

JOHANNESBURG

August 2, 1959.

Subject: Pan-Africanist Congress.

Source: Myself, and others where stated.

On Sunday, August 2, I attended the Witwatersrand regional meeting of the Pan-Africanist Congress, at the Comunal Hall, Orlando, J.G. I enclose these papers: (A.) Programme. (B) Copy of July-August "Africanist".

The meeting, which was due to start at 9 am, began at 11.5. Sobukwe ~~gave~~ told me the reason was probably because a fund-raising braai ~~had~~ been held on the two previous evenings. When the meeting began, there were about 150 in the hall - all Africans. By lunch-time, this figure had increased to a bit more than 200. I was the only white present. Otherwise, the crowd was ~~almost~~ largely made up of African males, only a scattering of women being present.

At the back of the stage and in front of it, were large cloth banners, reading: "Africa for the Africans, Cape to Cairo, Morocco to Madagascar." On the walls of the hall were cloth and paper banners reading: "Imperialists quit Africa", "Africa for Africans", ~~Free Dr Banda~~, "Free Kaunda and Banda", and "Izwe Lethu iAfrika" (Africa return to us.)

After the anthem and a ~~few~~ short prayer (in the vernacular and by a lay-man), Z.D. Sivisa ~~former~~ ANC Sophiatown chairman and chairman of the ANC Western Areas Region and now chairman of the PAC Wits. region) who was in the chair, welcomed the crowd and made a few introductory remarks (in the vernacular). Then straight on to item 4 on the ~~main~~ agenda, with R. Nziba introducing the national exec. members (who were on the platform) and then the regional exec. All this was done in the vernacular, with Nziba saying a few words about each person, who would then rise and with thumb lifted, shout "Izwe", to which the crowd responded. The national exec. members were: Sobukwe, S. Ngendane, Nyace, P. Raboroko, ~~and~~ P. Leballo and Z. Mathopeng.

Raboroko now read the text of "Our national heroes" (item 7 agenda and page 20 in booklet). Then Peter Moliti read the life of Lebede (item 5 agenda, page 11 in booklet). It was now 2.15 pm, and the meeting adjourned for lunch. I left at this stage, having been told by Sobukwe and Leballo that it was unlikely that any discussion would be taken, and that the meeting would simply go on reading from the booklet. I was also told that one resolution might be taken - on the status campaign. Leballo was supposed to phone me later at home, but did not do so.

In between the various lengthy speeches, songs were sung by the crowd, albeit in a somewhat desultory fashion.

~~Comments~~ Before I left, I asked for the membership figures. Leballo gave them to me, stressing that they were only up to Friday, July 31, and that many more had arrived since then which had not been included. He claimed a paid-up membership of 24,664 in 101 branches throughout the country. I asked what the reasons were for the failure to reach the previously-announced target of 100,000 by July 31. He answered in terms of "difficulties of finance and inexperience in organisation." He added: "We are very hopeful now because the pace of work of our ~~branches~~ branches is increasing rapidly." He said that the 100,000 target would be set now for December 16 - when the Africanists planned to hold their first national conference.

COMMENTS: 1) I have made a point of mentioning the late starting of this conference, because I was very surprised by it. When the Africanists first got going, a quite remarkable feature of their inaugural conference was their time-keeping - and this was so exact that it threw the ANC's sloppiness in this respect into sharp relief. My strict adherence to starting-times and to the agenda certainly impressed me as being indicative of a sense of purpose and of a possibly more mature outlook than the ANC in regard to organisation. But today, it was like any other African meeting, and the similarity was even greater in that there was no reprimand from the platform for the late start (the people on the platform - national and regional exec - also being ~~very~~ hopelessly late. It's perhaps a small point, but interesting nevertheless. 2) The number of speeches in the vernacular was far greater than one normally encounters at ANC meetings, and is almost certainly part and parcel of the Africanist outlook. In fact, at the first conference, Sobukwe said that English was being used a lot, but that this would change in time for the vernaculars. I might add that during the past week, he told me that though his speech would be in the booklet in English, he might give it in the vernacular. 3) Oddly enough, the booklets were not being distributed up to the time that I left. They were stacked in a neat pile under the table, and only a couple of people on the platform had copies. When I said I wanted to return to my office to write a story, Leballo gave me his personal copy, and he would give me a second one (for which I asked) during the week. What this was all about, I really don't know, unless the big boys decided that the booklet containing the speeches should only be sold after the delivery of the speeches so that people would have to listen to what was said. 4) There also seemed to be a little bit of embarrassment when I asked for the membership figures. Coincidentally or otherwise, the national executive members were called into a huddle by Sobukwe in an adjoining room as soon as I asked for the booklet and the figures. After a few minutes, they emerged and Leballo gave me a copy and the figures. I was not surprised if my requests were in fact the subject of discussion - the reason being that in this crowd, they seem to be very, very jealous of their positions and authority, and seem to resent any one executive member doing things without their knowledge and agreement of the others. This might have been an example of this. 5) In regard to the validity of the figures, it is impossible to judge them at this stage. I have been promised full access to the records for a personal check, but it remains to be seen if this will still be allowed. But otherwise, on the face value, I am not altogether disinclined to accept the stated membership figures - in terms of the total African population, and even allowing for the comparatively small number of politically semi-conscious ones, the total figure is by no means very great. On the other hand, today's meeting was that of the Witwatersrand, and for only about 200 to come speaks poorly of the organisation and enthusiasm of the region. 6) I did not see Madzunya at the meeting, and will have to check on this - it might be an indication of a growing split, as there has been a certain amount of friction between him and the big boys in recent weeks. 7) This meeting was as dull as ditch-water. There was no real spirit, this being best indicated by only sporadic and half-hearted applause of speakers (not of course that what was said in the morning merited such applause), and in the completely lifeless and desultory singing. This latter aspect is of course quite a characteristic of ANC meetings, and the nature of the singing is usually a fair indication of the feeling of the meeting. But this crowd lacked gusto and simply sat and listened. Perhaps it indicates a new kind of African rank and file, who believes more in deeds and controls his emotions....but I don't really think so. 7) Looking at the crowd, I was struck by the fact, that there were few really poorly-dressed among them, and in fact, many were very nattily dressed. This was in marked contrast to the ANC, where the number of people obviously in dire poverty is very high. 7) The various speeches speak for themselves and do not, I think, require comment. I shall of course do an intensive follow-up to this conference as possible, and will write further later.

ends.

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