

A Trail Of Courage and Determination

PART 1

- Edwin Mabitse

In this issue of 'DAWN' we publish the first of a series of articles on the theme mentioned above. It is hoped that this will serve as a fitting contribution to the campaign to ensure the marking of the all-important 70th Anniversary of the ANC in a big way. The central purpose of this occasion is to be the education of the masses of our people to their role, to rally them to the banner of their authentic representative, the ANC, in ever growing numbers. In this connection, to make them better able to translate into reality the declared objective of our national liberation movement of making 1982 the YEAR OF UNITY IN ACTION.

In this first instalment, the author examines the roots of African Political and National Consciousness.

The National Liberation drive in South Africa is gradually reaching out for majestic heights. This historic progression has been possible thanks to the indispensable presence in the van of the popular struggle of the steadfast leadership of the ANC. It has been a spiralling history with many an exciting turns which at all times served to emphasise the imperative of unswerving commitment to the overthrow of White minority colonial rule. The ANC has since its inception pursued the goal of the liberation of the nationally oppressed majority uncompromisingly for decade after decade. Today the organisation continues to be the visible vanguard of a mighty liberatory process that is currently threatening the very pillars of the white minority power establishment.

In order to be better able to appreciate the political significance of the unfolding liberation war in South Africa and the dialectical growth of the ANC into the force of national and international renown that it is today, the imperative

is to take a retrospective review of the history of the black man's struggle against white supremacy and apartheid. It will then come to light that the ANC ranks as the oldest and perhaps amongst the most resilient of liberatory national movements the continent has ever known. It has behind it a proud record of struggle which is indelibly inscribed in the hearts and minds of the oppressed millions in South Africa and the conscious communities of the continent at large.

Today, as the ANC begins a year-long campaign in celebration of its 70th birthday, it has grown into a political giant that towers high and beyond the horizons of our embattled motherland. Both friend and foe recognise it as a significant constituent factor in the unmistakable processes that are shaping the future of Africa and of the world.

The ANC sticks out as a symbol of African commitment to freedom, peace and social progress. Therefore, no moment can be more opportune to comb the complex yet so inspiring a maze of historical paths through which the ANC has had to surge, piloting as it does, an irresistible national movement in its quest for liberation, independence and an inclusive nationhood.

BACKGROUND

From the time the white colonial intruders set foot on our country during April of 1652, the stage was set to transform the South of Africa into a theatre of longdrawn life and death conflicts, between the aborigines and the foreign aggressors. What had at first seemed to the Africans to be people from far away lands flung to our shores by fate, want and distress and therefore meriting assistance and hospitality, soon proved themselves to be unscrupulous criminals and brigands. The people were then compelled to change their attitude and take to arms in defence of their birthright to land and livestock. Thus was begun a period of fierce conflict and war which dominated the relations between black and white during the early days of contact.

The socio-economic advantages of the colonialists which reflected themselves primarily in material disparity in arms and munitions rendered our people vulnerable in the face of a determined colonial offensive. In spite of the uneven odds, our people never gave up - they were determined to defend their land and to keep the white invader at bay.

In this spirit the Khoi-Khoi, the San, the Xhosa, the Zulu, Basotho and practically all the other African chiefdoms offered fierce resistance to the colonialists. The covetous plunder and expropriation of their land and stock provoked in the hearts

of the people a strong anti-colonialist feeling. The very wars of resistance that raged on for more than two-and-a-half centuries were a manifestation of a patriotic effort directed at thwarting further encroachment into their territories and to defeat the diabolic designs of the colonialists.

The ultimate s u b j u g a t i o n of our people coincided with the period of industrialisation. The discovery of gold and diamonds created new and urgent demands for a readily available labour army for the realisation of the profit objectives of the capitalist mining magnates. These developments hastened the foreigners' strategy of turning the colonised into a pool of cheap labour. A whole variety of tactics and means were used to oblige our people to go to the mines and railways seeking for employment. Amongst these, tax-enforcing laws (e.g. the Glen Grey Act) were used as if the very forcible expropriation of the land was not enough to turn the people into an optionless proletariat.

Though there was resistance in varied forms, the process took shape, and our people emerging from a traditional communal way of life were forcibly being introduced into an industrial mode of life. Therefore the destruction of the traditional social fibre made way for the birth of the African proletariat. The significance of this process was the bringing together in the industrial centres of Africans from all tribal groups in the country, where under the grinding wheel of capitalist and colour-defined master-servant relations they began to identify objectively as one people with a common destiny. This rudimentary form of national identity was to further gain impetus as industrialisation expanded.

RISE OF AFRICAN NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The development of national consciousness and awareness of the historical imperative of unity across tribal barriers and fettering prejudice amongst the blacks in South Africa, is a result of long complex historical processes. Several factors influenced the manner and direction of its unfolding. Although it can be said to have been largely a bi-product of the reactive process to racism-infested white colonialism, it is not incongruent to suggest as one of the factors, the traditional sense of belonging which has always been characteristic of our people.

I) ROLE OF THE ETHIOPIAN MOVEMENT²

(N.B. refers to the African Churches as united under the Ethiopianism of Rev. M. Mokone).

Ethiopianism was perhaps the most significant black mass movement prior to the formation of the ANC. It was "an attempt on the part of Africans to set up their own churches independent of the white ones" - Roux, *Time Longer Than Rope*, p.77. Therefore, the launching of the Ethiopian Church was the apex of the revolt of the African converts against the racialism of the missionary churches. By this time many Africans were already thoroughly acquainted with the Bible and the interpretation of theological dogmas. They had felt the need to have their own organised religious communities and a church that "would provide a field where they could develop their own ideas and express their own personalities without having to suffer the constant interference of white missionaries who claimed superior knowledge and understanding. At the back of it all, moreover, was the growing feeling of national consciousness and revolt against the whites, not only in religious matters, but in everything." - Roux, *Time Longer Than Rope*, p.78.

Thus, reacting to the practices of the white clergy who sought to maintain colonial relations by extending racialism and inequality into the church (which is after all contrary to Christian ethics), African clergymen started a series of breakaways from white churches attracting and taking with them large followings:

- Nehemia Tile founded the Tembu National Church in 1884. He had the support of the Tembu chief and of the entire tribe.
- An independent African church was set up amongst the Bapedi of Sekhukhuniland in 1889 after breaking away from the Lutheran Berlin mission.
- An African minister, Kenyane, broke away from the Anglican Church and organised an independent religious community.
- Rev. Mangena Mokone, together with twenty others, founded the Ethiopian Church after breaking away from the Wesleyan in 1892. The church soon spread beyond Pretoria where it was formed, establishing contact with other African churches inside South Africa including the AME (African Methodist Episcopal Church), a black church of the United States. In this way the Ethiopian Church was to become the umbrella of most of the independent African churches of the day, and perhaps the most important of them all.

The expression of resentment of malpractices within the missionary churches by Africans, initiated a movement of mass dimensions. The movement appealed to the Christian Africans' sense of identification in an atmosphere of racial hostility. In this way it was a political movement whose contributory role

towards the rise of African Nationalism and its future mellowing deserves special appreciation

II) THE ROLE OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA:

As it is well known, the common practice of colonial policy everywhere in the world has been to open education opportunities for a few members of the colonised nations. This has no genuine philanthropic motivation except for some rare cases. In some instances individuals have sought to enlighten the colonised sometimes as enticement for a more ready acceptance of the coloniser's religion. But history has shown that from amongst the ranks of the enlightened always spring up great men who are committed to the patriotic aspirations of their people. We also share such an experience.

From amongst the few Africans who had the fortune of receiving education in missionary centres or in colleges abroad, emerged men of the likes of J.T. Jabavu, W. Rubusana, John L. Dube, Pixley ka Seme, Selby Msimang and several others who were to play important roles at varying levels in the moulding of African political and national consciousness. They took their inspiration from patriotic identification and humanitarian concepts which in some cases were inspired by religious (Christian) sentiments. Albeit honest representatives of popular interests, some had the misfortune of falling victims of liberalistic gestures and compromises by some of the white politicians. But still they were committed to reforming the political system in a manner that would benefit the oppressed. Those who remained strong and level-headed played significant roles in the political organisations that were formed throughout the country before 1912. And no less an important role was played by the newspapers they launched in exposing the obnoxious conditions under which the coloniser was forcing our people to acquiesce, e.g. 'Isigidini saMaXhosa', launched by Rev. Elijah Makiwane in 1876; 'Imvo Zabantsundu', which came under the editorship of J.T. Jabavu in 1881, and others.

NB. The early forms of political organisations amongst the Africans and their significance will be discussed in better detail in the next issue.

