

HEROES OF OUR REVOLUTION

Dr J.L DUBE (1871-1945)

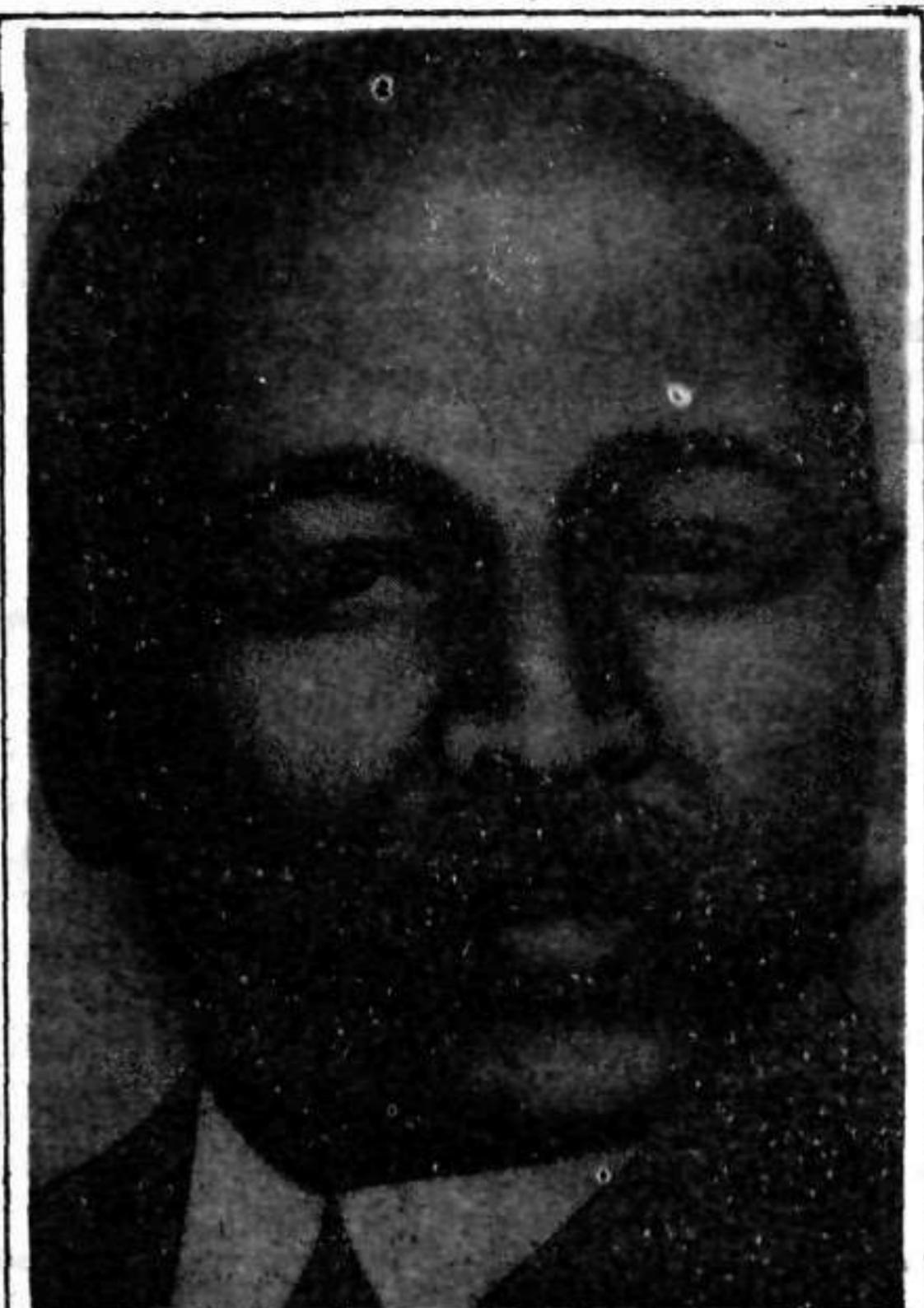
- Looksmart Makhanda

Our country has known men and women who in the course of time have risen to fame for various reasons. As history would have it some lost their fame during their living days or had it buried with their bodies; even the memory of their names has long faded from our minds. They are not mentioned even in books or talked about in tales. Theirs was a passing show.

Yet there are others whose names, ideas and actions have become part of our people's living and growing drive for liberation. These are the ones who knew what to live for; to share with their fellow countrymen their long-endured hardships and sacred hopes, and march hand in hand with them on the thorny path to a bright future. That is why we shall always remember men like John Langalibalele Dube even long after our cherished goal of a free and democratic South Africa has become an established reality.

CHILDHOOD

John Dube was born in 1871 at Inanda, Natal.



JOHN LANGALIBALELE DUBE

He lived his early childhood days at a crucial moment in our people's bitter resistance against colonial domination. This was the time when the British imperialists were going all out to grab all our land, strip us of all manhood and turn us into wage slaves. He was 8 years old when one of our people's armies won a historic victory over the hordes of British marauders at Isandlwana and surely the joy of the old people over their achievement had a lasting impression on young Dube. Through the efforts of his parents he managed to receive elementary education and later went to study at Amanzimtoti Training Institute. In 1887 he went to the United States to further his studies and at times gave talks on the plight of his oppressed people in South Africa. In 1892 he returned to South Africa and became a teacher at Amanzimtoti. After his second visit to the United States (1897-1900) for further studies in theology he returned to his country and set about establishing the Ohlange Institute. Overcoming many obstacles, Dube succeeded in this effort so that in August 1901 the institute was formally opened. For fund-raising purposes for maintaining Ohlange Institute, Dube had to make more trips to the United States.

In a pamphlet he wrote in 1892 and headed 'A TALK UPON MY NATIVE LAND' he appealed to his people drawing their attention to the future saying in part: "Then shall Africa take her place as a nation among the nations; then shall her sons and daughters sing aloud - 'Let us Arise and Shine, for our light has come.'" In fact John Dube was one of the adherents of Ethiopianism, a religious movement which became one form of African people's opposition to racist colonial domination and one of the main currents that merged into the then emerging African Nationalism.

From his first days as a principal at Ohlange, Dube began to engage himself in journalistic work and in 1903 launched Natal's first African paper, the weekly *Ilanga laseNatal*. He remained its editor until 1914. This paper, like others established in other parts of the country, proved to be a useful weapon in the hands of the African people in expressing their opinions on the political situation in the country and attacking the policies of the racist colonial authorities. As a result Dube got arrested by the colonial rulers following a comment published by *Ilanga laseNatal* on the first battle between Bambata's warriors and the British troops in which four racist troops were killed. The paper had remarked: 'A remarkable thing...is that the four troopers who were killed were all in the firing party at the execution of the twelve men (African

patriots - ed.) at Richmond. What does this mean? Call it a remarkable coincidence if you please, but we regard it as having a deep meaning. whether we are superstitious or not."

BAMBATHA REBELLION

Following the 1906 Bambata Rebellion which marked the closing of the first phase of our centuries of resistance to colonial domination the need for our people to unite and continue the struggle with new methods was assuming irresistible urgency. It was men like Dube who became the people's instrument in their response to the 1909 Act of the British imperial government, a racist law which consolidated the domination of the British and boer colonialists over our people through the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. A meeting referred to as the South African Native Convention was convened in Bloemfontein in 1909 at which African leaders took a common stand on the racist law mentioned above. The delegates who attended came from all the corners of our country. Dube represented Natal, Walter Rubusana, the Cape and L. Makgothi the O.F.S. and one from the Transvaal. There was also a representative from Botswana (then called Bechuanaland). While the participants in this convention could not influence the decision of the British imperialists on the proposed union one thing is clear: the meeting was an important step towards the forging of unity by our people.

It was against this background that Pixley ka Izaka Seme declared in an article published in Imvo on October 24, 1911: "We are one people. These divisions, these jealousies, are the cause of all our woes and all our backwardness and ignorance today."

CLARION CALL

In a matter of 2 months Seme's clarion call for the unity of the African people was to find its most fitting immediate response in one of the greatest events in our people's history. At a conference held in Bloemfontein on that memorable January 8, 1912 by decision of our people coming from the different parts of our country and beyond our borders the African National Congress was formed. It was no accident that John Dube was elected the President. Solomon Plaatjie was elected Secretary and Pixley ka Izaka Seme Treasurer. In this way Dube became a symbol of national unity against colonial domination not only for our people but also for our brother peoples in the neighbouring African states, who were represented at the founding conference of the ANC, and beyond. It was clear

from the very first day that the historic tasks of the national organisation which our people had chosen him to lead were great ones.

One of the urgent tasks of the ANC at the time was to give an expression to our people's bitter opposition to the 1913 Land Act which prohibited Africans, except in the Cape, from buying or leasing land from non-Africans outside the eight percent of the country's area which had been set aside for them by the racist government. In a petition written to the then racist Prime Minister Botha, expressing the fallacy and hypocrisy of the 'explanation' given by the colonialist authorities to justify the stripping of our people of their birthright to land, President John Dube remarked: "Whatever may be the explanation we can now speak from what we have seen of the effects even in the beginning, and which must inevitably grow worse and worse. We have seen our people driven from the places dear to them as the inheritance of generations, to become wanderers on the face of the earth. We have seen rents raised to the point of desperation. We have seen many of our people who by their frugality have laid by a little money in the hope of buying a small piece of land where they might make a home for their families and leave something for their children now told that their hopes are in vain; that no European is now permitted to sell or lease land to a native. We do not need any plainer explanation than what we have already seen." The full text of this petition was published in The Cape Argus. That was early 1914, and the same year John Dube led a deputation to England to protest against the 1913 Land Act. From then onwards he continued to discharge his duties as our president until in 1917 when he was succeeded by S.M. Makgato. In the years that followed John Dube continued to play an active role in the activities of the ANC as the Natal president. During the 1920's he attended the Pan-African conference in London. In 1935 he was elected to the executive committee of the All African Convention. Due to ill health he had to be relieved of his duties as ANC's president in the Natal branch. In 1945 John Langalibalele Dube, one of the founding fathers of the ANC, our vanguard national organisation for independence and freedom died.

As we look back to those days when our people had to forge for themselves a weapon for forging national unity for the first time in our history of resistance to colonial domination, we salute our founding fathers who spearheaded the creation of the ANC by our people. In this collective endeavour John Dube played his role in spite of the limitations of

his times. It is a matter of great historic significance that he became the first president of a revolutionary organisation that was destined to be a vital component of the forces of liberation not only in our country but also in our entire continent and the entire world.

WE BELIEVE

We have a belief
We believe in the
African National Congress
The pillar of our struggle.

We have a trust
We trust in the
African National Congress
Which guides us.

The African National Congress
Is our train to salvation
We, members of Umkhonto We Sizwe
We, members of
The Spear of the Nation.

We have no other belief but
In the African National Congress
We have no other trust but
In the African National Congress
The University
Through which we see the world.

The African National Congress
Did not only plant our seeds
But it is watering everyday of our lives
From the loss of our heroes' lives
Taken by those who are haunting our lives.

We are proud to be what we are
We are proud to be doing what we are doing
We are serving the people of South Africa.