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was beginning to crumble. The chiefs were becoming less and less the independent leaders and democratic spokesmen of their peoples; moving towards making them its obedient agents and civil servants, liable to instant dismissal for disobedience. Hence it was that the dream of Moshoeshe was furthered not by Chiefs, as independent rulers, but by a new class—the class of intellectual leaders and professional men who everywhere in the world have played such a vital part in the early stages of national liberation movements.

John L. Dube, leader of the Natal Native Congress was elected president and Sol T. Plaatje was first general secretary. The Vice-Presidents were Dr. W. B. Rubusana, Meshach Pelem, A. Mangena and S. M. Makgatho, leader of the Transvaal Native Congress.

Who were these men?

SEME: A lawyer, was, like Gandhi and Abdurahman, a graduate of a British university. Born in Natal he began his legal practice in Johannesburg in 1910. He was legal adviser to the Swazi people.

PLAATJE: Born at Boshof and educated at a mission school he became a court interpreter and newspaper editor. He was on the first ANC delegation to Britain in 1913 and wrote a book on the visit, 'Native Life in South Africa,' the first of the very few political histories by South African Africans. He was also a writer of literary and poetical works.

DUBE: Founder of Ilange Lase Natal in 1906, he was a Methodist parson.

RUBUSANA: Later to be the first and only African ever elected to a South African Provincial Council, an Honorary Ph.D. of McKinley University and the first African moderator to be appointed by the Congregational Union of South Africa.

PELEM: Was a teacher, later an interpreter, and then a recruiter of African labour for the railways.

MAKGATHO: Son of a chief, he was educated in England and became a teacher at Kilnerton. A large landowner, he was president of the Transvaal African Union from 1906 and later of the Transvaal Native Congress.

A. MANGENA: The first African to qualify as an advocate, he practised as an attorney in Johannesburg.

The structure of Congress, at the beginning, reflected this alliance between middle-class intellectuals and Chiefs. The Constitution was modelled to a considerable extent on American, and especially on British, parliamentary institutions and procedures. Congress was divided into a lower and an upper House. Paramount Chief Letsie II of Basutoland was unanimously elected governor of the Upper House—the House of Chiefs, who held their positions for life. There was a speaker, a sergeant-at-arms, and all the rest.

a chaplain.

Loyalty

Congress statements were full of eulogies to the British king and pledges of loyalty and devotion. They stressed that it was the chiefs and their loyal African subjects who were the true servants of imperialism, while the Boers, in whom so much faith was placed by the Crown, were potential traitors.

ANC, and he and Imvo fulminated on the "Northern Native Extremists" who endangered "the political freedom we have long enjoyed" in the Cape.

The purpose of Union, as we have seen, was partly in order to enable the state to drive the Africans off their land into the cities, and the means of doing this—the Land Act of 1913—was announced almost immediately after Union.

The fight against the Land Act was the ANC's first fight.

It decided to send a deputation to Britain to plead against the Act. Futile as the deputation itself was, the collection of the money at mass meetings all over the country and in intensive propaganda done, served to arouse the political consciousness of the people.

The reactionaries did everything possible to hamper the campaign. Sneered Jabavu's Imvo: "A 'Native Congress' of busybodies in other people's affairs . . . talk such twaddle . . . they must take the Imperial Government for a pack of simpletons to grant interviews on such supremely laughable errands." The government banned a number of ANC meetings called to discuss the appeal to Britain.

APO and ANC

The APO had welcomed the formation of the ANC with the greatest warmth, and the two organisations were firm allies. An attack by Jabavu on Abdurahman in 1913 drew from Saul Msane, one of the most militant Congress leaders of the period, this scathing reply: "In your career of political sycophancy and legerdemain you have at length involved yourself in such a position that you do not dare to come out openly and stoutly in defence of your own countrymen . . . Unlike Dr. Abdurahman you evidently fear to be called a red-tide agitator. We want no contemptible cowards in this crisis."

The ANC deputation against the Land Act duly set sail for Britain and were rebuffed.

South Africa, like the rest of the British Empire, immediately joined Britain in the war; Botha and Smuts invaded South-West Africa (then a German colony) and South African troops were sent to fight in Europe.

The A.N.C., like the A.P.O. and the Indian Congress, unhesitatingly decided to support the war effort, in the hope that Britain would recognise their loyalty and take steps to improve the position of their people. These hopes were bitterly disappointed. All that happened was that the Congress organisations ceased their agitation and lost ground during the war years. It was a setback from which the A.P.O., in particular, never recovered.

But the war served as the impetus for the development of a new force in South African politics: the International Socialist League, later to become the Communist Party of South Africa, which was to break with the sterile colour-bar policies of the Labour Party and to make an invaluable contribution to the national liberation movement of the oppressed people of the country.

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Nor did Congress have any of the class-consciousness manifested so clearly in the APO. One of the very first ANC-sponsored conferences, that at Kimberley in July, 1913—the time of a particularly bloody strike by white miners—adopted a resolution 'that the Natives dissociated themselves entirely from the industrial struggles on the Witwatersrand and elsewhere and preferred to seek redress for their grievances through constitutional rather than by violent means.'

Can this be read as a criticism of the Congress of that period? Of course not. For Congress in its early years was a creature of its environment and it was similar to other early national movements born under comparable conditions.

The early policy statements, for example, of the leaders of the Indian National Congress in India were in many cases identical almost word for word with those of the A.N.C. Said R. C. Dutt, Indian Congress President in 1901: "The people of India are not fond of sudden changes and revolutions. They desire to strengthen the present government, and to bring it more in touch with the people." And while an earlier president had declared "The educated classes are the friends and not the foes of England—the natural and necessary allies in the great work that lies before her."

Similarly too, early government policy both in India and South Africa was not to discourage the Congresses but to treat them as a safety valve and to patronise them.

Does this mean that the ANC was, in its early years, a reactionary force? On the contrary, the ANC represented the most progressive politically organised force among the African people and its nature was determined by the fact that the African working class was still comparatively small and completely unorganised.

In later years, as the power of the chiefs declined and that of the lawyers, doctors, traders, priests, and clerks—whose outlook corresponds with that of the class known in Europe as the 'petit-bourgeoisie'—grew, Congress became more militant, developing into a typical example of a 'bourgeois-national' organisation, its attention being focussed on the struggle to establish a place for the African small businessman in the economy.

These words of Seme's, before the ANC's 20th Annual Conference, put the Congress philosophy at that period in a nutshell: "Most of the failures which the Africans have met in business so far have been largely due to the fact that Native businessmen do not and cannot count upon any steady support from our own people. . . . Through this Congress we can and

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Through this Congress we can and should create our own markets and enough employment for our sons and daughters . . . Let us through this Congress come together and ask the government to give us land wherein we may develop ourselves."

(During and after the Second World War—as the African working class became a great force and began to make its weight felt, the Congress again moved forward, becoming the militant, principled body we know today.)

Step Forward

Jabavu played no part in the foundation conference of the

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