

# A Trail of Courage And Determination

## Part 3

- Amos Aluko

The beginning of the twentieth century ushered in a new phase in our people's struggle for liberation. Through bloody means the British imperialists and Boer colonialists (the Boers on their own would have failed) had succeeded to impose their brutal system of capitalist exploitation and national domination in our country. Our people had become virtually landless in the land of their forefathers with almost every aspect of their traditional life especially economic, political and social, completely disrupted. This situation posed a new and greater challenge on our people who were and remain resolved never to surrender but to continue to fight until they regain their national independence and freedom. This historic task was the forging of new weapons and methods of struggle.

Our people had learnt their lesson well: while the lack of unity in the face of the marauding colonialist plunderers armed with modern weapons was the main reason for our defeat, it is this very unity which when forged becomes the most effective and invincible weapon in the hands of the oppressed. The dire need for the creation of a national political organisation to serve as the pillar of unity for the oppressed in their common struggle was already dawning in the minds of our people. In the preceding part of this series we have seen how our people began to form provincially based political and other organisations in the early 1900's and before, like the Natal Native Congress, South African Native Congress formed in the Western Cape, the Orange River Colony Native Congress and the Transvaal Native Congress. It was this experience including the joint actions taken on this basis such as the holding of the South African Native Convention in Bloemfontein in 1909 with 60 delegates representing the various organisations in the country, to take a common stand on the Draft South Africa Act, which to a certain extent provided the schooling so necessary for creating national union for liberation.

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## UNION FOR DOMINATION

The formation of the Union of South Africa by the British and boer community in 1910 with the blessing of British imperialism and to the total disregard of our people's aspirations emphasised the urgency of organisation and unity by the oppressed. It was clear that the political union which was an expression of the economic intergration of the four provinces meant not only the consolidation of the system of imperialist exploitation and national domination of

our people and the continuation of the policies directed towards this end. It also meant the intensification of this system. This can be seen in the anti-African legislation made by the union government of Botha from the very first years of its operation.

As early as 1910 a land bill aimed at completely expropriating Africans of the little plots of land to which they still had access was already being prepared with Hertzog hysterically shouting about Africans threatening 'to squeeze out the white man from South Africa' using this extremely racist slogan to mobilise the Afrikaner farmers for the perpetuation of the policies of the old Transvaal and Orange Free State boer republics. There were also the Native Labour Regulation Act and the Mines and Works Act of 1911. The former enabled the white employers to repudiate a labour contract concluded with an African labourer and the shifting of the blame on to the African and the imposition of a heavy penalty on him. The latter debarred African mine workers from performing skilled jobs, in favour of white workers. To defend this naked robbery and the accompanying domination from the inevitable resistance by our people the Defence Act was passed for the establishment of European permanent force and an additional citizens' force. In addition to this oppressive legislation there was the perfection of the pass system, the curtailment of African freedom of movement, heavy taxation, denial of the blacks the rights of trading in their areas and countless other repressive measures.

## UNION FOR LIBERATION

With the plight of our people increasing in the wake of the unity in the enemy camp, unity of the oppressed could not

be postponed any further. This urgency of this vital issue was expressed by Pixley ka Izaka Seme, perhaps the most outstanding pioneer champion and theoretician of our national unity. Writing in October 1911 he sounded the clarion call saying:

"Again, it is conclusively urgent that this Congress should meet this year, because a matter which is so vitally important to our progress and welfare should not be unnecessarily postponed by reason of personal differences and selfishness of our leaders."

Emphasising why national unity of the African people was so crucial Seme went further:

"The demon of racialism, the aberrations of the Xhosa-Fingo feud, the animosity that exists, between the Zulus and the Tongas, between the Basutos and every other Native must be buried and forgotten; it has shed among us sufficient blood. We are one people. These divisions these jealousies, are the cause of all our woes and of all our backwardness and ignorance today."

Seme's words of wisdom were the most eloquent expression of the deepest aspirations of our people and they received the response they deserved. In a national conference held in Bloemfontein on January 8, 1912, by unanimous decision of our people the African National Congress (then named the South African Native National Congress) was established. This was a great occasion for our peoples in Southern Africa, a historic moment. The Conference was attended by delegates from every corner of our land. There were the traditional leaders, people who symbolized our people's tradition of heroic resistance created in the past centuries and who represented the vast majority of the rural population in our country and beyond who were clamouring for the return of their stolen land; these were patriots like Solomon ka Dinuzulu of the Zulu, Montsiwa of the Barolong, Lewanika of the Lozi (Southern Zambia), Letsie II of the Sotho, Labotsibeni of the Swazi, Dalindyabo of the Tembu, Sekhukhuni of the Pedi and Khama of the Tswana. There were also workers, peasants, ministers of religion, lawyers, teachers, clerks, interpreters, small traders and others.

After the opening speeches were made, the gathering sang Tiyo Soga's *Lizalis'idinga lakho Thixo, Nkosi Yenyano* (ful-

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fil thy Promise, God, thou Lord of Truth). Delivering the main speech, Pixley ka Izaka Seme declared:

"Chiefs of royal blood and gentlemen of our race, we have gathered here to consider and discuss a theme which my colleagues and I have decided to place before you. We have discovered that in the land of their birth, Africans are treated as hewers of wood and drawers of water. The white people

of this country have formed what is known as the Union of South Africa - a Union in which we have no voice in the making of laws and no part in their administration. We have called you therefore to this union so that we can together devise ways and means of forming our national union for the purpose of creating national unity and defending our rights and privileges."

Indeed the Bloemfontein Conference successfully carried out its historic task - the creation of the ANC. It resolved that two houses, The Upper House and Lower House should be set up. Honourary Presidents were elected; these were Chiefs Dalindyebo, Montsioa, Lewanika, Letsie II, Khama and Dini-zulu.

The actual executive committee which was also elected consisted of: The Rev. John Langalibalele Dube, as President; Solomon T. Plaatjie, Secretary; Pixley ka Isaka Seme, Treasurer; Thomas Maphikela, Speaker. The Rev. Mqoboli of the Wesleyan Church became Chaplain-in-Chief and Rev. H.R. Ngcayiya his assistant. Vice-Presidents were: Rev. Walter Rubusana, Meshack Pelem, Sam Makhatho and Alfred Mangena. These were men who were playing an active political role among our people locally and nationally.

To close the conference the delegates, whose confidence in the great strength that lies in our people was so tremendously raised, cast their minds as they sang one of John Knox Bokwe's 'Give a Thought to Africa' which calls on our people to 'raise the flag of freedom, on the hills and valleys'.

## FIRST BATTLES

The African National Congress was born in battle to lead our people in future battles for freedom and this is the

truth which was expressed by one African in response to President Dube's address in which he was explaining to a group of Africans in 1912 in Zululand why the ANC was formed and appealing for unity. The man declared:

"I thank Bambata. I thank Bambata very much. Would this spirit continue! I do not mean the Bambata of the bush who perished at Nkandla, but I mean this new spirit which we have just heard explained!"

From birth the ANC had to live up to the expectations of our people. In 1913 the Union government passed the Land Act. This racist law, which signified a serious attack against our people, stipulated that the white minority totalling 1.5 million was to enjoy the monopoly of more than 90% while the African population of 5.5 million and the rightful owners were allotted less than 10% of the total land. Previously Africans could purchase and lease land outside of the reserve on the same basis as whites. This was the position in all provinces except the Orange Free State. The pressure exerted by extreme racist elements like Hertzog also had an effect on government legislation.

It is not difficult to imagine how this piece of legislation affected the lives of our people. Now they were forced into areas where they could only have access to very small pieces of infertile and eroded land and infested with malaria-carrying mosquitoes. In addition to heavy taxation the reduction of our people to a status of refugees was designed to force them to the mines, with no other alternative. In his book 'Native Life in South Africa' Sol Plaatjie most accurately described this intensification of robbery of our people as 'one step to complete slavery'! Our people had good reason to be angered and be filled with more hatred.

## REPRESENTATIVE

As the representative of the aspirations of the oppressed the ANC had to take action, and this was done. The ANC mounted a campaign against the Land Act. A delegation appointed by the March 1913 ANC annual conference and consisting of J.L. Dube, Dr W.B. Rubusana, A. Mangena, Rev. I. Dlepu, W.Z. Mfenyana, S. Msane, L.T. Mvabasa, D. Letanka presented to the government our people's objection. This is an initiative to

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which our people attached great significance as can be seen in the delegation which gathered at a conference called by the ANC to hear the report of the delegates who had met the government and to decide on further action. People came from East London and King Williams-town in the south, Zoutpansberg in the Northern Transvaal, from Natal as well as from Botswana (then Bechuanaland) and converged in Johannesburg.

The racist government as could be expected paid no heed to our people. As

a result and still entertaining the hope that the British government which still exercised significant influence over South Africa would intervene in favour of Africans, a deputation was sent to London while another to Pretoria to present the Union government with resolutions expressing the African people's rejection of the terms of the Land Act and their intention to proceed to Britain. All these deputations yielded no success but a start had been made of joint action led by the ANC. It is significant to note that our people throughout the country contributed funds to meet the costs of sending deputations.

There were other battles in which the ANC was soon to be involved like the 1913 anti-pass campaign involving 600 women in Bloemfontein and 800 women in Winburg.

At this moment when African workers were rising to action as in the 1918 African Miner's Strike in which 100 000 workers were involved, the ANC backed the ISL (International Socialist League) in forming the Industrial Workers Union, the first trade union of African workers. This was the time of the world-changing Great October Socialist Revolution of the Russian workers. In 1919 the ANC led anti-pass campaigns in the Orange Free State and Transvaal in which more than 700 ANC members and sympathisers were arrested. This was only the beginning.

In 1919 the ANC adopted its first constitution which explained the aims of the movement and dealt with the problems facing the African people. Undeniably the fact that this constitution omitted a demand for equality and national liberation was one obvious weakness. But one cannot fail to appreciate the foresightedness of our founding fathers expressed in this constitution. It referred to the ANC as

a 'Pan African Association'. The understanding by our leaders of the imperative of African unity in the whole continent against a common enemy at such an early date is immeasurably great.

## INVALUABLE HERITAGE

Looking back from the vantage point of our times when our movement has become truly a revolutionary mass organisation it is not difficult to identify the shortcomings which the ANC had during its formative years. To the extent that such cognition of early shortcomings is intended to fully appreciate the process of the growth of our vanguard movement, to clearly see the problems confronting our founding fathers, to arm ourselves for the future battles for victory, it is a healthy revolutionary practice.

It would be criminal to fail to see that in charting out a new road to liberation, our people were bound to have shortcomings born of inexperience. What is more there were other decisive factors like the fact that the African working class, which was destined to play the leading role in our national liberation struggle and the accompanying transforming effect on the leader of this struggle the ANC, was also in its formative years, only beginning to learn to use the weapon of organisation for economic and political battles.

The creation of the ANC on January 8, 1912, therefore, was the first greatest step forward in our struggle to achieve our national independence and freedom. For the first time in our history our people had forged for themselves the most reliable weapon for continuing the struggle to its inevitably victorious end, an organisation without which our national unity which is so vital for winning our liberation would not be possible. With the birth of the ANC, the seed of nationhood devoid of all hatred and mistrust, a peaceful and prosperous nation, was sown on our blood-soaked soil. From the very day of its founding conference which was attended by delegates as far across our borders as from Zambia the ANC inspired the formation of national political organisations in many African countries and this has been a significant contribution to the liberation of the African continent from the chains of colonialism, oppression, exploitation and ignorance. The ANC is a committed fighter which has its place within the trench of the world forces which are relentlessly struggling for a new world of universal peace and boundless progress.

This is the invaluable heritage left to our embattled

people by our founding fathers - the ANC. . A custodian of our ancestors' heroic tradition of resistance on whose basis our people have continued to place stepping-stones to final liberation over the past 70 years, the ANC is our beacon to the future when the dream of Pixley ka Isaka Seme of a 'new and unique civilisation' shall have become a reality.

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Our war of liberation will also, as it has started, introduce new chapters in the history of guerilla warfare. But whatever the case may be, the revolutionary forces must be in command of a strong army by the time the conditions are ripe for the seizure of power, an army in a position not only to seize power but also to defend it.

In many cases than one the closure of the third stage with victory over the colonial enemy has not meant an end to the war. The Vietnamese people, after a long war against the French had to live through yet a more bloody war against the United States of America. The history of Angola is well known to us all. After the defeat of the Portuguese colonialists, the Angolan people were locked in yet another bitter war against the South African interventionists, a war that persists to this day. Such are the lessons of history and they should not be forgotten, especially by us who are still fighting. This means that we should not only be geared towards a protracted and bloody war but also be ready to face any intervention for the forces of reaction will not hesitate to come to the aid of their racist allies by all means, including military intervention as our war grows from strength to strength.

### **DAWN politiXword No.3 Answers**

ACROSS: 1. Morogoro 7. E r r s 8. Posters  
10. Hoe 11. Orbs 13. Mission 15. KO  
16. Dew 17. Women 20. Aggett.

DOWN: 2. Rush 3. Glee 4. Resound 5. Or  
6. Asks 8. Poem 9. Toes 12. Bokwe  
14. Seme 18. Nag 19. Be