

Bantu lecturer leads "Africanists"

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From a Special Correspondent

JOHANNESBURG (by Air Mail).—A tall, smooth-speaking South African University lecturer has emerged as a new and still unknown element in South African politics. He is Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, an African, of whom more may well be heard.

At the age of 35, he was elected this month as chairman of the newly-founded Pan-African Congress, which can best be described briefly as a "purified" African movement which rejects collaboration with white people in the struggle to bring about the aims of African nationalists.

Sobukwe is lecturer in Bantu languages at Witwatersrand University here. He heads a breakaway group of former members of the African National Congress, who are generally known as "Africanists." His principle may be summed up in a statement he made recently: "We do not believe in the multi-racialism of the African National Congress because multi-racialism is nothing but racialism multiplied.

"In the hands of the African National Congress it has become a formula for safeguarding white and Indian minority interests and in the Africa that we are striving for there will be no racial groups, but only individuals."

The Pan-African Congress was founded at a national meeting in the Johannesburg township of Orlando in protest against what Sobukwe and his followers call "the white domination of the African liberation movement."

AIM OF MOVEMENT

There are wheels within wheels in this situation. For the accusation of "white domination" of the South African Congress Movement has been frequently heard in the past six months. The target of the new "Africanist" move-

ment are the members of the Congress of Democrats, a body chiefly composed of former members of the banned Communist Party, who now form the European wing of the Congress Movement. Some idea of what is going on to-day can be gained from that fact.

Two of Sobukwe's lieutenants—Potlako Leballo and Joseph Madzunya — have often openly accused the present African National Congress leadership of dancing to the tune played by their Communist (white) members.

On this point, Sobukwe said: "Whenever one calls a man a Communist at the present juncture and one uses the word in a derogatory sense, one is automatically listed among the reactionaries." There is no doubt, however, that the creation of the new Pan-African Congress was largely inspired by strongly anti-Communist African nationalism, seeking its cue from Dr Nkrumah, Prime Minister of Ghana, rather than from the leaders of the Communist world.

The extent of Pan-African Congress support is as yet an unknown quantity. Some 300 Africans were present at the meeting at which it was born, but that does not mean to say that many more Africans do not support and belong to it. Sobukwe merely promises that he will reveal the total membership figures at some later date, and it is likely that the more this move is delayed the more the membership will be.

Since it may have some influence on the future of racial affairs in the southern part of the African continent, it is worth while examining the beliefs of its leader.

They are briefly expressed by the statement by Sobukwe when he said: "All white parties—whether they are nationalist, like the present Government, middle-of-the-road, like the United (Opposition) Party, or so-called 'Progressive,' like the Liberal Party

and the Congress of Democrats—are out to safeguard white interests.

"This also applies to the South African Indian Congress. The Indian Congress is dominated by the Indian mercantile class. As soon as the poor Indians throw up a leader of their own they will be welcomed within our ranks, since they, too, are among the oppressed in this country.

"The white man will have a place in the Africa of the future only if he regards himself to be an African. There will be no special provisions to safeguard his group interests, since our basis will be 'One man, one vote.'"

POSITION AT UNIVERSITY

Sobukwe, himself, is an interesting character. He started his career as a garden boy in Cape Province, but had the ambition and the ability to work his way up to a Bachelor of Arts degree at the all-African Fort Hare University College. He is now one of two African lecturers at the Witwatersrand University. As a member of the steadily growing African middle class in South Africa, he lives with his wife and four children in the native township of Mofolo.

Most of his fellow-Africans doubtless regard his position in life, as compared with their own, as one of luxury. But how long he will hold on to it remains to be seen, since there are reports the university authorities may take steps in view of his political activities.

One University spokesman has been quoted as saying: "We firmly base ourselves on academic freedom, but we may ask Sobukwe to resign his position as chairman of the Pan-African Congress since this would interfere with his work at the university." To which possible hint Sobukwe has replied: "The choice will be easy. I would resign my post as lecturer. I can't go back at this stage, even if it means poverty."

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- **Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand**

Location:- **Johannesburg**

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DOCUMENT DETAILS:

Document ID:- **A2618-Cp2-4-13**

Document Title:- **The Scotsman: Bantu lecturer leads "Africanists"**

Author:- **The Scotsman, Edinburgh**

Document Date:- **21 April 1959**