

A quiet man from quiet town is new President of the Africanists

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A new African political leader was introduced to the Press at Orlando this week at the end of the Pan-Africanist conference, writes Godwin Mohlomi

And for Mr. Robert Sobukwe, the man who has risen so dramatically from a "back-room boy" to top leadership, this meeting was a triumph after ten years of living with but one purpose in life — African Nationalism.

A surprise

Although he had been tipped by "The World" as first national president of the P.A.C., his election came as a surprise to

other reporters. They showed keen interest in the smartly-dressed, soft-spoken Sobukwe.

And, one of the reporters who fired most — and sometimes difficult — questions was Mr. Robert Resha, "New Age" reporter, treason trialist and a member of the rival A.N.C. national executive.

Lay preacher

But they did not rattle the calm Africanist. He answered all questions quietly in his deep voice, courteously and without hesitation.

Some of his calmness may have been bred into him, when, 30 years ago he spent his childhood in the sleepy town of Graaff Reinet, in the Karroo.

There, Mr. Sobukwe remembers, he went every Sunday with his parents to the Methodist Church. From a member of the congregation he rose to become a lay preacher and still is to-day.

From Graaff-Reinet, Mr. Sobukwe moved to Fort Beaufort where he took the teachers' lower primary course. Soon his teachers saw that he was a brilliant scholar and he was awarded a scholarship to write the Junior Certificate examination.

By 1946 he had matriculated and again moved — this time to Fort Hare University Col-

lege where he took his arts degree.

And this was the turning point in his outlook. Politics gripped him for the first time. This was more than ten years ago.

Ironically it was Native Administration that was to give fuel to his political thoughts. He puts it like this:

While studying the subject he saw that a lot in it was unfair and then the young student took his first active step in politics.

In trouble

And already then he showed a glimpse of the rebel in him against the A.N.C.

He helped found the A.N.C. youth branch at the university, rejected the policy of the All-African Convention and instead chose the ideology of African nationalism.

His educational and political training complete, Mr. Sobukwe moved to the Transvaal where he was to run into trouble with authority.

In Standerton

It came soon. When the 1952 defiance campaign started, Mr. Sobukwe, a Government teacher, went to the fore and became one of its leaders in the Standerton area.

But the Government stepped in quickly. Two inspectors from the Department of Education visited him and questioned him.

By November of that year he was fired.

Friends went to plead on his behalf. Mr. Sobukwe was given back his job — on condition he took no part in politics.

But these were conditions that the man whose imagination had been gripped by nationalism knew he could not comply with for long.

Suddenly the answer came.

A lecturer at Witwatersrand University resigned, Mr. Sobukwe applied and got a job — where he could again actively work for his people and his ideals.

Since 1954, Mr. Sobukwe has lectured in Zulu at the university. A number of Europeans in Government and municipal jobs have passed through his hands.

At his home in Mofolo, Mr. Sobukwe has a nurse-wife and four children.

But where-ever he is, at work or at home, you can be sure that one thought is never far from his mind — the idea and the ideal of the ideology that snatched him ten years ago — African nationalism.

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