

UNC: from Musazi to Obote

By Yoga Adhola.

I was recently involved in a very stormy debate about the two leaders of Uganda National Congress ever had: Ignatius Kangave Musazi and Apollo Milton Obote. The debate was between Major Mutengesa, a high level cadre of the National Resistance Movement and me, a leading ideologue of UPC.

Major Mutengesa, in the true spirit of NRMs, sought to downplay Obote and elevate Musazi, He called Obote a "tribalist" etc. While Musazi did play a glorious role in the anti-colonial struggles, that is no excuse to run down Obote. After all, the two belonged to different phases of the anti-colonial struggle.

The first professor of History at the University of Dar es salaam, Professor T.O. Ranger wrote a seminal paper, "Connexions between 'Primary Resistance' movements and modern nationalism in East and Central Africa" published in the Journal of African History ix, 3 (1968). In that article he advanced the theory that the anti-colonial struggles went through three phases.

The first phase, which he named 'Primary Resistance', was the resistance to what the natives saw as foreign intrusion into their societies. At one point Professor ranger called these "last-ditch resisters". Examples of these are Omukama Kabalega and Kabaka Mwanga.

After primary resistance had been defeated, we entered the phase of "secondary resistance" At this phase, colonialism had been accepted. The struggles were to gain better terms for the subjects. It was in this context that Musazi helped found the Uganda Motor Drivers' Association, the first ever trade union in 1938.

Musazi was also involved in organizing farmers to to secure better prices for their produce. In this regard he helped in the formation of the Bataka Party as well as the Uganda African Farmers Union. After the Bataka riots, both the Bataka Party and the UAFU were banned. Not cowed by the ban, he next organized the Federation of Partnership which went bankrupt in 1950.

At the instigation and encouragement of certain British and other foreign anti-colonialists, Musazi next organized the Uganda National Congress, the first political party in Uganda. Dr George Shepherd, an American who came to assist with the organization of co-operative movements was to write:

"I soon decided that it was important, both for the welfare of the people of Uganda and the co-operative movement that a political party be launched. This would take the pressure off the Federation of Farmers to be a political unit itself. And it would bring into the field an organization that would openly deal in the political issues, which after all were the decisive ones."

The final phase of the anti-colonial struggles was that of mass nationalism". This is the phase when the people wanted an end to colonialism. Obote belonged to the "mass nationalism" phase. There is a sense in which the change of leadership from Musazi to Obote was a move from one phase of the anti-colonial struggle to the next one. It was a move from a 'primary' or 'secondary' resistance movement (Ranger, T.O. 1968: ; Stokes, E. 1970: 100-106) which both the Bataka Party and Uganda Farmers Union, respectively, had been into a modern anti-colonial movement which would not only be anti-imperialist but would also champion the aspirations of minorities.

The first indication that the anti-colonial struggles needed to move from one phase to the other was the abortive attempt by younger members of the UNC who had had greater exposure to the struggle than Musazi, and who were dissatisfied with his leadership, to form the abortive Uganda Congress Party in 1957.

A year later John Kale, the father of the former Inspector General of Police, Kale Kayihura opened a UNC office in Cairo and also began operating a radio station for UNC. This Cairo office, David Apter, tells us in his book, "The Political kingdom in Uganda" became symptomatic of the crisis in UNC.

The merits of this office were disputed, and the Uganda National Congress was to irrevocably get split over this disagreement. A section of the membership of UNC, led by Musazi, felt that the Cairo office was a means of trading "the imperialism of one country for that of another, especially a country (meaning Egypt) that had for 2,500 years controlled the whole of the Nile Valley, but also communism." (Apter, D.E. 1961: 334)

The other section of Uganda National Congress, consisting of elements younger than Musazi but with greater exposure to the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles elsewhere, not only believed in maintaining contacts with the anti-imperialists world, but desired a more radical nationalist movement of the mobilizing type, striking firmly for a united Uganda while attacking the parochialism of the Lukiiko and the Baganda.

The contention between these two political lines came to a head on January 12, 1959. The previous month three senior members of the Uganda National Congress (Abu Mayanja, Jolly Joe Kiwanuka, and Dr. Kununka) had attended the Pan-African Congress in Accra, Ghana. They had participated in passing resolutions which, among other things, recommended that "those African traditional institutions whether political, social or economic which clearly have shown their reactionary character and the sordid support of colonialism be condemned."

Returning from Accra via Cairo, where they called at the controversial office, Kiwanuka defended the Cairo office and identified the real issue at stake: "Uganda cannot remain an island in a sea of Pan-African and universal nationalism.... Our establishment of a nationalist political office in Cairo has marked a great era in our struggle. It has broken the chains of isolation, and focused world attention on the seriousness of the Uganda people in our unshakable upsurge for freedom."

To Musazi, that statement was a sacrilege which could not be tolerated in the Uganda National Congress. He proceeded to expel some six of the most significant officials of the UNC who

supported the Cairo office. In announcing their expulsion, Musazi indicated that he would never trade the imperialism of one country for that of another, especially a country that had for 2,500 years controlled the whole of the Nile Valley, and that the group he expelled had no sense of discipline. Musazi also felt that the Cairo office had Communist backing." (Apter, D.E. 1961: 334) (4)

The response of the six and their political followers did not take long to come. At the Annual Delegates Conference held on January 12, 1959, Ignatius Musazi, President of the Uganda National Congress, was expelled from the UNC and Apollo Milton Obote elected to replace him. The conference also went on to endorse all the resolutions taken at the Accra Conference.

The significance of these events is/was succinctly captured by David Apter's observation: "the old Congress ended . . . Congress had now entered the Pan-African phase of nationalism."(Apter, D.E. 1961: 334) From then on too, the non-Ganda joined Uganda National Congress in large numbers; "formerly under Ganda leadership, it made little headway."(La Fontaine in Low, D.A. 1971: 254 Footnote 64)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Most of the references are from "The Political kingdom in Uganda" by David Apter.

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