

All-Africa Talks In Tunis

AFRICA looks like becoming the first continent to develop a parliament of its own. There were all the makings of an African Parliament in the second All-African People's Conference (AAPC) which met in Tunis at the beginning of the year.

The AAPC is growing up fast, and becoming much more representative. Foreign and other Ministers and diplomats took their places as ordinary members alongside the 200 nationalist leaders who came from 30 African territories.

There are still notable gaps in the membership. None of the governments of the French Community came, although opposition leaders from these territories were present. Of the independent countries, only Libya, the Sudan and the Cameroons Republic were not represented.

South Africa took the lead by being the first country to be represented by delegates of different races. Tennyson Makiwane, the agile representative of the African National Congress in Europe, and Patrick van Rensburg, a former South African diplomat and representative of the Liberal Party, were both recognised as fully accredited delegates.

Trade union agreement

The rapid growth of the AAPC has naturally produced its growing-pains. Early on, the conference showed signs of strong differences of opinion, although all delegates were agreed on the fundamentals of immediate independence for all African territories, and resistance to all forms of new-colonialism (a subject on which we heard a great deal). The chief point of difference was over the future of trade union organisation in Africa.

This was an issue that had led to controversy before the conference even started. On the one side were Tom Mboya of Kenya and M. Tlilla of Tunisia, who presided over the conference, and on the other, Ghana and Guinea.

The points of difference are clear. Although everybody is agreed that African trade unions should be linked to the struggle for independence, and that there should be an All-African Federation of Trade Unions (AAFTU), there is disagreement on whether individual trade unions should maintain their present links with other international trade union organisations, such as the Western-orientated ICFTU, or the Communist-orientated WFTU.

Ghana and Guinea, strongly supported by the United Arab Republic and Morocco, believe that the policy of non-commitment is violated by association with either of these two international labour organisations.

Anti-isolation plea

Kenya and Tunisia, supported by Liberia, Nigeria and Tanganyika, insist that their affiliations with the ICFTU in no way imperil their independence.

Although Tom Mboya could not attend the conference — he was too busy talking about the future of his own country in London — he sent a recording of his views on this subject.

"The AAFTU," he said, "is essential to develop a purely African personality in trade union affairs. But it is essential that this personality should not become isolated. It must express itself through international organisations."

His opponents disagreed.

In the end the conference unanimously agreed "to forget" previous disagreements over setting up the AAFTU, and decided to start from scratch by convening a fresh conference of trade union leaders in Casablanca in May. Here the argument will begin again.

There was also considerable criticism because the AAPC had no written constitution. This argument was happily resolved with the adoption of a proper constitution.

The two key posts in the AAPC are now held by Guinea and Ghana. The former's nominee is Secretary-General for three years, and Mr. Kojo Botsio, Ghana's Minister of Economic Development, is secretary of the Steering Committee.

The affairs of the AAPC will be conducted by a Steering Committee of members drawn from each of the member countries.

The atmosphere of the meeting in Tunis was determined by three factors. First, it met at the time when the extremists among the Algerian settlers were in rebellion against France itself. The fact that the Algerian Provisional Government — the FLN insurgent movement — has its seat in Tunis greatly added to the tensions of those anxious days.

Non-violence favoured

The leaders of the FLN played a prominent role in sharpening the determination of the delegates. Their proposal to start an International Brigade to fight with the FLN was enthusiastically received. But it is unlikely that very much more will be heard of this proposal in the near future.

At the previous conference in Accra there had been considerable discussion as to whether or not violence should be used in the struggle for independence. Dr. Nkrumah and Tom Mboya took the initiative in arguing in favour of non-violence as a policy, unless violence was imposed by the colonial powers on the independence movements.

In Tunis this issue was hardly debated. The President of Tunisia, M. Bourguiba, pronouncing himself in favour of non-violence, added that, in the achievement of independence, all methods of struggle were equally respectable. Conference left it at that.

The second important factor was the announcement of the unexpected decision at Brussels that the Belgian Congo would achieve its independence on June 30. Conference lost its head.

The third factor was the all-pervasive influence of the Tunisians and their beloved leader, President Bourguiba. Here is an independent African state at which few people can point an accusatory finger. Its policies are tolerant. Corruption is virtually unknown. The people accept self-discipline. The machinery of government works smoothly, and relatively efficiently. Just being in

Tunisia was enough to radiate a feeling of confidence and optimism.

One other aspect of the Tunis meeting is worth mentioning. It attracted, in addition to the 200 delegates, a large number of foreign observers — including Russians, Americans, Chinese, Yugoslavs, Italians, Indians, Germans and British.

But no non-Africans were allowed to play any part in the conference. A request by the Soviet delegation to speak from the podium was politely but firmly turned down.

The AAPC is for Africans only; but for Africans irrespective of their race, colour or creed. The only qualification is that they should believe in the broad principles of Pan-Africanism with its vision of a united, independent and non-committed African continent, freed not only from colonialism, but equally from racial discrimination in every form. ●



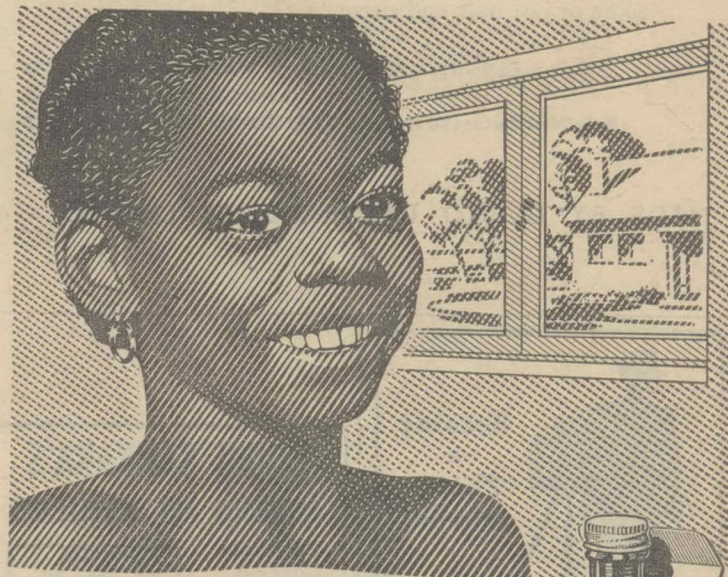
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