

A section of the "African Claims" offered by the ANC to the government of the Union of South Africa in late 1943 included an assessment of the "Atlantic Charter" agreed to by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill in the summer of 1941. The terms of the Atlantic Charter are provided in single quotation marks below, followed by the assessments offered by the ANC committee members assigned this project. What do these observations reveal about the ANC and its fundamental goals?

The Atlantic Charter

(From the standpoint of Africans within the Union of South Africa.)

FIRST POINT - NO AGGRANDISEMENT

'Their countries seek no aggrandisement, territorial or otherwise'.

In this article there is very important assurance which is intended to exonerate the Allied Nations from the charge of having entered into this war for territorial gains or imperialistic reasons. With that understanding we support the principle contained in this article and hope that the rejection of aggrandisement in the War Aims of the Allied Nations is genuine and well meant. Having regard, however to the possible danger of aggrandisement in the form of the extension of the Mandates System which was instituted after the last Great War, in spite of similar assurances in President Wilson's FOURTEEN POINTS, and also to the possibility of 'annexation' of certain African territories though their economic strangulation under veiled forms of assistance, we have deemed it necessary to make these three reservations.

Firstly, the status and independence of Abyssinia [Ethiopia] and her right to sovereignty must be safeguarded, and any political and economic assistance she may need must be freely negotiated by her and be in accordance with her freely expressed wishes. Abyssinia should be afforded a corridor into the sea for purposes of trade and direct communication with the outside world.

Secondly, we urge that as a fulfilment of the War Aim of the Allied Nations namely, to liberate territories and peoples under foreign domination, the former Italian colonies in Africa should be granted independence and their security provided for under the future system of World Security.

Thirdly, there are the anxieties of Africans with regard to British Protectorates in Southern Africa. It is well known that the Union of South Africa is negotiating for the incorporation of the three Protectorates of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland and that incorporation might be pressed during or after this present war as part of South Africa's price for participation in this war. The schedule to the South Africa Act of 1909 did envisage the transfer, under certain conditions, of territories to the Union of South Africa, but Africans were not contracting parties to these arrangements and they do not regard the provisions of the schedule as morally and politically binding on them. They would deprecate any action on the part of Great Britain which would bring about the extension of European political control at the expense of their vital interests. Africans, therefore, are definitely opposed to the transfer of the Protectorates to the South African State.

SECOND POINT - NO TERRITORIAL CHANGES

'They desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned'.

This statement is intended to refer to territorial changes which have been brought about in Europe by military aggression. It is clear, however, that territorial changes are also being discussed in regard to other parts of the world. We are mainly concerned with such changes in so far as they related to the African continent, and in this connection mention has to be made to the suggested territorial changes in regard to West Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa under a system of regional regrouping as outlined in the recent speeches and writings of Field Marshal Smuts.

We hope that the mistakes of the past whereby African people and their lands were treated as pawns in the political game of European nations will not be repeated, and we urge that before such changes are effected there must be effective consultation and that the suggested changes must be in accord with the freely expressed wishes of the indigenous inhabitants. Further, where territorial changes have taken place in the past and have not resulted in the political and other advancement of the Africans living in those territories or colonies it would be a mistake to continue to maintain the status quo after the war. The objective of promoting self-government for colonial peoples must be actively pursued by powers having such lands under their administrative control, and this objective should also be a matter of international concern more than has been the case in the past.

THIRD POINT - THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT

"They respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them'.

The principle of Self Determination made famous by President Wilson is his FOURTEEN POINTS on behalf of small nations has been reaffirmed by this article of the charter. This principle of self determination necessarily raises not only issues relating to the independent existence of small nations besides their more powerful neighbours but those also concerning the political rights and status of minorities and of Africans now held under European tutelage.

In the African continent in particular, European aggression and conquest has resulted in the establishment of Alien governments which, however beneficent they might be in intention or in fact, are not accountable to the indigenous inhabitants. Africans are still very conscious of the loss of their independence, freedom and the right of choosing the form of government under which they will live. It is the inalienable right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live and therefore Africans welcome the belated recognition of this right by the Allied Nations.

We believe that the acid test of this third article of the charter is its application to the African continent. In certain parts of Africa it should be possible to accord Africans sovereign rights and to establish administrations of their own choosing. But in other parts of Africa where there are the peculiar circumstances of a politically entrenched European minority ruling a majority African population the demands of the Africans for full citizenship rights and direct participation in all the councils of the state should be recognised. This is most urgent in the Union of South Africa.

FORTH POINT - THE OPEN DOOR POLICY IN TRADE AND RAW MATERIALS

"They will endeavour, with due regard for their existing obligations, to further the enjoyment of all states, great and small, victor or vanquished, of access, on equal terms, to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity.

There is envisaged by this article an Open Door Policy in regard to trade and the distribution of the world's resources. Africa has figured prominently in the discussions on the better distribution of the world resources and of free international trade because of her rich raw materials most of which have not as yet been fully tapped. The exploitation that is suggested by the above article, judging by past experiences and present economic evils, raises in our minds considerable misgivings as likely to bring about a continuation of the exploitation of African resources to the detriment of her indigenous inhabitants and the enrichment of foreigners.

We are, however, in agreement with the necessity for the technical and economic utilisation of a country's resources with due regard for the human welfare and the economic improvement of the indigenous inhabitants. The primary obligation of any government is to promote the economic advancement of the peoples under its charge and any obligation, agreement, contract or treaty in conflict with this primary obligation should not be countenanced.

In our view it is essential that any economic assistance that might be rendered to weak and insufficiently developed African States should be of such a nature as will really promote their economic progress.

FIFTH POINT – ECONOMIC COLLABORATION AND IMPROVED LABOUR STANDARDS

'They desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations on the economic field with the object of securing for all improved labour standards, economic advancement and Social Security'.

This article of the charter has reference to the International Labour Office as the machinery by which nations shall collaborate in economic affairs. The Governments of African states have fully participated in the deliberations and exchange of ideas in regard to the promotion of improved living standards and industrial peace. For this reason Africans are vitally interested in the decisions and conventions of the International Labour Office.

But it is regrettable that conventions dealing with the welfare of the African labour - Forced Labour, Migrant or Recruited Labour, Health and Housing, Wage Rates - that have been drawn up at Geneva and accepted by the majority of civilised states have, for selfish reasons, been either rejected or half-heartedly applied by African governments whose protestations at being civilised have been loudest. Thus Africa has not to any large extent felt the beneficent influence of the International Labour Organisation.

Hitherto the International Organisation has been representative mainly of the interests of Governments and the capitalist class. We claim that collaboration between all nations in the economic field must include consideration of the interest of labour as well as of capital, and that all workers, including African workers, must be fully and directly represented in this collaboration. In order to make participation by the workers effective it is essential that their right to collective bargaining should be legally recognised and guaranteed.

We shall understand, "improved labour standards," "economic advancement" and "social security" as referred to in this article to mean the following-

- (a) the removal of the Colour Bar; (b) training in skilled occupations;
- (c) remuneration according to skill;

- (d) a living wage and all other workers' benefits;
- (e) proper and adequate housing for all races and colours.

The policy of economic collaboration is probably more applicable to economic relations between sovereign states rather than to relations with weak and insufficiently developed states or territories. In our view it is essential that any economic assistance that might be rendered to weak and insufficiently developed African territories should be of such a nature as will really promote their economic improvement and not pauperise them.

SIXTH POINT - THE DESTRUCTION OF NAZI TYRANNY

'After the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny, they hope to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all men in all lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want'.

Africans are in full agreement with the war aim of destroying Nazi tyranny, but they desire to see all forms of racial domination in all lands, including the Allied countries, completely destroyed. Only in this way, they firmly believe, shall there be established peace which will afford all peoples and races the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford the assurance that all men in all lands shall live out their lives in freedom from fear, want and oppression.

SEVENTH POINT - THE FREEDOM OF THE SEAS

'Such a peace should enable all men to traverse the high seas and oceans without hindrance'.

We agree with the principle of the freedom of the seas.

EIGHTH POINT - THE ABANDONMENT OF THE USE OF FORCE

'They believe that all the nations of the world, for realistic as well as spiritual reasons, must come to the abandonment of the use of force.

Since no further peace can be maintained if land, sea or air armaments continue to be employed by nations which threaten or may threaten aggression outside of their frontiers, they believe, pending the establishment of a wider and permanent system of general security, that the disarmament of such nations is essential. . . . They will likewise aid and encourage all other practical measures which will lighten for peace-loving peoples the crushing burden of armaments'.

We are in agreement in principle with the idea of the abandoning of the use of force for the settlement of international disputes, but we do not agree with the idea envisaged in this article of the charter concerning the armament of some nations and the disarmament of other nations as this policy is provocative of future wars. As a preliminary, steps must be taken to nationalise the armament industry.

While recognising the necessity for the use of force within a country as part of its policing machinery, we must nevertheless deplore the fact that force, especially in South Africa, is frequently resorted to as a method of suppressing the legitimate ventilation of their grievances by oppressed, unarmed and disarmed sections of the population.