

# A Trail Of Courage and Determination

## PART 4

- Edwin Mabitse

(IN THIS INSTALMENT THE AUTHOR EXAMINES THE COMPLEX AND DIVERSIFIED IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES THAT WENT INTO THE ANC'S PROCESS OF DEFINING A CLEAR AND CONSISTENT IDEOLOGICAL COMMITMENT).

As the struggle for freedom and the National emancipation of the black oppressed escalates and reaches out for new heights a whole range of questions meriting urgent and unfailing attention present themselves. Coupled to these is the imperative of declaring our positions openly in the face of unabating smear campaigns aimed at slandering and distorting our political orientation - its policy and programme - both in content and historical origin. It is therefore expedient for us to lay bare some of the chief historical factors that influenced the manner and direction of the all-around development of the broad movement for national liberation in South Africa. It is therefore fitting and right that in looking into this process, our subject should be the ANC since the ANC is clearly the epitome of this great process. A glimpse into this aspect of ANC history in this its 70th year is a worthy effort as lofty as it is significant to the everlasting edification of the young fighting ranks of our people.

This author is of the opinion that the issue being discussed herein has been raised to varying degrees of sharpness before - but these in the majority of cases were responses to attacks and accusations levelled against the liberatory forces of our country. With this in mind, here an angle of approach which in simple terms is an explanatory argument based on the historical experience of the ANC is being attempted.

## BIRTH OF THE ANC

The birth of the ANC on January 8, 1912 has gone down in the annals as an event of great historic significance in the life of our people and the continent at large. The inaugural conference was attended by leading royal personages from all corners of South Africa and the then Protectorates, by unschooled tribesmen, by members of the intelligentsia and churchmen and by representatives of a wide spectrum of local organisations. In short the conference was representative of a variety of social forces from the ranks of the oppressed, all inspired by the unity call and motivated by a vision of a free, independent and democratic nationhood. These transcending aspirations welded the people into a solid whole transporting them beyond fettering contradictions based on previous prejudice and undermined divisions normally conditioned by social status in a developing capitalist economy. Yet the band holding the people together could not at the same time act as conveyor of a uniform political perspective as regarded the method and means of attaining the objectives of the black oppressed. The overriding goal of unity of purpose was beyond debate. Yet variances in the finer details of the march towards realizing the goals of Congress as a whole manifested themselves and became a seedbed of great happenings that have gone into the dialectics of the ANC's development.

This 'struggle' was necessary and quite in line with the need for perfection of the strategy for the national liberation of the oppressed. A keen perusal of the history of the formative years of Congress reveal to us a number of influences that evidently affected the process of defining a clear ideological commitment. Let us hasten to add that such a process was historical inevitability and as such could not be decided by the resolutions of individuals in as much as it could not have matured overnight. It was to last for years as part of the glorious pages of the peoples heroic struggles.

## THE CHRISTIAN FACTOR

The role of the missionary church in South Africa has been discussed in better detail in previous instalments of

this series. What comes out very clearly, notwithstanding the several negative aspects, is that the Christian doctrine introduced among oppressed people has always had an effect conditioning the formation of political attitudes characterised by an eagerness for equality, justice and harmony.

Towards the end of the 19th century the Christian teaching had spread sufficiently among broad sections of the oppressed. Many African converts who had come to be thoroughly acquainted with its theological dogmas began to query the practice of the missionary church as violation of the fundamental tenets of the christian religion. This was to result in mass breakaways of black converts from the white-controlled and colonially orientated missionary churches - this movement has passed into the annals as amongst the great political upheavals that contributed significantly to the Rise of African Political Consciousness. (see *A TRAIL OF COURAGE AND DETERMINATION - Part 1*)

### CHRISTIANITY

During the years of the ANC christianity continued to exert influence. The christian vision of non-racial justice and equality persisted, acting as a durable lodestar to many who cherished its ideals and had surrendered themselves to the faith. Within successive executives of the ANC and at all other levels of leadership many were committed christians, who saw the solution to the plight of the oppressed as dependent largely on the evangelisation of Africans.

The Rev. James Calata, who was the Secretary-General of the ANC from 1936 to 1949 expressed this feeling most explicitly when he stated: "It was the spirit of Christ had led and is still leading men to the truth of the common brotherhood of man irrespective of race, colour or creed." Even many ordinary rank and file members of the ANC who were not regular churchgoers lived and thought in Christian terms,



Looking forward to national emancipation that would come through complete acceptance of the faith. As a result the ANC from its inception has always respected the christian positions of many of its members and leaders and fully acknowledged their right to full participation and contribution to the national struggle since it understood that the christian teaching has unmistakeable elements of social perspective when approached with honesty and sincerity. It was therefore not per chance that the inaugural conference of the ANC was opened with the singing of Tiyo Soga's *Lizalise Tixo Nkosi Idinga Lakho yenyano* (Fulfill thy Promise Thou Lord of Truth) and *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica* (Lord Bless Africa) later adopted as an official anthem of the ANC and therefore of the oppressed people of South Africa.

## THE JOINT COUNCILS

To carry the argument further, let us look into the practical expression of the ANC's principled commitment to non-racialism. In this connection the Joint Councils, though not necessarily a result of Congress initiative, provide a worthy basis - these councils were made possible organisationally and functionally, thanks to Congress rejection of the skin strategy.

The Joint Councils were forums of Black and White co-operation and co-ordination of political effort targetted at the defeat of the general Union policy of discrimination and indifference *vis-a-vis* the Black oppressed. These had been established after 1921 and were to play an important role for many years in the direction of drawing the attention of sincere liberal White opinion to the dangers of the granite racist policy of the Union government. This development was welcomed by many (mostly the black intelligentsia) as a healthy expression of the presence within the white minority group that was still moved by the human conscience and genuine philanthropic considerations.

The Joint Councils brought together influential Whites and several important political figures from the Black com-

munity including leaders of the popular organisations. Persons like John Dube, D.D.T. Jabavu, Dr Xuma, Selope Thema and Selby Msimang became important members of the councils. The impact the councils had on Black opinion and the attitude during this time can be best summed up by Dr A.B. Xuma's (former President of ANC) statement that the movement represented. "...A group, and thank God, an increasing group of fair-minded, sympathetic and just people among both boer and Briton".

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and just people among

Of course the importance of these councils cannot be overemphasised, yet they were a part of, historically speaking, the rudiments of organised white political identification with the struggles of the black oppressed. Limited by their own varying political visions some came and passed hardly unnoticed whilst others persisted planting as they did the seeds of genuine democratic and non-racist attitudes within the White Section. The councils did not end up as mere talking shops but waged real struggles against discriminatory legislations such as the Hertzog Bills and declared their full support to efforts of the All-African Convention.



Dr A.B. Xuma

Councils and the South African Institute of Race Relations continued to protest but disillusion with their effectiveness soon took hold over those who pinned hopes on their methods. The passing of the bills put simply, was a serious blow against the prestige of the councils. In this connection

When the Hertzog Bills became law in 1936, the Joint

Peter Walshe writes: "Just as the APS (Aborigines Protection Society - EM) had been found to be ineffective in the years after Union, so now the Joint Councils had failed to stem the tide of discriminatory legislation, making it painfully clear that a European pressure group operating on the periphery of white politics could offer Africans nothing more than an amelioration of the details of repression".

But the days of the councils were not futile nor wasted. They were a historical milestone leading to the gallant future of the Congress of Democrats, the Congress of the People and the 'Treason Trial'. Nay, the councils made their mark as an important historical factor against racial prejudice, thus vindicating Congress policy.

### PAN-AFRICANISM

Simply put Pan-Africanism means 'for all Africans' and/or 'for the whole of Africa'. Yet today the concept 'Pan-Africanism' has acquired an ideological meaning associated with different trends emanating from a claim to the African identity. In this way, the concept has sketched a history which when studied helps to explain the evolution of African Nationalism and its more than one variants that have come to be associated with names of individuals who were the chief protagonists in the said trends.

But it was in the context of the first meaning ("for all African and/or for the whole of Africa") that the idea was written into the first constitution of the ANC. There it is stated that Congress was to become a 'federal Pan-African Association.' This was an expression of the broadness of mind of the founding fathers of the ANC and that their vision of justice and equality extended beyond the borders of South Africa to embrace Africans everywhere in the continent who were suffering similar disabilities. The early policy statements of the ANC and its songs (e.g. Caluza's *Sikhalel'izwe Lakithi* and our National Anthem, *Nkosi Sikelel'i Afrika*) manifested our people's commitment to the unity of the Africans of the continent as one political people. This was further emphasised and enhanced by the adoption of the continental slogan, 'Mayibuye i-Afrika' during the gallant years of the Congress Youth League.

It is important that we reiterate here that this part of our history was one of unseasoned probing. As a result the

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movement was susceptible to several influential ideological articulations of both internal and external origin. Contact with the outside world had been secured through individual intellectuals educated abroad. Many of these contributed to the formation of the ANC and were soon to rise to positions of leadership and therefore whatever their limitations, they steered Congress

during this most trying period. Limitations they did have and these emanated from their political experience that was greatly conditioned by the milieu of their academic training. Their vision of an ideal society was through the windows of bourgeois democracy whose values contrasted sharply with the details of South African society - the fact of capitalist development in South Africa notwithstanding. Some became attracted towards methods cherished by their counterparts, notably the Black Americans, who were also caught in a race conflict engendered and aggravated by rampant western capitalism.

In this way the Black American's struggle represented to some individuals a precedent for advance in South Africa, with the policies of Booker T. Washington, Dr, W. E. B. Du Bois and later Marcus Garvey exerting influence even amongst Africans who though had not studied in the U.S. were however either well read or just well informed about developments.

These influences no doubt left some impact in the Congress as is reflected by statements of some leaders of Congress: On accepting the presidency of the ANC 1912, John L. Dube stated, "Booker Washington is to be my guiding star, would that he were nigh to give us the help of his wise counsel! . I have chosen this great man, firstly because he is perhaps the most famous and best living example of our Africa's sons, and, secondly because, like him, I, too, have my heart centred mainly in the education of my race. Therein, methinks lies the shortest and best way to their mental,

moral, material and political betterment".

Washington's ideas however had critics even in the US amongst the Black Americans who saw in his method serious shortcomings. One of these critics was Du Bois. Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois' approach found following amongst influential ANC members. Whereas there doesn't appear to have been any decisive impact of his teachings on official ANC (the concern for his political organisation for the realisation of popular aspirations had already developed amongst the Blacks in South Africa as early as at the turn of the 20th century - long before Du Bois' ideas had built an assertive following) they cannot be simply put aside since they definitely went into the political debate of the day of which the ANC was a decisive participant on the continent.

Likewise Marcus Garvey did not pass unnoticed. His ideas seem to have gripped individuals particularly amongst the young militants and were to persist for many years. But his somewhat careless emphasis of race in an attempt to evolve a viable strategy for the emancipation of the Black people contradicted with principled positions of the South African liberatory movement and as such could not be acceptable.

It is a matter of proud record for the ANC and its allies that in spite of all influences, the movement evolved its own political perspective founded upon South African experience and in keeping with local peculiarities. Of course all positive aspects of the influences were accordingly adapted to all possible degrees of relevance.

### THE MARXIST FACTOR

When the ANC was formed in 1912 what was destined to become the Marxist movement in South Africa was still very fragmented and as such not effective. Things began to change and to assume urgency with the launching of the ISL (International Socialist League) the rightful forerunner to the CPSA (Communist Party of South Africa) in 1915. As early as 1916, almost within a year since the formation of the ISL, leaders and members of the league attended a meeting addressed by Saul Msane, a leader of the ANC. Here was manifest the beginnings of a historical alliance that was to grow from strength to strength with time.



Much has been written and said about the glorious history of co-operation between the ANC and the Communist Party in our country. We not dwell onto the details of this history here but concern ourselves with those aspects that will best reflect the mutuality of the influence between the ANC and the Party, and the historic highlights of our mature alliance.

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The ANC is a national liberatory organisation of our people for the realisation of the cherished goal of freedom. It remains a mass movement uniting all the patriotic ranks of our country ranged against apartheid fascism. It has never been a Marxist Party and cannot be one now. Yet there have been communists in the ANC who have always stood firmly and unflinchingly in the forefront of the struggle for national liberation in South Africa and defended the ANC



Moses Mabhida

and its positions as they continue to do because, as Comrade Moses Mabhida, General Secretary of the SACP stated recently that the Party is not a secret organisation and that it has participated in bitter struggles for national liberation throughout the years, likewise the ANC has and continues to defend the Party and its positions because as J.T. Gumede, former President of the ANC once said, "Of all political parties the Communist Party is the only one that honestly and sincerely fights for the oppressed."

The history of the ANC/SACP alliance is not a question of how the Party influenced the ANC. But, as comrade Gxobhayeza Kwedini wrote in the African Communist No.88 of 1982, "Concretely related to the Communist Party, we maintain

that it would be an act of dishonesty on our part if we failed to mention that the ANC helped a great deal to keep the Communist Party alive. Of course this was a mutual process. But what needs to be emphasised is the ANC's co-operation and good relations with the Communist Party; the ANC's defence of the legitimate role of the Communist Party, its right to exist independently and legally - all this is unparalleled on the African continent." And we may add that we of the ANC will apologise to no one for being allies with the SACP.

### THE MOROGORO CONFERENCE

The Morogoro consultative conference that convened from 5th May to the 1st June 1969 in Tanzania was doubtless the high point of the ANC's politico-ideological development in its quest for a sound revolutionary perspective capable of meeting the all-round challenges of the national liberation drive in the peculiar conditions of South Africa. The conference itself was a product, as the article seeks to assert, of a long principled historical process that escalated the popular struggle from one summit to higher summits as it did.

As a matter of record, the years of the ANCYL (ANC Youth League) provided a catalyst that was both timely and momentous in the direction of elevating the Congress to higher levels of political organisation and greater emphasis on the perspective of mass action as the principal motive force for advance. This great turning point made possible the historic events of the fifties such as the Defiance Campaign, the Congress of the People, the 'Treason Trial' and in the sixties, the Pietermaritzburg Conference, the Lobatsi Conference of the ANC, etc., which events are significant precedents of the Morogoro Conference and as such have gone into the crucial chemistry of its background history, and therefore were important mileposts in the path to the maturing of our broad nationalism and the definition of our politico-ideological commitments as profoundly elaborated in the documents containing decisions and propositions of the Morogoro Conference - of these documents, 'Forward to freedom' - The Strategy and Tactics of the ANC, is perhaps the most decisive and lucid in the charting of the way forward.

The pressing need for a consultative conference of that nature and magnitude was necessitated by lessons drawn from past experiences - especially since the establishment of the ANC external mission had presented new political and organisational problems. In this connection, Gxobhiyeza Kwedini in the same issue of the A.C. cited above, points out: "The task before the Morogoro Conference was not only the question of bringing about organisational changes, but to chart the way to victory. It was both organisational and politico-ideological."

It therefore becomes clear why the conference was so broad in its deliberations - virtually combing all issues relevant to our struggle. The international context of the struggle was elaborated upon, further stressing the principled internationalism of the ANC. And erroneous concepts and destructive postulates about nationalism and the national liberation movement were correctly refuted and rejected without detracting from the basic context of our struggle nor confusing the forces to drive it. In this regard 'Forward to Freedom' states: "The national character of the struggle must therefore dominate our approach. But it is a national struggle which is taking place in a different era and in a different context from those which characterised the early struggles against colonialism. It is happening in a new kind of world - a world which is no longer monopolised by the imperialist system; a world in which the existence of the powerful Socialist system and a significant sector of newly liberated areas has altered the balance of forces... It is also happening in a new kind of South Africa; a South Africa in which there is a large and developed working class whose class consciousness and in which the independent expressions of the working people - their political organs and trade unions - are very much part of the liberation front. Thus our nationalism must not be confused with chauvinism of a previous epoch. It must not be confused with the classical drive by an elitist group among the oppressed to gain ascendancy so that they can replace the oppressor in the exploitation of the mass."

**LODESTAR**

Today the politico-ideological positions summed up above.

have become an indispensable lodestar lighting our path to freedom. These are fruits yielded after a painstaking history of struggle and sacrifice to which all our people, from all sections, from all walks of life have contributed.

These positions constitute the basis of our consistency, determination and full conviction that in our country it is inevitable that the forces of justice and freedom will prevail over those of evil and reaction.

The enemies of our people have attacked us and sought to label us for our open firmness in declaring our beliefs and choosing our course. Our forebears did not waver and we the youth of South Africa, at this very promising hour, cannot bow down to the ravings of our cornered enemy and the harangues of his allies. Ours is a just cause and triumph it must!

#### SOURCES

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## **CHIEF A.J. LUTULI**

**“The length of the term of slavery depends largely on the oppressed themselves and not on the oppressor . . .**

**WE HAVE THE KEY TO FREEDOM,  
not the oppressor.**

**It all depends on how much we sacrifice  
ourselves for freedom.**

**WE DETERMINE THE PACE  
NOT THE OPPRESSOR.”**