

# CONGRESS AND THE AFRICANISTS:

## (I) THE AFRICANIST CASE

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SINCE April 1959, there exist in South Africa two Congresses, the old and the new, each claiming to be the direct heir and legitimate successor to the original Congress which was founded in 1912 and which styled itself the South African Native National Congress. Each of the two Congresses claims to be the mouth-piece of the African people.

According to its January, 1958 constitution, the African National Congress (ANC) stands for the "creation of a united democratic South Africa on the principles outlined in the Freedom Charter".<sup>1</sup> The new body, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), according to its April, 1959 constitution, stands for the "establishment and maintenance of an Africanist socialist democracy, recognizing the primacy of the material and spiritual interests of the individual".

For the sake of convenience, therefore, the use of the key word from these foundation documents will be adopted to describe the new and the old Congress. Unless it is glaringly inconsistent with the context, the African National Congress will be referred to as the Charterist Congress, its adherents as the Charterists, and its policy, programme and philosophic outlook as Charterism. The Pan Africanist Congress will be designated the Africanist Congress, its members the Africanists, and its policy, programme and philosophic outlook as Afri-canism.

The Native Congress died a formal death in December, 1943, when its constitution was scrapped. That lengthy constitution was also its manifesto, and it spoke of and for the "Native people". The manifestoes of its successor, the African Congress, were the 1943 African Claims and the 1949 Programme of Action. These spoke of and for the "African people". It died in 1953, with the birth of the (multi-racial) Congress Alliance, and was finally buried in December, 1957, with the incorporation of the Charter into its new constitution. The manifesto

<sup>1</sup>For a full text of the Freedom Charter, see 'Africa South' Vol. I No. 3.

of the Charterist Congress, the Kliptown Charter of 1955, speaks of and for the "people of South Africa, black and white together". The Africanist Congress, in the 1959 Pan Africanist manifesto, speaks of and for the "African people", whom it regards as "part of one African nation". The basic literature of each body, therefore, provides the clue to its essential nature.

On the 2nd November, 1958, the Transvaal Africanists severed all relations with the Charterist Congress as it was constituted. "We are", they declared, "launching out openly, as the custodians of the African National Congress policy, as it was formulated in 1912 and pursued up to the time of the Congress Alliance".

The editorial in the January, 1959 issue of '*The Africanist*', official organ of the Africanist Movement, stated:

"Our intention in this issue is to stress the inevitability of the step we have taken. Because of our ideological differences with the purveyors of the Kliptown Charter, it was inevitable that a struggle should rage within the ANC for leadership of that body. But the grave error made by the Africanists was to think that the leadership could be 'democratically removed'. Because it controls the machinery of Congress, this bureaucracy has so juggled with it that they were always assured of victory".

The Charterists allege that the principal target of the Africanist attack upon them is their "broad humanism, which claims equality but not domination for the African people". This statement itself bears out the main Africanist contention that the differences between the Charterists and themselves are mainly ideological. The Charterists have yet to understand that politics is a matter not of race or colour, but of vital material and spiritual interests.

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. This is an issue that no social philosophy pretending to have a solution for Africa's social problem can afford to gloss over.

Nationalism demands that the interests of indigenous peoples should dominate over those of aliens, because the country belongs to the indigenous peoples. Socialism demands that the interests of the workers should dominate over those of their

employers, because their contribution to the creation of wealth is more significant than that of their bosses. Democracy demands that those of the majority should dominate over those of the minority, because they are a majority. In Africa in general, and South Africa in particular, the African people are indigenous to the soil, are the real workers and are the majority. Their right to the effective control of their own interests is, therefore, unchallengeable.

Following the dictates of its "broad humanism", the Charterist Congress needs must be wedded to the evolution of some formula wherein that control shall remain vested in the European national group, and wherein the interests of the African people shall be "judiciously balanced" against those of the Europeans, so as to achieve "equality and justice" between the two sections. It is the evolution of such a formula that constitutes the essence of multi-racial liberalism. By virtue of the logic inherent in its own constitution—a union of exploiters and the exploited—the Charterist Congress repudiates any movement that shows signs of being genuinely nationalist, socialist or democratic. The basic reason for the existence of the Charterist Congress is, therefore, to resist the transfer of effective political power to the African people. Charterism is, indeed, a charade representing a barricade.

The gravamen of the Africanist charge against the Charterists, therefore, is that they have betrayed the material interests of the African people. They have sacrificed these interests upon the political altar of an ungodly alliance, an alliance of slave-owner, slave-driver and slave. The ostensible object of this alliance is the destruction of slavery and the freeing of the slave, and yet the real motive is the perpetuation of that slavery under a new guise. The Kliptown Charter, erroneously called the Freedom Charter, offers a classic illustration of the essentials of Charterism.

"And, therefore, we the people of South Africa", proclaims the ultimate clause, "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 indigenous African nationals and immigrant European foreign nationals—the dispossessed and their dispossessors, the victims and their 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 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”.

In the Kliptown Charter the word ‘freedom’ does find mention in the title, but barely in the actual text. The Charter does not speak of independence or self-determination, and does not mention African nationalism or white domination. It does, however, speak of “the abolition of fenced locations”, entrenching by implication the invisible fences that surround Roosevelt Park and Orchards, symbols of white privilege and prerogative.

Charterists aver that African nationalism is a “wave of black chauvinism, provoked by the savagery of the Nationalist Party”. They proceed to allege that “it is perhaps secretly encouraged and financed by that Party”.

Official Africanist literature sufficiently refutes the charge of the Africanists being either chauvinistic or racialistic. Suffice it to say the Africanists attach no political significance to the biological make-up of any people; but they do attach a great deal of such significance to the control of material and spiritual interests.

There is no truth in the charge that Africanists are encouraged and financed by the Nationalist Party. Barely a fortnight after the emergence of the Pan Africanist Congress and the release of its policy and programme, two Nationalist Cabinet Ministers, Mr. Swart and Dr. Hertzog, condemned it as a hot-bed of “the most dangerous and poisonous agitators in the country”. When the Bantustan Bill came before Parliament, it is common knowledge that the Charterists opposed it because they had not been consulted. The Africanists opposed it because they could never countenance the balkanization of their country by foreigners.

“Another spectacular result of our Inaugural Conference”, comments the June, 1959 issue of *‘The Africanist’*, “has been the shameless theft by the Charterist Congress of the programme and slogans of PAC”. After Mr. Luthuli had publicly stated on the eve of the Accra Conference that our struggle here was not

for independence or self-determination, but for equal rights, the Africa Day issue of '*New Age*' came out with the unbelievable statement that "we are against white domination, we demand the right of self-determination". *Who* are against white domination? *Who* want self-determination? *For whom?*

The Charterists have also stated that they will not bail or defend arrested people in their campaigns. How does this compare with the slogan of "no bail, no defence, no fine" announced by our President Mangaliso Sobukwe in the closed session of the Pan Africanist Congress immediately after his election?

The illustrations cited rebut the base insinuation that the Pan Africanists are the hirelings and puppets of the Nationalist Party. It is a desperate bid to conceal the fact that it is the black Charterists who stand exposed as the self-confessed lackeys and flunkies of the white ruling class and the Indian merchant class.

The Charterists deny that the 1949 Programme of Action is an Africanist programme, and assert that "it is a regular Congress document, adopted at a national conference on the initiative of the Congress leadership".

In the July-September, 1959 issue of '*Africa South*', Stanley Trapido states: "The ANC Youth League, influenced by some of the radical conceptions of the All African Convention, provided an important pressure group within the ANC; and as a result of its activities and influence, the ANC adopted its now famous 'Programme of Action' ". Over-anxious to conceal all tracks of their "gravitation towards multi-racial liberalism", the Charterists must falsify history. The preamble to that Programme speaks the language of the Africanists. It speaks of 'national freedom', 'independence' and 'white domination', all of which concepts are taboo in Charterist circles. Small wonder that the Charterists cannot afford to quote it.

"The fundamental principles of the Programme of Action", proclaims the preamble, "are inspired by the desire to achieve national freedom. By national freedom we mean freedom from white domination and the attainment of political independence . . ."

Such is the declaratory statement introducing this Programme, this setting out of a series of tactical weapons such as boycotts, civil disobedience campaigns, non-co-operation activities and national stoppages of work. This Programme is Africanist both in spirit and letter.

The genesis and history of the ANC Youth League shows why the Programme is what it is and why the PAC is the real off-shoot of the ANC, both on the ideological and political planes.

The ANC Youth League was born at a meeting held at the Domestic and Cultural Workers' Club Hall in Diagonal Street, Johannesburg, in October, 1943; a meeting convened and presided over by the present writer. Soon afterwards, the League released a manifesto and adopted a basic policy which declared its aims and objects to be, *inter alia*:

To rally and unite the African youth into one national front on the basis of African nationalism.

To give force, direction and vigour to the struggle of the African people for freedom.

The basic policy also gave the following resumé of the historic tasks of the liberation movement:

The creation of a united nation out of the heterogeneous tribes.  
The freeing of Africa from foreign domination and foreign leadership.

The creation of conditions which would enable Africa to make her own contribution to human progress and happiness.

With their abandonment of African nationalism and its historic tasks, and following their active identification with the ideas and programme of the ruling class, the Chartist leadership has deflected both ideologically and politically from the true course of the liberatory movement which this Programme provided.

A comparison of these principles with those of PAC shows strikingly how consistent and continuous the evolution of the ideas of the Africanists has been. The aims and objects of PAC, indeed, are founded on a coalescence of the aims of the ANC Youth League and of the historic tasks of African nationalism; and they are, *inter alia*:

To unite and to rally the African people into one national front on the basis of African nationalism.

To fight for the overthrow of white domination and for the implementation and maintenance of the right of self-determination for the African people.

To work and strive for the establishment and the maintenance of an Africanist socialist democracy, recognizing the primacy of the material and spiritual interests of the individual.

To advance the concept of the Federation of Southern Africa and of Pan Africanism.

The Africanists are the former members of the original ANC Youth League, the hard core who remained unwaveringly loyal to the ideas and principles of the liberatory movement when disintegration set into it and gravitation began towards the ideas of such movements of the ruling class as Moral Rearmament, the Congress of Democrats and the Liberal Party. Most of the foundation members of PAC are former members of the League, and these were all *ex-officio* members of the ANC. The top leaders of PAC are, without exception, former members of the Youth League.

The Africanists gave the famous Programme of Action to the ANC; and it was from this programme that the historic Defiance Campaign flowed. It was as Youth Leaguers that they mainly planned, organised and executed that campaign. Many of the present top leaders of PAC, including the writer himself, served prison sentences for leading 'defiance' batches into action. Africanists have shouldered the burden of many an ANC campaign, such as the various bus boycotts. Some Africanists were cited as treason co-conspirators, some have been treason suspects and some are treason trialists today. Even in the abortive and mishandled campaign against passes for women, Africanist womanhood has played its part.

As the mouthpiece of the African people, and not of "the people of South Africa", the Africanists consider themselves as the direct heirs and legitimate successors of both the Native and African Congresses; the custodians of the policy and programme of the original Congresses. Within the ANC itself, they have resisted and repudiated all overt signs and symbols of ideological deflection and susceptibility to external control. Africanist leaders are tried and tested men and women, who have both ideologically and politically remained "sea green incorruptibles".

Both Kliptown Charterism and multi-racial liberalism are different facets of the same ideological block, and both have already been shown to constitute open sabotage of the liberatory movement of the African people. It remains to demonstrate Charterist tactics to be a chip of the same block.

In March, 1958, a National Workers' Conference decided to call a three day strike<sup>2</sup> as a protest against the travesty of a general election which debarred the majority from any participation. In taking this political decision, this *ad hoc* body was openly

<sup>2</sup>See *Africa South* Vol. II No. 4—"The Strike That Failed" by Stanley Uys.

sabotaging the ANC by deliberately bypassing it and openly usurping its function. In that campaign the ANC was to be relegated to the role of supporting the workers.

The campaign had a threefold object: to cut down to size the prestige and reputation of the ANC; to give a working-class character to the liberatory struggle; and to oust the Nationalist Party in favour of the United Party.

The fact that the national stoppage of work day, June 26th, had been a resounding success the previous year had enhanced the prestige and advanced the reputation of the ANC as representative of the African people. As that stoppage of work flowed from the nation-building programme of 1949, the appeal had obviously been to the Africans as a nation. This fact struck terror into the hearts of the white pseudo-leftist directorate of the ANC.

Accordingly, the South African Congress of Trade Unions, a multi-racial body representing a handful of trade unions which exist largely on paper, convened the Workers' Conference to launch this political strike and to stampede the majority of trade unions which were non-SACTU and the National Working Committee of the ANC into supporting the workers. In this way the struggle would assume a working-class character.

The exhortation of 'End Nationalist Rule' on the posters showed the desire of the directorate to use the African and Indian masses as a touting machine for the United Party. The strike was a damp squib. The ANC which had merely announced support for it, called it off on the first day. And the majority of voters re-elected the Nationalists and demonstrated the solidarity of the white ruling class.

The campaign had failed in its objective of deposing the Nationalist Party and installing the United Party, and in that of making the African people "working-class conscious", so that they could be used as a nucleus for the working-class struggle. It had, however, succeeded in crippling the ANC. The sacrifice of African nationalism on the altar of Charterism proved the last straw in the relationship between Charterists and the Africanists. Although on June 26th the Africanists were still members of the ANC, the movement was so crippled that it failed to issue a call for a stay-at-home. Following the secession of the Africanists, and haunted by the ghost of the stay-at-home fiasco, the Charterists again failed to call for a national stoppage on June 26th of this year.

The Chartist movement represents the interests of both the ruling class and the subject classes, and finds itself, therefore, neither fish, flesh, fowl nor good red herring. It reflects, in the words of Joe Matthews, "the aspirations of all those classes striving for democratic change. That is why", Matthews continues, "it is so ridiculous to describe the Freedom Charter as a socialist or a communist programme."<sup>3</sup>

Mr. A. Luthuli, President-General of the ANC, has said: "All I ask for is a good government. What does it matter whether it is a black government or a white government? Let it be a white government as long as it is a good government and passes good laws". All that the Charterists stand for is benevolent despotism, unmindful of the fact that self-government is more important than good government, and that there can be no good government without self-government. Charterism is clearly the antithesis of freedom and independence.

In sharp contrast to the ex-chief's statement, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Prime Minister of Ghana, told the opening session of the All African People's Conference in Accra, that:

"This decade is the decade of African independence. We welcome into our midst peoples of all other nations who desire to live among us in peace and equality. But they must respect us and our rights, our right as the majority to rule. That, as our Western friends have taught us to understand it, is the essence of democracy".

The Africanists may be allowed to add: "But they must respect us and our rights, our right as the indigenous peoples, our right as the workers and peasants and our right as the majority to rule. These rights, as our Western friends have taught us to understand, constitute the essential elements of nationalism, socialism and democracy".

The African people are determined to liberate themselves and to establish and maintain an Africanist socialist democracy, which will recognize the primacy of the material and spiritual interests of the individual, and which will be, according to the Africanist manifesto, "original in conception, Africanistic in orientation, socialistic in content, democratic in form, and creative in purpose . . . a democracy in which man shall at long last find his true self and in which the human personality shall blossom to the full".

<sup>3</sup>See *Africa South* Vol. III No. 4 — 'Revolution: Further Reflections' by Joe Matthews.