of the A.N.C. is a bureaucracy and one which has so juggled with the machinery of Congress that it cannot be democratically removed is malicious nonsense. Representation at any conference of the A.N.C., whether provincial or national, is on the basis of branch delegates, one delegate for every twenty members of a branch; and every delegate has the right to participate in discussion and elections for both the provincial and national leadership. The Africanists have never been able to supplant the Congress leadership democratically precisely because they have always constituted a minority, if rowdy and undisciplined, group at any conference.

The arrogance of the Africanists—or is it the consciousness of their weakness?—makes them seize on slogans like ‘self-determination’ as though they were their prerogative. Suffice it to say that when a Congress member uses such terms, he uses them as they are everywhere understood and not with the special meanings that the Africanists apply to them. The ‘no bail, no defence, no fine’ clap-trap has never found a place in the A.N.C., because Congress does not believe in an idle and worthless martyrdom. We claim no monopoly over political slogans. What we do, with justice, claim is that we give to our voices the allegiance of our hands and our hearts. Fighting with catchwords can accomplish a great deal of noise. But whether it can accomplish anything else is doubtful.

Nothing will deter the A.N.C. and the Congress Movement of which it is a part from striving for a multi-racial democracy founded on the principles of the Freedom Charter. And it will avail the Africanists nothing to attempt to discredit this objective by suggesting that it is the same type of multi-racialism that is being imposed by the British Colonial Office in countries like Kenya. The Freedom Charter unequivocally rejects the concept of community rights, be they political or economic. There can be no room in the Congress concept of a multi-racial or common society for the balancing out of African rights by rights for the members of any other group. We stand firmly by the principle of equal rights for all, irrespective of race, colour or creed. May we suggest that the Africanists now begin to take seriously their “historic task of liberating the Africans and achieving independence and self-determination”. They would do better to get down to the hazardous job of fighting the Nationalists than to continue in their sterile vendetta against the Congress Movement. Their “historic” mission is surely not fulfilled by their persistent abuse of the A.N.C.