

THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS.

[1952-53]

In view of the widespread interest in the present situation in South Africa aroused, among other things, by the campaign of non-violent civil disobedience embarked upon by the African people, it may be of assistance to your readers in following the march of events in that unhappy land to know something about the African National Congress, the organisation which is primarily responsible for the launching and the direction of the Campaign of Defiance of Unjust Laws, as it is described in South Africa.

There is a sense in which the African National Congress owes its existence to the United States, for its founder, Dr P. K. I. Seme, was educated in this country. Seme was born and brought up in Natal on a Mission Station of the American Board, a Congregational Missionary Society which has its headquarters in Boston, Mass. After receiving his early education in the Mission Schools of that Society, he came to this country where after a distinguished College career, he won a scholarship to Oxford University. In the United Kingdom he was called to the Bar, and he returned to South Africa shortly after the consummation of Union ^{the} of South Africa in 1910. At that time the African people had no organisation which brought together members of different tribes. The political organisations which existed among them were organised on a more or less tribal basis. Thus in Natal among the Zulus to which ~~tribe~~ ^{tribe} Pixley Seme himself belonged there was a body known as the Natal Native Congress headed by John L. Dube who had himself received his College education in the United States; in the Transvaal there were two such bodies the Transvaal Native Congress and the Transvaal Native Organisation, both of which were dominated by the Sotho tribes inhabiting that part of the country; in the Orange Free State there was an Orange Free State Native Association catering principally for the Tswana tribes; in the Cape there was a body known as the Bantu Union for the Xhosa-speaking tribes. After the Boer War of 1899-1902 there were four ~~separate~~ British Colonies in South Africa, the Cape Colony, ~~the~~ Natal, the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony. It had been the dream of many statesmen and administrators that a Union of these territories should be brought about, not only for economic reasons but principally in order that the white rulers of Southern Africa might pursue a uniform policy towards the non-whites in their midst. This dream was fulfilled in May, 1910 when the Union of South Africa was brought into being. The South Africa Act of 1909 in which the Constitution of the Union

was contained made it quite clear that it was the intention of white population to make South Africa into a "white man's country". Membership of Parliament was to be confined to persons of European descent; the ~~franchise~~ right to vote was to be denied to non-~~whites~~ whites in all parts of the country except the Cape Province where they had enjoyed such rights since 1854. Even in regard to the latter provision made in the Constitution for depriving of their voting rights by a two-thirds majority of the two Houses of Parliament sitting together ^{When} ~~When~~ Africans were deprived of their right to participate in ordinary elections in 1936 ~~byxxxxxxx~~ only 11 members of Parliament out of a total of 190 voted against the measure, while the Coloureds--persons of mixed descent--were deprived of their voting rights by a simple majority in 1950.

To return to our subject, when the South Africa Act was being considered by the British Parliament, the non-white groups ~~had~~ sent a deputation to Great Britain to protest against the illiberal provisions of the Constitution but their representations were of no avail. It seemed clear that there was nothing for them but to return to their homeland and to organise themselves for the defence of their rights. Some conceived the idea of establishing an organisation which would endeavour to weld together the different tribes into a united nation. The only reply in his view to a united white South Africa was a united black South Africa. Together with a group of young African lawyers who had just recently returned from training overseas he drew up an elaborate scheme for a mass organisation which would be open to all classes of persons of African descent, chiefs and commoners, educated and uneducated, professional men and artisans, from all parts of Southern Africa, including the Union of South Africa and the High Commission Territories of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland. In other words they sought to build an African nation which would ignore the political divisions set up by the white man which divided one tribe from another or the same tribe under separate jurisdictions. Supreme authority in the organisation was to be vested in an annual conference divided into two Houses, an Upper House of Chiefs and a Lower House of Commoners. It was considered essential that the Chiefs, the traditional leaders of the African people, should be given a prominent place in the movement. At that time the Chiefs had not yet been reduced to the position of government servants which they occupy today under the Native Administration Act of 1927. Consequently some of the most prominent African Chiefs supported the

movement both financially and morally. It was largely through the support of the Chiefs that the African National Congress was able to send two deputations overseas, one to the United Kingdom in 1914 to make representations to the British Government against the Union Natives Land Act of 1913 which gave effect to the principle of territorial segregation between black and white. The story of the hardships and the disabilities in land matters which that Act imposed upon the African people is told by the then General Secretary of the African National Congress, Solomon T. Plaatje, in his wellknown book "Native Life in South Africa". The second deputation in 1919 went to the Paris Peace Conference to plead the cause of the African people in the light of President Wilson's famous principle of 'self-determination for small nations'. Needless to say these deputations proved abortive. In the meantime the African National Congress continued to establish branches in different parts of the country, and to engage in fighting for the protection of the rights of the Africans. At its annual conferences resolutions were passed dealing with the various disabilities under which Africans laboured. These would then be brought to the attention of the Government by means of deputations or correspondence. The day-to-day grievances of the people in matters such as proper accommodation on the trains and other means of public conveyance, the iniquitous Pass Laws, curfew regulations, more facilities for the education of African children, etc. In order to propagate its point of view the African National Congress published the first multi-lingual newspaper for Africans known as "Abantu-Batho". Today there are several such newspapers circulating among Africans but largely controlled by a company, the "Bantu Press Limited" which has absorbed all the previously independent African newspapers. In the course of its history the African National Congress has had its ups and downs. Other organisations which sought to supplant it in the African mind have come and gone. Among these may be mentioned the I.C.U., ~~founded by~~ a labor movement founded by one of the most dynamic personalities that have yet appeared among African leaders, Clements Kadalie. The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (the I.C.U.) swept through the country like a wild fire until it had a membership of ~~100,000~~ 100,000, and many people thought that this meant the end of Congress, but the I.C.U. in time collapsed. Another movement which seemed to challenge the position of the African National Congress as the mouthpiece of the African people was the All-African Convention which was established in 1935 as a result of the agitation against Prime

Minister J.B.M.Hertzog's Bills to deprive the Africans in the Cape of their franchise rights. This agitation culminated in an emergency conference held in Bloemfontein which was attended by delegates from political, social and cultural organisations. When it was that the Conference should ~~have~~ form a permanent organisation, this move was opposed by the leaders of the African National Congress. Nevertheless the new body was formed and is still carrying on a fitful existence in certain parts of the country. The African National Congress has in the meantime gone from strength to strength as the only body which stands for African Nationalism. For many years the African National Congress followed a policy of co-operation with the Government, while fighting for the extension of democratic rights to the African people. It was in 1949 at its annual conference in Bloemfontein that the Congress finally decided upon a policy of non-collaboration and non-cooperation with the authorities. The resolution passed indicated that ~~thenceforth~~ the Congress intended to work for political independence and total freedom from white domination. In the light of this stand it called upon members of Congress to resign from the Native Representative Council established by the Union Government under the Hertzog laws of 1936. ~~Then~~ Dr J.S. Moroka, the President-General of Congress, and Prof. Z.K. Matthews President of the Cape Province section of Congress resigned as from January 1, 1950. The Government then took the step of ~~abolishing~~ abolishing the Native Representative Council on the ground that this body had developed into a focal point for demands for equality with the European. In its place the Government hopes to establish local bodies organised on an ethnic or tribal basis.

A logical development of the policy of non-cooperation is the campaign of civil disobedience which was decided upon at the annual conference of Congress in December, 1951. The Congress is satisfied that the African people have now no alternative but to embark upon a campaign for the defiance of the unjust laws to which their people are subjected. The Congress has invited other non-European organisations to join them in this struggle. The Campaign is one of non-violent passive resistance based on the principles made famous by Mahatma Gandhi who first applied it in South Africa. The Campaign was launched on June 26, 1952, and since that time thousands of African and Indians have responded to the ^{hundreds} appeal for volunteers and have defied some of the discriminatory laws such as the Pass laws, the apartheid entrances in public places such as railroad stations and post offices, ~~xxxx~~ etc.

In a number of centres the capacity of the local jails have already been exceeded by the number of people arrested. Welfare Committees have been formed to take ~~some~~ care of the dependants of those in custody. Funds are being raised for the carrying on of the struggle mainly through a Stamp Fund known as the Million Shilling Freedom Stamp Fund. Contributions towards this fund are being solicited from all sections of the population in South Africa, and even beyond. The African people are the poorest section of the community in South Africa. As has been pointed out, the bulk of the members "find it extremely difficult to ~~pay~~ pay their regular dues, however small" and the ~~organisation~~ organisation has to depend largely on voluntary efforts for its various services. The response of the people to this movement indicates that the African National Congress enjoys their confidence and that the policies pursued by successive South African governments have driven them to the point of desperation. It is not possible to say at this stage what the outcome of the struggle will be, but there is no doubt that with the general awakening of Africans in different parts of the continent of Africa the ~~present~~ policy of white domination and racial discrimination will find increasing opposition from Africans who regard it as ~~incompatible~~ incompatible with the principles of freedom and justice, and a threat to international peace and security.

The leader of the African National Congress at the present is Dr James S. Moroka, a grandson of Chief Moroka, the first African Chief to befriend the Boer emigrants who trekked from the Cape Colony in 1836 into the interior in an attempt to get away from British rule with its new-fangled ideas at the time about the freedom of ~~black~~ slaves. Dr Moroka received his early education at the famous Lovedale Missionary Institution, and afterwards qualified as a medical doctor at Edinburgh, Scotland. As a medical practitioner he has during the last ~~30~~ thirty years built a wide and lucrative practice among both whites and non-whites. But although he pays supertax, he is not regarded as a citizen in the land of his birth. Small wonder that he is devoting himself to the cause of freeing South Africa from the curse of racial ~~discrimination~~ discrimination.