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Africa X-Ray Report



BEHIND-THE-SCENES INFORMATION ABOUT
SIGNIFICANT TRENDS
SUPPLIED BY SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS OF
INDEPENDENT INTELLIGENCE
SERVICE

April, 1958

Pretoria officials dismayed by secret reports from North.

The Africanists' anti-Communism and the A.N.C.

Calculated risks in Uganda.

New light in Africa.

PRETORIA OFFICIALS DISMAYED BY SECRET REPORTS FROM NORTH

Some senior officials of the South African Department of External Affairs confess privately today that they are very worried. They say the whole course of the current white election campaign has little relation to the portentous changes now taking shape at a bewildering pace all over Africa.

They are officials who have been studying intelligence reports coming in about developments in the French North African crisis, farther south in French Africa, in Cairo—and in Kenya and other parts of East Africa. The intelligence reports tell of:

- (1) Vigorous nationalist activities and a unity movement spreading fast throughout French Africa (the latter with headquarters in Cairo).
- (2) A spreading rebellion in the French Cameroons (in West Africa).

THE AFRICANISTS' ANTI-COMMUNISM AND THE A.N.C.

OUR PREVIOUS REPORT disclosed that a main attraction the Africanists offer in their efforts to control the African National Congress is their anti-Communism. This is apart from Africanist capitalisation on incidental grievances among members of the A.N.C. or their appeal through African nationalism to particular African self interests.

Through anti-Communism, the Africanists attract sympathy of a sort from such basically incompatible elements as certain White liberals and some of the wealthier African middle class. Otherwise these elements would have little in common with the Africanists — and even less to hope for from rabble-rousing.

Anti-Communism has also brought the Africanists some systematic press support. Sneers at “communistic influence” in the A.N.C. are common in the White press generally, especially in the Afrikaans press. And sneers are also reasonably frequent in the English dailies. Little space is made available for reasoned and informed rebuttals of the charges.

The World,* published by White owners for an African readership, has carried on a regular anti-Communist, anti-A.N.C. campaign for years, seizing avidly on every little sign of dissidence in the Congress and magnifying it out of all proportion to its significance. Some of the other “Native papers” (all White-owned, most of them by Argus Company subsidiaries) also play the same line, but none so persistently, or directly as **The World**.

One reason for this press attitude is certainly the antipathy of White businessmen and financial concerns towards the general growth of non-white political consciousness and organisation. To this the repressive policies of Dr. Verwoerd, Minister of Native Affairs, have enormously contributed. But in the case of **The World** there is a more-particular reason.

Publicity gain

This newspaper's recent chief African editor, the late Dr. J. N. Nlipo, was an ardent Moral Re-Armer. Hence he was even more strongly against Communism (or what he thought was Communism) than his employers. Thus **The World** not only ran down the Congresses for their “Communism.” It also gave the Africanists much more publicity than they intrinsically deserved — and for the same reason. The policy has been carried on since Dr. Nlipo's death, and it ensures the Africanists quite a favourable press.

How Communist is the A.N.C. in fact? Critics point to its “Commie-line foreign policy” — peace and nuclear disarmament, denunciation of Nato and Western Imperialism (Kenya, Cyprus, Malaya, British Guiana, Suez, Algeria). They refer often to the trips made by prominent A.N.C. members to Iron Curtain countries before the South African passport regulations were amended. One point of attack is the “ultra-Socialist” clauses of the Freedom Charter — though (as **Africa X-Ray** pointed out in November 1956) these are capable of interpretations which would hardly raise an eyebrow in any Western country outside South Africa.

And there are also the charges made at the treason inquiry, and prosecuting Counsel's arguments about “a communistic conspiracy.” These must be balanced at this stage by the defence argument that this is “a Reichstag fire trial” to try to suppress political opposition to the South African Government's colour policies.

*Formerly **Bantu World**, owned by a White associate company of the Argus Printing and Publishing Company, which controls about one half of South Africa's English-language daily press.

Nothing has happened since to invalidate one of our earliest reports (June 1955) which said in part:

"Western Nations appear hamstrung — "Here, our reports distinguish clearly between Communism and 'Communism.' There are few indoctrinated Communists among Africans, and Marxist-Leninist theory makes little appeal. But chosen African leaders, including conservative Christians who fight the colour bar, are banned and proscribed as 'Communists.' So — as one African politician told an Africa X-Ray observer — 'Communism begins to look like something on our side.'

"Africans say they find too few White Christians practising what they profess. The U.K. and U.S., unlike India and Russia, appear hamstrung in colour-bar debates by Clause 2 (7) of the U.N. Charter and — for reasons not obvious to Africans from their eye-level — are seen to keep friendly company with powers who deny their colonials advancing freedom."

Passport laws

The 1955 report said significantly:

"Eyes turn to East. — Before the recent law banning exit from South Africa without a passport, African intelligentsia compared Russia's willingness to allow entry to non-Whites without passports — only some of them genuine Communists — with the more formal attitude of the U.S., apparently anxious to preserve good relations with the S.A. Government. And the S.A. Government, Africans point out, refused a passport to Prof. Z. K. Matthews, a well-known non-Communist A.N.C. leader, who had just completed a year's teaching at Columbia University, New York, when he was invited to an international university-sponsored race relations conference in Rhodesia."

The report continued: "Thus the political jargon that is in vogue between the Elbe and the Yangtze, or the militant liberalism heard south of the Himalayas, have crept into the talk and articles of non-White politicians, who today are unlikely to be given a passport except to Caux. Reports reaching Africa X-Ray from several reliable quarters point to this significant trend: Africans in South Africa, blocked on all sides politically and seeing the Western powers pledged to non-interference or the status quo, are coming to the view that one main hope for them lies with the new anti-colonial powers of Asia and Eastern Europe. More and more, they are looking to the East for help."

No neutrality

And then the 1955 X-Ray report said: "A well-informed and conservative African in one of the larger towns, a clergyman, has described the spread of this feeling among Africans recently as 'widespread in the towns.' Another middle-road African commented: **'We need help now. There can be no neutrality over racial discrimination.** Those that are not with us are against us. We want Britain and America as allies, if only they seemed more urgent about the colour question — like Nehru'."

That X-Ray preview is valid today. What hostile critics now refer to as the "Commie-line foreign policy" is in fact evidence of the growing identification of the Union's Africans (and other non-Whites)

with undeveloped and colonial peoples in general – especially those in Africa. In all the circumstances, this can be readily understood. It leads inevitably to some acclaim of things Russian as “good” in themselves and of things Western as “bad.”

It is, however, true that side by side with Christian liberals and socialists (like Chief Luthuli, Oliver Tambo and Professor Z. K. Matthews), many of the A.N.C. leaders are non-denominational humanists, rationalists and so on. They vary from what in any other country would be the Centre out to the Far Left and the Farthest Left. Among the latter – and they are some of the hardest Congress workers – are members of the now dissolved Communist Party of South Africa. There is no secret about who they are. Most of them were publicly known to be members of the old Communist Party (referred to as the C.P.).

What is less clearly realised is that the driving force of the C.P. in South Africa was not, in the main, Marxist ideology, but detestation of the colour bar and all it entails. Many, probably most, of the non-White recruits to the C.P. (as well as many of its White members) joined for a particular reason – for over a quarter of a century, the C.P. was the only organisation in South Africa openly fighting the colour bar on a multi-racial basis.

Many of those people remained members of their churches as well as of the C.P. – they saw no incompatibility in the two loyalties. And it can be argued that the churches have only lately begun to earn the loyalty they have continued to receive from those on the wrong side of the colour bar.

The Communism of former C.P. members of the African National Congress is nearer to 19th Century radicalism than the 20th Century cold-war ideological Communism.

The issue of the colour bar and racial discrimination cuts right through and across all considerations of “Communism” in South Africa. One fact is clear in any analysis – ex-members of the C.P. are always found on the side of multi-racialism. They stand against any single group or race loyalty, and are thus bitterly opposed to “Africanism” in all its manifestations. Therefore there is little, if any, talk today of the “black proletariat” which featured more prominently in earlier C.P. policy in South Africa.

Situation better

Africans have certainly been influenced against the West by events in Suez, Kenya, Rhodesia, Algeria and other areas, though Ghana and Nigeria have made some impact. But the speech by Khrushchev at the 20th Soviet Congress, and Russian intervention in Hungary, despite much later rationalising (and perhaps partly because of it), have considerably loosened such ideological inflexibilities as there were. The whole intellectual situation is far more healthily fluid today.

Recent amendments to the A.N.C.'s constitution have been misread by some as the imposition of central bureaucratic control. Hostile critics say this is of a “leftist” type. But the A.N.C. leadership is in fact trying to bring about greater uniformity and cohesion between the provincial branches. (Federal fragmentation, often on some sort of ethnic basis, has long been a weakness in African politics). At the same time, the A.N.C. leadership is seeking to give more scope to local branches and regions within the framework of a unified general policy direction.

An important step towards these objectives is the division of local A.N.C. funds into three shares: one to be paid to the national executive, one to the provincial executive and one to be retained by the branch or regional body. Hitherto, provincial executives have been in a position to starve the national executive, while keeping regions and branches strictly accountable.

Even more than the national executive, local branches will benefit from this increased autonomy. Available talent will be more-widely spread. The additional flexibility is clearly designed as part preparation for the total banning of the A.N.C. which the Nationalists are always threatening, and to which they will undoubtedly be driven by their own inner and inescapable "logic." (The A.N.C. has recently been banned in certain rural tribal areas.)

The prestige of the present leadership of the A.N.C., and in particular of Chief Albert Luthuli, the President-General, has been immeasurably enhanced by the "martyrdom" of the treason trial proceedings. Chief Luthuli, until his discharge, stood out head and shoulders above the other accused of all races as their unquestioned leader. Almost alone, he quelled the excited outburst in the dock when Joe Slovo questioned the presiding magistrate's authority and was supported by a surge of accused persons towards Mr. Wessels.

Had Chief Luthuli not been listened to, the inadequate number of police present could not have prevented an ugly incident. **Significantly, no prosecution for contempt of court followed the occurrence.**

Chief Luthuli is a genuinely religious man who has come into politics because of his moral convictions. He now has a position of public loyalty and popularity unequalled since the days of Clements Kadalie (See *Africa X-Ray*, February 1958.)

Weaknesses

He works easily with the Left, the Right and the Centre, demanding only unqualified opposition to racial discrimination. His main weaknesses* are a certain inarticulateness and little indication so far of policy (as distinct from personal) direction ability. So greatly is he respected by Whites and non-Whites that much will depend on how he overcomes these disabilities in the next few years.

If Chief Luthuli's type of middle-left leadership, retaining friendly relations with those on either flank, continues – and manages to devise constructive policies to retain the initiative at present held by the Congresses – there is little serious danger of the A.N.C.'s being captured for either the destructive, retrogressive nationalism of the Africanists, or for dogmatically Far Left policies.

But if through its own shortcomings, or the continued intransigence of South African Whites, this Left-Centre leadership eventually becomes unacceptable to rank-and-file Congressmen, the alternatives are likely to be much more reckless and irresponsible. #

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand

Location:- Johannesburg

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DOCUMENT DETAILS:

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Document ID:- A2618-Cd1

Document Title:- African X-Ray Report: The Africanists' Anti-Communism and the ANC

Author:- Matthew Nkoana

Document Date:- April 1959