

SIXTH PAN AFRICAN CONGRESS
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DR. C.L.R. JAMES TALKS TO
GERI STARK, INFORMATION OFFICER,
SIXTH PAN AFRICAN CONGRESS

INTRODUCTION

C.L.R. James is the noted scholar, novelist (Minty Alley), and author of such studies as Black Jacobins, considered a classic history of the Haitian revolution; World Revolution, 1917-1936; A History of Pan-African Revolt (1939); State Capitalism and World Revolution (1950, 1956, 1969); and Party Politics in the West Indies. Born in 1901 in Trinidad, Dr. James has also been an international influence in the liberation movement. He, George Padmore and Jomo Kenyatta were among the organizers of the International Service Bureau in London during the late Thirties. In the West Indies, he participated in the formation of the People's National Movement that pressed for Trinidad's independence, and served as secretary of the Federal West Indian Labor Party.

Dr. James is an International Sponsor of the Sixth Pan African Congress.

6th PAC: Mr. James, to give some historical perspective to our discussion, can you tell us briefly about the issues facing the African world at the Fifth Pan African Congress?

James: At the time of the 5th PAC, the issue for the African world was the fact that we were not only subordinate in ideas and in actual life to Western society, to those who led the world at the time, but we didn't have much prospects of emerging from that subordinate position. That was the issue. Marcus Garvey had begun. Marcus Garvey had said, 'we are not going to continue to be the way we are. At one time we were people who mattered in the world and we shall be again.' But Marcus Garvey died and by 1945, the World War had come, although the world revolution had not come. But there were these issues among the African people--we were waiting to go somewhere but there was no policy or program that was clearly set before us. It is important to know where you are going and to be aware of what you have left behind. So that is where we were in 1945.

6th PAC: In the intervening period between 1945 and the present, how has that major issue been transformed?

James: The major issue is to get out of our subordinate position, even if that position is presently covered over with a blanket that says that you are free. That is the real major issue for Africans to emerge completely and be an absolutely free and independent people. But since the end of WW II and into the present time, the attitude of Blacks to Western civilization has changed immensely. In addition, many positions have been won. For instance, in Africa and in the Caribbean, political

independence has been won. It is now being discovered-- a fact which is a great political education - that political independence is not what it is said to be or made out to be. Nor has it given what it can give. But the attitude of African people to Western civilization, from end to end of the modern world, is absolutely different from what it was in 1945 when the 5th Pan African Congress took place.

6th PAC: How would you assess the significance of the upcoming 6th Pan African Congress?

James: The 6th Pan African Congress is going to help do what the people are wanting to be done for them. Now I have to be quite precise in this tremendous matter where so many millions are concerned. I do not think the people as a whole who were around the 5th PAC were very much concerned about what the 5th PAC or any Congress was going to do. But today the African people in the world are very anxious, very concerned and have all sorts of organizations, all of which aim at dragging the African people from their subordinated places. That is the difference between the 5th and the 6th Congress. In the 5th, we were a vanguard, we were a body of people who had some advanced ideas, and very good ideas they were, but a great mass of the population following us, that we did not have. Today, not only the 6th PAC, but all sorts of groups in every part of the world, in many parts of Africa, in the United States, right through the Caribbean, are taking part and having in mind where are we going and what are we going to do. Courtland Cox and I were present at the last Commonwealth Conference, and we paid close

attention to the Conference because we were concerned with the African people who were there. What struck me after a few days there, is the dominant position that General Gowon held among people who attended the Conference. What the other people were doing, what Prime Minister Trudeau was doing (I suppose he was there because it was held in Canada), what Heath, etc., were doing there was paid little attention to. But there was no question that one of the men who emerged as a world figure at the present time and a man to look at in the future was General Gowon of Nigeria.

6th PAC: To be more specific about the 6th Pan African Congress, what are some of the issues that you think can be raised for discussion at this Congress?

James: Now the most important issues that have to be raised at the Congress, I think, are stated in the document that has been published by the 6th PAC, the Call. Number one: Self-reliance. Self-reliance is an abstract phrase, a difficult phrase to explain in concrete terms. You cannot go to the midst of Africa and tell an African peasant: "You must be self-reliant." He will say: "Yes, I am very self-reliant, but I have no money, I have no seeds, I am starving." But the concept of self-reliance, the belief that the future of Africa must depend upon the Africans relying upon themselves and using what they have and seeking what they want with their own conception--I believe if the Congress is permeated by this idea, it is certain to bring out a great deal that would be of great importance in the world. Second point: The 2nd thing that I

think of in regard to the 6th PAC, is the freedom of Southern Africa. I mean that is a question that has been talked about for a long time, but now it is an urgent matter. It is a matter that white and Black are looking at, and people who we once thought were quiet and were not going to take much of any steps are now actively progressing and putting themselves forward and challenging the white governments. The European and other governments are very much aware of the danger that faces them if the people of Southern Africa raise themselves. We too are concerned with the complete independence of Southern Africa. And I believe they will get that independence in Southern Africa more quickly and more freely than the Blacks of the United States. They are such a tremendous majority of the population.

Number Three is the change in the economic structure of the colonial territories. You know they gave us, or we took, political freedom and we ran up a National flag, we had a National anthem, we had a Prime Minister who would go to England and have tea, or dinner with the Queen (dinner was special). But the people have realized that political freedom is not sufficient. Political freedom means that you are to settle your own political affairs. Most of the African political leaders at least recognize this today. Political freedom must also mean economic control of your own material affairs. There is no real political freedom if other people control your material circumstances, the material goods that you produce and the persons and prices to whom you sell and what you arrange with those people. All that has got to be under the control of the

African people themselves. If I may be allowed to say so: It is not only the African people, but a whole set of people all over the Third World, who have to be in control of their material circumstances. And the real things that matter are these three things: (1) Self-reliance--that is a mental concept, but which all people can have. You do not have to read it in any books. Now Nkrumah was able to instill that into the people of Ghana; that was what caused the great success of the revolution in Ghana. It was a form of self-reliance and we place that foremost. (2) The freedom of Southern Africa--that situation has gone on long enough and the Southern Africans are quite ready to take whatever steps are necessary. What they are depending upon, what I think they must be looking at, is to the rest of Africa and what we are doing. Well, the 6th PAC has made up its mind to do all that it can. (3) The third point, may be the most important and the most immediate: complete control over economic and financial life. Not the flag, or the National anthems, nor the Prime Ministers, but complete control over economic and social life. That is what I think the 6th Pan African Congress stands for, that is what it is aiming at, that is what it has proclaimed and a great distinction between that and the 5th PAC is that people everywhere are thinking in those terms. They may not be thinking in the exact terms of the 6th PAC, but those are the ideas that are running about in the minds of African people.

6th PAC: On the last point that you made, the question of economic independence and control, there is an intense discussion going on in the entire African world about which path to economic control. Do you have any ideas about that?

James: I have very strong ideas and I am very happy that these strong ideas are not my own, they are the ideas publicly stated, in my opinion, certainly by a political figure today whose ideas, political prospects, and programs are not exceeded by any living politician. Here is Dr. Nyerere speaking about what he thinks about the future of Africa, and he calls his lecture The Rational Choice. I will read for you some of what he says. This is his conclusion: "It cannot be denied that many difficulties face a Third World country which chooses the socialist alternative of development. Not least among these are its own past, the dynamism of capitalist initiative techniques, and the gambler instinct which every human being seems to possess, so that we all hope we shall be among the privileged, not the exploited. But I believe that we can choose the socialist path, and that by so doing we can develop ourselves in freedom and towards those conditions which allow dignity and self-respect for every one of our citizens. I believe that this prospect must be pursued with vigor and determination. We shall not create socialist societies overnight; because we have to start from where we are, we shall have to make compromises with capitalist money and skill, and we shall have to take risks in our development. But I am convinced that Third World countries..." That is a very significant thing. He does not

... speak only about Africa, he speaks about Third World countries, all of them, that means India, China, Indo China and seven-eighths of South America. He goes on to say: "...Third World countries have the power to transform themselves, over time, into socialist societies in which their peoples can live in harmony and cooperation as they work together for their common benefit." That is the idea of socialism that I have. That is the conception which I believe we must all have.

6th PAC: Are there any other points you would make about the Congress?

James: Just this--a conference like the 6th Pan African Congress represents the fact that a substantive number of human beings feel the need for a change in the political policy that they've been following during the previous period. Every time a conference takes place, it marks a stage in the political development and interest of the people taking part in it, and those to whom appeal is being made for support. We've already made clear what the Sixth Pan African Congress stands for, and its relationship to previous Congresses. Now, we have added something new that never was taken up by any of the previous conferences. I will read the passage from The Call: "Consistent with our commitment to independence and self-reliance, the Sixth Pan African Congress will pursue the development of a Pan African Science and Technology Center. The Center will be designed to serve the vast array of needs of African people in the scientific and technological fields...." Now this is a Center that will be organized by African people, supported by African people

and run by African people. Its aim will be to accumulate in one particular spot a Center both for the accumulation of material and information, and for getting together persons ready and willing to participate in the scientific and technical development of African people. At the same time, the Center will be a sort of exhibition hall where the work that has been done and the work that is still to be done can be seen in one spot. The Center expresses the two aspects of self-reliance and political self-determination. It will be directly under our control, and will stand ready to fight against the present domination that scientists and technologists of advanced countries exert over our peoples' development. This is entirely new!. I doubt if there have been many political conferences in the past which have planned so definite a stage towards a new sphere of activity. We're certain that today, with all the calls for assistance being made from various parts of the African world, the Sixth Pan African Congress and everybody connected with it, should concentrate on making the Science-Technology Center a nucleus for development of the needs and interests of the vast majority of African people. That brings to a close what the conference stands for, and where it stands in the long-range of Pan African Congresses.