

# THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

NATIONAL OFFICE:  
Jan Smuts House  
University of the Witwatersrand  
Johannesburg  
South Africa



Telex: 4-27291 SA  
Fax: National (011) 403-1926  
International + 27 11 403-1926

POSTAL ADDRESS:  
P.O. Box 31596  
Braamfontein  
2017  
South Africa

Cables: "INSINTAFF" Johannesburg  
Telephone: National (011) 339-2021  
International + 27 11 339-2021

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## AFRICANISM ON THE MARCH: OLD IDEAS, NEW DIRECTIONS

The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania emerged from the shadows at a recent Consultative Conference in Harare where the organisation's leadership held three days of talks with delegates from inside South Africa.

The talks covered a wide range of topics but the issues which dominated the discussions were negotiations, internal mobilisation, armed struggle and unity with other liberation movements. They were intended to inform the exiled leadership on prevailing conditions inside South Africa and to present the internal delegates with an opportunity to question, criticise and discuss PAC policies and strategies.

### SIGNIFICANCE

The revival of Africanism in South Africa, evident since the mid-1980s, continues to strengthen its major proponent, the PAC. The meeting between eight PAC Central Committee members - including Johnson Mlambo (chairman), Ahmed Gora Ebrahim (Secretary for Foreign Affairs), Joe Mkwanazi (Administrative Secretary) and Lesaoana Makhanda (Secretary for Labour) - and some 22 delegates "from home" represented the first such meeting involving the leadership of the PAC.

Its major "rival", the African National Congress (ANC), has participated in many similar meetings since Dakar in 1987 but the conference in Harare represented the first occasion that the PAC has been involved. Unlike the ANC meetings which to date have been characterised by a fairly high degree of dissenting opinion, particularly on the issues of armed struggle and sanctions, the PAC conference was able to adopt a final statement which reiterated the organisation's stand on armed struggle - that it will continue - and on sanctions, where the organisation has repeatedly called on the international community to impose comprehensive mandatory sanctions against Pretoria.

It is thus clear that the ANC is attempting to reconcile views which at times are extremely divergent while the Africanists, albeit with a smaller constituency, do display a far greater degree of unity. In addition the conference should be seen, at least in part, as a consequence of the growth of the PAC and the increasingly important role it plays in the South African drama, and in part a response to recent developments inside the country.

The strong diplomatic representation - including the United

Kingdom, the United States, Red China and the Soviet Union - at the only "open" session of the conference was clear evidence of the growth of the PAC's influence in the international community. As a matter of interest the PAC has tripled its diplomatic representation since 1985 and now has more "foreign envoys" than the Republic of South Africa and only a few less than the ANC.

The available evidence would suggest that the renewed international interest in the PAC and Africanism is related to the revival of the PAC, as demonstrated in various academic research papers, rather than a case of the international community "hedging its bets."

#### THE CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS ANALYSED

As mentioned above four issues dominated the proceedings and sparked lively debate among the PAC members and the delegates from South Africa who included lawyers, churchmen, journalists, trade unionists and academics.

The negotiation issue, specifically the role of the PAC in such a process, occupied most of the first day, and the salient features of the debate included:

- \* an indication of a more flexible approach than the PAC has previously been given credit for;
- \* that unconditional negotiations are out of the question and that certain conditions must be met before the PAC would consider participating;
- \* that the "time was not right" for negotiations at this point in South Africa's history;
- \* a common and shared perception that the SA government was not serious in its stated intention to negotiate;
- \* that no negotiated settlement which involved the concept of groups could succeed.

The PAC declared itself willing to consider participation in a negotiation process only if the "five pillars" of apartheid were removed first. This implies the removal from the statute books of the Population Registration Act, the Land Acts of 1913 and 1936, the Acts which created the Bantustans, the SA Constitution Act of 1983 (which created the tricameral Parliament), and the Bantu Education Act. These demands are nothing new as far as the PAC is concerned and with the exception of the 1983 tricameral constitution all date back to the founding congress of the PAC in 1959.

But, whatever its preconditions, the meeting did not rule out the possibility of entering a negotiation process at some future date and that represents some significant movement on the part of the PAC.

The issue of unity received considerable attention, but the overriding impression to emerge from the meeting was that a united liberation struggle in South Africa did not seem to be a viable proposition in the short to medium term. While all the delegates emphasised the importance of a unified effort,

there was little in the way of concrete suggestions as to how such unity could be forged. The major issues separating the Africanists from the ANC "Charterist" position remains the suspicion with which the Africanists regard the SA Communist Party and the role of white "groups" - such as the Five Freedoms Forum, Black Sash etc - in the "struggle" as well as what the Africanists call the "lack of direction" by the ANC.

The Africanists draw a clear distinction between white South Africans as individuals who accept African socialist majority rule (and are thus welcome) and whites who see themselves as part of a "group" attempting to influence the course of the liberation struggle for (usually) selfish ends. (These are not welcome).

The PAC reaffirmed its commitment to armed struggle as the principle means of achieving liberation. Arguments were presented against the current PAC policy of instructing its cadres in the Azanian People's Liberation Army, the PAC's military wing, to attack only members of the security forces.

It was suggested that in order to make the war "intolerable" to whites APLA insurgents should be instructed to take the war out of the townships and into white areas.

There was no response from the PAC to this suggestion but it seems likely that the PAC tactic of attacking only security force personnel will remain official policy for at least the medium term.

On the internal mobilisation dimension it was suggested by delegates that the formation of the Pan Africanist Movement, scheduled for early December, will provide the PAC with a "sympathetic" mass movement inside the country on the same lines as the Mass Democratic Movement supports the ANC. The formation of PAM will provide the PAC with a potential (and nominally independent) internal mobilisation mechanism, the first time it has enjoyed such a position since its formation in 1959.

Delegates also suggested that the PAC should seriously consider putting forward clearly formulated economic and constitutional guidelines (such as the ANC guidelines) in order to facilitate the internal mobilisation mechanisms. It can be expected that such a PAC document will emerge sometime in the near future.

#### CONCLUSION

The PAC will continue to play "second fiddle" in the liberation struggle in South Africa, and clearly it trails the ANC in terms of apparent mass support, resources and acceptance as an authentic "voice of the people". However, recent and current developments in South Africa, particularly those associated with negotiation, could severely test the ANC's support base, especially if the organisation is perceived to be conceding too much too quickly by its volatile and often unpredictable constituency. The PAC may benefit from this situation. But whatever road lies ahead the PAC is set to play an increasingly important role.