

Thirty Years ago

Naturally, I became reminescent, and my thoughts went back along a corridor of thirty years, back to the initial years of the African National Congress, years of its youth, years of its vitality, and years of its strength. I remembered the stir and sensation which the Congress caused, and the terror which it excited in among illiberal Europeans when it assembled in Johannesburg in July 1913. Then, over 200 delegates came from every district in South Africa. I conjured up the Congress session I had attended at Kimberley in ^{the} January 1914, when all the giants of our race were present - President J.L. Dube, Secretary S.E. Piastje, Saul Momo, A.A. Soga, Dr W.E. Rubusana, Prince Selunga - ka Mbandeni, M. Pelem, Cleopas Momo, Chief Joshua Momo, I.T. Mvabaza, S.M. Makgatho, D. Letanka, R.W. Msimanga, P. M. Sene, Chief W.E. Fonyang, T. Maphikela, I. Dudu-M'belle, Selby Msimanga, and others - chiefs, commoners, professional men, and business men from all over the Union as well as from High Commission Territories; when the Secretary for Native Affairs - so-called - felt it incumbent upon him to attend as the ear of the Government, to keep the flame of indignation burning low, when the Mayor of Kimberley - Sir R. Oppenheimer felt it a privilege to address the Congress, when great sons of South Africa like Sir David Harris bared their heads to greet the Congress, when millionaire companies like De Beers entertained the Congress to a dinner party, when high Church dignitaries like Bishop Gore-Brown felt it an honour to be invited to open the Congress session, when the City Hall of Kimberley was thrown open to welcome and entertain the delegates to Congress, when every African felt it an imperious duty to be represented, and a personal loss to be unable to attend the Congress session, when branches sprouted and blossomed everywhere in the land, when money flowed fast into the coffers of the Congress, when the grinding provisions of the Natives' Land Act were upon us, when Deputations, costing thousands of pounds were elected and sent to England; when, when; when; It is an epic and a pageant.

There were just two unfortunate things about the Congress of these days. The first was its horrible name. They called it the "South African Native National Congress", an example of inferiority complex and slavish psychology disguised under a tautological absurdity. Imagine the French Academy in France being called the French

Native National Academy, or the British Parliament being called the British Native National Parliament'. The ~~main~~ other unfortunate thing was the absence, the non-cooperation and even antagonism of J. Tengo Jabavu - a real loss which irritated and peeved the officials of the Congress and led to innuendoes which excited reprisals, and degenerated into unsavoury personal attacks on the platform and in the Press .

Comparison and Question .

Looking at the Congress NOW, and comparing it with the Congress THEN , can it be denied that there has been decline? Who will answer that ? Can the foundation members answer ? They who saw the Congress at its inception and watched its growth from infancy to full-blown maturity : Alas ! One after another, they have gone away from us, and crossed the Great Divide , and only a very few remain. Then we must ask . Can these remaining fathers put their finger on cause of the decadence?

Can ~~it~~ you - Father Dube -First President of the Congress and Leader of English Delegations , Can you tell us why our Folk-moot , our Ndaba , our Pitso has fallen on evil days ? Or you - Citizen P.ka Seme -Father and Founder of the National Congress ! Can you say why this child of yours is listless and emaciated, anaemic and ailing ? We are not accusing , we are not casting aspersions; we are only asking , we are but consulting with you , and only crying :-

" But yesterday the word of Congress might have stood against " the world -

But now lies she there, and none so poor to do her reverence :"

Why ?

But , enough of this invidious comparison and perhaps futile cry , and in any case, the past is always glorious, and we are too apt to exalt it and hanker after it .

TO DAY

There were certain high lights in the 1942 Congress session . The Speaker was dignified, judicial, and conspicuously 'non-party', and had the meeting well in hand .The writer has reason to know this because he was called to order and cut short in the course of a peroration .The Interpreter-(the President jocularly called him the 'Interrupter')was inimitable , and obviously a master of all the South African jingoes and taals , a real humorist . But the crowning excellence was in the President and the Presidential address . He, not a very, very tall man nor a very very stout man, and his voice not exactly like the roar of

of a lion ; his address - a cool and masterly review , a penetrating and dispassionate analysis of Afro-European affairs, delivered with an appropriate air of scientific detachment and un-emotion , no futile repetitions , no woolly, amorphous, pointless ideas ; no mere grandiloquence ; no spinning, stringing together and slinging of polysyllables ; no shouting, no fist shaking and finger drilling ; no undue elevation of the voice, just a quiet, sober statement of observations and their deductions and conclusions . /It was like a drink of cool and pure water from a crystal fountain . And for a wonder, every word was faithfully reported in the Press .

Conclusion and Exhortation

There is prodigious strength in the African National Congress. Stupendous forces which we little dream of, lie in it . It is like old Africa herself , so prosaic, and outwardly unattractive at first sight, but rich beyond the dreams of avarice and only awaiting exploitation . The African National Congress is a giant, dormant, asleep. He only needs to stretch his limbs, put out his hand, and take of the luscious fruit which hangs over-ripe and ^{only} awaits picking . Such are the "freedoms", the "charters", the "securities", the "self determinations" and a host of other things that are at present reserved ~~xxxx~~ for an insignificant minority . This is no new found faith; it is a conviction of ~~xxxxxx~~ decades .

We have the right architect, and we Africans must come in our thousands to help rebuild our house, which must not be a mere hovel but an edifice, bigger, stronger and statelier even than than the original plan, and worthy of the New Africa that we are .

Every member of the African National Congress is conscious of ~~the~~ these facts . What remains is to broadcast them . What we want, then of each man is extensive recruiting with some self-denial , indifatigable advertising and some sacrifice , an all out effort to build up the Congress for Africans without studying too much the personal loss or personal advantage. In short, we want Propaganda without, ~~xxxx~~ and Proper-Gandhi within .

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