

The African Patriots

THE STORY OF THE
AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
OF SOUTH AFRICA



MARY BENSON

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1963

In Memory of Christopher Gell

NKOSI SIKELEL' I-AFRIKA

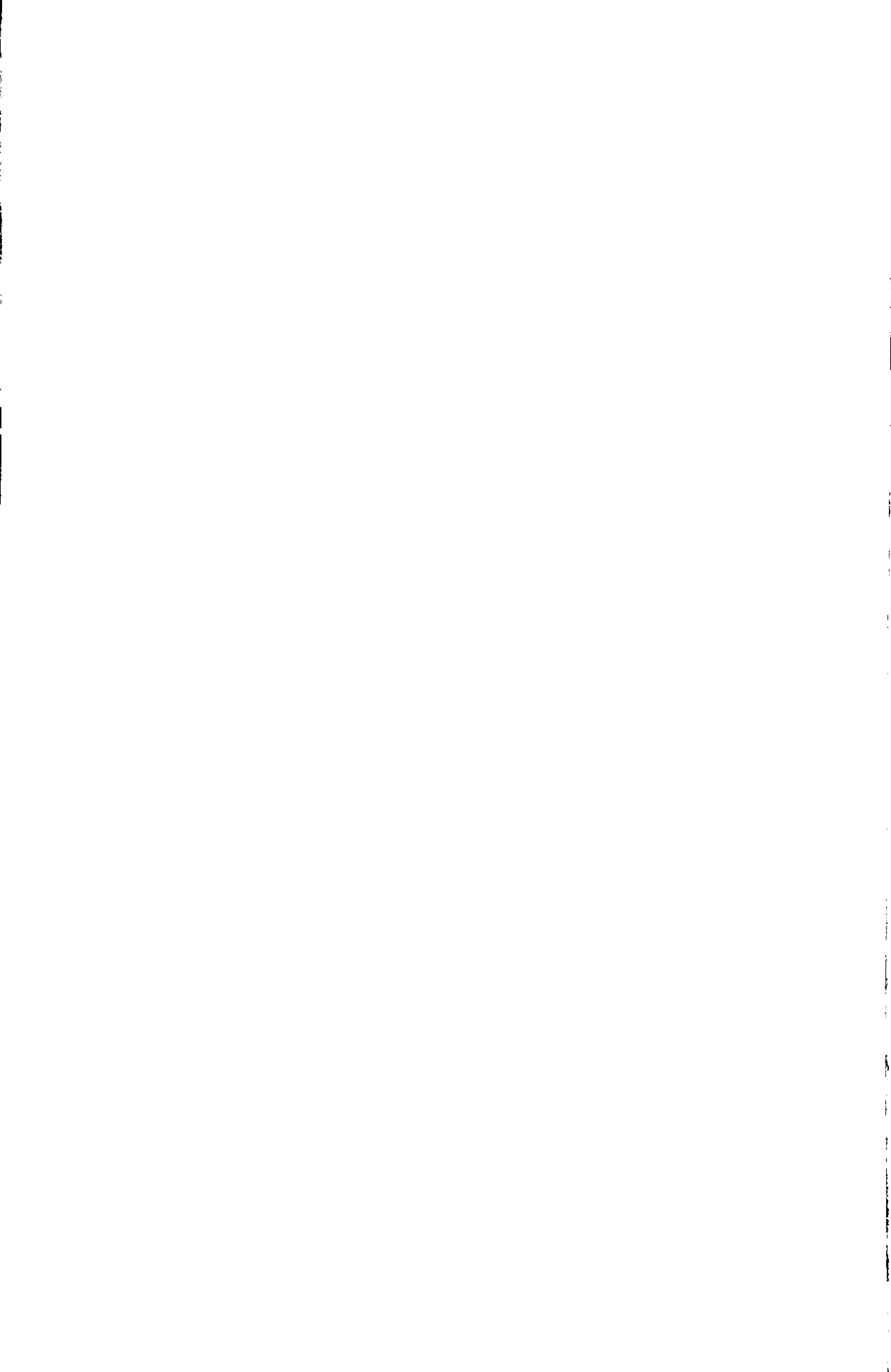
Composed by the Xhosa composer Enoch Sontonga and
a missionary at Lovedale College for the African National
Congress in 1912

Translated by Todd Matshikiza

NKOSI SIKELEL' I-AFRIKA	LORD BLESS AFRICA
MALUPHAKANYISW'	LET ITS HORN (of
UPHONDO LWAYO	hope) BE RAISED
YIVA NEMITHANDAZO	LISTEN ALSO TO
YETHU	OUR PLEAS
NKOSI SIKELELA	LORD BLESS
NKOSI SIKELELA	LORD BLESS
YIZA MOYA	COME SPIRIT
YIZA MOYA	COME SPIRIT
OYINGCWELE	HOLY SPIRIT
NKOSI SIKELELA THINA	LORD BLESS US
LUSAPHO LWAKHO	THY CHARGE

The passive resistance in South Africa 'is the most important activity the world can at present take part in, and in which not Christendom alone but all the peoples of the earth will participate.'

TOLSTOY—*letter to Gandhi, 1910*



Acknowledgments



THIS is a committed book. During the year spent in historical and personal research in South Africa I found it impossible not to become engaged by the spirit of the African National Congress. I am proud that some of its former leaders and members are my friends. There are many people in South Africa—politicians, academics, clergymen, journalists, lawyers, doctors, housewives, secretaries and clerks—who have been most generous in helping with the book. Because of the laws under which they could be victimized I am not thanking them individually. But if they should read the book I hope they will know how deeply grateful I am. Even at the time of interviewing them some of the subjects were being persecuted. I must add particular thanks to those who so quickly and excellently replied to letters. One day I hope to thank them all publicly.

To Colin Legum I owe a large debt for invaluable advice on the manuscript. Margery Perham, Phyllis Randone and Anthony Sampson encouraged me with their suggestions. I am grateful to 'Rusty' Bernstein for the use of records on the Mine Strike and to Mrs. E. Binyon and Cyril Dunn for notes on certain incidents. Particularly I thank Eli Weinberg for his pictures.

I was persuaded into writing this book. I could think of several writers better equipped to do it, but it was clearly urgent both to get people's reminiscences about what happened fifty years ago and to do the necessary research before the South African Government's extending tyranny prevented this—the 'Sabotage Act', which was passed just after the research was completed, would certainly have made things more difficult than the existing restrictions. Police raids over many years have of course removed much of the written material that must have existed—indeed as I waded through some of what still remains, I sometimes felt grateful to the Special Branch that there was not more!

Acknowledgments

I only wish the story could have mentioned far more of the thousands of people of all races who struggle so indomitably for freedom and justice in South Africa.

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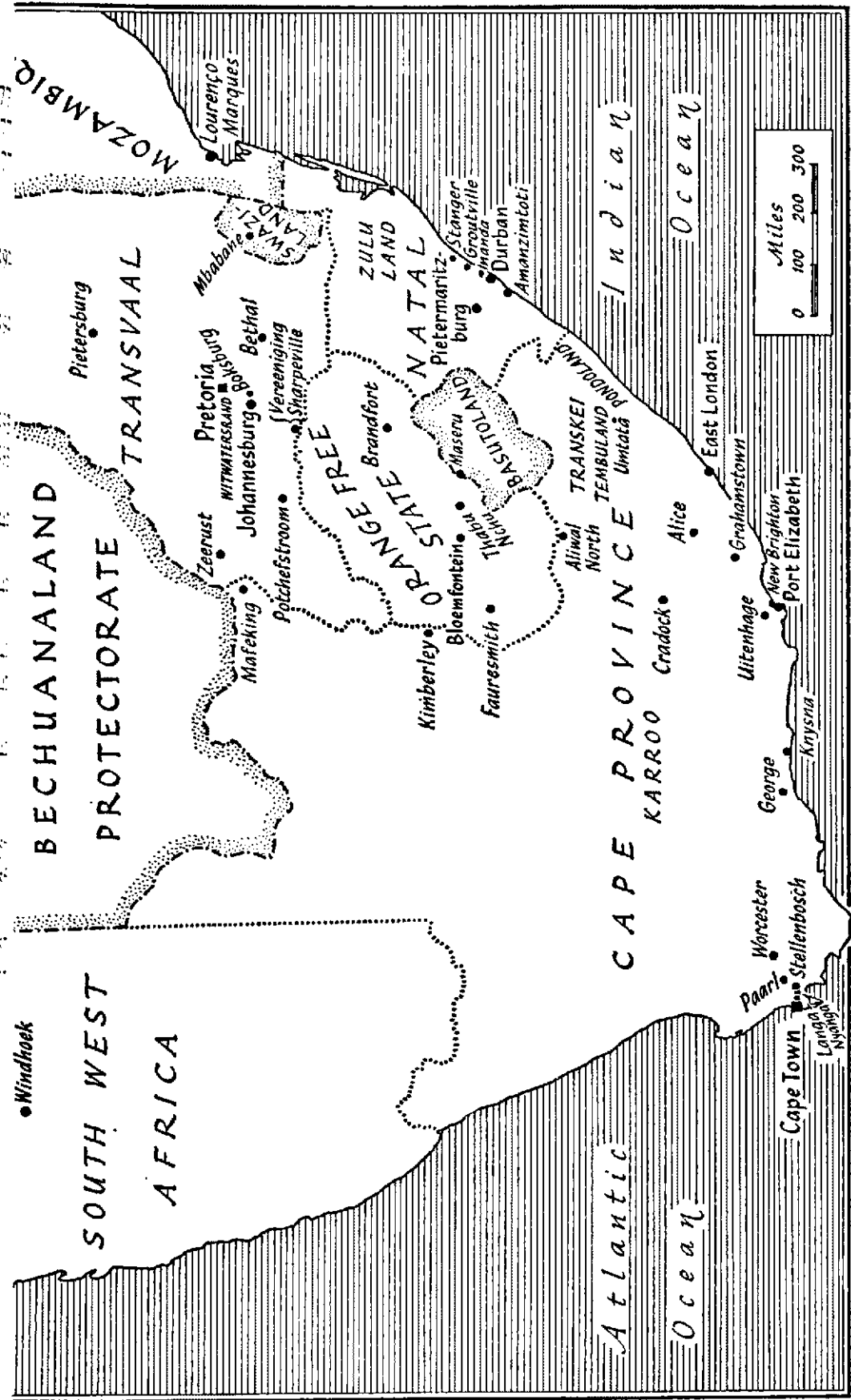
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Map of Southern Africa showing places mentioned in the book

NAMES OF LEADING OFFICERS OF THE CONGRESS
SINCE 1912

PRESIDENT-GENERAL

The Rev. John L. Dube
S. M. Makgatho
The Rev. Z. R. Mahabane
J. T. Gumede
Dr. P. ka I. Seme
The Rev. Z. R. Mahabane
Dr. A. B. Xuma
Dr. J. S. Moroka
Chief A. J. Lutuli

SECRETARY-GENERAL

Sol T. Plaatje
R. V. Selope Thema
E. Mochochoko
T. D. Mweli Skota
Halley Plaatje
The Rev. Elijah Mdolomba
The Rev. James A. Calata
Walter M. Sisulu
Oliver Tambo
Duma Nokwe

Prologue

1880–1910: Trends and Attitudes



After a hundred years of war and skirmishes the tribes in South Africa had finally given in to the European invaders; succumbing not only to their superior weapons but to their beguiling ideas. From 1880, therefore, Africans began to work within the modern frame and to think in terms of political rather than military action. The first African political association—the *Imbumba Yama Afrika* (Union of Africans)—was formed in the Eastern Cape in the early 1880's; at the same time, incidentally, as Afrikaners formed their first political party, the Afrikaner Bond. Looking back, it is possible to see the emergence of two contrary trends—Africans, deeply influenced by the teachings of Victorian humanitarians and Christian missionaries, began to discover themselves as part of mankind, while Afrikaners, anxious to preserve their small nation in isolation, turned their back on the rest of mankind.

Of course the nascent political consciousness was apparent in the activities of only a few Africans and in the main the tribesmen and those working as labourers for the white settlers, were ignorant and insular. But those few were significant. Many of them were voters, on the common roll of the Cape Colony since 1854. From the 1880's some helped to form African organizations in various parts of the country although political expression was scattered and hesitant. The first African Christian church was established and the first African newspaper published. By 1880 Africans in the Cape had two generations of missionary education behind them, provided either by the Church of Scotland's College, Lovedale, founded in 1841 before comparable schools were provided for whites, or by Methodists and Anglicans who established schools soon after. Mr. Gungulisa, an elderly Xhosa butcher in Port Elizabeth, who was a boy in the 'nineties, recalls those days: 'Things were all right there according to the law of the late Queen

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Victoria,' he says. 'The aboriginals were just starting to get taken with Western ideas. We were registered voters, allowed to buy property, a farm say, we could hold land, and if a voter we could even possess firearms. We enjoyed it.'

However, although the African proportion of the votes in the Colony was negligible, in a few constituencies of the Eastern Cape they were beginning to make themselves felt. The Government twice raised the franchise qualifications and an African petition to Queen Victoria appealing against this proved ineffectual, so that at the turn of the century Africans formed only 4.7% of the voters in the Cape Colony. Yet they were seen as a threat. All the same Cape policies were broadly liberal, whereas in British Natal, contrary to Queen Victoria's declaration that all races would be equal, the Zulus were being confined to diminishing reserves as European immigrants took their land for sugar estates. From all accounts there was not much to choose between the attitude of Natal farmers and of the Boer Governments of the two Republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, where there was 'no equality in church or state'. The representative of Natal farmers expressed the view to a Native Affairs Commission: 'The native is the most tractable man going, as long as he knows you have your foot on his neck . . . I think the thing that should be used very freely is the lash, for it is bodily pain that the native fears.'

When the Boer War broke out many Africans supported the British forces—some for wages but some acting upon principle—and in 1901 the British Government assured them that there would be no peace that did not give them the same privileges as whites. But when the Peace Treaty was signed at Vereeniging Africans found it to be a 'shameless betrayal'.¹ The British Government—a Liberal Government—far from fulfilling the assurance, had become so intent on reconciling the defeated Boers to their new status of becoming British subjects, that, ironically the victory became the basis for the ultimate ascendancy of Afrikaner nationalism with its renunciation of the British connection. And it was the British who initiated a colour bar in the new mining industry of the Transvaal. Furthermore some of those Africans who had helped the British during the war found themselves suffering for that service. Dr. James Moroka, a distinguished physician whose family in the Orange Free State had given such

¹ *Contact* article by Selby Msimang, April 2, 1960.

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assistance, explains, 'Our position was worse than it had been because the Boers said, you chaps are skellums, and from that time we got it in the neck.'

These events gave a decided impetus to African political activity though the groups that sprang up all over the country were as yet small and local in their membership. Among them was the Natal Native Congress, of 'Christian and civilized' Africans, led by Martin Lutuli of Tugela. Meanwhile a young Indian lawyer, M. K. Gandhi, since his arrival in South Africa, had already formed the Natal Indian Congress in 1894, and the Coloured people in the Cape set up the African People's Organization. Again, a petition was sent to the Imperial Government, this time in 1906 from the Transvaal Natives' Congress. The petitioners 'respectfully' reminded the House of Commons of their loyalty and claimed, as British subjects, their right to liberty, freedom and equality. They said that the pass laws in the Transvaal—conceived in Southern Africa by the Netherlands East Indies Company 250 years before—were 'repugnant, unnecessary, undesirable and unBritish'. They pointed out that there had been no trouble in the Cape since these laws had fallen into disuse. Their petition was ignored.

Perhaps it was symbolic that in that same year, 1906, as well as the petition there were two other forms of protest made against the increasing abuses of freedom and justice. In Natal, Bambata, a Zulu chieftain, led a rebellion against European seizure of Zulu land and the sudden imposition of a tax at a time of extreme poverty. More than 3,000 Africans and 30 Europeans were killed in the fighting. In the Transvaal Gandhi originated the method of passive resistance when he organized Indians against an attempt to force them, like Africans, to carry passes. It may be superficial to draw any conclusion about the effectiveness of the three methods of protest used at this time, but it is tempting to observe that the petition was ineffectual, that the rebellion was stamped out with great violence, and that only the passive resistance succeeded in averting the immediate threat.

Between 1906 and 1910 the fate of the non-whites of South Africa was in the balance. To us looking back it is clear that the policies of the two Boer Republics would prevail over the liberal policy of the Cape; we can discern strong trends working in this direction. They were typified in a remark made by one of the British Government's most influential advisers, Lord Milner, the

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former Governor of the Cape Colony, who had said in 1899: 'The *ultimate* end is a self-governing white community, supported by *well-treated* and *justly governed* black labour.' For all their liberal principles eminent Englishmen were so intent on the object of Union between the Cape, Natal and the two former Republics that they seemed to see nothing of the implications of their actions. The British Government was influenced considerably by Milner's Kindergarten—among them Lionel Curtis, Patrick Duncan and Robert Brand—who lobbied passionately for Union and virtually called on the white South Africans to unite in their own interests.¹ This call found a ready response: in the Transvaal people took the line that only by Union could the whites deal with the native problem without interference from Downing Street.

What was the attitude to the role of Africans of the most enlightened Afrikaners? General Jan Smuts, who was proving to be the most effective proponent of Union, expressed his confusion in a letter in 1906: 'When I consider the political future of the Natives in South Africa I must say that I look into shadows and darkness; and then I feel inclined to shift the intolerable burden of solving that sphinx problem to the ampler shoulders and stronger brains of the future.'²

While representative of the view of General Louis Botha, the greatest of Afrikaner leaders, was a belief he expressed that the civilizing of natives could best be accomplished by the breaking up of Zululand, Basutoland and Swaziland, so that natives living in reserves should work for whites and could have their land exploited.³

Such were the attitudes of the vast majority of the whites who were intent on rapidly developing the country's resources with the use of African labour, and few of whom had ever met any of the increasing number of educated Africans. It is relevant that at this time in South Africa, whereas just over 165,000 whites were at schools, the comparable number of Africans was over 186,000 although the quality of education for Africans, apart from the few excellent missionary schools, can be judged from the fact that the education grant for the million whites was 16 times as great as that for the four million Africans.

¹ *The Unification of South Africa 1902-1910*, L. M. Thompson.

² Letter to Merriman, March 13, 1906. *Ibid.*

³ Transvaal Labour Commission Report.

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When it became known that Britain was proposing to hand over the non-white population to the rule of the privileged white minority, widespread opposition broke out—a premonition of what was to happen 40 years later when Federation was imposed on Nyasaland and the Rhodesias—and African political associations rallied to resist the threat. Led by three editors of African newspapers, the Rev. Walter Rubusana, John Tengo Jabavu, and the Rev. John Dube, they met and while they approved the principle of Union, they emphatically protested against the colour bar in the proposed constitution. This restricted the vote to whites in all provinces except in the Cape, and even there deprived Africans of the right to elect an African to Parliament. They requested 'full and equal rights' for all persons. The Coloured people also registered their protest.

When the all-white National Convention, representing the four parts to the proposed Union, met in Bloemfontein in 1909 it did not even discuss these protests.

It was not as if the problems of the moment were so absorbing that people concerned with drawing up the Union constitution could not realize the significance of their act. The Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town with leaders of the Presbyterian and Baptist churches and other leading churchmen, clearly answered all the arguments of the advocates of the colour bar and put forward a constructive case for basing political rights on just and practical grounds. W. P. Schreiner, a former Prime Minister of the Cape, led a small group of liberals in consistently opposing Union. His sister, Olive, the writer, gave a moving warning of what was to come if white South Africans, 'blinded by the gain of the moment,' saw nothing in the 'dark man' but 'a vast engine of labour'. With astonishing foresight she envisaged a South Africa in which the white man dispossessed the African of his land and forced him 'permanently in his millions into the locations and compounds and slums of our cities, obtaining his labour cheaper.' She foresaw that if 'uninstructed in the highest forms of labour, without the rights of citizenship, his own social organization broken up, without our having aided him to participate in our own,'—if the whites reduced 'this vast mass to the condition of a seething ignorant proletariat'—then she would rather 'draw a veil over the future of this land.'¹

These recommendations and warnings went unheeded. The

¹ *Closer Union*, by Olive Schreiner.

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National Convention approved the draft constitution for Union.

However final responsibility rested with Parliament in Britain and an African deputation, led by Rubusana, Jabavu, and W. P. Schreiner went there in the hope of persuading the British Government to reject the colour bar in the constitution. They met with the retort from the Colonial Secretary that the question must be settled in South Africa itself. When the House of Commons considered the Bill to establish Union, Britain was engrossed in Lloyd George's controversial budget and in the first threat of war with Germany which, the Colonial Under-Secretary pointed out, made the more urgent the need for a friendly white population in South Africa. As for the colour bar in the Bill, he claimed that there had been 'the most striking and enormous advance in generosity and in the humane treatment of natives in South Africa.' Only the Labour Party and about thirty Liberals stood against the colour bar. The rest of the Members of Parliament, although they unanimously regretted it, sent the Act on its way 'respectfully and earnestly' begging white South Africa, sooner or later, to modify its provisions. Many of the arguments used in favour of the Union were based upon the easy assumption that democracy was a cause which always went forwards and not backwards. In the House of Lords, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. R. T. Davidson, joined the others in the assumption that all would be well. The sole critic was a Liberal, Lord Courtney, who predicted that the government of a large non-white majority by a relatively small white minority would lead to unrest, instability and danger.

Through the Act of Union the British Government betrayed the African people but, not only did it give the whites unlimited power over the non-whites, it also paved the way for the Afrikaners—who already formed the majority of white voters—eventually to win control over the people of British stock who had so passionately worked for Union.

The first South African Cabinet in 1910 included the two pro-British Boer Generals—Botha as Prime Minister and Smuts, his deputy—and there was a third General, J. B. M. Hertzog. One of their Government's first acts was to pass a law preventing the employment of Africans in certain jobs and restricting them to low-paid labour, thus protecting the white workers. Soon another Act so regulated African labour that it became a criminal offence for them to break a contract or to strike. Yet another disarmed African

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constabulary, and they were put into short trousers and a little cap while the African mounted police were retitled 'police boys'. The Africans, their tribal society and peasant economy disrupted by the expanding migrant labour system and naturally drawn to the few towns, were indeed, as Olive Schreiner had feared, becoming 'a vast engine of labour': mine labourers, kitchen 'boys', garden 'boys', cleaners; pass-bearers; vagrants; forced to earn wages in order to pay tax, turned into criminals if they failed to pay tax or to produce a pass; their chiefs turned into virtual servants of the White Government. In essence, their humanity was denied.

The Act of Union, which sealed their fate, was seen by Africans to be an Act uniting white South Africans against black.

I

1910-1912: The Foundation



The white South Africans had formed their Union of four provinces—the Transvaal, the Orange Free State, the Cape and Natal. There existed a scattering of African organizations in each province: their need was unity. They were shocked at being surrendered by the British Government to a white supremacy government which stood opposed as a fundamental principle to the extension of democratic rights to the non-white majority. They had trusted the British and had looked to them for protection and leadership. At this critical moment Pixley Ka (Son of) Izaka Seme returned to South Africa after studying overseas.

Seme, whose parents were Christian Zulus, had benefited as a child from a custom followed by many white missionaries and had been virtually fostered by the Rev. S. Pixley of the Congregational American Board Mission in Inanda. From the hills of Zululand, the boy had been plunged into life in New York City, when the missionary sent him to Columbia University to further his studies. He became one of the most brilliant students of the day, winning a gold medal for conspicuous merit, and distinguishing himself as a public speaker in college societies. From America the young man went to Jesus College, Oxford, where he studied law. Africans liked to think of him as an aristocrat though in fact his parents were humble; however Oxford gave him polish and 'a taste for nobility', and he did marry into the Zulu royal house. He completed his studies in London where he was called to the bar at the Middle Temple.

On his return to South Africa, the young attorney—able, ambitious, impatient, humorous, but a bit of a snob—naturally headed for the centre of progress. New York, Edwardian London, and now Johannesburg—a rough mining town with wide dusty streets and a few elaborate Victorian public buildings amongst brick and

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corrugated iron shops and offices. He was at once confronted by the humiliation to which Natives were subjected in the Transvaal, and he was appalled, not only for himself but for his fellows. Africans were not allowed to walk on the pavements and they had to take off their hats when passing a white man; they could travel only fourth class on the trains in a sort of cattle-truck; white politicians openly admitted that taxes were imposed on Natives to make them work; policemen repeatedly demanded to see their passes and tax receipts, even raiding churches on Sundays in order to do so, arresting those without the documents; they were hardly heard, seldom believed, in the courts of law; politically they had no voice; children could not be educated beyond Standard VI. The situation was much the same in the provinces of Natal and the Free State.

Meanwhile Africans remained divided into many separate tribes, thinking tribally and mainly illiterate, with such political organizations as existed small and remote from each other. At Oxford Seme had dreamed of rebuilding the Zulu nation; now he was provoked into thinking in wider political terms.

He called together three other African lawyers, all of whom had also just qualified in England. Alfred Mangena, a Zulu, was the first African barrister in South Africa. He had established offices in Johannesburg and Pretoria in 1909 despite protests on racial grounds from the Transvaal Law Society. Richard Msimang, son of the founder of the Independent Methodist Church in South Africa, after becoming a solicitor in Taunton, Somerset, returned home to be straight away arrested and imprisoned for not having a pass. George Dixon Montsioa, a descendant of the Barolong Paramount Chief in Mafeking, had set up practice in Pietersburg in the Northern Transvaal.

To these three friends Seme put his conviction that the tribes must come together. The Xhosa-Fingo feud was an aberration. The animosity existing between the Zulus and the Tongas, between the Basuto and every other Native, must be buried and forgotten. 'We are one people,' he insisted. 'These divisions, these jealousies, are the cause of all our woes and of all our backwardness and ignorance today.' The first step, he suggested, was to call a conference of all African chiefs and leaders. His friends eagerly agreed.

Early in January 1912, from kraals in the highveld and lowveld of the Transvaal, from Zulu villages, from the beautiful bare up-

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lands of the Transkei, from the arid expanses of Bechuanaland and the royal capital of Swaziland, from the Paramount Chief's fastness in the mountains of Basutoland, came chiefs and their followers, some of them from tribes that had long been mutually hostile. From locations in the brash mining areas of Johannesburg and Kimberley, and near the growing ports of Durban, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town, and from the small farming towns of the Eastern Cape and Free State, came the sprinkling of educated men and representatives of political associations—lawyers and clergymen and teachers—as well as clerks and messengers and servants, members of the new African urban proletariat. By train, travelling uncomfortably in their fourth class carriages, by ox-wagon, on horse-back and on bicycles, they came to Bloemfontein, the geographical centre of the Union, which had become the favourite place for national conferences. An unremarkable dorp with colonial iron-roof verandahed buildings, it lay beside a bush-covered kopje; along its roads the trees, eucalyptus, and fir with their drooping foliage gave an air of dusty dejection to the hot January day. But in the location, which was known for its hospitality, there was an enthusiastic and happy atmosphere.

On January 8 the conference began. The delegates crowded into the hall in the location. The platform was filled with eminent Africans, some in frock-coats with top hats, carrying furled umbrellas, all in formal attire. Among them were the Chiefs from the neighbouring High Commission Territories: Prince Malunga Ka-Mbandeni, Regent of Swaziland, just back from England; Chief Maama, descendant of Moshoeshe the Great, representing the Paramount Chief of Basutoland; and Chiefs Molema, Montsioa and Mankwane from Bechuanaland. They had a Sergeant-at-Arms to keep order wearing a tunic with sergeant's stripes, breeches and gaiters, and carrying a hide shield, knobkerrie and axe.

The Rev. Henry Ngcayiya, a teacher and leader of the Ethiopian Church, opened the dignified proceedings with a prayer. This was followed by an anthem composed for the conference by a Xhosa composer, Enoch Sontonga: *Nkosi Sikelel' i-Afrika*—'God Bless Africa'—was sung for the first time at a great African gathering.

Pixley Seme led the discussions. The short, blunt-faced, well-groomed young lawyer from Oxford explained his purpose: 'Chiefs of royal blood and gentlemen of our race,' he said, 'we have

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gathered here to consider and discuss a scheme which my colleagues and I have decided to place before you. We have discovered that in the land of their birth, Africans are treated as hewers of wood and drawers of water. The white people of this country have formed what is known as the Union of South Africa—a union in which we have no voice in the making of laws and no part in the administration. We have called you, therefore, to this conference so that we can together find ways and means of forming *our* national union for the purpose of creating national unity and defending our rights and privileges.¹

The delegates were greatly excited at the prospect of unity and, as one of them said, 'even the difficulties of language did not prevent us exchanging pleasantries for we recognized that we were trying to find one another and we felt wonderfully optimistic. To us freedom was only round the corner.' The conference resolved to 'unite together and form a federation of one Pan-African association'.

Thus the South African Native National Congress was formed. It was to be more than thirty years before comparable organizations were set up in Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Kenya, and Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

The conference accepted Seme's recommendation that the Congress should be modelled on the American Congress and it was also decided to combine British parliamentary structure and procedures in an Upper House of Chiefs and a Lower House of Commoners, each with a President. The Paramount Chief of the Basuto, Letsie II, was unanimously elected Honorary Governor, leader of the Upper House in which 'Princes of African blood' were to hold their seats for life.

When it came to the election of a President-General, the obvious thing was for a distinguished Xhosa to be chosen as the Xhosa had been the first to be educated and they had an outstanding representative there, the Rev. Walter Rubusana. He was the first and only African ever to be elected to the Cape Provincial Council, an event that had caused a sensation among the whites. Educated at Lovedale and in the United States, he was a teacher and a leader of the Congregational Church, as well as an author of Xhosa books (his work on the revised version of the Xhosa Bible earned him a doctorate of literature). Furthermore he had been a member of the

¹ Quoted by R. V. Selope Thema, *Drum*, July 1953.

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deputation to Britain to protest against the Union constitution in 1909 and he was a fine orator. But the Xhosa delegates at the conference decided that the Cape should take a back seat in order to unite people from the other provinces who besides suffered under greater restrictions, and when Seme proposed as President-General a renowned Zulu, they supported the election of the Rev. John Langelibalele ('the bright sun') Dube, while Rubusana became one of the Vice-Presidents.

Dube, at forty-one years, with narrow slanting eyes and Edwardian moustache, may have seemed staid but he was a determined and practical visionary. After attending the American Board Mission School in Amanzimtoti, Natal,¹ in 1889 he had gone to the United States where he worked his way through college. He became a teacher, then studied theology. He was influenced by great Negroes, some of whom had founded colleges, such as Booker T. Washington of Tuskegee and Dr. John Hope of Atlanta University, and he was all the more dismayed on his return to Natal to find that the Government was still only providing Natives with education up to Standard IV. He at once tried to establish an industrial school. The obstacles were immense, for one thing where could an African possibly raise the necessary capital? People scoffed at his dream and the Boer War made any local fund-raising doubly difficult so, almost penniless, he returned to America, and through forceful lectures raised enough money to go back and establish Ohlange Institute, high on a hill at his birthplace, Inanda. Pupils helped in the building, and when he later decided to open a girls' school as well, he again toured the States, this time with his wife, a gifted singer, and they raised funds by lecturing and singing. His vision for his people went further: in 1904 he founded the first African newspaper in Natal, *Ilanga lase Natal* (sun of Natal), and he became President of the Natal Native Congress. But first and foremost Dube was a Zulu patriot, related to the royal house and adviser to the Paramount Chief. He had courted arrest by protesting outspokenly against the execution of Zulus during the Bambata rebellion in 1906. His patriotism was both a virtue and a disadvantage; however, for the time being the Native National Congress saw only his virtue, his complete identification of himself with the Zulu people who honoured him, and his strong belief that Africans must learn to

¹ Later Adams College.

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stand on their own feet, that self-help was the best foundation for the freedom they sought. His parochialism was not immediately apparent nor was his tactlessness and tendency to be intolerant of other people's views.

The others who were elected to office were also earnest men, desiring the self-improvement of their people. Seme became Treasurer-General and Richard Msimang became chairman of the committee set up to draft a constitution.

Not all the leaders were so highly educated. The Secretary-General was Solomon Tshekiso Plaatje, a pleasant-faced, deep-browed young man with wide-set eyes who had only had a few years' education at a Lutheran school in the north-west Cape and for the rest read voraciously and taught himself. He not only passed the Cape Civil Service examinations, coming top in typing, Dutch and Native languages, but he spoke English and German. He had interpreted and drawn up weekly reports on the Native situation for the British in Mafeking during the siege, afterwards interpreting for the Duke of Connaught. He contributed to English language newspapers in Cape Town and Pretoria, then, financed by Chief Silas Molema in Mafeking, he founded and edited a Tswana newspaper. A fine lucid orator himself, he hated inarticulate speakers. From the start he was extremely popular in Congress.

Another self-made man was Thomas Mapikela who, after training as a carpenter in the Grahamstown Native College, eventually became a successful builder and a leading citizen in the location of Bloemfontein. His experience as a member of the Free State Native Congress since the beginning of the century, and on the delegation to London in 1909, together with his respect for the traditions of the Imperial Parliament, made him an ideal person for Speaker of the Congress. He filled the role with tactful strength and spoke English, Zulu and Sotho fluently. A man of character, slight and energetic, with a wide gentle mouth, he made an imposing figure on the platform as he sat there in his morning coat with top hat beside his chair. He had a habit of taking his spectacles, which hung on a chain, out of his breast-pocket, folding them and replacing them, to which he gave a grave meaning. He was known as 'Map of Africa' because of his name, Mapikela, and because he used to say that the whole of Africa and not just the south was the Africans' country.

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Under the leadership of these men the newly-formed Congress decided to seek redress of grievances by constitutional means and to agitate for the removal of the colour bar in education, in industry, in Parliament and in the administration. They hoped to educate the white Parliament, enlist the sympathy of Europeans, and teach the African people to understand their rights and duties and to be industrious, clean and thrifty. Also they would encourage the establishment of national colleges. These were considerable aims and the Eastern Cape newspaper, *Imvo Zabantsundu* (African Opinion)¹ commented that the S.A.N.N.C. 'is nothing less than a Native Parliament'. So this alliance of solid middle-class urban men with chiefs and tribesmen from rural areas was formed. The lawyers, clergy and journalists represented a new form of leadership alongside the traditional. The significance of the event was completely overlooked by white South Africans. Only the African newspaper *Imvo* reported it.

Later in the year Pixley Seme launched the first national African newspaper, the *Abantu-Batho* ('People' published in English and three Bantu languages). Although half a dozen other African newspapers existed, usually edited by Congress leaders, they were confined to particular provinces or towns. Seme's enthusiasm and energy in planning this mouthpiece for the national organization won financial support from the Queen Regent of Swaziland, Natotsibeni, a public-minded woman who sympathized with his aim of uniting the African people.

'We were dreaming of changes,' said one editor of *Abantu-Batho*, 'of the day when Africans would sit in Parliament and would be able to buy land.' However the establishment of the S.A.N.N.C. and of its newspaper were but first steps; in the country at large the people remained divided, unaware.

¹ March 26, 1912.

II

1912-1918: Land and Loyalty



Some months after Africans had formed their Native National Congress, Afrikaners formed the Nationalist Party, under the leadership of General Hertzog, who had just been dropped from Botha's Cabinet because of his fervent anti-British nationalism. Before this crisis Hertzog had, of all things, been Minister of Native Affairs and Justice, appointed to those portfolios by Botha in order to placate the Afrikaner voters. When Hertzog had taken over Native Affairs racial extremists hailed him as their future Prime Minister and acclaimed him as the right man to fix up the Natives. He toured the Orange Free State and lectured farmers on their folly in letting land to the Natives. In some cases, where farmers had rushed to the mines and left their farms in the care of Native servants, on a half-share system, it was found that the servants were heading for prosperity and this was seen to menace white supremacy.

Meanwhile in the Eastern Transvaal, Seme had caused consternation amongst white farmers by buying four farms and establishing the African Farmers' Association to encourage Africans to buy land and learn modern farming methods. The neighbouring whites complained that in these circumstances South Africa could never be a white man's country. In response to such clamour the Rt. Hon. Abraham Fischer, former Prime Minister of the Orange River Colony and now a Member of Parliament, asked his constituents: 'What is it you want? We have passed all the coolie laws and we have passed all the kafir laws . . . what more can the Government do for you?'

They wanted more labour on their farms and an end to the Natives' right to buy land.

Land. This was the African's only security. Effective political rights had been denied him by Union, now something far more

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precious was to be plundered. The Government pushed ahead with the Native Land Bill. The million whites would have access to more than 90% of the country while the four million Africans would be restricted to 7.3% of the country—with rights of freehold ownership or of leasehold and transaction in land only in 'reserves'. Much of this was of poor fertility, indeed certain areas in the Northern Cape and the Northern Transvaal were known to be permanently drought-stricken. The Bill also made it a crime for any but servants to live on white farms and ordered the immediate eviction of Native squatters. Nearly a million Africans were squatters on white farms, living there with their families and small herds in return for services to the farmer.

In face of this terrible threat the Native National Congress organized protest meetings and at its first annual conference in March 1913 appointed a deputation to see the new Minister of Native Affairs. As there seemed no hope of achieving withdrawal of the Bill the deputation concentrated on suggesting reforms. Every request was refused. Dube wrote to Lord Gladstone, the Governor-General, appealing to him to withhold his consent. His Excellency replied that this was not within his constitutional function. When Congress requested an interview with him this met with the same reply. Meanwhile Church and Mission Councils representing, it was said in the House of Assembly, hundreds of thousands of African souls, made their protest. The Government rejected this and innumerable similar African petitions. It accepted thirteen petitions signed by 304 whites. In Parliament, though the Bill met with strong opposition from the best brains in both Houses, the Government, mindful of the backveld farmers who must be retained as loyal voters, steam-rolled it through. Lord Gladstone signed it on behalf of the King and, on a Friday morning, June 20, 1913, 'the African woke,' as Sol Plaatje put it, 'to find himself a pariah in the land of his birth.'

Congress resolved that there was nothing left to do but to appeal to His Majesty's Government and to 'apprise the British public of the kind of Government ruling South Africa under the Union Jack.' They had for so long felt close to Britain that it did not seem pointless. But one influential Cape leader mocked their intention as a 'supremely laughable errand': John Tengo Jabavu, editor of *Imvo*, who had been slow to see the dangers implicit in Union, was now bemused by his friendship with the new Minister of

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Native Affairs, J. H. Sauer, who happened also to be one of *Imvo's* shareholders, and supported the Land Act as sponsored by a 'sincere friend' of the Natives.

Congress disregarded his attacks on them as 'northern extremists'. While fund-raising went ahead the Secretary-General, Plaatje, toured the Free State, and other Congress leaders toured the Transvaal, gathering evidence for the deputation. It was mid-winter and white farmers had begun to evict African squatters and half-share farmers. On many occasions in the Free State Plaatje found families bivouacked, their beasts dying of starvation, as they rested from going to and fro in the country in search of a place to live. One such man was Kgobadi. He had been earning £100 a year on an Afrikaner's farm while he and his wife had looked after their own cattle. When the Act went through the farmer demanded the services of Kgobadi, his wife and his cattle, in return for 30/- a month. Kgobadi refused. The farmer evicted them. One night in the veld Plaatje found them with their children huddled together on their ox-wagon. A blizzard whipped across the flat land. Kgobadi's goats were to kid and the kids had been dying as they trekked. And Mrs. Kgobadi had been nursing a sick baby in the jolting wagon. The baby died that night. Plaatje told how the death of the child added a fresh perplexity to the stricken parents. They had no right or title to the farm lands through which they trekked: they must keep to the public roads—the deceased child had to be buried, but where, when and how?

So the father dug a grave at night, when no one was looking, and in that crude manner their baby was buried.

As Plaatje came across more—hundreds and hundreds—people wandering, his writing became the more impassioned. Some farmers told him that they had wanted their squatters to stay on because 'we were living so nicely with your people', but they would have risked a fine of £100.

He met an Afrikaner policeman on horseback, who said jovially, 'If ever there was a fool's errand, it is that of a kafir trying to find a new home for his stock and family.'

'And what do you think, baas officer,' asked Plaatje with a deference likely to elicit a reply, 'must eventually be the lot of a people under such unfortunate circumstances?'

'They had no business to hanker after British rule,' was the policeman's reply. 'Why did they not assist the forces of their

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Republic during the war instead of supplying the English with scouts and intelligence? . . . Serve them right, I say. . . .'

Plaatje followed a case of an evicted family who, after a fruitless search for a place to live, took a travelling pass to Basutoland, the nearby British colony. But before they could reach it they were ambushed by some Afrikaners who shot them and took their stock. One of the whites was arrested. The stolen cattle had been found in his possession; a bullet near the bodies fitted his pistol. In his trial in Bloemfontein General Hertzog defended him. The white jury acquitted him. His friends acclaimed him. Subsequently the police arrested him on a charge of stealing the murdered African's cattle; he was convicted and sentenced to three years' imprisonment, with hard labour.

Another factor which Plaatje observed was the irony of South Africa 'which so tyrannically chased her own Natives from the country', receiving 'at this very time with open arms, Polish, Finnish, Russian and German Jews, fled from the tyranny of their governments.' He transposed some words from *The Merchant of Venice* and asked: 'Hath not a kafir eyes? . . . If you prick us do we not bleed? . . . If you tickle us do we not laugh? . . . and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.'¹

But, in this latter they proved unlike the peoples of Europe: at a time when white workers on the Witwatersrand had broken into violence, the Native Congress was pursuing its course by deputations. The fund-raising for the deputation to go to England continued, and on two occasions in the Transvaal chiefs and tribesmen were stimulated to contribute to the Congress fund after General Botha, the Prime Minister, had visited them and warned them against Congress.

The Government and even their own white liberal friends were appealing to Congress leaders not to go to England on the grounds that the Land Act was a domestic affair. So decent were Congress that they interpreted these appeals as a sign that the Government intended to make concessions. They should have been disabused when the Secretary for Native Affairs appeared in person at their second annual conference in Kimberley in February 1914, profusely expressing the Government's gratitude to the Natives and their leaders for 'loyal co-operation', and warning that Congress

¹ *Native Life in South Africa*, S. Plaatje.

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would set the clock back many years if it pursued its intention of appealing to Britain. They were left in bewilderment and gloom—but only momentarily, they thoroughly enjoyed the conference which was opened by the Bishop of Kimberley and Kuruman, while Afrikaner guests joined in the speeches and telegrams of greetings were read from Members of Parliament. In between the deliberations De Beers Diamond Company entertained the delegates, who as usual included frock-coated chiefs, clergy and intellectuals, and they had a bio¹ and concert. When the conference got down to serious business the deputation was elected. Dube as President-General would lead, the others were Sol Plaatje, Mapikela the Speaker, Rubusana,² and Saul Msane, editor of the Congress newspaper *Abantu-Batho*.

The deputation were surprised to be invited by the Governor-General, Lord Gladstone, to Government House, when they arrived in Cape Town in May 1914. Again hope sprang. But all he wanted was to urge them not to go to Britain. They were firm. They told him of the barbarous cruelties inflicted by the Land Act. They believed they saw astonishment and pity on his face, then His Excellency remarked: 'The Natives are not the only sufferers. Even in England people have suffered hardships . . . till they were compelled to emigrate to America and other places.'

One last attempt to dissuade them from appealing to Britain was made by no less a person than General Botha himself who, as Plaatje put it, 'condescended' to meet the deputation. They hoped he would make some offer of a compromise. He simply told them that he and some of his acquaintances had refrained from evicting their own Natives. When they suggested that he should at least amend the law to legalize the settlement of tenants, he replied: 'Parliament will think I'm mad.'

On reaching London the deputation saw the Colonial Secretary, the Rt. Hon. L. Harcourt, who took no notes, asked no questions, told them that the Prime Minister of South Africa had assured him that the Natives had too much land already and, on every point they made, replied that he had the assurance of General Botha to

¹ Cinema.

² Rubusana, and the African people of the Eastern Cape, had just suffered a bad setback when, due to the intervention of Jabavu, who split the vote, Rubusana lost his seat on the Cape Provincial Council to a white candidate. Never again was an African elected and however distinguished Jabavu was in the educational field, he never retrieved his political reputation.

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the contrary. He concluded that they should have made their case to their own Parliament. So they decided to appeal to the British Parliament and public. Through the help of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society and the Rt. Hon. A. Henderson, M.P. and the Brotherhood Movement, they put their case. Questions were asked on their behalf in the House of Commons. It was pointed out for instance that in the Transvaal 300,000 whites had 31 million morgen of land while the 1 million natives were confined to half a million morgen. The Colonial Secretary brushed all points aside. However the deputation had a sympathetic press and were praised for their decorum in presenting the real and pressing grievances of their people. The *Daily News* said they were obviously men of culture and had given a reasonable account of the set-up in South Africa; it was time Parliament gave attention to its obligation; the South African Native 'has no vote and no friends'. *The Globe* pointed to the anomaly that the Basuto and Gold Coast Africans had just successfully appealed to London but in the case of the far more serious grievances of the South African Natives, they had no constitutional right to do so.

While the deputation were in England, and indeed throughout the two years of protest against the assault on the Africans' only security, the land, some Congress leaders had also been involved in other protests—against continued assault on their freedom of movement. In the Orange Free State African women were degraded and impoverished by the pass laws; forced to buy a fresh pass each month costing 1/- so that, for instance, a mother and five daughters were having to pay 6/- a month to the Municipality at a time when £2 a month was an excellent wage and, whereas men could get exemptions from the laws on limited grounds, women could not. Petitions and deputations having proved ineffectual, the women of the Free State 'threw off their shawls' and took the law into their own hands, as Plaatje put it in his report on the widespread protests. In Bloemfontein in July 1913 600 indignant but calm women marched to the Municipal offices and asked for the Mayor. He was out. When the Deputy Mayor came out to see them they deposited at his feet a bag of passes for the previous month and said they would not buy any more. For the first time South Africa witnessed passive resistance from the African people. This action by African women took place at the time of the suffragettes' protests in England.

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The idea caught on. In Jagersfontein, a small dorp, 52 women led by 'a jet-black Mozambique lady' went to jail rather than carry passes. There was not enough room in the Jagersfontein jail so the 53 were taken in donkey carts to Fauresmith and imprisoned there. In other dorps the jails were flooded. Plaatje, before leaving for England, had visited 34 of the passive resisters who were doing hard labour in Kroonstad. He was shocked to see how emaciated they had become, besides it was exceptionally cold and their socks and shoes had been taken away. He at once telegraphed the Prime Minister (who had just taken over Native Affairs—the fourth incumbent in three years). Plaatje pointed out that all these women were in jail not for committing a crime but for resenting a crime which had been committed against them. Botha replied in Afrikaans: 'It shall be my endeavour, as hitherto, to safeguard the just interests of the inhabitants of this land irrespective of colour'. Nothing was done.

Soon after, Dube returned from England and reported back to a special meeting of the Congress in Bloemfontein. Congress expressed disappointment at the cold reception given by the Imperial Government to their deputation, and gratitude to the British public for their warm welcome. While the conference was in session news came that Britain had declared war on Germany. At once the Africans decided 'to hang up Native grievances' and to render the Government every assistance. Dube and other leaders set off for Pretoria to offer the services of Congress. The African women of the Free State halted their passive resistance campaign and joined sewing classes to send clothing to the afflicted Belgians. From African people throughout Southern Africa there were offers of assistance. For instance one Congress leader in the Transvaal organized a touring choir to raise funds for the Governor-General's fund while the Rev. Walter Rubusana, who had so much influence among the Xhosa in the Eastern Cape, offered to help recruit 5,000 men to assist the South African forces fighting the Germans in South-West Africa.

The Government gave its reply: 'The Government does not desire to avail itself of the services, in a combatant capacity . . . of citizens not of European descent. Apart from other considerations, the present war is one which has its origins among the white people of Europe and the Government are anxious to avoid the employment of its native citizens in a warfare against whites.'

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But the patriotism of the Africans was irrepressible: they could be heard in country places singing 'Tipperary' in Xhosa, and as soon as they were called for they joined up in their tens of thousands to do menial tasks. Plaatje commented that Turcos, Algerians, Moroccans, Jamaicans, were doing wonderful deeds for the cause of the Allies; that the Canadian troops included Red Indians; but the non-whites of South Africa were required only as wagon drivers and as orderlies. Exposed to all the risks of war, they were not even mentioned in casualty lists if they were shot. Native drivers were classed with transport mules, he said, but if a mule were killed the owner was compensated.

When in 1915 the Boer Rebellion broke out, among the 10,000 rebels to be detained was Piet Grobler, the Member of Parliament who had originally moved the Native Land Bill in 1913.

After the rest of the Congress deputation had returned to South Africa, Plaatje remained in Britain. He toured the country speaking at meetings. When he ran out of money he managed somehow to make a living by journalism. His *Native Life in South Africa* was published and he worked with Professor Daniel Jones of London University on a Tswana reader. During that first hard winter of the Great War he was impressed by the silent determination of the London crowds and was moved by the young Scotsmen whom he saw going off to the front from Edinburgh. He found the audiences that he addressed so kind that for a time he forgot he was an African. He liked to dress formally in the British style, wearing a bowler hat and carrying gloves and an umbrella. He told about his people: he was not, he said, appealing on behalf of naked hordes of cannibals such as were displayed in fantastic pictures in shop windows in Europe, but on behalf of five million loyal British subjects. He described how recently in Johannesburg, when the Governor-General had congratulated a fashionable crowd on the maintenance at full pitch of the gold industry despite the strain of war, Lord Buxton had had no word for the African miners, the 200,000 'subterranean heroes, who by day and by night, for a mere pittance,' Plaatje pointed out, 'sacrificed their lungs to the rock dust which develops miners' phthisis,' and who paid taxes that were used towards beautifying white homes and maintaining the Government schools from which Africans were excluded.

More than 84,000 non-whites had joined the South African army, and among their casualties were the 600 African volunteers

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drowned at sea when the troop ship *Mendi* struck a mine and sank. It was at this time in 1917 that General Smuts, by then a world hero, made a celebrated speech at the Savoy Hotel in London in which he said, 'it has been our ideal to make it (South Africa) a white man's country,' an ideal still to be consummated. The speech shocked Congress and rankled in its leaders' minds for long after.

Meanwhile Congress had troubles of its own. Although its conference continued to be held annually, early enthusiasm had diminished. The executive, separated by great distances with difficulties of communication, met irregularly. The newspaper suffered from lack of funds and war-time paper shortages. Some turned against Dube, quarrelled with him and drove him to resign. Dube, humiliated, withdrew altogether from Congress to concentrate on advising the Zulu royal house and running Ohlange Institute. Some, always an impatient man, was anyway losing interest in Congress and concentrating on his law practice and work as legal adviser to the Swazi royal family. The rest of the Executive proceeded to resign *en bloc*. So a personality squabble almost destroyed the organization.

Yet the will to survive won. Daniel Letanka, a kind, reserved and diligent man, and one of the editors of the Congress newspaper, called a conference and a new Executive was appointed. The President-General was Samuel Mapoch Makgatho, a Transvaler, which was logical when Johannesburg and the surrounding Reef had attracted many of the Africans driven off the land by the Land Act with the result that they were now becoming urbanized. Makgatho, in his middle fifties, educated in the Transvaal and in England, was a religious man—a Methodist lay preacher—and as a teacher had founded the Transvaal African Teachers' Association. But two factors more than others won him the confidence of Congress supporters: one was that since 1906 he had led successive African political organizations in the Transvaal; the other was that although not an outstanding personality, he was a fiery man 'who would not budge' and was practical. For instance he challenged the railway segregation policy and suffered assault from an infuriated Mr. Wolmarans, an Afrikaner next to whom he sat on the train. Other Congress leaders followed his example and they eventually won the right to have carriages of all classes provided for Africans, albeit segregated ones.

When the end of the war came Makgatho led Congress in

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expressing African loyalty to His Majesty the King, and pride at their contribution to the war effort. Congress went on to call for a removal of the colour bar in the franchise and, looking further afield, called for an assurance that the High Commission Territories would not be incorporated in the Union and that South-West Africa would not be disposed of until the inhabitants had been consulted. This concern about South-West Africa showed considerable prescience. In reply to their cable His Majesty thanked them for their congratulations on the glorious victory.

III

1918–1924: Passive Resistance and Missed Opportunities



The post-war years were a time of general industrial unrest. The cost of living had soared, there was a drought and crop failures. All over South Africa white workers came out on strike, but the Africans endured greater tribulation. Though they had to pay the same prices or more for goods as had the whites,¹ for them in Johannesburg £4 a month was regarded as a good wage; against this their rent cost 10/- a month, tax £1—£2 a year, and they still had to pay for food, clothing, fuel and the children's education. The crop failures in the over-crowded reserves sent thousands of illiterate peasants searching for work in the few towns. Even from the comparatively contented Cape, hunger was driving people to live under the restrictions of the Transvaal. Around the expanding white towns and suburbs, Native 'locations' proliferated and—denied Municipal services—inevitably became slums. But for all the squalor the locations bustled with an engaging vitality.

* → These conditions set off a chain of protests in which Congress leaders took part despite the risks of prosecution. A cruel handicap was the Master and Servants Act which made it a criminal offence for an African to break his contract or refuse to obey an order from his employer. Furthermore Africans were liable to criminal prosecution if they dared to strike.

The first African strike, in 1918, had been of 'night-soil boys'—sanitary workers—in Johannesburg who downed buckets and demanded 6d. a day more on their wage. 152 of them were arrested. The Congress instructed a European lawyer to defend them. The

¹ The Johannesburg *Star* reckoned that because storekeepers' charges varied in different areas, Europeans got £10 more in goods for every £100 spent than Natives.

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Magistrate found them guilty and sentenced them to two months' hard labour, gratuitously promising shooting or lashes if they tried to escape or disobeyed orders.¹ Congress led the storm of protest by calling for a general strike for a 1/- a day increase in wage. The police promptly arrested five Congress leaders, including the kindly Letanka, as well as S. P. Bunting and two other members of the International Socialist League who, as the forerunners of the Communist Party, had been active in organizing labour. They were charged with incitement to violence and were described as 'dangerous' by the Prosecutor. This was the first time that Africans and Europeans were arrested together for political activity but it was largely a coincidence for Congress had no connection with the socialists who in turn were not favourably disposed towards the 'bourgeois' Congress. The case fell away when the main witness, an African, Luke Masina, who had been hired by the Native Affairs Department to spy on Congress, repudiated his false witness. (He subsequently joined Congress.).²

The next attempt at a strike had taken place in Bloemfontein where Selby Msimang, a methodical and energetic young man, a founder-member of Congress and younger brother of Richard, urged the people to stop work and demand 4/6 a day instead of 2/-. The reaction of the authorities was to declare martial law. African meetings were outlawed and Msimang was arrested. At his trial crowds of Africans demonstrated. He was released on bail and invited the Mayor and Magistrate to meet a large gathering of Africans in the location. He explained to them that the agitation for higher wages 'is not a matter that has been thought of on the spur of the moment or brought into the minds of the people by outside influences. It is a movement which is spontaneous among the people, only it has been lying dormant in their minds on account of their obedience to the order of General Botha that people should refrain from making any agitations during hostilities.' The war having ended, now, he pointed out, was the time to raise the question. He was subsequently acquitted and African wages were raised, but this was a small, local victory.³

Besides, though their grievances were many, Africans were difficult to organize. Many workers in the towns were herded into

¹ *Cape Argus*, June 11, 1918.

² *Time Longer than Rope*, E. Roux.

³ *The Star*, March 1, 3, 7, 1919.

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easily controlled compounds; others, often illiterate and bewildered by the white man's world, were too busy trying to adapt to that world to think much about politics.

The Government's most effective instrument in controlling their movement and maintaining their subjection was the hated pass system which turned any African outside the Native reserves into a vagrant unless he were working for a European, or, if he were a clergyman, lawyer or the like, he could be exempted from the pass laws though he would still have to produce on demand a certificate proving this. An African needed passes to get a job, to travel, and to be out after curfew. Anyone not producing a pass on demand was liable to a fine or imprisonment and the resentment against the laws was exacerbated by the way many policemen administered them. Such justification as the Government might claim for the system was offset by the fact that there was far less trouble in the Cape Province where pass laws were not applied.

In Johannesburg in March and April 1919, Congress succeeded in organizing the bitter resentment into massive demonstrations against the pass laws. Several thousand Africans led by Horatio Bud-Mbelle, a young leader in the Transvaal section of Congress and a relative of Plaatje's, held a mass meeting during which picketers collected people's passes in sacks. The Congress leaders were emphatic that there must be 'no violence'; the picketers collected and put away any sticks or sjamboks that men might be carrying. The speeches over, they all sang 'Rule Britannia', 'Nkosi Sikelel' i-Afrika' and 'The King'. The crowd cheered enthusiastically for the King and for the Governor-General. For President Wilson of the United States there were especially loud cheers because he had aroused their imagination with his Fourteen Points envisaging freedom for dependent peoples. The business of collecting passes went on. The *Johannesburg Star* remarked that there were no untoward incidents: 'as a matter of fact there was a sort of humorous atmosphere among the Natives.' Several thousand Africans had already marched to the pass office, where they left sacks full of passes, and protested against the law to an official. He told them that if they broke the law they would suffer. The evening paper carried the headline **NATIVE MENACE.**

White workers who were simultaneously on strike came forward to say that if there were 'native trouble' they would stand by the community. African picketers were arrested. A police officer told

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them they had gone against the laws of the country and against the King; they would be punished for their 'traitorous behaviour'. Meanwhile a strike of white barbers which had lasted a week was now settled and the men resumed work 'satisfied with the concessions granted'. As soon as white builders, plumbers, butchers and hairdressers had started striking, the Government appointed an Industrial Commission to look into their grievances. A Congress leader told a journalist: 'The white man fights for his rights and when he does not get them he goes on strike. . . . And you don't put them in gaol. But if we want to fight for our rights the police lock us up . . .'

The passive resistance spread rapidly through the mining villages. From all over the Witwatersrand Congress leaders took sacks full of passes and dumped them at the pass office. Bud-Mbelle explained to a journalist that their object in 'initiating passive resistance' was not to challenge the Government for they 'owed absolute allegiance to the King and the British constitution', but, he pointed out, their attempts to achieve redress for their many grievances through petitions and representations had been to no avail; so there had been no alternative but to resort to passive resistance. He reminded the journalist how meticulously they had organized against violence, how from every platform Congress told people not to shout nor incite police and, if arrested, to go quietly.

The protests went on despite hundreds of arrests. In Vrededorp women played a leading part in the orderly meeting. People wore white arm-bands imprinted with 'Freedom for All' and they sang the 100th Psalm:

'Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.
Serve the Lord with gladness. . . .
For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting;
And His truth endureth to all generations.'

A huge crowd gathered outside the court for the first trial of two hundred people arrested on a charge of disturbing the public peace. They all pleaded 'Not guilty'. Sentences ranged from one to six months' imprisonment with hard labour, in some cases with lashes. When the Magistrate pronounced sentence, from the non-white public gallery came audible 'clicks' of indignation.

Outside the court the crowds waited. Some of them were women with children on their backs, including wives who had brought food to their husbands on trial. A Johannesburg resident, a Mr.

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William Hosken, was to describe what happened. Police, mounted and on foot, arrived, to be greeted by hearty cheers from the Natives, then some booing, followed by 'absolute quiet'. Not a single hostile move was made by the Natives. Then—'to my astonishment,' said Hosken, 'the mounted police suddenly spurred their horses and charged on the crowd.' The police used their staves vigorously, riding over Natives—who included women. Whereupon a civilian began 'slashing with a stick at every Native that he came near, and finally struck a Native woman a severe blow.' Hosken remonstrated, and demanded the man's name, but was ignored. He heard one bystander exclaiming: 'Would I had a machine gun, and I could then do some execution.' As he went along the street he came across more whites intercepting Natives.¹

All was quiet at the Magistrates' court the next day. Natives, the Press reported, were in a subdued mood. A police official declared, 'Yesterday's little charge has had the right effect, and I am confident that the back of the trouble has been broken.'

Meanwhile Bud-Mbelle and other Congress leaders were arrested, at a time when members of the Government were arriving in Johannesburg to confer with the white strike leaders.

Yet the protests continued for a few more days. On one occasion Africans stoned the police and on another whites shot and killed an African demonstrator.

In the Cape Peninsula feeling was so strong that although only a few Africans lived there a Congress branch organized a protest meeting in sympathy with the Transvaal resistance and from there as well as from the Transvaal came calls for the Government to consider the whole question of the pass laws and the denial of citizenship rights to the African people.

The Government appointed a one-man commission of inquiry into the allegations of police ill-treatment in Johannesburg, who exonerated the police 'in view of the difficult circumstances'. However, he did bluntly suggest that the Government should modify the pass laws as it appeared to him that the Natives were determined to resist them. The Government ignored his suggestion, as it ignored a subsequent recommendation by a Committee from the Department of Justice and Native Affairs, 'that the present system of pass laws should be abolished'.

Evidence of the Natives' 'determination to resist the pass laws'

¹ Letter to the *Star*, April 1919.

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came powerfully from another source as, with the ending of the war, African women felt free to renew their protest. They had acquired a remarkable leader, Mrs. Charlotte Maxeke. Born in the Cape in 1874, as a girl Charlotte Manye, who had a lovely voice, toured England in an African choir, performing before Queen Victoria. The choir went on to New York where it broke up and Charlotte found herself stranded. Fortunately Negro friends helped her and sent her to Wilberforce University in Ohio, where she graduated as a Bachelor of Science in 1905. There, too, she met and married another South African, Marshall Maxeke, who had gone from Lovedale College to the United States to study music and, after taking a Bachelor of Arts degree with Honours in Classics and Mathematics, graduated in Theology. He became a missionary of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and with Charlotte returned to South Africa. They decided to do in the Transvaal what John Dube had done in Natal, and after a hard struggle to raise funds they had established a school near Pietersburg in 1908. Maxeke also edited a local African newspaper and became a prominent member of the Transvaal Native Congress.

Charlotte Maxeke, aroused by the struggle of the women in the Free State in 1913, strongly advocated the founding of a women's section of Congress. Highly intelligent and lovable, she was striking to look at, tall, ample-figured, with sparkling, penetrating eyes which one of her friends said 'could strike terror into those who crossed swords with her and yet be gentle and kind to those who needed her sympathy.' She liked to tell the story of how she once boarded a tram in Johannesburg in which only Europeans were allowed to use the lower decks. Because of her size she just could not climb up the stairs. When the conductor came and ordered her upstairs, she gave him one look and said, 'Young man, you try and get me up there if you can.' She completed her journey among the whites on the lower deck.¹ She did not always travel so comfortably—sometimes when she went to organize the women in the Free State she had to travel by goods train, sitting on top of coal.

She became President of the Women's Congress and led them fearlessly. Although women had been so active in anti-pass protests years before, it was a revolution in African life for them to be thus directly involved in politics, and at that time they were hardly seen in the big towns. They brought an element of realism into the

¹ *Imvo*—article by Professor Z. K. Matthews.

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Congress. They demonstrated against passes in many parts of the country. Mrs. Maxeke led them in Johannesburg. Mrs. Mapikela was prominent in the Free State. In small villages women dumped bags of passes at Municipal offices. Many were imprisoned. In one village, Brandfort, they succeeded in getting the pass laws withdrawn, while in some areas the authorities relaxed the laws.

But no headway had been made in the crucial question of Parliamentary representation. The hopes of Congress leaders again turned towards the first object of their loyalty, the King of England. The recollection of President Wilson's declaration that even small nations were entitled to the right of self-determination encouraged them to send a second deputation not only to Britain, but to the Peace Conference at Versailles. Certain leaders argued strongly that it would be better to send a deputation led by Africans from South-West Africa, which could argue against the mandate being given to the Union Government, as subsequently happened. They were outnumbered, unfortunately, for this would have been a unique opportunity legitimately to engage the attention of the Peace Conference when former German territories were discussed, and to give facts about the lack of political and human rights in South Africa.

The deputation that went to Versailles included Sol Plaatje and was led by J. T. Gumede, a solid, amiable Zulu, a teacher, pianist and singer, who had already toured Europe with a Zulu choir. The Congress Chaplain went, as well as one of the managers of *Abantu-Batho*, while the principal spokesman was the fifth member, Richard Victor Selope ('Don't Beg') Thema, an attractive, debonair young man who had been Secretary-General of Congress since 1915 and a frequent contributor to *Abantu-Batho*. Thema came from a poor family in the Northern Transvaal and as a child during the Anglo-Boer War had been commandeered by the Boers to be at one time or another a kitchen-boy, cook, batman, waiter and labourer. After taking his matriculation at Lovedale College he became a clerk in his home town, Pietersburg, until an incident took place that changed the course of his life. One day as he cycled to work, his hat on his head, he passed a white policeman on horse-back who veered round and demanded to know where Thema's hat was. Thema replied: 'On my head,' whereupon the policeman knocked him off his bicycle and kicked him for not taking his hat off. There and then Thema decided to join the

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Native National Congress and was so effective in establishing a branch locally that Richard Msimang, the solicitor, gave him a job in his firm in Johannesburg.

Versailles 1919. The deputation found that apart from the official delegation led by General Botha and General Smuts, there was another, unofficial deputation from South Africa, lobbying hard at that time, consisting of General Hertzog, Dr. D. F. Malan, and other Afrikaner Nationalists, who wanted to arouse sympathy for their aim of a Republic of South Africa. The Afrikaners followed President Wilson to America when the Peace Conference ended, but the Native National Congress deputation could not afford to do so. Nor did they get any hearing in Versailles, and when they went on to the Colonial Office in London they were at once advised to return to South Africa and work patiently within the limits of the Union's constitution. Interviews with Mr. Lloyd George, the Prime Minister, and with the Archbishop of Canterbury, left the deputation with no alternative but to try once again to arouse British public opinion to compel their Government to influence the South African Government. As before they had a good press and the British people were friendly; a splendid banquet was put on for their entertainment, but they were arguing a hopeless case and their funds ran out. All but Plaatje returned to South Africa and reported back to a Congress that at last was disillusioned. As one of its leaders, the Rev. Z. R. Mahabane, said a year or two later, they felt that England 'had finally washed her hands of the innocent blood of the Bantu races, divested herself of all responsibility—although like Pilate in sacred history' she would never be 'absolved from responsibility in the shameful "selling away" of a whole nation.'¹

Sol Plaatje became the first of South Africa's leaders to make political contact with Africans from other parts of the continent and with American Negroes, when he attended the Pan-African Congress in Paris, organized by Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, with the object of influencing the Peace Conference. From France, Plaatje went on to enlighten people in Canada and the United States about conditions in South Africa.

Meanwhile in the Union industrial discontent once again drove Africans to action. In February 1920 more than 40,000 African miners on the Witwatersrand came out on strike with a demand for

¹ *Three Presidential Addresses.* Lovedale Press.

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higher wages. James Gumede, just back from London, helped to organize the miners but after a Congress meeting on one mine had been broken up by white civilians shooting on the crowd, the organizing petered out and the strike was soon crushed by a combination of white miners 'scabbing', of police and civilians violently driving Africans back to work (several Africans being killed), and by sheer lack of trade union know-how.

This was not the only opportunity that Congress lost in the urgent need to rally the workers and channel their anger at their grievances into effective action. Though Bud-Mbelle, Selby Msimang, and several other young men worked with the people in organizing protests, the main body of Congress went its way, respectably making petitions. Its latest asked the Governor-General to remove the phrase in the reference to Members of Parliament—'of European descent': the deprivation that still rankled with most Congress leaders. For the time being, national dignity concerned them more than the cost of living and poverty.

This was epitomized by the Congress constitution, drawn up by Richard Msimang after four years of earnest consideration, and published in 1919. Although it said that Congress was 'without legislative pretensions', its objectives tended to be pretentious, covering a wide range of political and educational activities including the setting before the Government and Parliament of proposed laws to benefit and protect the subject races, while not only were provinces and districts embraced in the branch organization but it was envisaged that the High Commission Territories, Nyasaland, West Africa and East Africa could be represented in Congress. The chiefs kept their honoured place in the Upper House. The President-General and Treasurer had to be at least forty and thirty-five-years old respectively with certain property qualifications; the Secretary-General could be younger. The President nominated people for members to elect to the Executive every three years. Only men 'of the aboriginal races of Africa' could be members—for a fee of 2/6 a year—but a generous provision opened honorary membership to people of any race who rendered eminent services to the African people. Women could join the Bantu Women's Congress. The most important section related to the methods that Congress would use—'demonstration, agitation, resolutions, protest and constitutional propaganda; deputations . . . ; passive action or continued movement. . . .'

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Whatever 'continued movement' might have meant it evidently did not cover organizing the workers. Selby Msimang with other young men tried once more to fill this gap, and at a conference in Johannesburg got support from workers in Bloemfontein, Cape Town and Queenstown. But of all the top leaders in Congress, only Mrs. Maxeke came to it. As Msimang put it, this 'generous, handsome woman threw the whole weight of her intellectual gifts on the side of the men'. They were outpaced by the man who had been co-sponsor with Msimang: Clements Kadalie, a dynamic clerk from Nyasaland, who took away to Cape Town the constitution agreed on by the workers' conference and with the help of a European, used it to set up his own organization. This, the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, promised to win higher wages and better conditions for the African people who began to pay their fees and join in their thousands, not surprisingly, for, as the Johannesburg *Star* stated, the Native 'is crowded off the land . . . denied a permanent foothold in urban areas . . . exploited at every point, badgered from pillar to post, and under disabilities of all kinds whether he stays at home or seeks work away from it.' The crux of the matter was that 'unorganized and inarticulate he is powerless'.

Meanwhile, since the death of Botha in 1919, Smuts had been Prime Minister and also Minister of Native Affairs and of Justice. Between 1920 and 1922 he showed that he was not to be trifled with. A threatened strike of Africans in Port Elizabeth in October 1920 was crushed by police and white civilians: more than twenty non-whites were killed. A few months later at Bulhoek in the Eastern Cape, a fervid religious sect illegally camping on common ground was eventually removed by the army. The Israelites armed with rough tools charged; the police fired, killing 163 Israelites and wounding nearly as many. At this time Congress was holding its annual conference at Bloemfontein. The shocked delegates adjourned to march in a solemn funeral procession through the streets. The Bulhoek massacre is a story told to African children 'as an incident that has passed into what one might call the political history of the people'.¹

A few months later Smuts's army, supported by bombing planes, moved into the Mandated territory of South-West Africa to attack the Bondelswarts, a Hottentot tribe, who because of poverty

¹ Z. K. Matthews's Evidence in Treason Trial.

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refused to pay a heavy dog tax imposed on them. More than 100 men, women and children were killed and many mutilated.

Again in 1922 on the Rand a white miners' strike turned into a full-scale revolt over a Chamber of Mines proposal to lower the colour bar to enable African miners to do more of the lower skilled work reserved for whites. Smuts personally directed the forces to smash this revolt. Africans were not involved and the tiny minority of the left-wing who fought for their rights as fellow-workers were easily isolated and two of them were shot. During the two months of rioting Africans were spontaneously attacked; seven were killed and thirty-six wounded. Thousands were rendered unemployed and returned by the Chamber of Mines to the reserves. (This, by the way, was the occasion when white strikers sang 'The Red Flag' and communists raised a banner which read 'Workers of the World Fight and Unite for a White South Africa'. Shortly afterwards Dr. D. F. Malan, the Afrikaner Nationalist leader in the Cape, commended the Natives for 'true patriotism' and General Hertzog subscribed to the funds of Kadalie's new trade union!)

Smuts's Government was greatly weakened. The Nationalists gained ground. The Native National Congress declared it had no confidence in the Government. And for the first time it passed a motion of no-confidence in the British Government. Speakers even supported the idea of a Republic.

Smuts's comment was that the Congress was not representative, 'it consisted of a body of intellectuals', which drew from the *Johannesburg Star*¹ the retort that Smuts himself was an intellectual and there was 'scarcely less wide a gap between his mental outlook and that of some illiterate *bywoner* (white squatter) of the backveld' than between Congress leaders and ordinary Africans. The editorial concluded: 'Of course the Native Congress does not represent all the Natives. How could it in the circumstances prevailing in South Africa? . . . But upon questions directly affecting the interests of the Natives as a whole, the Congress probably represents Native opinion a good deal more faithfully than an Assembly elected by European voters.' The *Star* pointed out that in 1921 when Smuts had appointed a Native Affairs Commission because there had been so much trouble among Africans, the Commission had recommended the establishment of Native councils to consult the people but, two years later, nothing had been done.

¹ June 2, 1923.

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(When the councils were eventually set up, they proved the futility of advisory bodies, lacking legislative power to ensure implementation of their recommendations.)

And at the next election in 1924 white voters put into power a Government which demonstrated the extent to which political expediency could go: the Afrikaner Nationalists joined with the Labour Party—which had been backed in the election by the Communist Party both intent only on getting rid of Smuts who had put down the white miners—to form an anti-capitalist coalition. General Hertzog was the new Prime Minister, just as his followers had predicted at the time of the Native Land Act.

IV

1924-1929: Philosophies on Trial



One of Hertzog's first actions was to threaten strict enforcement of segregation. If he did so, a Congress leader warned, the whole country would be on fire.

In the event nothing immediately came of Hertzog's threat as he avoided headlong conflict.

Yet there was provocation enough: at a time of unprecedented prosperity throughout the country, while the Government remitted taxation for whites, the poll tax for Africans in the Transvaal was increased by 25%. An ironical factor was that for the first time Hertzog created a portfolio of Labour, of which the first Minister was the leader of the Labour Party, Walter Madeley, whose one concern—which he shared with Hertzog—was for the white worker and the increasing number of 'poor whites' created by the country's economic system. Further provocation lay in a renewed threat to enforce rigidly the pass laws against women in the Free State and Transvaal. Again the women rallied. Their protests, which included a boycott of the Prince of Wales's visit to Bloemfontein, again resulted in many arrests, cheerfully courted. But this time they won a decided victory: the pass laws as they applied to women in the two former Republics were quietly allowed to lapse.

Another victory was scored by Congress in the case of the Transvaal poll tax increase when Daniel Letanka challenged the law by refusing to pay, was arrested and won the case in the Supreme Court, with the result that the Transvaal rate was reduced by 75% to £1 per annum and rates throughout the country were brought into line.

But for the rest, Congress's influence waned as it failed to rise to the occasion while the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union swept the country, eclipsing Congress and drawing away many of

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its members. The leaders of the two organizations typified their strengths and weaknesses. The I.C.U. leader Kadalie—demagogic, magnetic, with his odd high-pitched voice—rallied the masses as no one had done before: promising reforms, cursing Hertzog. He was soon wielding such power that even European politicians thought it worth their while to woo him. He recruited as his chief lieutenant Allison Wessels George Champion, a Zulu from Stanger, Natal, who had organized the Native clerks on the Rand mines, a natural rebel, big, bold-voiced, ruthless and charming.

On the other hand the new President-General of the Native National Congress was a benevolent clergyman, the Rev. Zaccheus R. Mahabane. A Methodist, thoughtful, and slow-speaking, sparely built, with a round jolly face, Mahabane had joined Congress in 1917 because 'I think right from the beginning I was always interested in the temporal welfare of the people, as well as the spiritual, because before I joined the Ministry in 1910, I had an idea of reading law so as to be in a better position to make intelligent representations on behalf of Non-Europeans'. Though he had felt it inappropriate for a Minister to take on the leadership of a political organization, he was persuaded to do so. The work of Congress as he saw it was to try to educate Africans about their rights, to make representations against the colour bar and for better wages, and to hold frequent meetings.

Simultaneously Congress was weakened when some militant leaders had to withdraw from politics to earn a living. For instance Sol Plaatje became African lobby correspondent in Cape Town, attending Parliament regularly to watch over African interests, and he also translated some of Shakespeare's plays into Sechuana. Then Charlotte Maxeke who had campaigned successfully for the increasing replacement of men in domestic service by women, opened an employment office for women; later, as a recognized authority on matters affecting women and juveniles, she was appointed Probation Officer in the Johannesburg area. Another loss was Bud-Mbelle who became a court interpreter, not a job that could be regarded as in the interests of his people.

'A sorry tale of chaos' was how the new Secretary-General of Congress described this period of its decline. Though the annual conference held in Johannesburg in Easter 1925 began with a rousing procession through the streets led by a brass band and leaders carrying banners, there followed a report on 'possibly the

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worst year that Congress had ever experienced': all the provinces were disregarding resolutions; the Treasurer, a chief in a rural area, was not answering letters; lack of funds prevented a tour to raise funds; no one sent in membership lists so it was not known whether Congress had any members at all! Delivering this report should have been enough to depress the most optimistic of leaders, but the new Secretary-General, T. D. Mveli Skota, followed it up with certain proposals that were to be of historic significance.

The determined young man, bright-eyed with the excitement of what he envisaged, said: 'I suggest that immediate steps be taken to register the Constitution, *Nkosi Sikelel' i-Afrika* (God Save Africa), and *Mayibuye Afrika* (Let Africa Return) to enable Congress to take legal steps to recover Congress funds.' In this curious way *Nkosi Sikelel' i-Afrika* was formally confirmed as the Native National Congress anthem, to be taken up over the years by Congresses in Central and East Africa and to become the national anthem from Cape Town to Nairobi. Skota went on to propose a Congress flag: red, black and green. Levi Mvabaza, another Transvaal leader, wanted black for the African people, green for the land, with gold for the riches underground, and this was unanimously adopted; thirty-six years later Tanganyika hoisted these colours to mark her independence.

Skota's next suggestion was that Congress should set up virtually a 'shadow cabinet' with each member of its Executive being responsible for a particular department of the national life. Even though this was agreed, it had little effect. For example, Clements Kadalie, who had been appointed Secretary for Labour, chose to concentrate on the I.C.U.

Another fascinating suggestion did not reach the conference because the Executive had turned it down. Skota had suggested: 'The position in which the Blackman finds himself in his own country today from Cape to Cairo, makes it imperative for him to take immediate action if he is to avoid perpetual slavery.' Congress should organize a 'monster conclave' inviting the national parties of Egypt, Abyssinia, and West Africa, the progressive associations of Kenya and Nyasaland, the Christian association of the Rhodesias, the Lekgotla la Bafo of Basutoland and the Chiefs of Swaziland and the Bechuanaland Protectorate. The proposal was turned down on the grounds that the Government would oppose such a plan. However, Skota's other related motion, that 'South'

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and 'Native' should be deleted from the Congress title, was agreed in part and thus, in 1925, it was retitled the South African African National Congress. The paradoxical nature of the A.N.C. was epitomized by these snatches of vision in the midst of chaos.

Although Skota was defeated in his dream of a great All-African conference, some years later in 1932 he edited a unique book that symbolized this dream: *The African Yearly Register* contained biographies of eminent Africans throughout the continent from the Emperor of Abyssinia down, and a copy of it was accepted by the Prince of Wales. Local English-language newspapers praised it as 'every bit as engrossing as a novel'.

Skota's interest in the continent of Africa had grown not only out of his wide correspondence as Secretary of Congress but also through the influence of Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican who had fired African imagination from West Africa to South Africa through his 'Back to Africa' cry to the Negroes and his flamboyant soap-box meetings in New York which were enlivened by his uniformed band and his picturesque language. Indeed even in remote corners of the Ciskei, illiterate peasants suddenly became wildly excited over the anticipated advent of Garvey to liberate them; while later, Kwame Nkrumah was to say that Garvey's writings did more than any other to fire his enthusiasm.¹

Another foreign Negro with great influence in the Union was the West African educationist, Dr. J. E. K. Aggrey. But while Garvey fired both the man in the street and the nationalist intellectuals, Aggrey's influence moderated the views of other intellectuals. Aggrey's statements about the harmony of white and black piano keys had been given form in the Joint Council of Europeans and Natives established in Johannesburg during his visit in the early twenties. Similar Councils were subsequently formed in other towns to consider Bills introduced in Parliament and to make recommendations. Thus for the first time Congress leaders became associated with the small group of white liberals. It was a natural association for those who had had a Christian liberal education in the schools of the Eastern Cape, who had learnt English history, and whose parents had revered the distant Queen Victoria. Besides they were eager to trust liberals because they were eager to share in white society. The Joint Councils unconsciously accepted another of Aggrey's tenets, that half a loaf was better than none,

¹ K. Nkrumah's *Autobiography*.

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thus neutralizing African nationalism, giving rise to a growing suspicion among Congress members that the Johannesburg Council was too much influenced by the Chamber of Mines, with its obvious concern to keep wages down. Congress had suffered in other ways from white enterprises: the club which it had established in 1915 as a lively centre for political and social meetings had been undermined by the Bantu Men's Social Centre, while *Abantu-Batho*, after declining with the decline of Congress, was almost put out of business by *The Bantu World* started by a white businessman who could afford to attract *Abantu-Batho's* composers and was not so dependent on advertising.

Africans did not judge whites by their philosophy so much as by their actions and when it came to assessing liberalism, socialism and communism, it was on personal experience of individual exponents that their opinions were largely based. They found that in the Joint Councils liberals, with the best of intentions, instead of helping them to win and defend their rights, urged them to abandon militancy, and persuaded them that through education, moderation and patience Africans could win white sympathy. They could only judge so-called socialists by the Labour Party—engrossed in the needs of white workers. This left the communists who after 1924 had become disillusioned by white labour and concentrated more on African workers. The communists best known to Africans were two Englishmen, S. P. Bunting, the lawyer who came from a non-conformist humanitarian family, and Bill Andrews, both of them 'always ready to help us in our battles' explained one, if anything, anti-communist Congress leader: 'they had their meetings and we had our meetings and Bunting would come and discuss things with us. In all the cases he defended for Congress I don't think he was paid for three of them. He was a wonderful man,' an opinion shared even by African clergy. Furthermore, Bunting and one or two others were the only whites to call for the *full* recognition of African rights, so that the Rev. C. F. Andrews, Gandhi's Anglican friend, after visiting the country in the 'twenties, had said that his whole heart went out to the communists there because they were the only Europeans 'ready to admit Indians, Cape Coloured and Bantu on equal terms'.¹

Selope Thema, one of the ablest of Congress leaders, joined the Johannesburg Joint Council in 1924 and sought equality and

¹ *Time Longer than Rope*, by E. Roux.

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respectability for his people by urging that Africans should progress in business enterprise. In a Congress circular he described a West African businessman he had met in London in 1919. This man, a cocoa merchant, had told him a story of how when he went to New York city on business, a white American business friend invited him to dinner. Two other Americans had joined them and when they saw that the West African was black, protested that to dine with him was an insult no decent man would tolerate. They were about to leave when their host said: 'Gentlemen, I am very sorry that your pride, or more precisely, your prejudice, does not allow you to associate with my friend there. True, he is black, but he is a gentleman, and besides, he is a well-to-do man. Indeed,' the host said with emphasis, 'he is one of the wealthiest men in West Africa, and my object in inviting you to meet him was to put within your reach the Wealth [*sic*] of West Africa. If, by doing this, I have insulted you, I must beg your pardon.'

Whereupon one of the gentlemen eagerly asked, 'Did you say this man was one of the wealthiest men in West Africa?'

'Yes.'

'Then it is we who owe you an apology, we misunderstood your action!'

Whereupon the incident closed happily with the plea from the previously contemptuous guests, 'Will you forgive us and introduce us to your friend?'

Mr. Thema solemnly pointed to the moral of the story: 'it is realized that the development of our commercial value as a people will secure for us a place in the affairs of civilized mankind. . . . Today we are despised not simply because our skin is black, but chiefly because we are commercially and economically of little value.'

A pathetic commentary perhaps on the impact of 'Western civilization' but to Selope Thema and to how many other aspiring Africans of the time it was a meaningful, encouraging example. However, as a call to the growing African middle-class to support Congress it was fruitless: the last thing that most shopkeepers, clergymen, and teachers wanted was to be involved in politics.

In 1926 Hertzog enacted his 'Colour Bar' Bill, the Mines and Works Amendment Act, which debarred Africans from a variety of better paid jobs *whatever* their skills or potential; he strengthened the Masters and Servants Act under which it was a

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criminal offence for Africans to break contracts or refuse to obey orders. The Urban Areas Act of 1923 had limited the influx of Natives into towns but economic need drove them there, creating pressures which Hertzog tried to deal with by stricter segregation and discriminatory laws. At a time when Mahabane, the President-General, was making more use of chiefs in Congress, Hertzog enacted the Native Administration Act of 1927 which named the Governor-General as Supreme Chief, thus giving the Government total power in the appointment and deposition of chiefs, and beginning the process of intimidating them from supporting Congress, which meant the gradual withdrawal of their followers as well. The Act forbade the holding of meetings in tribal areas without the white Native Commissioner's permission, which had the effect of limiting Congress activity increasingly to urban areas. And it embraced a notorious 'hostility clause' under which anyone said to be promoting 'any feeling of hostility between Natives and Europeans' was liable to imprisonment of up to one year or a fine of £100 or both. As it was not used against white politicians but only against Africans and their white friends, here was yet another deterrent to political action.

Even the I.C.U. at the zenith of its power with 200,000 members, failed to combat these laws. In the late 'twenties it went through a series of paroxysms. After winning the sympathy of white labour, through the S.A. Industrial Federation, so that Hertzog had to resign and reconstitute his Ministry without Madeley, it deteriorated in a confusion of quarrels between organizers and misuse of cash—just as happened in the early days of British trade unionism when officials were unaccustomed to power and proper control of funds. And when Kadalie succumbed to the flattery of Europeans, his critics taunted him with the phrase '*Hamba kahle*', meaning 'go carefully', and one communist member of the I.C.U., Thomas Mbeki, cried out that people could no longer endure the injustice; 'the failure of the A.N.C. was due to too much prayer and no direct action. For God's sake,' he urged Kadalie, 'don't turn chameleon. Are you going back to the masses and ask them to pray, or will you tell them to depend on their numerical powers?' But Kadalie, though he organized some impressive strikes, was by this time set on purging the Union of communist 'white-ants', and then went off to London, Paris and Geneva, where he won the sympathy of many trade unionists.

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George Champion, who had so skilfully organized the Natal I.C.U., used Kadalie's absence to entrench himself, and when Kadalie returned the two men quarrelled bitterly. The outcome was two organizations with Champion in control of the I.C.U. Yase (of) Natal. (Later, when British sympathizers sent out William Ballinger, to restore order in the Union's affairs, there was a further split.)

The President-General of the A.N.C., Mahabane, also went to Europe in the late 1920's when he and the first President-General, John Dube, attended the International Missionary Conference in Le Zoute in Belgium. Passing through London Dr. Dube in an interview warned that the situation in South Africa was very dangerous, 'and the attitude of the present Government alarms us,' he said. 'The Colour Bar Bill seems more than we can patiently bear. . . . If the Government persists with its present attitude, we can only think that it desires to exterminate us'. These were strong words from this moderate man. Mahabane, in his address to the distinguished delegates at the Missionary Conference, which included men as prominent in Imperial affairs as Sir Frederick Lugard and J. H. Oldham, spoke of the reaction 'that has taken place in the African's mind through the advance of Western civilization. . . . Some of us know,' he said, 'that not every white man is a Christian, but the average African looks upon every white man as a Christian, and if he does not lead the Christian life then the mind of the African revolts against Christianity.'

Mahabane's words could be regarded as prophetic for at the next election in the A.N.C. there was a sharp swing to the left, and the new President-General, when he also went to Belgium in 1927, did not attend a missionary conference, but a communist-front conference of the League Against Imperialism. There were eminent men present, as at Le Zoute, only this time they were not great administrators, but revolutionaries from Asia and Africa—including the coming leader of the Indian National Congress, Pandit Nehru. The new leader of the A.N.C. was James Gumede, a broad-minded Roman Catholic, who, having twice pinned his hopes on Britain helping to free the non-whites of South Africa—once in a deputation from a tribe which helped the British in the Boer War, and the other time in the 1919 deputation—had begun to look elsewhere. The Brussels conference, concerned with the

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'War Danger' and with the 'penetration of Latin America by Yankee Imperialism' could not have been of particular interest to him, but when it came to an end, for the first time in the history of the A.N.C., its President was invited to visit a foreign country—Russia. Gumede, a middle-aged, upright man with a good sense of humour, singularly without racial bias himself, had in South Africa been subjected to the usual humiliations. He now found himself fêted 'as though I was the Prime Minister of the Union' and visited Asiatic parts where he saw that non-Europeans, some as dark as himself, enjoyed the same political and social rights as the whites. Back in Cape Town in January 1928 he told a crowded reception in his honour that he had come from the 'new Jerusalem'; Russia was a land of equality and freedom raised from serfdom. 'Your land and yourselves,' he told South Africans, 'are held in bondage. You must redeem your heritage.'¹

He met with strenuous, even virulent opposition, for although the Communist Party was the only non-racial political party and ran night schools for Africans and helped them form trade unions, very few Africans had actually joined it. The majority remained suspicious because, explained one Congress leader, 'it does not believe in God, in Kings or Chiefs. Africans have always believed in a God. They are not materialists.'

When the A.N.C. for the first time came to consider the question, the Chiefs in the Upper House debated a resolution disapproving of the growing fraternization between the A.N.C. and the Communist Party. One Chief pointed out, 'The Tsar was a great man in his country but where is he now?' However, President-General Gumede remarked that the Native Administration Act, the very Act that so undermined chiefs' power, had been initiated by Hertzog, who declared the communists to be the only opposition to his Native policy that he feared; and that the Government, the South African Party, and the English language Press run by the Chamber of Mines, alike hated the Communist Party because it spoke for the masses and was against oppression, Thereupon the Chiefs withdrew their motion though rumblings of dissatisfaction continued. Dube, who was present at the conference, accused Gumede of irresponsibility while Selope Thema, with his liberal connections and also something of a tribalist, resented Gumede's view and popularity and is said to have invented the slogan—

¹ *Cape Times*, January 28, 1928.

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Gumede says he has 'brought the golden key to freedom'—which brought mockery on Gumede's head. Some said Gumede 'has concealed a snake in his pocket and it will bite you'.

Gumede, a man seldom angered nor harsh in judgment, accepted such criticisms as an expression of opinion that people were entitled to make. He dedicated himself to the work, selling his small store, and relying partly on his wife's taking in washing as he set about trying to reorganize Congress. It still had debts incurred by the 1919 deputation and in legal cases fought during the anti-pass campaign. He tried to encourage the A.N.C. to work with other races, but found that neither his own people nor the others, who were still pre-occupied with their separate and higher status, were ready to make common cause.

At one conference when the handful of communists in Congress moved that it affiliate with the Communist Party, they were defeated by a large majority, as was their second proposal, that Congress should join with other African organizations in a 'mass revolutionary movement to combat the evil measures' which Hertzog was again threatening in the form of Bills to bring about segregation of the races.

But again Hertzog had to postpone his Bills while the election took place in 1929. During the campaign Smuts, leader of the opposition South African Party, spoke of 'British states in Africa' which would 'all become members of a great African Dominion, stretching unbroken throughout Africa'. At once Hertzog accused Smuts of wanting 'a kafir state' from South Africa to London, with equal rights. Hertzog, Dr. D. F. Malan and Tielman Roos, issued a manifesto¹ describing what would become of South Africa if Smuts's policy were accepted. The terms 'kafir land', 'black kafir state', 'a kafir ocean' were liberally sprinkled through it. 'Our national pride, our patriotism, the honour we have to uphold', the three Nationalist leaders said; our 'glorious heritage' all would be 'scrapped' if Smuts had his way.² Useless for Smuts's supporters to point out that his plea had simply been one for the unity of whites for mutual protection. The cry of a black bogey, together with the singular prosperity South Africa had enjoyed since 1924, brought the Nationalists into office, this time with an overall majority.

¹ Known as the 'Black Manifesto'.

² *The Star*, January 29, 1929.

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Yet the voice of reason prevailed at the A.N.C. conference that Easter. The Congress reply to what it described as the 'extraordinary and mischievous' manifesto pointed out that whereas in the previous century there had been over ten Natives to every White, at the present time there were only three Natives to each White. 'How in the face of that,' they asked 'could the European be depicted as a drowning man, gasping for breath, catching at every straw, and threatened to be engulfed in a single "kafir ocean"?'

Congress was still a respectable body, its conference opened by the Mayor, the Bishop, the Chief Magistrate and the Superintendent of Locations. The location had been given a shove away from the town of Bloemfontein, a power station had been built on its old site, and its small brick dwellings were now further out. The inhabitants were just as hospitable. The Speaker, Mapikela, had built a large double-storeyed house next-door to the conference hall, and people continued to enjoy their annual get-together with its musical receptions or dance in the evenings. When they met to consider new legislation they discussed the Riotous Assemblies Amendment Bill which gave the Minister of Justice power to banish anyone from any district if he considered the person's presence might stir up hostility; a weapon fit for Oswald Pirow, the Minister. George Champion suggested that Hertzog and Pirow should be indicted for creating hostility by calling on Whites to unite against Blacks. But this was not formally moved, whereas the perennial resolutions were passed calling for abolition of the pass laws and the colour bar and for Parliamentary representation. 'Respectfully' yet 'strongly' Congress urged the Government to appoint a commission to consider wages, cost of living, and the exclusion of Natives from the Old-Age Pensions Act, and to study the effect of conditions on the moral integrity of the African people.

This latter resolution represented a cry from the heart of all those Africans whose tribal society was being shattered and who found themselves shut out of the new society, the economy of which they were obliged to serve. It was taken up by the Rev. Zaccheus Mahabane, now chaplain of the A.N.C., in his Easter sermon to the conference when, on behalf of all the people—educated, Christian, illiterate, heathen—he said: 'We have been denied all rights pertaining to human beings. We are treated as



1a Founder—
Pixley ka Izaka Seme



1b First President—
The Rev. John L. Dube



1c Twice a President—
The Rev. Z. Mahabane (in 1960)



1d 'Founder' of the Modern A.N.C.
—Dr. A. B. Xuma



2a 1919 Deputation to Versailles and London—*Back, l. to r.:* J. L. Gumede, L. T. Mvabaza, R. V. Selope Thema. *Front, l. to r.:* Solomon Plaatje, Rev. H. Ngcayiya

2b 1942 Deputation to Deputy Prime Minister—*Back, l. to r.:* Z. K. Matthews, R. G. Baloyi, A. J. Sililo, R. H. Godlo. *Front, l. to r.:* T. M. Mapikela, J. A. Calata, A. B. Xuma, E. Qamata. A picture for which Canon Calata was sentenced



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aliens in the land of our fathers. We are treated as children although we claim to be men and women. We are spoon-fed like children. We are denied all representation in the legislature of the land. As a nation we are practically dead, non-existent, not known in the councils of the whole world. We are a race of servants, hewers of wood and drawers of water for the white man.' Yet, despite the niggardly policy of the Government, he pointed out that, through the generosity of missions, their children were being educated and Native journalists, doctors, teachers, were making a notable contribution. The text of his sermon was 'because I live, ye shall live also'. He expressed his strong belief that 'the only power that has been known to exalt a nation is righteousness. The only power that will raise up our people from this position of slavery and oppression is religion. . . . The human soul is irrepressible. . . .' So powerfully did he preach, his usually cheerful face tense with the depth of his feeling, that Champion, one of the growing body of Africans who were losing faith in Christianity, was aroused to a warm appreciation of the sermon, an appreciation unanimously supported by the delegates.

Hertzog was now set on an ever-more-ruthless policy. His Minister of Justice, Pirow, made a personal *début* in November 1929 when he flew dramatically from Pretoria to supervise tax collection in Durban. The Minister of Finance did not object to this poaching, for the Minister of Justice was not concerned to see that white voters paid up, but that voiceless Africans—who if they failed to pay were automatically criminals—should do so. He literally commanded an invasion of 500 white police armed with machine guns and bayoneted rifles, together with 200 Native police. At 3 a.m. they 'invested' Native compounds 'silently and swiftly' (to quote the *Johannesburg Star*) in search of tax defaulters. While 5,000 Africans were searched, tear gas was thrown at spectators. Some 350 men were arrested for failure to produce tax receipts. Unless they paid at once they were imprisoned for a month.¹ 'We first advertise in the illustrated periodicals,' remarked *The Star*,² 'the charm of our seaside resorts and then proceed to give them a unique and world-wide advertisement of this sort.'

In the recriminations that followed the feelings of the people affected were barely considered. The results of an unofficial inquiry

¹ In 1931-2 convictions under the Native Taxation Act numbered 50,000.

² November 14, 1929.

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by the Joint Council into the inability of Africans to pay tax showed that Native wages in Durban had not been raised since 1914! Many were earning £3 a month. The Government's retort, according to the *Rand Daily Mail*, was that its action had been based on information more sensational than the Zinoviev letter which had led to the downfall of the first Labour Government in Britain. It gave no details of this information but the smear was effective and whites in Durban remarked that the Zulus were good-humoured people, so it must be the Communist Party and Soviet money behind the discontent. The A.N.C. and the I.C.U. published a joint denial of communist influence and were supported by William Ballinger, the member of the British Labour Party sent to South Africa to help reorganize the I.C.U., who cabled London: 'Discount press report communist influence in Durban. Causes unrest deep-seated economic wrongs. Critical situation.'¹

Non-white frustration burst out in protest meetings against Pirow's 'law of oppression'—the Riotous Assemblies Amendment Bill; in Johannesburg all sections of the I.C.U. joined with the Communist Party and with the A.N.C. in burning effigies of 'Pirow the tyrant', and of Hertzog and Smuts; demonstrations which spread to all parts of the country.

One of these protest meetings was held on December 16, 1929, in the location at Potchefstroom, a pretty dorp on the Vaal River, that had become a seat of Afrikaner nationalism. Several thousand Africans turned up as did several hundred Europeans. The principal speakers were Edwin Mofutsanyana and J. B. Marks, who both belonged to the Communist Party and to the A.N.C. Their speeches were broken up by coarse shouts such as '*Hou jou bek kafir!*' (Shut up kafir!). Their appeals to the police to control the hooligans were fruitless and African anger was rapidly rising when one of the rowdies aimed a revolver at the speakers and fired several shots. Marks and Mofutsanyana escaped by diving from the platform but one African was killed and six injured. The crowd turned on the whites who were saved by the arrival of the Magistrate who assured the Africans that they would get justice. Subsequently, a white man, the brother of the location superintendent, was arrested and charged with murder. The evidence was that he had discharged the contents of his revolver at the Africans and

¹ *Manchester Guardian*, November 20, 1929.

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was re-loading when he had been caught by the police. The white jury gave its verdict: 'Not guilty.'¹

The decade of unrest had ended, as it had begun, in violence.

¹ Potchefstroom had been the scene of an earlier disturbance with white civilians precipitating shooting, and there had been similar incidents in other areas, for instance in Bloemfontein in 1925 and in Durban in 1928.

V

1930-1935: The Depression and Divisions



The Wall Street crash struck South Africa at a time of severe drought. The poorest people—white and black—were badly hit. Poor whites took kafir work and hundreds of blacks were thrown out of work. Having nowhere to go, thousands of Africans became displaced persons in their own country, in danger of arrest under the pass laws. In Weenen, Natal, as Dr. Dube disclosed, men were working for six months at 10/- a month and women at 2/6 a month. Rich sugar planters were using umfaans (small boys) taken from Pondoland by white recruiters and on these plantations some Africans, on becoming ill, had been turned out of their jobs and left to wander. Plaatje pointed out that Native labour was in the same market as white, paying the same price for a pound of coffee and a pair of shoes, yet having to work five or six times as long for the same amount.

At this critical time the A.N.C. went through an upheaval with its Executive resigning because of President-General Gumede's 'communistic tendencies' and his neglect in circulating information. According to an Afrikaner newspaper, when it came to the election of a new President-General there was blatant manoeuvring by the right-wing, yet there were only four communists to support Gumede. The new President-General was Pixley Seme, the founder of Congress, elected by 36 votes to 14. Seme, whose status had been enhanced by a doctorate from Columbia University, was seen as a man who could rescue Congress from its low fortunes. But he had proved to be a man of sudden enthusiasms followed by long stretches of disinterest. It was sad that he whose dream had been to encourage divided tribes to co-operate, was himself incapable of co-operating with colleagues and, once in office, he began to domineer over his Executive. He dismissed four of them, including such tried Congress leaders as Letanka and Mweli

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Skota. He was also jealous of newcomers as Z. K. Matthews, a young schoolmaster, discovered when he first attended a Congress conference; Seme accosted him with the demand: 'What is your idea of attending—provincial honours or national honours?' While to Champion, the still powerful leader of the I.C.U. Yase Natal, and also a member of the A.N.C., Dr. Seme wrote: 'All organizations should fall into line with the A.N.C. . . . I must command all under me.'

Gumede made a last appeal to Congress for Africans to rely on their own strength and the strength of the colonially oppressed peoples, to demand equal rights by using organized labour unions, going in for strikes, demonstrations, the burning of passes and refusal to pay taxes. The appeal was dismissed by Seme, who favoured self-help of a different kind—through Africans getting rights to trade and through social clubs. He condemned boycotts and strikes because they 'never leave any pleasant impression in the public mind'.

In 1927 Gumede had said that there were two wings of their movement for the political and economic emancipation from the tyranny of European rule, the right and the left, both 'absolutely necessary for our progress . . . just as a bird must have two wings for successful flight, so must any movement have the conservative and radical wings, that is to say, we may differ in our views but this should not necessarily mean divisions and bickering.' Not necessarily, but almost unavoidably there *were* divisions, complicated by disagreement over the form and timing of action, and frequently aggravated by conflicts of personality.

This was particularly true of the Cape Peninsula, though not during the early 'twenties when it had been Kadalie's stronghold, nor immediately after that when in the absence of a settled African population, such organizers as the A.N.C. had were usually Coloured men who joined it on the decline of the African People's Organization. Among them was John Gomas, a tailor, son of a fisherman, who during his early years in the A.N.C. had been imprisoned for protesting against the police shooting of an African in Paarl. Another was Jimmy La Guma, Secretary of the Cape Town branch of the A.N.C. However, these two men found more scope in the Communist Party when it came to organize trade unions and night schools. It was in any event exceptional for Coloured people to be involved in politics: the majority of them

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were concerned to maintain their meagre privileges—better wages and opportunities than Africans as well as freedom of movement. Their great social ambition was to belong to the whites rather than blacks.

In the late 'twenties and early 'thirties, when the A.N.C. became quite a force in the Peninsula, divisions became sharp. For the men who put it on the map—James Thaele (pronounced Ty-éle) and Bransby Ndobe and Elliot Tonjeni—represented not only a right and left wing but disagreed fiercely about timing and type of action. As personalities they clashed on sight. Although Ndobe and Tonjeni are now shadowy figures and appear as simply 'young militants', Thaele, President of the Cape Western A.N.C., was anything but shadowy. In rare unison both liberals and communists have described him as a political opportunist, while the National A.N.C. suffered from his egotism in refusing to accept its jurisdiction. But whatever his critics said there is no doubt that Thaele engagingly enlivened politics in Cape Town by his panache. On a hot day, under the palm trees of the Grand Parade next to the colonial Town Hall, with Table Mountain and Devil's Peak making a superb back-drop to the performance—for performance it was—Professor Thaele, wearing white sun helmet, white suit, white spats, white gloves, and carrying a walking stick, would stand there dignified, his bearing almost military, and would begin to address a few loungers. Quickly the crowd would gather, fascinated by his 'latinized' English (or, as the less courteous put it, his 'jawbreakers'), which had been a part of his make-up since childhood. As a boy at Lovedale College in 1909 his bombastic language had entertained his fellow-pupils. In a debate he had said, 'Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, the paradoxical demonstration of this stupendous redundancy is unmitigated by the despicable degeneration,' to which the Chairman somewhat brutally responded with a 'Sit down, Thaele,' to which Thaele, ever polite, had replied, 'Thank you, Mr. Chairman'. (On the following morning all the other pupils had gone to Thaele to ask to copy the splendid sentence.)

For years he addressed these lunchtime meetings in Cape Town. He said, à propos of Hertzog's segregation policy, 'If a man has built a house and closed the door on you, you will waste time kicking at the door, it is best to build a house of your own.' He compared Hertzog and Smuts to two snakes, the former out in the

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open on the path and the latter in the grass. 'The one out,' he said, 'you can attack and kill. But the snake in the grass might bite you, you never know.' He liked to quote Mrs. Naidu, the Indian poet and Gandhi's secretary, who on a visit to South Africa in the mid-'twenties had said, 'Africans, Africa belongs to you. The Europeans are only holding it until the fullness of time.'

Thaele, son of a Basuto chief and a Coloured mother, had been brought up in the Dutch Reformed church but left it after he had been turned out from worshipping in the mother-church because of his colour. He had studied for fifteen years in the United States and earned a doctorate, before Marcus Garvey inspired him to return to South Africa to lead his people. In Cape Town he founded a private school for Africans and was called Professor. He established an A.N.C. office with his brother as Secretary, even buying property for the Congress, and encouraging non-whites to start social centres and to apply to use the City Hall for their dances—to them a daring move. It was when he came to organize people in the villages that he clashed with Ndobe and Tonjeni. He accused them of being communists (which they denied) and said that 'if you have any smashing to be done, leave it to the Communist Party to do and when it is done they won't be there to rebuild it.' For their part, they told Thaele that he ought to be a bishop, not a Congress leader, while their communist friends suspected him of being a tool of the C.I.D. Certainly he was on good terms with one sergeant, familiarly known as 'C.I.D.' White, who shadowed him for years and who on one occasion was found secreted behind a curtain at a private Congress meeting at which Thaele was being particularly provocative to the young men, giving rise to the suspicion that he had planted White there in order to trap them. Thaele's relationship with White could well have been one of those classic cases of two men on opposite sides of a fence, ambivalently growing older together, jibing at each other, joking with each other. Whatever the truth behind these divisions, there was no doubt that they were wasteful.

During the late 'twenties the three men had succeeded in establishing branches of Congress in the beautiful mountainous fruit-growing areas, where wages for non-whites were pitifully low, but tragic events checked their progress. In Worcester location anger aroused by a police liquor raid led to the death of a white police officer. The police retaliated and five Africans were killed

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and others wounded. Civilians went about assaulting Africans. One, who was wandering around with a rifle, taking pot-shots at Africans, was arrested by the police and fined five shillings by the Magistrate for being in possession of a rifle without a licence. He was complimented by the Magistrate for his public spirit. He said that he was trying to shoot Tonjeni. Humorists among the Africans said that he was fined because he missed!¹ There was good reason to believe that the disturbances had been instigated by an *agent-provocateur*; at all events they provided Pirow with a convenient opportunity to ban all A.N.C. meetings in the Western Cape. Thaele, his brother Kennan, and two other men, defied the ban, and were imprisoned until the charges were withdrawn.

As if it was not enough that the Government was thus enfeebling Congress, Thaele tried to divide Tonjeni from Ndobe, but the friends remained mutually loyal and broke away to set up the Independent A.N.C., which achieved the support of *Abantu-Batho*, the Congress paper in Johannesburg. Their new organization was short-lived. Pirow, having found that the banning of A.N.C. meetings did not subdue its leaders and supporters, proceeded to prohibit and banish a number of them, including Tonjeni and Ndobe. Thaele was noticeably quieter.

In Natal too Pirow set about banishing Africans but, ironically, he picked on Champion whose hey-day was passed and left the radical African leader of the moment at large. This was Johannes Nkosi, a 25-year-old Zulu, who had worked on Dr. Seme's farm in the Transvaal and, at the age of fourteen, taken part in the A.N.C.'s anti-pass campaign of 1919. In 1926 he had attended the Communist Party's night school in Johannesburg and joined the Party. With Champion deported and Dube so moderate as to be no problem, Nkosi found himself with an open field to organize a pass-burning campaign initiated by the communists. The pass laws had become so persistent a persecution that even the prudent newspaper *Imvo* sympathized with the call, referring to the 'damnable pin-pricks and inconveniences suffered by all classes of Natives in their daily lives' and asking: 'Why grumble when violent forms of protest have ultimately to be resorted to, and the aid of communists solicited? We do not love communists as such; but a white man would never hesitate to snatch a nigger's hand that saves him from drowning. Neither would a black man hesitate to

¹ *Time Longer than Rope*, by E. Roux.

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call in a communist, or any other hated and despised person for that matter, who helps him to discard the yoke of bondage.'

In December 1930 the A.N.C., represented by Plaatje, Mahabane and Selope Thema, protested to the Native Affairs Department against the demoralization and degradation caused by the pass laws which, they pointed out, had outlived their usefulness and were no protection to Europeans. By this time more than 40,000 Africans were convicted under the laws each year. The Minister for Native Affairs asked for patience.

A few weeks later, on December 16,¹ the pass-burning campaign took place with only Durban, where Nkosi had worked hard, producing a substantial protest. Nearly 4,000 passes were collected at a huge gathering there and a procession was being organized to carry them through the town when a large force of police arrived and advanced on the speakers' platform. Nkosi, trying to control the frantic crowd, was shot down. He and two other men died the next day. No policeman was charged. Twenty-six Africans were sentenced to several months' hard labour for 'incitement to violence'. The campaign was over.

The police ordered 'idle, dissolute or disorderly persons' to be banished from Durban and announced that the resulting deportation of about 200 Africans 'shook the foundation of communism' there. Not for the last time Government exaggeration of the strength and influence of communism must have enhanced its reputation among the oppressed, while a blessing from the Department of Justice on the Natal Native Congress for 'doing considerable good among the Natives' with its 200 members 'steady and most law-abiding', must have damned Dube's Congress in many African eyes.

Even so, the communists, considering the almost classical situation in which they were functioning, made extraordinarily little progress. Their launching of the anti-pass campaign despite warnings that it was premature and the suffering caused was a factor in their failure. Another was Moscow's interventions in a situation that was going nicely for them. In 1929 the Comintern had ordered the dissolution of a League of African Rights founded by Bunting just as it was getting under way. In 1931 Dimitrov's

¹ The anniversary of the defeat of the Zulu Chief Dingaan at Blood River—for the Whites a day of victory, for Africans, of protest.

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policy was universally enforced and the one man whom Africans unreservedly admired among the white communists, Bunting, was expelled from the Party¹ with other 'right-wing deviationists' who had years of self-sacrificing work to their credit, while newcomers, doctrinaire 'Bolsheviks', Douglas and Molly Wolton and Bach, were empowered to purge the Party. Incidentally Africans nicknamed Wolton 'Deepening Economic Crisis'. The African trade unions which the communists had helped to establish were smashed, the night schools in Johannesburg dwindled. By 1933, according to Dr. Roux, the historian of this period and one of those expelled, communist activity had almost vanished; there were probably 150 members, most of them white. Whereupon the Woltons left South Africa and went to England.

As far as the A.N.C. was concerned, it was not on the best of terms with the Communist Party and had been referred to by certain communists as a lot of 'materialists', 'brigands', even 'bastards'. The turbulence within the Party therefore only affected the handful of men who happened to be members of both organizations, some of them of mixed race, some African. The two who were significant in A.N.C. activities were J. B. Marks, a school teacher in Potchefstroom, strong in his convictions and popular, and Moses Kotane. While Marks remained within the fold beside the Woltons, Kotane took an independent line.

Kotane, born in 1905, of Bechuana parents in the Transvaal, had been brought up in a strict traditional household by a devout Lutheran grandfather. The boy tended cattle and worked for local farmers because his family was poor. Not until he was fifteen did he attend school—a Lutheran Bible school. But at seventeen he had to leave his home and school to earn a living. A thin, slanting-eyed country boy, he arrived in Krugersdorp, where he got a job cleaning the studio and milking the cow for a photographer at £1 10s. od. a month. When he asked for £2 he was dismissed. Next he became a cleaner in a boarding house where, with the help of a dictionary, he read as much as he could during his spare time. As he found pronunciation difficult, he paid a child staying there 2/- a month to teach him but the child was lazy and progress was slow. After a spell on the mines he was back in another boarding house as a waiter and cleaner. This time his hunger for learning

¹ Bunting, though never reinstated, remained loyal to the Party until his death.

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took him to a night school, but he already knew so much more than the other students that he found himself drawn in to teaching them and, not getting his money's worth, he left, to rely on a kindly white woman in the boarding house who patiently answered the innumerable questions that poured from him. One instance was when he observed that white people arrested in Potchefstroom location for protesting against injustices to Africans were communists, and asked her, 'Did this have something to do with communion in church?'—though it did not seem quite to fit in to the context. She said, yes, she thought that they *were* church people! 'Anyway,' he thought, 'they must be good as they were talking for the people.' It was not until he got a better job in a bakery that he had enough time to attend political meetings and join an organization.

He joined the A.N.C. It was 1927 with Mahabane about to be replaced by Gumede. Kotane soon felt that there was something wrong with Congress, and realized that 'when in Congress you learnt nothing. You went to meetings and you protested and they didn't *teach* you anything. They did not think about the ordinary fellow.' So he joined the Bakers' Union, which in the vacuum left by I.C.U. splits was organized by the Communist Party. He was critical of some communists for not doing their work properly and when the Secretary of the Party asked him to join his response was, what for? He was a member of a trade union and of the A.N.C. so why join the Communist Party? However, he accepted an invitation to go with a friend to a branch meeting. Bunting was in the chair. Kotane and his friend suddenly found themselves being put up as members, which he thought 'bloody dishonest'. In his experience, you went out and joined the A.N.C., you were *asked* to join a trades union, but the Communist Party 'hooked you in'. But what mattered to him was that here for the first time his craving for education was answered. There was a night school—'now here is where I learnt something'—nor did he have to pay. He joined the Party.

As he lost interest in the A.N.C., 'down almost to nothing', with Seme 'collecting people in the street and getting them to vote for him', he became more and more absorbed in Communist Party activities, addressing their meetings in the streets, organizing trade unions, helping in the night school, and becoming type-setter for one of their papers *Inkululeko* as well as editor of its

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African section, working in its shabby offices in Johannesburg.¹ In 1931 he was chosen to go to Moscow. Twenty-six years old, slightly built, a genial realist, he set out, not without apprehension. He spent two years in the U.S.S.R. learning Soviet history of the labour movement and political economy.

He returned to South Africa to find that the 'Bolshevizing' carried out by the Woltons and Bach had broken the Party, that Bunting, a 'proper humanitarian', had been expelled and that when people asked why, they were expelled too. The formerly lively Non-European Federation of Trade Unions had been replaced by the one Party committee trying to do everything, with Bach making fantastic claims of successes, telling African organizers, for example, to say when five miners came to a meeting that 100 had been recruited! When Kotane called for Gomas and another Capetonian to come to Johannesburg to help counter this situation, Bach attacked him for dangerously introducing a social democratic line. Kotane's briefly held appointment as joint-secretary of the Party committee in Johannesburg came to an abrupt end. He set off for Cape Town with the object of cutting himself adrift. He did not want to attack the Party and he did not renounce the principles he had come to believe in, he just wanted to go away.

Although Kotane and J. B. Marks were on different sides in these Party upheavals, it is significant that both had been decisively influenced in the early stages of their political growth by Bishop Brown Montgomery, whose books on Christianity and capitalism contained such precepts as 'banish the gods from the skies and the capitalists from the earth'. The only comparable socialist influence elsewhere in Africa at the time was in Senegal where, in the late 'twenties, the Senegal Socialist Party had been founded.

By 1933, when left-wing activity was at its lowest, the extreme right-wing flourished. Pirow, the newly appointed Minister of Defence, was in friendly contact with Hitler; and anti-semitism surfaced in the Greyshirts and Blackshirts.

Against this background an economic crisis drove Hertzog and Smuts to form a coalition. Their Government took South Africa off the gold standard and the country once again thrived. Many more gold mines were opened and secondary industries expanded, while farmers prospered. Johannesburg grew more in four years

¹ On a site now occupied by the Anglo-American Mining Corporation's new skyscraper.

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than it had in the previous forty and there was a feeling of confidence and hope among white South Africans. Non-whites, for all the discrimination and disabilities, and the lower standard of living to which they were restricted by law, found much to enjoy in this industrialized society, as did thousands of Africans drawn to it from the poorer, rural, British and Portuguese colonies. Politically this had disadvantages, partly because migrant labourers usually remained barely educated and within a tribal fold, and because the urban Africans, having achieved a few small possessions, wanted exceedingly to protect such security as these represented. Nor did the influx of Africans from neighbouring countries make any political impact on Union inhabitants although in British and French colonial Africa the hitherto apathetic Imperial powers had begun to recognize Africans as capable of being educated and responsible.

However in the mid-'thirties the Italian attack on Ethiopia made all Africa sharply aware of being part of one great continent. For Africans in the Union, Italy's wanton invasion of the ancient African kingdom had a double significance: some, particularly Christians, believed that their race stemmed from Ethiopia and there was a legend that the Queen of Sheba who had visited King Solomon was a Hlubi woman; besides, the Ethiopian church, founded by the A.N.C.'s first chaplain, the Rev. Henry Ngcayiya, was one of their most important churches. But apart from this, the black kingdom was standing against European invaders. Black pride was high and African newspapers, full of reports of the war and pictures of Ethiopian soldiers, had stupendous sales. The defeat of Haile Selassie caused a sad relapse.

VI

1936: Honourable Trusteeship



Hertzog had been promising the Whites segregation since 1924, a promise that to the non-whites was a threat. In the late 'twenties he had begun to formulate the basic laws to achieve this and widespread protests had come not only from non-white leaders but also from the Anglican Archbishop, former Chief Justices and other notable white liberals and Christians, who warned of national disaster if the threatened bills went through. However, at that time Hertzog had not had the two-thirds majority necessary to amend the entrenched clause that guarded Cape Africans on the common voters roll. But in December 1934 he felt he had achieved his object when he and Smuts fused to form the United Party, commanding some four-fifths of the seats in the Assembly, with the Afrikaner 'purified' Nationalists under Dr. D. F. Malan forming the opposition.

Hertzog could not have chosen a better time to put forward his segregation bills. Twenty-five years after Union, non-white political activity was at its lowest ebb. The I.C.U. had almost petered out and its failure had damaged the movement for liberation by giving the rank and file a feeling that politicians were self-seeking and corrupt. Communist activity was intermittent and in 1935 further expulsions took place while the newspaper *Umsebenzi* was collapsing. As for the A.N.C., *Abantu-Batho*, after fighting to the end for better conditions, had finally been forced to close down, while Seme had been re-elected President-General by a unanimous vote from a conference that he had packed with supporters. To add insult to this injury he described the alliance of Smuts and Hertzog as 'really a very rare combination of the most powerful and capable people' and on behalf of Congress he expressed 'our hope and our faith in the members of the Government whose names have earned in our country, as well as in the whole world, the

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highest reputation.' The gap between the desires of the ordinary people and the leadership had never been so wide.

One of Hertzog's bills laid down that no more Natives could register as voters; the 11,000 existing voters in the Cape would thus gradually disappear. Instead, Natives would indirectly elect four white senators through electoral colleges based on the pattern of chiefs. This Natives' Representation Bill also proposed the establishment of the Natives' Representative Council, a purely advisory Council comprised of Natives, including Chiefs, and Government officials. The Native Trust and Land Bill deprived Cape Natives of their right to buy land outside reserves but provided for more land to be acquired for Natives; however the total proportion of the country thus allowed for would even so be only 13%. Sir James Rose-Innes, a former Chief Justice, was moved to say that there was a 'full-blooded fascist flavour' about the proposals.

Another decisive point in the history of South Africa had come. Just as in 1910, so now all over the country Africans who were aware of what was happening looked for a leader. But this time Seme, aged and involved in the problems of living, did not respond when people urged him to call a mass conference. They turned to Professor D. D. Jabavu of Fort Hare Native College, the father figure of African education, and he agreed to collaborate with Seme in calling it.

On December 16, Dingaan's Day, 1935, the All-African Convention met in Bloemfontein location. The 500 delegates included Indians and Coloured people, the largest representative conference yet held among the non-whites, covering a wide range of political, social, religious, sporting and chiefly interests. The Mayor of Bloemfontein opened it, the Superintendent of the Native Administration Department was there, as well as a number of white liberals. A newcomer to African politics took the chair, Dr. A. B. Xuma, a young medical doctor recently back from studying in America and Europe, who delighted delegates so often forced in the past to listen to long-winded lectures from their white guests, when he firmly but politely limited these visitors to five minutes each.

There was remarkable unanimity among former opponents—Jabavu, Seme, Kadalie, Champion. The time had come for the Black people of Africa to stand together. This was the theme. Mrs. Charlotte Maxeke took it up; non-Europeans, she said, while thanking Europeans for their support, must go ahead themselves.

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In the midst of the indignation and bitter distress expressed, there was the voice of reason, with speakers pointing out that the only way for South Africa was one of political identity, that history had disproved that granting political rights to Africans would be a menace to the whites: the wars and friction which had prevailed before the enfranchisement of the non-Europeans had only to be contrasted with the peaceful relations that had followed and had now lasted seventy-five years. They called for at least a qualified franchise for all Africans throughout the Union. Once again, in spite of the tight spot they themselves were in, they generously considered their neighbours in the High Commission Territories, who at the time were threatened by incorporation with South Africa. Once again they appealed to His Majesty and to the British Parliament.

When it came to action, the outcome of this, the most significant and representative conference yet held by the non-white majority of South Africa, was to override a minority call from militants wanting immediate demonstrations and strikes, and to decide to send a deputation to see the Prime Minister. An Afrikaner newspaper summarized the result in placards: NATURELLE BLY STIL (Natives Stay Quiet).

Against a background of considerable agitation, with Africans coming together with churchmen, trade unionists, and representatives of many organizations, as well as distinguished liberals, the deputation arrived in Cape Town, led by Professor Jabavu and consisting mainly of clergy and moderate men. They found themselves caught in the web of a plot.

It had become apparent that Hertzog could not quite get the two-thirds majority necessary to amend the entrenched clause because the Members of Parliament representing Eastern Cape constituencies would lose face among their Native voters if they agreed to the Bill as it stood. These United Party M.P.'s had therefore framed a 'compromise'. Instead of the Cape Native vote being abolished, in addition to the four senators to be chosen by Native electoral colleges, the Cape Natives would be put on a separate roll to vote for *three* white M.P.'s. Not only was this a fantastic piece of treachery from the Eastern Cape M.P.'s, but the compromise itself was considerably weaker than Hertzog's own proposal in 1927 and 1929 that *seven* seats be allocated for Natives; a proposal vociferously rejected by these very Cape M.P.'s on the



FOUNDERS OF THE YOUTH LEAGUE

3a Walter Sisulu

3c Oliver Tambo

3b Anton Lembede

3d Nelson Mandela





4a Gert Sibande and his family from Bethal



4b J. B. Marks, President of Mine Workers



4c Moses Kotane back from Bandung 1955

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grounds that it violated the principle of common citizenship entrenched in the Cape Native franchise. But this was not all. The M.P.'s wanted it to appear as if the Natives themselves had initiated the compromise; thus the United Party could present it as 'what Natives themselves ask for' and the Party's self-styled liberals could vote with a good conscience for the abolition of Cape Native voters from the common roll—a right enjoyed for nearly 100 years; thus the Prime Minister could rely for his two-thirds majority on his own Party, and not have the humiliation of appealing to Malan's Nationalists.¹

The Press played a leading part in the double talk that followed. The *Cape Times* (February 11, 1936), while admitting that the Cape Natives had never abused their electoral privilege over eighty years and that it would be difficult to find a parallel anywhere for a proposal depriving people of franchise rights merely because of the colour of their skin, urged the Africans to accept the compromise! It warned the All-African Convention deputation that it would be 'calamitous' for them not to do so, that 'on their heads' responsibility rested.

Jabavu and his deputation were men anxious to see the best in others, quite unable to argue militantly on behalf of their people. Hertzog, when they saw him, powerfully persuaded them that he had no alternative. Meanwhile the Cape M.P.'s were busy persuading them that they should suggest a compromise—that half a loaf might be better than none.

Rumours of the compromise had reached two doctors on the Executive of the A.A.C. Puzzled and angry they at once set out for Cape Town: A. B. Xuma hurrying from Johannesburg, and James Moroka, from Thaba 'Nchu. Representing the Transvaal and the Free State African delegates to the A.A.C., they determined to retrieve whatever blunders Jabavu and the Cape delegates might have made. When they met they were, according to Moroka, 'at loggerheads' with Jabavu and two clergymen, Zaccheus Mahabane and A. S. M'timkulu, favouring the compromise. Moroka hotly rejected it. During a week they argued while the Government excelled itself in its hospitality to them and intermittently sent messages such as, 'Gentlemen, you must not disappoint the Prime Minister, he expects you to be reasonable.'

¹ Based on a statement by R. F. A. Hoernlé, O. D. Schreiner, W. H. Ramsbottom.

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When the deputation saw Hertzog again they were reinforced by the presence of Moroka and Xuma and although the Prime Minister charmed them, even rendering Xuma speechless at his 'courteous and dignified way', Moroka firmly announced that they were against the compromise, indeed that 'I want the franchise to be extended from the Cape to the Free State and the Transvaal—to the whole country!'

Hertzog's gambit was to impress on them that his Bills were for their own benefit, that if they did not accept them they were doomed. He told them: 'It is not that we hate you, but if we give you the right to vote, within a very short space of time the whole Parliament will be controlled by Natives. I must tell you point-blank I am not prepared for this.'

Moroka thought to himself that if a man spoke that way then at least you knew where you were. It was all a question of fear. The General was afraid of the African people.

They came away from the interview with Jabavu and Mahabane still favouring the compromise, with Moroka insisting, 'I will tell the people if you compromise. We must have *nothing* to do with it. If they are going to take our rights away let them do the dirty job themselves!' Fortunately the committee of liberals who were assisting them and particularly Sir James Rose-Innes and Donald Molteno (a young barrister descendant of the Cape Colony's most liberal Prime Minister), were utterly opposed to the compromise which they called 'a United Party wangle.' Moroka took the lead and signed a refusal to accept the compromise. The others of the deputation followed. After addressing a crowded meeting Jabavu departed and left Moroka to preside over the deputation.

By this time Hertzog had given up the attempts to get the compromise put forward by subtle methods, and had himself announced it. Moroka and the deputation told a press conference that they rejected the Government's proposal. One of the deputation illustrated their feelings by telling the Press a fable: a man had many fowls. One day he sent word he wished to consult them. They were astonished for it was not his custom to consult his fowls. He said: 'My children, I want to consult you on an important matter. I want to make soup of you—a great deal of soup. I have therefore come to ask you: into what kind of soup would you like to be made?'

At another big meeting of Africans the Rev. Zaccheus Mahabane

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spoke. Obliquely replying to Hertzog, he said that the white man made much of the 'black menace', a thing which did not exist except in his own imagination; in introducing these laws he had started from a wrong premise, he was actuated by fear. The white man feared, said the gentle reasonable black clergyman, that from preponderating numbers the black man might swamp him, attack him, or pounce on him.

Whereupon a voice from the back of the hall, no doubt a deep voice, remarked: 'He will one of these days.'

As soon as it was known that the A.A.C.'s deputation had rejected the compromise, telegrams of support poured in from all over the country and, Moroka says on looking back, 'then all the deputation realized that no, we had saved the ship.'

But though there were louder protests from whites than on any previous occasion when non-whites' rights had been affected, these were confined to churchmen, liberals and the left-wing, and to protests in the British Parliament and Press. The local Press was determined to carry on with the farce and on February 17, 1936, the *Cape Argus* reported that 'dramatically the Prime Minister announced at the joint session of the two Houses of Parliament this afternoon that he had accepted the compromise on the Native vote.' As for Smuts, who had said in 1926 that to deprive the Natives of the Cape of the vote would be a direct violation of the constitution, he now fully backed Hertzog in what the Bloemfontein *Friend* called 'the coping stone' on one of the Prime Minister's 'most cherished ambitions'.

When Sir James Rose-Innes condemned the disenfranchising of Africans *en masse* as 'a step for which there is no precedent in history . . . and which runs counter to the trend of civilized world opinion'; and when he went on to point out that far from the Whites being in danger of swamping by the Native vote, in 1933 of an electorate numbering 922,000, Africans numbered only 10,700, Hertzog had the answer to all such arguments. The final answer that, through the years, has never ceased to persuade white South Africans: joint voting, he said, paved the way to miscegenation. The *Cape Argus* hastened to quote this brilliant conclusion. Indeed, it described the Prime Minister's speech in moving the second reading of the Bill as 'worthy of a great occasion'. The Bill was passed by 169 votes to 11. The firm and honourable eleven included a member of the Cabinet, Jan Hofmeyr. Hertzog had

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persuaded a few Cape waverers to support him with the argument that all the remaining rights of Cape Africans would be preserved, a patently dishonest argument as it was inevitable that Cape Africans would come to lose land rights as well.

So ended a most disreputable transaction between two men, General Hertzog and General Smuts, for so long political enemies. The *Cape Argus* enthused about the 'path of honourable trusteeship' along which Hertzog was leading the white man.¹

¹ February 26, 1936.

VII

1936-1940: Silver Jubilee and Beginnings of Revival



Hertzog's segregation laws jerked Africans into greater political awareness. In the village of Thaba 'Nchu in the Free State political meetings were held. Africans in the Eastern Cape, on finding that they had lost their vote, joined the A.N.C. In Fort Hare Native College, students began to prick up their political ears, for, although they had not had the vote, their parents had. When Jabavu and Moroka and the other members of the A.A.C. deputation reported back to the full Convention, in June 1936, they found a new mood of strength and of unity.

The mood was short-lived. Should people collaborate and elect men to the Natives' Representative Council and to Parliament, or should they boycott?

After much argument it was agreed to 'give it a try'. Even the communists thought this, even Dr. Moroka, although he believed that men should join the N.R.C. in order to wreck it. Only a group led by Coloured Trotskyites quarrelled angrily with the decision. When it came to the elections to the N.R.C., several Congress leaders were voted in. Among them was Selope Thema, somewhat of an opportunist but a well-informed and often brilliant orator. He had come a long way from the young radical of 1919 and after years on the Joint Council and as a member of the Institute of Race Relations, had achieved added respectability as editor of the *Bantu World*. Thomas Mapikela, still the Speaker of Congress, indeed the 'Grand Old Man' of its conference, and head of the Bloemfontein Location Advisory Board, became N.R.C. representative for the Free State urban areas, while Dube was elected for Natal. In the first election of the three white Members of Parliament and four white Senators to represent Natives, the A.N.C. joined with

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the A.A.C. and the Cape Native Voters Association in asking Donald Molteno to stand, having learned to trust him during the fight against Hertzog's bills. Mrs. Margaret Ballinger was amongst the other successful representatives. The Secretary invited the candidates to become patrons of the Cape A.N.C., the only time whites became formally associated with Congress.

Another question that disrupted African unity was whether the A.A.C. should continue. Despite hot opposition from A.N.C. leaders, Jabavu obtained majority support in advocating its permanence. He became President with Moroka, Treasurer, while even Xuma, from London, cabled his support.

The emergence of this rival organization, coming on top of the A.N.C.'s failure to lead the opposition to the Hertzog bills, shocked some of its members into a decision. Some must go. But how to achieve this, when he had just got himself re-elected by a standing vote of confidence? Fortunately, at the same conference, he had appointed as Secretary-General the Rev. James A. Calata, an Anglican clergyman, whose characteristics might have seemed contradictory yet harmonized within him: of restrained personality, he had fire; a steadfast Christian, he was a patriot to the marrow of his bones; conservative, he had nerve and, clear-brained, he had a capacity for hard work. He also had a quality rare in A.N.C. leaders, he was *with* the people. The fact that he was a Xhosa living in the Eastern Cape, represented the swing into purely African politics of people newly pushed off the common voters' roll.

Born in 1895, James, as a boy, had gone to St. Matthew's, the Anglican Training College in the Cape, where he came to show marked ability in teaching—helping the warden and his wife to devise new methods—and also in music. After ten years of testing his vocation he had been accepted at the Theological College, and such was his character as a priest that the warden looked on him as a possible future bishop. Offered the principalship of St. Matthew's school, he refused because he wanted to be amongst his people. He had become interested in politics on first using his vote in 1919, and having rejected the idea of joining the only lively organization—the I.C.U.—because when Kadalie talked about Christ it went against his grain, he took part in local political organizations, agitating for better wages for farm labourers.

In 1928 he had been sent to the St. James's Mission Church in Cradock, a pretty village in the eastern Karroo. The location

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where he worked was a sprawl of flat-topped golden-brown clay houses, no drains, battered earth roads rent by gullies—typical of most locations except that it had beauty with its church, large and simple, shaded by dark pine and peppercorn trees, a landmark for the whole village, and with a view across bare veld to strongly etched hills, flat-topped and austere, softened in the rosy sunsets.

The young African priest arrived in Cradock full of enthusiasm. Thin, very dark-skinned, with a strong face and a rich strong voice, he became a familiar figure in his neat grey suit, as he went about quietly among the Africans. He was especially keen on choral music, on youth work and education, and as Commissioner of the Pathfinders (African Boy Scouts) he worked with friendly whites. Not long after his arrival came the 1930 depression. As he watched the outspans fill with Africans turned out by farmers who could no longer employ them, in his deep distress he felt that he saw a way of fighting for the needs and the rights of these displaced persons through the A.N.C., and he therefore led the Cradock Vigilance Association in becoming a branch of the A.N.C. by simply changing its name.

But in 1933 Calata became seriously ill with tuberculosis and had to be sent to a sanatorium. While there he had a vision of his mother, to whom he had been very devoted, urging him not only to save souls but to help the African people in their plight. When he emerged from hospital, his church gave him two years' leave but as he only had £8 saved he and his wife stayed at home. He soon found that inactivity made him feel worse, a discovery that coincided with his appointment as Secretary-General of the A.N.C. under Seme, and his anxiety to set about reorganizing Congress was so obvious that his doctor agreed. However, to do so, he must have funds. He therefore invested part of his £8 in a visit to Mapikela, for he felt sure that the Bloemfontein branch, as the centre for Congress conferences, must have some cash in hand. He and Mapikela went through the books. They found a balance of a shilling but even that was only on paper and not in the cash box! Whereupon local people made a collection and Calata set off for Johannesburg.

Should the A.N.C. continue? In view of its decline and with the advent of the A.A.C., was there any future in Congress? These were the questions that he asked as he went the rounds of men holding the remnant of Congress together in the Transvaal. He

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himself believed firmly that it was worthwhile, indeed that it was imperative to revive it, and he found support particularly from J. B. Marks and Mofutsanyana. On the other hand Selope Thema saw no hope of a future for Congress. But eventually the decision was taken: Congress should continue. Mveli Skota, the former editor of *Abantu-Batho*, was made Chairman of a co-ordinating committee, with Marks as its Secretary. The vital question was, who should replace Seme? Calata was eager to draw more graduates into Congress and wanted Dr. Xuma with his youth, energy and professional success, in the lead. Xuma however was in England for eighteen months. The others felt that the ideal man would be one of the 'old guard', someone esteemed by the people, capable of uniting them and leading the revival, and also outspoken and able. It looked as if the Rev. Zaccheus Mahabane was the obvious choice, being at the time well to the fore in a number of religious conferences where his ability was clear to see.

Mahabane was very unwilling to resume the Presidency. One of Congress's most active workers came to him and said: 'Well, Umfundisi, you can see that the people are at present leaderless. If you refuse to come back to office then you will have left the people in the lurch and we shall report the case to God.' Whereupon Mahabane felt compelled to agree. He was elected and so, in its Jubilee year, Congress had two clergymen at its head, both eager to ensure its revival, but both with pastoral work to do: Mahabane the Methodist in Winburg in the Free State and Calata the Anglican in Cradock in the Eastern Cape.

Calata's dedication to the task was unremitting and he brought to Congress a spiritual influence which helped to stabilize it, but the fact remained that there were no funds in the kitty, and with African clergy notoriously ill paid, he simply had not got the cash to travel in order to raise funds from chiefs or townspeople to achieve the necessary reorganization. His awareness of the conditions under which the rural African people were living made the frustration the more intolerable. Not far from his home 40,000 Africans, according to a survey made by Professor W. M. Macmillan, had £3 per head per annum spending power and for half or more of this they depended on wage-earning away from their homes and families. Throughout the country almost two million Africans were working on white farms, completely subject to their masters, with no supervision, no education or religion. A

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good wage on a farm was £2 a month plus living, while some wages were 6/- a month, or even no wage at all with children also forced to work. Many Africans still had to accept such conditions in order to earn cash to pay poll tax, a fact stated in Parliament by certain members of the United Party. The prices of everything an African bought, such as blankets, shoes, clothing, had gone up nearly 50%. Sir John Harris, who was visiting South Africa on behalf of the Anti-Slavery Society in London, remarked that this was at a time of spectacular prosperity for South Africa and that African wages none the less had not increased by 'a penny piece'. Meanwhile the Native reserves remained at 12.4% of the land despite population increases, in other words the division of land equalled 370 acres for every white to 6 acres for every African. The reserves were almost denuded of able-bodied men gone to work elsewhere for cash wages, particularly in the mines, finding themselves in bitter competition with poor whites, who had been driven from the poverty of the *platteland* by the depression of the early 'thirties and who often were incapable of doing the skilled jobs reserved for whites.

In December 1937 Calata wrote to George Champion, now in the A.N.C. 'cabinet' as 'Minister for Lands and Locations', pointing out that the Native Laws Amendment Act would come into operation on January 1. This provided yet more stringent control over Africans' entry into urban areas, in effect turning them into rootless tenants, only permitted in these white enclaves on sufferance. Calata said 'the whole race' was looking to the A.N.C. for a line of action. Perhaps the A.N.C. could provide legal defence for the law's victims. He was just off to Bloemfontein to consult Mahabane, Mapikela and others, about possible action. He wished that Champion could join them but—the old refrain—there were no funds.

And all the while the laws and their implementation at once increased people's frustration and bitterness while intimidating them and discouraging protest. One example was an innovation to implement more stringently the pass laws and the liquor laws: pick-up vans were introduced by the police. The number of prosecutions of Africans immediately increased as police drove arrogantly round the locations and urban areas at night, on their routine of stopping Africans and demanding to see their passes, banging at doors and bursting into houses in search of illicit

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liquor, tearing up floor boards, and humiliating parents in front of their children. This led to one of the periodic small explosions that punctuate the country's history. In September 1937 in Vereeniging location the police made one of a series of raids in search of liquor and were stoned. The next morning they drove into the location in one of their hated pick-up vans. They found the people 'defiant', so withdrew to return with reinforcements, whereupon a large crowd attacked them with stones. As they retreated the crowd managed to surround the pick-up van, to overturn it and throw it against a fence, and then went on to batter two white constables and an African policeman to death. Armed and bayoneted reinforcements rescued the other police and wounded a number of Africans with rifle fire. The resulting inquiry typified Government reaction to such riots—although the Superintendent of the location gave as one cause the 'harsh and oppressive laws' that young and inexperienced police had to administer, and although the Magistrate showed that the pick-up van's advent had increased prosecutions, the Prime Minister's conclusion was that 'no punishment or means must be left untried' in ending the violence. The causes of the violence were left to fester.

One major obstacle that Calata found in reorganizing was continuing division in the Provinces. He wrote innumerable tactful conciliatory letters in an attempt to heal the breaches. Somehow he also fulfilled his work in the parish, extending the church and school, building a church hall, and justifying the trust that both his congregation and other location inhabitants placed in him. He was involved in the long drawn-out quarrel between the two dominating Zulu leaders, Dr. Dube, President of his own Natal Native Congress, and George Champion, who upon the dissolution of his I.C.U. Yase Natal and since his return from banishment, had functioned as a member of the A.N.C. National Executive. Dube was cross to learn that Champion had been appointed the A.N.C.'s Minister of Lands and Locations, an appointment made without his knowledge, not surprisingly since he refused to unite his Natal Congress with the National body. One reason for his stubbornness arose out of his belief that Congress should be governed by chiefs. The fact was that this had become a struggle as to who should be the effective leader of the Zulus in Natal. The Zulus were great believers in one supreme leader at a time and their Paramount Chief's failure to respond to the challenge of events, and virtual

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retreat into being a tribal leader within Zululand, had left these two political leaders to compete for provincial leadership like two bulls in one kraal. Although Dube's behaviour caused especial dismay, for he had been a man big in mind and stature, he received more sympathy because of his age and the fact that he was an institution. When Champion angrily protested to Calata about Dube's obstruction of his efforts to get support for the A.N.C., Calata wrote soothingly: 'The Zulu nation needs careful guidance under the Congress and I am sure that by combining your efforts with those of Dr. Dube's, there lies the only way.' He much wanted to visit Natal to discuss the problems with the two men and he said, 'I have tried all I could to find money to bring me over to Natal but have failed.'

The Natal wrangle was not Calata's only headache and in May 1938, in the Cape, he found Professor Thaele 'still recalcitrant', and refusing to accept the result of provincial elections in which he had been replaced. Calata sadly remarked: 'I am afraid we are still very far from salvation as long as we have men who look more after their own interests than that of the nation.' There was nothing for it but for him and Mahabane to go to Cape Town. He chaired a Board of Inquiry which came to the decision that Thaele was in the wrong. As Calata pronounced this, a stone was thrown at him from outside, hitting a widow and breaking it. The culprit could not be found. Whereupon the owners of the hall demanded that as it was Calata's words that had angered the thrower, he must himself pay the 10/- for the repair of the window! However for the time being affairs in the Cape Congress looked a little more regular.

Moses Kotane, who had settled down in Cape Town, was one of those concerned in the reorganization, but in 1938 he became more involved in communist activity as the Party revived. In the Cape it formed the National Liberation League with Gomas and La Guma among its leaders. Like certain other communist united front organizations, it was not to last long, but it made a militant impression. In the trades union field, meanwhile, schism upon schism had left a young Trotskyite to organize most efficiently.

Militant demands remained the prerogative of the left-wing and when the A.N.C. held its annual conference in 1938, although it began on Dingaan's Day, December 16, to celebrate Africans' pride in a Zulu hero, the discussions took their orderly course. The

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decisions were so mild that Marks was moved to question Congress's weaknesses; its failure to impress its aims and objects on the masses. He commented on the inferiority complex and spirit of defeatism which often led Africans to think that to attain freedom they must have a white skin. But the A.N.C. was intent, as Calata put it, 'on closing our ranks behind our Parliamentary representatives and members of the Natives' Representative Council.' The N.R.C. was already proving ineffectual, with the Government taking no notice of its resolutions. And as long as the Council existed the Government could use it to deceive the ignorant by passing it off as an effective form of African representation and co-operation. Its one asset was that the African members gained a closer view of the legislative process and, brought together from distant parts of the country, they could discuss among themselves their people's grievances and possible action. Meanwhile the white M.P.s representing Natives, though they got a fair enough hearing in the House, could never affect the voting and often found themselves roundly attacked by both United Party and Afrikaner Nationalists.¹

Once again the A.N.C. decided to send a deputation to see the Minister of Native Affairs; this time to protest particularly against the pass laws. Mahabane and Calata were accompanied by Z. K. Matthews, the academic, who was just back from England and Germany, and one or two others. The Minister, H. A. Fagan, agreed that the pass laws should be abolished and promised to do his best to achieve this. Just before they left him he asked Calata how many members Congress had that year.

Calata replied, '4,000.'

Fagan laughed and remarked, 'I knew you were only representing your jackets. How can an organization of 4,000 members claim to speak for 8 million?'

There was a good deal in this, but they might have retorted that non-whites had none of the facilities nor freedom of the whites to organize political parties. They might have added that the A.N.C. was the oldest and most consistent of African organizations, that while others had sprung up with a flourish, these had faded out; the Congress survived.

¹ In the A.N.C.'s experience, several of the M.P.'s 'representing' Africans did not feel themselves bound to consult Africans but acted as if they knew what was best for them.

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In 1939 small occurrences aroused hope of a more efficient A.N.C. One was that Calata's efforts to build it into more than just an annual get-together were beginning to bear fruit, and it even looked as if Dube and Champion would unite when Dube attended a National conference held in Durban. Calata had not seen him since they had both been members of choirs, singing in Cape Town in 1912. Now he was thankful to see Dube on their platform. (Indeed the conference was fixed in people's memories when, as the Regent Paramount Chief of Zululand arrived and began to walk down the aisle, Dube—by this time a large elderly academic figure of a man, recently honoured with a doctorate by Natal University—jumped up and performed a Zulu dance of excitement. Several Europeans were so frightened by what they thought to be a Zulu war dance and the cheers and ululations of the women that went with it, that they rushed anxiously out of the hall.) Another hopeful sign was financial encouragement when, for the first time since Calata had become Secretary-General, he was presented with some cash—£15—a good deal of it contributed by Indian guests.

It was at this point that war again broke out in Europe. In September 1939, after Britain had declared war on Germany, General Smuts ousted Hertzog to become Prime Minister and declared war with the support of a narrow majority in Parliament. The A.N.C.'s reaction was that 'unless and until the Government grants the Africans full democratic and citizenship rights' it was not prepared to advise them to take part in the war, in any capacity. But this was soon modified and Congress came to approve South Africa's part in the war. Some knew about nazism—Z. K. Matthews had just visited Germany—and could relate it to their own experience of racialism in South Africa.

Recruiting went slowly and Calata commented: 'If the Government of South Africa does not get Africans to volunteer for service they must examine the situation from within. I am afraid they are themselves to blame for the present attitude of mind of the Africans. Hitler had absolutely nothing to do with it.' Some Congress members joined up in spite of the restrictions on non-whites who again were digging, driving, fetching and carrying. One, Thaele's brother, came to the conclusion that 'well, the country was in danger, and even if a man has quarrelled with his wife, if he sees an enemy approaching his house, he would get up

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to settle with that enemy.' La Guma joined up despite the double dilemma of being one of the discriminated-against non-whites and of being a communist; the latter dilemma deriving from Stalin's pact with Hitler in August 1939 so that South African communists, from their 'popular front' against fascism, overnight swung to agitate against the 'imperialist' war. However, when Hitler invaded Russia, the imperialist war became the 'peoples' war'.

The non-whites were not only needed in menial capacities in the army but were eagerly recruited for the iron and steel works and the munition factories and other industries that proliferated. The war effort was all the more dependent on the non-white contribution in face of the pro-Hitler activities of such extreme Afrikaner organizations as the Ossewabrandwag and Pirow's New Order 'Under the Swastika'. Many Nationalists were vocal in support of the nazis. A newspaper editor, H. F. Verwoerd, made his paper a tool of the nazis.¹ Policemen were among would-be saboteurs.

The year 1940 was unique in the history of modern South Africa: no racially discriminating laws were introduced.

¹ Judgment Transvaal Supreme Court, July 13, 1943.

VIII

1940-1943: Reorganization at a Time of Ferment



Towards the end of 1940 James Calata wrote to George Champion: 'Please come to Bloemfontein and let us choose the right man for our President-General. You don't believe in prayer, but I can tell you that I am praying as hard as I can as the Congress, if it cannot find the right man for its President-General, must dissolve in favour of the A.A.C.' Able though Mahabane was, as a clergyman in an inaccessible parish he could never be a suitable President-General. Until the right man was found, Calata's ambition for the reorganizing of Congress would never be realized.

In December 1940 the right man was found when Dr. Alfred Bitini Xuma, back from extended study in Europe, though not even a member of Congress, was elected President-General. Mahabane soon left the A.N.C. to work with its rival, the A.A.C.

Xuma, like any young Xhosa, had herded cattle in his home in the Transkei and, as seventh child, had had to work hard to get some education. His ambition had been fired when he heard about Seme, Dube and other Africans who had studied overseas; while still a youth he taught until he had saved enough to get to the United States where he worked his way through high school and college by taking jobs on farms and as a waiter. Eventually he qualified as a doctor in Chicago and St. Louis, and married a Negro wife who was later prominent in Y.W.C.A. affairs. He studied surgery and gynaecology in Hungary and Edinburgh. Calata had therefore seen in him a combination of qualities that made him the ideal leader for Congress: sophisticated, widely travelled, enjoying a successful career, yet quite young and vital, one of the respected Xhosa people and, furthermore, living in Johannesburg to which Africans were flocking for the wartime industrial boom and which was the obvious centre for the A.N.C.

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Most important, Calata believed him to be the man to attract intellectuals to Congress.

Xuma, a small lively man with bright large eyes, and a soft voice, had a quiet confidence, and, particularly considering the seven or eight degrees that he held from great European centres and the conditions under which African doctors had to work in South Africa, his lack of bitterness was remarkable. Hitherto, apart from his part in the deputation to Hertzog in 1936, he had been too busy to think about politics and had believed that if he made his career a success that in itself would vindicate the rights of Africans to be treated as equals by the whites. But this offer of the leadership of the oldest of the African organizations filled him with enthusiasm and he came to the new field of action with a will to dedicate himself to reorganizing Congress and also, a rare qualification, with the private means to do so. This latter was fortunate for no sooner had he taken over than he received accounts from his two predecessors: Dr. Seme claimed £13 6s. 8d. and Mr. Mahabane claimed 15/- for expenses they had incurred during their terms of office. Seme was threatening to sue Congress and so Xuma paid him out of his own pocket rather than have Congress exposed.

Xuma's decision to align himself with what the A.A.C. called 'a moribund organization' was mocked by his former friends in the Convention. When he set off on a tour of the Cape the Rev. Zaccheus Mahabane cheered him on by saying: 'My! I have just been saying to my wife, Congress is dead and the new President-General is trying to resuscitate it!' Xuma's comment was: 'I am a medical doctor but I have not succeeded to bring life to the dead.' Maybe, but he put new life into the moribund and in doing so won praise. For instance, Marks felt that Xuma was the man of the moment and argued this with Selope Thema who disliked Xuma for his self-centredness and lack of interest in the people, though he was subsequently won round to become his warm supporter.

Xuma took drastic action in the Cape, where the Provincial Congress had again divided, and expelled the entire Executive, took over control and in due course handed over to a new Executive elected in conference. The resulting discipline and integration won the support of men like Dr. R. Bokwe, member of a well-known Cape family and brother-in-law of Z. K. Matthews, who had previously not thought much of the organization but who now agreed to become Treasurer of the Cape Congress. In the Trans-

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vaal, Xuma commissioned a number of men to start new branches and, instead of a system which had grown up over years of people attending conferences by buying a ticket, he insisted on branch membership and a minimum representation so that Congress came to represent something definite.

A significant innovation was his appointment of a Secretary for Mines, Gaur Radebe. He was a short, energetic, bombastic man who, prompted by the communists, for the first time in the history of South Africa, through the A.N.C. inaugurated a trade union for African mineworkers: on August 3, 1941 Congress called a conference of representatives of leading trade unions, including white unions, and the African Mine Workers Union was formed. Twenty years earlier Gumede had tried to organize mineworkers; would Xuma learn from that lesson?

When it came to Natal it needed all Xuma's diplomacy to succeed and this he did after a night-long session with Champion and with M'timkulu, representing Dr. Dube who was seriously ill. The Natal Province for the first time was united under the National Executive. Selby Msimang became its Secretary.

Xuma was getting into his stride. In a dramatic gesture he tore up the old constitution. Some watched him do so, folded his arms in a mute gesture of protest while tears came into his eyes. Even today founder members of the A.N.C. feel passionately about Xuma's act. The constitution, with its imperial associations, had become almost sacred to them, however much they had been disillusioned by Britain. They would not have minded its revision and, in fact, Xuma himself came to regret his zealous haste in destroying rather than revising.

He drafted a new constitution with the help of Bram Fischer, an able young lawyer, communist grandson of the fierce old reactionary Abraham Fischer, who had been Prime Minister of the Orange River Colony. The new constitution was certainly more democratic, with a National Executive wholly elected (instead of depending on initial nomination by the President), with a widening of membership and removal of the racial bar so that the President need no longer be an aboriginal but could be one of the Coloured people. It abolished the ineffectual House of Chiefs, and brought Congress as a whole more closely to the organization of a political party. Xuma later, however, felt that it left too much unsaid, on the assumption that branches would use their own

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initiative, and he regretted the loss of Presidential power provided by the old constitution which facilitated his reorganizing.

Xuma might be too coldly self-sufficient to be popular, but the widespread optimism that he generated among younger men and the more militant, promised great things for the future of the A.N.C. and what it might achieve for the African people.

In the country at large there were signs to justify an even deeper optimism for, with the fall of Singapore in 1942, white South Africa was gravely alarmed at the prospect of a Japanese invasion, and Smuts, set about on all sides by Afrikaner Nationalists who were jubilant at Hitler's advances, suddenly made the startling declaration: 'Isolation has gone and I am afraid segregation has fallen on evil days too.'¹ He and Xuma both quoted the Atlantic Charter produced by Churchill and Roosevelt on August 14, 1941. Smuts said that it should mean 'for all, improved labour standards, economic advancement and social security,' while Xuma told the A.N.C. Conference in December 1942 that Africans in Southern Africa should draw up their own Atlantic Charter. After the war, he urged, the world should know 'our hopes and our despairs directly from us.' He spoke about 'our men' who were 'dying up North', who were helping to take North Africa and Madagascar, who would have done even more 'if we had not been debarred from skilled trades for war production, and if we had arms as befits all brave men who have never betrayed their Government.' He went on to point out: 'Of late we have heard inspiring words of hope from the Minister of State,' but so far, he added, 'no fundamental change has taken place.'

The Deputy Prime Minister, Colonel Deneys Reitz, met a deputation consisting of the most influential of African leaders, Xuma, Z. K. Matthews (newly elected to the A.N.C. Executive and to the Natives' Representative Council), Mapikela and Calata, and other prominent members of the N.R.C. as well as a representative of the effectual Non-European Council of Trade Unions.² They protested against the pass laws. Reitz said he was so impressed with their case that he would write a memorandum for the Prime Minister but, he pointed out, he was bound by Parliament and the United Party, and he could give no promises. However, such being the influence of the remote but possibly imminent Japanese forces, it was suddenly announced that the police would

¹ Address to the S.A. Institute of Race Relations. ² See plate 2b.

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only ask for passes where a crime was suspected. There was a startling drop in the arrests—in Johannesburg, for example, they fell from 200 a day to 20. But soon the United States fleet engaged the Japanese. The pass laws were again intensified.

‘To hell with the Pass Laws!’ This was the slogan adopted by the Communist Party which promptly joined the A.N.C. in their decision to launch an anti-pass campaign. They began carefully to plan this action.

Then hopes were aroused by the Government’s appointment of an Inter-departmental Committee of Inquiry into economic, health and social conditions in urban areas, under Douglas Smit, to which Xuma gave evidence on behalf of the A.N.C.

Among the perennial representations about low wages, the pass laws and the need for more education, he made a powerful case for the hundreds of thousands of Africans flocking to the towns in response to the huge demand for cheap labour in wartime industries, to be immediately segregated into insanitary, over-crowded slums under the Natives (Urban Area) Act. In Pimville, he pointed out, people had been living in iron half-tanks for forty years and were surrounded by a sewage farm. The locations had little if any street lighting, no house lighting, bad roads, often non-existent sanitation. They were many miles from the towns and Xuma reasoned that decent housing, at a fair distance from work, would make workers more competent. African wages might be £3 a month at a time when the breadline, as the Government’s own Committee remarked, was £7 10s. od. As a result nearly half a million Africans a year were convicted for non-payment of tax and other statutory offences: as few could afford to pay the resulting fines they went to gaol and the family lost its breadwinner. Nor, he added, was there any benefit for unemployed Africans as there was for Europeans, yet they were liable for tax.

The Smit Committee confirmed much of this, and Smuts’s Government, strengthened by the good news from the North African front and by a three-fold split in the Afrikaner Nationalist front, could surely have fulfilled promises of a better life for all. But when the frustration building up in African workers surfaced in a series of strikes along the Rand and in Natal, Smuts responded by passing War Measures rendering illegal ‘all strikes by all Africans under all circumstances’ and forbidding unauthorized meetings on mine property.

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Not surprisingly there was a riot—in Marabastad, Pretoria—in which 16 Africans and one European were killed and many wounded. A subsequent commission of inquiry found evidence of much discontent.

In August, 1943, in the African township of Alexandra, tucked away to one side of the main road out of Johannesburg to Pretoria, the local bus company raised its fare from 4d. a journey to 5d.: 2d. a day extra for people who, as the Smit Committee had found, had a probable average wage of £5 2s. 11d. a month: a fifth of a wage on fares. Spontaneously the African people walked. It was mid-winter, and in the bleak cold of the highveld, Alexandra lay under a thin grey cloud of smoke, from the braziers on which the night meal had been cooked. Every morning early from thousands of small, iron-roofed houses the people emerged and set out along the steep main road towards the city. 15,000 men and women trudged the nine or more miles to work; cleaners and messengers and clerks, washerwomen and maids. Some were given lifts but most of them walked. Again, in the chill of nightfall they walked the nine miles back home. A Bus Service Committee was quickly set up, led by the A.N.C.'s Executive member for Mines, Gaur Radebe, who lived in Alexandra, and including leaders of the community there, and representatives from Trades Unions, Vigilance Societies, the Communist Party, as well as certain white sympathizers. But the people of Alexandra had shown that they were ahead of any organization and, militant and determined, for nine days they walked until the bus company gave in and reduced the fare to 4d. The Government set up a Bus Commission.

The second half of the year 1943 was full of momentous incidents. Smuts had won an election with a secure majority, though admittedly the election had been held under ideal conditions. The Allies were surging ahead on all fronts against Germany and Japan. African optimism, always near the surface, rose again when the Lansdowne Commission was set up to investigate conditions on the mines, this in response to the demands of the African Mine Workers Union. Then at a meeting of the Natives' Representative Council, the Deputy Prime Minister intimated that the freedoms envisaged in the Atlantic Charter would be for Africans too. Non-whites recalled how in 1942 Smuts had said that, looking to the friendly relations that had grown up between white South Africans and brown and black soldiers in the war, old ideas on the colour

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question 'which had brought nothing but bitterness and strife' must change. Now once more, at the end of 1943, he spoke about the world needing 'the British system' with its goodwill, good government and human co-operation, 'a mission of freedom and human happiness'. This surely signified that he subscribed to Britain's rejection of nazi ideas of race and sympathized with Britain's as yet vaguely held out promise of self-government for Africans. The new Deputy Prime Minister, furthermore, was Jan Hofmeyr, the most liberal of Ministers in the history of South Africa. The Government was even considering 'a people's charter' covering employment, social security, housing, public health, nutrition and education for all.

While Nnamdi Azikiwe was publishing an Atlantic Charter for British West Africa, in South Africa under Xuma's supervision, the cream of the African intellectuals began work on their Bill of Rights, based on the Charter. Z. K. Matthews, now Reader in African law and languages at Fort Hare College, was Chairman of the drafting committee. They agreed that Africans desired the end of nazi tyranny as promised in the Atlantic Charter, but, they emphasized, Africans wanted *all* racial domination completely destroyed. Once again, as in 1919, they referred to President Wilson's Fourteen Points. The point that most deeply concerned them was the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they would live. The acid test of the good faith of the creators of the Charter lay, they declared, in the application of this point to Africa.

In this ferment of events and ideas the A.N.C.'s annual conference passed a resolution that was to have singular consequences: a Youth League would be formed. Several undergraduates from Fort Hare College who had been expelled for taking part in strikes, together with a number of young men working in Johannesburg and undergraduates at the University of the Witwatersrand, had simultaneously begun to take an interest in Congress. The policy which Calata had planned in the 'thirties and which Xuma was carrying through—of attracting intellectuals to Congress—was bearing fruit; but neither Calata nor Xuma could have imagined what the outcome would be.

IX

1943-1944: The Youth League



Given the inequity and injustice permeating life in South Africa it was natural that the idealism enshrined in the Atlantic Charter and running through remarks made by members of the Government with the object of inspiring and sustaining the war effort, should fan the flames of political discontent and breed a new and self-conscious nationalism among young Africans. Once they had the go-ahead from the A.N.C. conference, several of them formed a provisional committee and, according to Dr. Xuma, everything 'was decided in my study in Sophiatown with Sisulu, Mandela and others.' But there was more to it than this. The *ad hoc* committee Chairman was a medical student, Willie Nkomo, a hard worker with personality but unpredictable, swinging subsequently from the A.N.C. to the Communist Party to Moral Rearmament, and almost immediately he was replaced by Anton Muziwakhe Lembede, who became the Youth League's first President. Simultaneously the Acting Secretary, Congress Mbata, a teacher with a reserved nature, who later found his *métier* in the Institute of Race Relations, was replaced by Oliver Tambo.

Lembede and Tambo had certain points in common—both were teachers, studying to become lawyers, and both were children of humble parents who had been determined that their children should have a better life than themselves—Lembede the child of Zulu farm labourers in Natal, so poor that they dressed in sacks, and Tambo of heathen Pondo peasants. Both men were religious, Lembede a Roman Catholic and Tambo an Anglican. But at this point their life stories must be told separately.

Anton Lembede's parents had scraped together money to send him to primary school for two years but after that he had to become a kitchen-boy for an Indian family until he had saved enough to

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go back to school. He was phenomenally industrious, passed his first year in high school with a first class and subsequently, in 1933, won a bursary to Adams Teacher Training College, the Congregational institution in Amanzimtoti. Another student, Jordan Ngubane, became his good friend, and the Principal, Dr. Edgar Brookes, as well as two of the staff, Albert Lutuli and Z. K. Matthews, all regarded Anton as an excellent student. Otherwise he did not make much impression except that Lutuli thought him an iconoclast while his fellow students were struck by his extreme poverty; he wore home-made pants that shrank and shrank as he washed them, and whilst most of the boys had brought two or three rugs for their beds, he only had a cheap blanket.

His manners were rough, an uncouthness that went oddly with his sensitivity and the passion for learning that drove him; that took him in 1935 to teach in the Free State because there he could learn Afrikaans and Sesotho, as well as privately studying until he passed his matriculation with a distinction in Latin. Within three years, again by correspondence, he had taken his B.A., majoring in philosophy and Roman-Dutch law. Just as Plaatje had done some thirty years before, so Lembede taught himself German and read widely. When he moved to Johannesburg in 1943, he was articled to Dr. Seme, an old man and delighted to have this remarkable student in his firm. Lembede joined the A.N.C. along with his friend Peter Mda, like himself a Roman Catholic and a teacher wanting to be a lawyer—a brilliant, intense, tireless worker.

Lembede at thirty was an intriguing mixture—arrogant yet disarming, aggressive so that he made enemies yet with an unusual ability to laugh at himself. He was tall and slight with a mobile face and small moustache, and he might have been good-looking but for a smile that seemed almost a sneer. He and Mda were having a decided influence on younger men, and on one occasion addressed a meeting at St. Peter's, the Anglican school. Although Lembede was not a fluent speaker and sometimes almost stammered, he was fond of high-flown language, swinging from pedagogic to demagogic utterances, while exerting a spell through the power of his personality. This particular lecture typified his curious mixture of intellect with startling philosophizing: when he came to quote Karl Marx and to claim that a pair of boots was better than all the plays of Shakespeare, the Chairman hastily closed the meeting.

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St. Peter's school meant much in Oliver Tambo's life: he was there both as a student and a teacher. A younger man than Lembede, as a child in Pondoland he had thoroughly disliked school and frequently played truant until his father, newly converted to the Anglican faith, sent him to the Holy Cross Mission where they understood that the fathers had a free boarding school. To their dismay they found that there was no such provision but at that moment two sisters in Britain wrote to the fathers, offering fees for one child, and this gift was used for Oliver. The fun of going a long distance from the tribal village to boarding school made all the difference and he suddenly found himself mad keen on education. When he was later accepted by St. Peter's, with his elder stepbrother paying half the fees of £12 a year and the two Englishwomen the other half, there was the double thrill of going to this particular school and of going to Johannesburg—for although thousands of Pondo had gone year after year to the mines, he was the first to go to *boarding school* in the great city. After two years, when he was nineteen, he passed his Junior Certificate with a first class, and as a result the Bunga, the Transkei Tribal Council which normally only provided scholarships for sons of important people, gave him a scholarship not only to finish at St. Peter's, but to go on to Fort Hare College. He took science because he wanted eventually to do medicine, having grown up among stories about certain Pondo reputed to control lightning and to give mysterious forms of medical treatment, and he was eager to discover these mysteries. His part in students' strikes led to his expulsion. But his rebellion had been as much for spiritual as for political reasons. When a pledge was demanded of students regarding their conduct and spiritual life, he could not comply: 'An agreement with God written and signed?' Impossible. He returned to St. Peter's in 1943, at the age of twenty-five, to become science master.

Slight, dark-skinned with tribal marks engraved on his cheeks, nice-looking, with neat hands, he became popular with the pupils and found friends among the Community of the Resurrection, the priests who ran St. Peter's. But he hankered after a different career, not medicine any longer but law, and it was through another member of the Youth League, Walter Sisulu, who was impressed by him and interested in his future, that he later became articled to a firm in Johannesburg.

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Walter Max Sisulu was one of the few members of the Youth League who had not been highly educated, but the extraordinary range of his experience made up for this in human terms. He, more than any other individual in the League, and probably than any Congress leader, knew just what it meant to be 'a native'; and although tens of thousands of Africans had probably gone through very similar experiences, like tens of thousands of perfectly good oysters, they did not have in them the grain that would produce a pearl. This may be an incongruous simile for Sisulu, a pale-skinned, plain man in heavy rimmed spectacles, whom some people saw as frustrated, unsuccessfully reaching for fulfilment and consequently bitter. But there were others who found him trustworthy and generous and there were those who simply gave him up as an enigma.

Born in the same district as Dr. Xuma, in Engcobo in the Transkei, in 1912, he had been strictly brought up by his uncle, a respected village headman: prayers twice a day, to the Anglican service in the church hut on Sundays, with due respect—in the best Victorian tradition still prevailing among the older generation of the Xhosa—for the upper class, which in this case meant the white missionaries and officials who called upon his uncle. Implicit in all this was loyalty to the Government. But the uncomfortable grain was there and Walter was reprimanded by his aunt for being rude to patronizing white visitors: 'I doubt whether you will be *allowed* to work for a white man', a reproof which had on him the opposite effect to that she intended, and he was delighted. At the Anglican school he relished the stories of Moses and David and the exciting struggle of the Jews to overthrow foreign rulers, while in the village he enjoyed the gossip about Wellington Butelezi, who had travelled about the Transkei, claiming to be American, educated at the 'University of Oxford and Cambridge', and promising liberation with the help of brother Negroes. Butelezi had left behind him agents who went about talking of the people's oppression and hardships, and leaving Walter and the other villagers with the impression that America was a Negro country, and one day would liberate them. Only later did it come out that Butelezi came from Natal where his former schoolmates irreverently called him 'Bootlaces'. He was one of those meteors who from time to time flare across the African sky, and his crusade promising liberation enabled him to collect thousands of

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half crowns, before he was expelled from the Transkei and disappeared into obscurity.

Upon the death of his uncle, Walter at the age of sixteen had to leave school, and take on family responsibilities such as coping with the stock and the crops, but soon, to assert his manhood, he went to a Johannesburg mine, working with pick and shovel at the rockface, a mile underground, and each night sleeping on the wooden boards, alongside the other mine 'boys' in the grim, celibate barracks of one of the innumerable compounds. He hated the Compound Manager who to him represented the inhumanity of the system, but he felt helpless and his rebellious spirit found its only outlet in listening to the older men grumbling about the bad food and contemplating a strike. He had been through tribal initiation before going to the mine, and now, his manhood complete, he went home with money to buy a horse and saddle and a good suit, enough to earn the neighbours' respect.

His next job was in East London, as 'kitchen boy' to a pleasant family who took a personal interest in him, and whom he found interesting as he studied their manners and the way in which they brought up their children. Although the grain had set off an itch so that in spare moments in the kitchen he studied an English grammar and was vaguely aware of the need for political action, when he attended meetings, despite being thrilled by Kadalie's speeches, he did not join the I.C.U.

It was not until he returned to Johannesburg that he learnt his first political lesson. He was working in a bakery at 18/- a week and, having picked up a little about trade unions he led the workers out on strike for higher wages; whereupon the boss saw each man separately, persuaded him to resume work at the same wage, and sacked Sisulu. As he went through a succession of factory jobs, he clashed repeatedly with white bosses and his sole relief became a delving back into Xhosa history, and writing articles about tribal heroes for the *Bantu World*. The clashes came not merely from personal revolt: one evening in the train going home to the township where he lived he saw a white ticket-collector, for no apparent reason, confiscating an African child's season ticket. He at once asked the collector why he had done this but, instead of replying, the man hit him. He fought back, was overpowered, arrested and imprisoned. He had never been in prison and he found it to be 'the nastiest experience' of his life. He was finding that the whites

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whom he and most Africans encountered were the police raiding locations for passes or liquor or for tax receipts, or pass officials dealing with queues of 'boys' like cattle, or gaolers who beat up African prisoners and caused what Sisulu could feel to be 'shocking misery', and all these things aroused in him not fear of the white man, but contempt.

As he went from job to job he studied for his Junior Certificate by correspondence and became one of the first Africans to enter the Technical College when it was opened to non-whites. His mother had joined him and they lived in one of the small brick box houses in Orlando where she took in washing for white families. He took a leading part in music and debating clubs. His vague search for political expression was taking more definite form, and it was with the A.N.C.'s revival in 1937 that he felt he had found what he wanted. He admired Seme as the foundation stone of Congress and in a number of discussions with him was impressed by his shrewdness. He was influenced too by the forcefulness of J. B. Marks as a speaker. By 1940, when he was having a little success in a land and estate agency that he and five friends had formed to deal in such freehold land as existed, he actually joined Congress and for the first time heard Xuma giving one of his lucid presidential addresses. Sisulu could hardly believe that so vivid a picture could be painted by a black man and was proud that they came from the same birthplace. So it was that in 1941, when African interest in the war flared up with the aggressive entry into the struggle of the non-white Japan, Sisulu, Tambo, and another young man from the Transkei, Nelson Mandela, were all simultaneously drawn towards politics.

It was perhaps odd that Walter Sisulu, who had always had to struggle for education and for jobs, and had come of a comparatively poor family, should have been in a position to help Mandela, an aristocrat born into as privileged a society as an African could be.

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela had been slow to rebel. His childhood as the son of a Tembu chief had been strict but pleasant. They lived in neat white-faced thatched huts, along the banks of the Bashee river, a green-watered stream flowing through beautiful hills in the Transkei. Nelson had followed tradition in tending sheep and cattle and helping to plough fields, before attending Methodist schools. His father died in 1930, when he was twelve, and he was fostered according to custom by his cousin, Acting

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Paramount Chief of the Tembu. He found life in the royal kraal singularly dull, and envied the exploits of his more plebeian friends—such as stealing a pig and taking it to the forests to kill and roast and eat. But he enjoyed listening to his cousin trying cases in the tribal court and dreamed of becoming a lawyer. So much did he long to see life and have adventures, that he tried on several occasions to run away from school but was unsuccessful.

It was not until he reached Fort Hare College, and was studying for his B.A. in 1940, that he had what he might have regarded as his first adventure, and joined in the students' boycott of the Students' Representative Council when the authorities deprived it of its powers. As happened later to his friend, Oliver Tambu, he was suspended. The Paramount Chief told him to accept the Principal's ultimatum to agree to serve on the Students' Representative Council and so be enabled to return to Fort Hare, and probably he would have obeyed had not another issue cropped up: the Chief was planning a tribal marriage for him. He promptly fled to Johannesburg where, of all things, he became a mine policeman, sitting at the compound gate, clutching his 'badges' of office—a whistle and a knobkerrie. However it was only for two days as a telegram from the Paramount Chief tracked him down and he had to hide again.

So naïf was he that his ambition was to become a clerk in the Native Affairs Department but he had no idea how to set about getting a job, and when a friend said, 'I'll take you to Sisulu, he might suggest something,' he was grateful. He thought Sisulu intelligent and sincere. Sisulu, on hearing of his early ambition to become a lawyer, arranged with the aid of Gaur Radebe for Mandela to be articled to a firm of Jewish lawyers, and gave Mandela some money to tide him over. Radebe was the A.N.C. member formerly concerned with the founding of the African Mine Workers Union and also involved in the Alexandra bus boycott. He was a clerk, with limited education, a rather lordly man with a masterly ability in debate, and when Mandela heard him outwitting Europeans in the firm, he was fascinated and impressed, though he found Radebe far too radical.

Mandela had his first experience of relations with Europeans in the firm, for at home there had only been white magistrates and traders and teachers, generally regarded by the young people as minor gods. He found one of the attorneys, a Polish Jew, kind and

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helpful and, as for the typists, they were quite nice girls within the limitations of their typical attitudes. One girl told him, 'Look Nelson there is no colour bar here. Tea will be put on the counter and you can take a cup.' And she added, 'For you and Radebe, we've bought two new cups and you must use those.' Mandela, keen to get on with his articles and not be distracted by fighting petty battles, decided not to react, but as soon as he told Radebe about the incident the little man's belligerence surfaced and he said, 'Look, you watch what I am going to do,' and promptly went over to the counter and took one of the old cups. Mandela, in a cleft stick between offending the girl or Radebe, pretended that he did not drink tea at all!

Meanwhile he studied for the final year of his B.A. by correspondence course and in 1942 graduated—a tall, handsome, athletic young man with natural authority. He was too broke to buy a suit for the occasion and again Sisulu came to his help. Sisulu was happy to do anything to further his career as he believed he was a young man with a future. But in 1943, when Mandela, aged twenty-five, was at last able to afford to go to the University of the Witwatersrand to study law, Sisulu's small company ran into difficulties and he had to agree to its being taken over by Dr. Seme with other Africans and some whites.

Sisulu at the time was much preoccupied with the founding of the Youth League, and it had been from his office that he, Lembede, Ngubane, Mandela, Nkomo and Mbata, had met before going on to see Dr. Xuma in Sophiatown to tell him their proposals. They felt it would be necessary to 'exploit every diplomatic avenue' as they anticipated his antagonism. It was clear that he saw a Youth League simply as a pressure group upholding Congress policy, whereas they were intent on committing Congress to a policy of direct action and in ridding the African people of the sense of inferiority that had insidiously grown over years of oppression. They were fed up with what they regarded as the old guard's ineffectual tactics at a time when Gandhi was leading passive resisters to gaol in India. Xuma questioned their approach and their frank criticism of Congress. He warned them that they must start off without antagonizing people.

But they were carried away in a glow of excited argument and planning, evolving their concepts of nationalism and their tactics in the radical transformation of Congress that they envisaged.

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Night after night the young men met,¹ and young women too; one of them, Albertina, a serious nurse with a noble brow, became Walter Sisulu's wife during 1944. They would all meet, appropriately enough since they were planning a new policy for Congress, in the office of its founder, Seme, where Lembede worked, or, in the same ramshackle building in the business area of Johannesburg, they met in the A.N.C. office, or perhaps in one or another's homes in Orlando, the expanding township crammed with innumerable little houses that looked like match boxes. Sometimes they talked all through the night. As their ideas caught on, new members were continually joining.

The outstanding man was undoubtedly Lembede who was proving to be creative and incorruptible. Of his magnetism one of his friends said that he had a remarkable capacity for arousing people's adoration so that they did not notice his weaknesses—his roughness and his sarcasm were therefore seen as masculinity, and his rigid views were accepted as part of his terrific drive and passion to free his people. His view on the basic principle of African nationalism—as expressed in *Inyaniso* ('Voice of African Youth'), a short-lived organ for their policy, was that the philosophical basis was neither that of communism which saw man as essentially an economic animal, nor of nazism which made of man a beast of prey. The Youth League, he explained, believed that 'man is body, mind and spirit' and history was a record of humanity's striving for complete realization. He quoted Paul Kruger's words which he regarded to be 'deep human wisdom', that one who wanted to create the future must not forget the past, and he reminded Africans of their great leaders, Shaka, Moshoeshe, Hintsa, Sikhukhuni, Khama, Sobuza and Mosilikaze. African nationalism's economic basis was, he said, socialism—'our valuable legacy from our ancestors'. Another legacy was democracy, for in African society men were not assessed by wealth but all took part in khotlas, the tribal assemblies. As for the ethical basis, Lembede urged Africans to 'retain and preserve the belief in the immortality of the spirits of our ancestors', on a foundation of Christian morals 'since there is nothing better anywhere in the world.'

There were conflicts: Nkomo disagreeing with Lembede for his

¹ According to records of the first few meetings, also present were Mxolisi Majombozi, Zame Conco, B. Masekela, Johannes Matlou, Mkele, B. B. Ngide, and Maqanda; others joined later.

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emphasis on Africanism, Mda and Sisulu, both uncompromising men, clashing—with Mda openly contemptuous of Sisulu's lack of education, and the journalist Ngubane, who had an almost pathological feeling about royalty, virtually repudiating Mandela because of his birth. But their motto 'Africa's cause must triumph' carried them along. The League came to be known as the propagator of 'Africanism', yet the concept of 'Africa for the Africans' which had been used in the 1890's in Natal and in the Cape by an English Baptist missionary, James Booth, was not specifically expressed.

After several meetings early in 1944, they were ready to present their manifesto to a general meeting in Johannesburg in March. They disregarded Xuma's warning that they should be tactful. They frankly attacked past policies. Congress had yielded to oppression they said, 'regarding itself as a body of gentlemen with clean hands,' the organization of a privileged few—professionals, traders, a sprinkling of intellectuals and conservatives. But now the African Youth League were calling a halt to the oppression and past failures and they must be the 'Brains Trust and Power Station' of the spirit of African nationalism and must give force, direction and vigour to the struggle for freedom by reinforcing the A.N.C. As the 'harshness' of white domination roused 'feelings of hatred' in the African of everything barring his way to full citizenship, the conflict had become one of race on one side and ideals on the other. 'The Whiteman,' said the Youth League, 'regards the universe as a gigantic machine hurtling through time and space to its final destruction: individuals in it are but tiny organisms with private lives that lead to private deaths.' White South Africans, in the League's view, had acquired as absolute measures of values, as the things to live for—'personal power, success and fame'. Whereas African ideals could be understood in the African regard for the universe 'as one composite whole: an organic entity, progressively driving towards greater harmony and unity,' its individual parts interdependent, realizing their fullest life in communal contentment.

Among the objectives of the League in working for the educational, moral and cultural advance of African youth, was one concerning land policy which would become a point of great significance many years later. This policy would divide land among farmers and peasants of all nationalities in proportion to their

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numbers, with planned development and scientific methods taught to farmers and peasants towards achieving full industrialization and the raising of the living standard of all workers, with abolition of the colour bar in all fields.

The nationalism of the Youth League was implied in its reference to the rejection of 'foreign leadership' and the point was made that though useful ideas might be borrowed from foreign ideologies, their wholesale importation into Africa was likewise rejected. In their leaders they called for high ethical standards, personifying and symbolizing 'popular aspirations and ideals'.

In spite of Xuma's early caution, having accepted the inevitable, he now blessed the Youth League and later said that he and Selope Thema had established it. So it was duly constituted with membership open to Africans between the ages of twelve and forty, while others 'who live like Africans' could also join. Branches were formed in various parts of the country—indeed one young man, Robert Matji, had already formed one many months before in Pretoria. The Youth League was to function as part of the A.N.C. and so Lembede's insistence that Africans should rely on themselves for their liberation, and the semi-mystical nationalism that he expressed and that his friend Mda eagerly propagated, found its channel. But for the time being the impatient young idealists must be content to work in the background, until they were sure of the right moment.

X

1944-1946: African Claims



The Youth League's militant ideas were a foretaste of the rise of African nationalism in West and East Africa where the considerable part played by Africans in the war—serving in the Middle East and Far East and encountering other nationalisms and resistance movements—was a potent factor in stimulating political activity. But in South Africa for the time being the conditions created by the war set off a series of revolts with a pattern of mass action led, not by the A.N.C. or its Youth League who were functioning on a different level altogether, but by elemental indigenous leaders thrown up by the situation.

The greatest of such revolts began in 1944 when tens of thousands of Africans who had for so long been jammed into the dreadful slums around Johannesburg followed a demagogic township eccentric, James Mpanza, in a spontaneous trek from Orlando to vacant municipal land nearby. There they squatted, setting up shanties of sack-cloth, old iron and mealie stalks. From the swarming slums of the Reef thousands more joined them. Mpanza's slogan, Sofasonke, 'we all die together', became his nickname. Similar events took place in Kliptown and other areas, and inevitably in the chaotic situation the movements became corrupted.

One revolt with a constructive outcome took place in Alexandra Township, where once again the bus company put up the fare and once again the boycott was on. This time it lasted for seven weeks, with men, women and young people, walking in mid-summer heat and sometimes heavy rain, the eight or nine miles each way. And this time their victory was more sure when, early in 1945, a Utility Company took over the bus service and reverted to the original fare.

The situation in South Africa would seem to be predictable and

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any observer would expect violence; yet when it erupted it somehow seemed unpredictable, like the event on a Sunday afternoon in November 1944 when a tram, driven by a white, knocked down and killed an African in the Western Areas of Johannesburg. In a moment a crowd had gathered and stoned the tram and passing cars, and white hooligans used the opportunity to destroy the nearby building of the *Bantu World*, the newspaper edited by Selope Thema, of which Jordan Ngubane was assistant editor. Usually poverty and frustration found their outlet in faction fights between groups of men of different tribes, or in the steadily spreading crime in the townships.

One leader who found himself faced daily with thousands of people homeless, ill-paid, without adequate transport, exposed to the ravages of disease and lawless elements, and voiceless in the councils of state, was Paul Mosaka, the business-like, articulate member of the Natives' Representative Council for the urban areas of the Transvaal and Free State. These people caught, as he put it, in the 'maelstrom of industrialism', looked to him for relief and direction. He told them to join the A.N.C., to which he belonged, and to ask its branches to deal with their local problems. But as Congress still had no paid clerks or organizers and as the Secretary-General, Calata, was for most of the time away in the Cape, although individual members of Congress were involved in effective sectional action—as in a teachers' salary campaign for example—the branches could not help. Mosaka and Senator Hyman Basner, a barrister who had earned African confidence by fighting cases on their behalf and in 1942 been elected to the Senate as Native Representative, repeatedly appealed to Dr. Xuma to galvanize the reorganized Congress. When he failed to respond, Mosaka and Basner launched the African Democratic Party, which they hoped could give mass backing to the Natives' Representatives in Parliament. Although Mosaka intended the A.D.P. to become an organization affiliated to the A.N.C., this was unprecedented, and his action was regarded by Xuma, Selope Thema and the Youth League alike, as a treacherous step, weakening the A.N.C. He therefore broke with the A.N.C. and, although the A.D.P. failed to make much progress and Basner's presence aroused suspicion of a 'foreign element', Mosaka himself remained a respected member of the N.R.C.

At this point in 1944, when the Allies were mounting the offen-

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sive for their last great onslaught on Hitler, Smuts's Government, rejecting a move in Parliament by Donald Molteno for a repeal of the pass laws, instigated mass arrests of pass offenders. The A.N.C. therefore launched its campaign against the pass laws—carefully planned with the help of other organizations over the past year. In Johannesburg Xuma chaired a spectacular conference of 600 delegates, representing 605,000 people. Afterwards many thousands marched in protest through the city. The Vice-National Chairman to Xuma was Dr. Yusuf Dadoo, influential leader of the Transvaal Indians and a communist. Their secretary was the A.N.C.'s Transvaal Secretary, David Bopape, a small vital man, an exceptionally hard worker (he had even organized street hawkers), and a good psychologist, with crowd appeal even though he was not a particularly good speaker. Out of all this activity, and a determination to do away with the passes such as had not been seen since the 1919 campaign, came the objective of a petition with a target of a million signatures. Meetings were held all over the country except in Natal, where the examination of passes had been relaxed. The Natives' Representative Council, the Transkei Bunga and the Transkei African Voters' Association, supported the demand for the abolition of the pass laws.

The great petition was due to be delivered to the Government in August 1944, but not until June 1945 did the National Anti-Pass Committee send a deputation to Cape Town, and then without having achieved anything like the hoped-for million signatures. And although the deputation had come to protest against the most anachronistic of South Africa's laws, Jan Hofmeyr, acting for Smuts, refused to see them. So they organized an immense demonstration along the Grand Parade. Thema, Dadoo and others were promptly arrested for leading an illegal procession. Instead of relief, there was a threat that the pass laws would be extended to the Africans in Cape Town. This set off a new flood of protests from the N.R.C. as from a meeting of people of all races in the Cathedral Hall in Cape Town where Bishop Lavis was among the prominent citizens who described the pass laws as 'disgusting' and as 'Hitler methods in a so-called democratic country'. In Pretoria a deputation from the Institute of Race Relations, the newly formed Campaign for Right and Justice, and the A.N.C., met the Minister of Native Affairs, Major Piet van der Byl, who airily dismissed them.

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And so with every possible constitutional protest made, the National Anti-Pass Committee had achieved nothing. Its representatives reported back to their respective areas that the Government had given them the cold shoulder. A flurry of recriminations broke out with Xuma and Thema accusing communists of pushing their line, and communists accusing Xuma of playing safe: recriminations difficult to pursue so long after the event. The Youth League, while agreeing with the communists' criticisms of Xuma, were unremittingly hostile to the communists and, at the 1945 conference of the Transvaal A.N.C., Lembede, Mandela, Tambo and Sisulu, succeeded in getting a resolution passed that was clearly aimed at members of the C.P., calling for people belonging to other organizations to resign from the A.N.C. However in the National conference it was defeated by a big majority.

The A.N.C. in co-operation with many organizations celebrated Victory in Europe in May 1945. The parade was the biggest ever seen in Johannesburg: 20,000 Africans with a few people of other races followed the two brass bands and the leaders carrying the flags—the A.N.C.'s black, green and gold flag waved alongside those of the victorious Allies. The slogan that day, with the nazis defeated in Europe, was 'Let's finish the job'.

Since July 1943 the Russian army's series of victories transformed them overnight into glorious allies, and South African communists suddenly found themselves respectable. The open diplomatic relations between the South African Government and the Soviet Union brought many notabilities to the annual celebration of the October Revolution at the Soviet Embassy. South African communists, as well as Africans—this being the only Embassy to invite them to its functions—found themselves in a minority and nibbled gingerly at their caviar as they looked around the room and saw Hofmeyr, the Deputy Prime Minister, Colin Steyn, the Minister of Justice, senior diplomats and civil servants, among their fellow guests. Another reflection of this respectability was that Hilda Watts, a communist, had been elected by a white middle-class suburb to the Johannesburg City Council.

The unusual opening up of communications between the non-communist and communist worlds during the war years, which gave African nationalists throughout the continent an increased interest in Marx's modes of thought and methods of organization, was but part of the transformation as British Imperial Power was

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diminished and the two giants, America and Russia became the colossi in world affairs. However the fierce anti-colonialism increasingly goading the West Africans' political struggle, which had developed in some of them during their years of study in the United States, hardly affected Africans in the dissimilar situation in the Union.

For the first time since Plaatje's contact with West African leaders in 1919, the A.N.C. sent a delegate, Marko Hlubi, to the Pan-African Congress—the fifth, in Manchester in October 1945. He and the other South African delegate, Peter Abrahams, the writer, met many of Africa's young leaders, among them Kwame Nkrumah, Chief Akintola and Jomo Kenyatta. This Congress, while demanding for Africa 'autonomy and independence', made a significant move when it discussed the methods of achieving these aims, for it endorsed Gandhi's passive resistance as the only effective way of persuading alien rulers to respect the rights of unarmed subject races. Once free, they would unite against restoration of any western imperialism as well as the dangers of communism.

In line with these aims was the Bill of Rights just completed by the Committee of African intellectuals. These 'African Claims' were unanimously adopted at the A.N.C. conference on December 16, 1945. The delegates made the revolutionary claim of one man one vote; of equal justice in the courts, freedom of land ownership, of residence and of movement, with of course repeal of the pass laws. They claimed freedom of the press, and demanded equal opportunity in training and in work, and a share in material resources, equal pay, and the removal of the industrial colour bar. One important claim was their rejection of the concept that 'there is any need for a special type of education for Africans as such', which showed apprehension of what might lie ahead; compulsory and equal education for all was what they claimed. Implicit in all this was the repeal of discriminatory legislation.

But how to set about achieving these claims? Xuma maddened the Youth League by his attitude which was expressed in his foreword to the published 'Claims'. He said: 'We know that the Prime Minister . . . and his delegation to the Peace Conference will represent the interests of the people of our country.' And, although he remarked that Africans realized the Government would not grant their claims 'for the mere asking and there must be a long

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struggle entailing great sacrifice of time and means and even life itself', he proceeded to tell people to remember the 'wise and encouraging' advice of the Prime Minister that they should concentrate on such vital matters as native health and native food.

Even ordinary people took the Atlantic Charter seriously and at a meeting in Cape Town in October 1945 some 8,000 Africans had called for its immediate implementation. One African speaker referred to the thousands of Africans who had joined up and many of whom had been killed and wounded in defending the freedom that had always been denied to them. Another speaker said that they should appeal to Smuts, when he returned from the United Nations, to abolish the pass laws, that he who had done so much for world freedom would surely listen sympathetically.

Smuts was at the United Nations busy drafting the Preamble to its Charter. In the Union during the war years, for all the excellent surveys that he had had made, his Government had failed to implement their main recommendations. Even Johannesburg's African housing problem—the result of twenty years of neglect, exacerbated by the wartime influx of Africans and the simultaneous shortage of materials—which the Johannesburg City Council (and a Labour Party Council at that) failed to cope with, was not treated by the Government as a national emergency; in 1946 there still remained a backlog of some 50,000 houses. A Campaign for Right and Justice was formed by a number of economic, social, political and religious organizations, under the chairmanship of a judge, to assure the Government that in any progressive measures it might institute it would have considerable backing. The Campaign believed that through a positive economic policy, people could become so absorbed in constructively meeting the needs of the country that racialism might be overcome. But Smuts, the world statesman, remained incapable of thinking in large concepts about home affairs. He did not see that the Union had come to the end of an era.

XI

1946: The Indians Lead the Struggle



In 1946 at the very time that India was leading Asia in the sweep towards freedom, Smuts, struggling to hold his weakening Government, allowed himself to be pressed by the largely English-speaking voters of Natal into enacting laws to segregate Indians in South Africa, just as Hertzog's laws had segregated Africans ten years earlier. The 'Ghetto' Bill, as it was called, permanently restricted Indians to certain areas, sugaring the pill by promising Parliamentary representation for Indians for the first time—by three white M.P.'s and two white senators. Lord Wavell, the Viceroy of India, and Lord Auchinleck, the Commander-in-Chief, were a party to the Indian Government's prompt action of threatening to terminate trade relations with the Union Government, while preparations were made to bring the treatment of non-whites in South Africa before the United Nations. Gandhi, at the height of his influence in India, appealed to the 'great soldier-statesman', Smuts, not to take the whites down the precipice that this artificial protection of races would lead them to.¹

But Smuts was adamant. In May the Act was passed. In June the Indian Government recalled its High Commissioner from South Africa, and the Indians in South Africa for the first time since Gandhi's days launched a passive resistance campaign. Smuts by this one act had incurred the wrath of a potentially powerful State and had paved the way for the outside world to express its condemnation of the Government's racial prejudice through United Nations channels.

It was not as if the Indians were a threat. Their forebears had been brought to South Africa in 1860 to work on sugar plantations in response to the Natal Government's entreaties, its pledges of equality of treatment, and its blandishments about the rich land

¹ *Harijan*, March 24, 1946.

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and bright prospects awaiting them, and they had so transformed Natal's economy by their labour that within two years sugar exports had risen by nearly 400%. But since 1880 the Natal British had played up the bogey of 'Asiatic domination'—yet whereas until 1921 Asians had outnumbered them by about 5,000, in 1946 they outnumbered Asians by 4,000, while in the country at large the Indian population remained practically stationary, fluctuating between 2.3% and 2.5% of the total between 1904 and 1946. Hardly a year had passed without some new anti-Indian restriction. Gandhi had made patient efforts to negotiate for reforms; failing, he had initiated passive resistance between 1906–1914.

Now the leaders turned to these methods again. The Indians might be an isolated community, rejected by both white and black, divided among themselves into religious groups, but they had a handful of remarkable individuals to lead them. The resistance movement was headed by two doctors, the good-looking, articulate communist Yusuf Dadoo, from the Transvaal, and the chubby thirty-six-year-old Gandhian, Monty Naicker, from Natal. Another influential leader was the Muslim, Maulvi Ismail Cachalia, a black-bearded, compactly built man.

If the Prime Minister was devoid of vision, there were young South Africans who had a vision of a common society, of what South Africa could and should become, and a sparsely furnished flat in a block of Indian apartments in Johannesburg's commercial centre had become the meeting place for them and their friends. The flat belonged to Ismail Meer, a gently handsome and humane law student with a nice sense of humour penetrating his occasional moodiness. He was one of the organizers of the passive resistance campaign and edited *The Passive Resister*, a newspaper covering both the campaign and events of interest to non-whites. The son of a Muslim trader in midland Natal, Ismail had been brought up in the Islamic belief in the brotherhood of man and his family had always had African and white friends. When his father went bankrupt in the 1930 slump the boy had shared the poverty of so many of the Indian community and had to go out to work and educate himself at night. As he became politically aware, he was one of those young Indians to be agonized by the representatives of their community—the South African Indian Congress—conservative merchants and businessmen who believed in conciliation with the white authorities. It was not until the late 'thirties that the Indian

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youth, through the extension of university education, got the intellectual impetus they needed. Many of them were influenced by a remarkable old English woman, Dr. Mabel Palmer, a friend of George Bernard Shaw's and a Fabian, who started classes for all races at the Sastri College in Durban, and, for all her authoritarian ways, enriched the lives of hundreds of young Indians by her stimulating lectures and the discussions that followed on a variety of subjects, including socialism and Marxism. By the time Meer came to study at the universities of Natal and then the Witwatersrand, his background, his nature, his experience of non-white conditions, all drew him towards the only inter-racial body, the Communist Party. For him and other Indian students it provided a relevant and apparently effective political and economic philosophy, though more important than dialectics was the fact that it was a meeting place for all races in complete equality. The demand for equality made so directly and persistently by the Party, had hardly even been put forward by Africans. As for Christians, only a rare clergyman had made it and consequently been out on a shaky limb from the solid edifice of the church—one such was Michael Scott, an Anglican priest who had worked in India before coming to Johannesburg, and it was natural that he should become one of Meer's closest friends.

Meer's best friend from Natal, and a fellow-student at the law school, was Jaydew Nasib Singh, a young man of romantic good looks, who combined a passion for justice with precision and effectiveness. He was teaching part-time to help him through college and lived in an African township near Johannesburg. Africans found him human and genuine. Among their university friends was Ruth First, a slight, black-haired eighteen-year-old, with large dark eyes, extremely attractive if over-fierce in her pursuance of the ideals bred in her, for she had been born in a communist family from those Jewish immigrants from Latvia and Lithuania who over the years provided some of the bravest campaigners for the Left.

A Muslim, a man of Hindu extraction, a Christian, and a communist, and an African nationalist—for Nelson Mandela had become a friend of Meer's and frequently stayed in the flat when they were swotting and so came to know the others who were in and out, and who included Indian resisters and students as well as communists. Mandela was quite the best-dressed, meticulous and,

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the others felt, rather aloof. He was in fact 'violently anti-communist' because he believed in chieftaincy and, he said, 'I felt that this type of philosophy threatened to upset the order which we should preserve so far as Africans are concerned.' Furthermore he had been told that they were anti-Christ and his background was a strongly religious one.

Although the resistance campaign was taking place in Durban, there was a constant going to and fro and something of the spirit of exaltation, that led more and more young Indians to compete for acceptance as resisters, percolated to the youth in Johannesburg. Before long 600 volunteers had gone to gaol and, under Dr. Xuma's chairmanship, a conference of Africans in Johannesburg unanimately expressed support for the Indian people, while an entire branch of the A.N.C., from Germiston, joined the resistance in order to show solidarity with an oppressed section of the population and in the belief that in time all Non-European people would unite against common injustice. Michael Scott, who had been active in the Campaign for Right and Justice, went down to Durban with Yusuf Cachalia—younger brother of the Maulvi Cachalia—and when he saw the quiet steadfastness of the Indian resisters, including young girls, withstanding attacks from white hooligans, he was moved to take part, and, with the others, was imprisoned. This aroused a tribute from Ismail Meer's newspaper: 'There have been few Europeans before the Rev. Scott who have actually allied themselves with the cause of the Indian people . . . all the more credit is due to the Rev. Scott for he has come forward at a time when the ranks of the liberals has been considerably thinned; when the church is by no means unanimous in condemnation of South Africa's policy based on racialism.' J. N. Singh was Secretary of the Transvaal Passive Resistance Council and Meer Secretary of the Indian Congress and they and their friends were involved in a campaign to distribute food to people in need during the wartime shortage. They organized concerts with a political tinge and helped in the great Indian rallies to which as many as 8,000 people would come. Yusuf Dadoo, when he was not in prison for resisting, was an inspired speaker at these rallies, and Mandela was fascinated by his combination of Indian nationalism with simplicity.

Great days—and in Meer's flat over endless cups of tea and curry meals at any time of the day or night, they discussed and

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argued and planned, they worked and they listened to the gramophone. They could afford to feel optimistic—they were young and planning for a better world, and, despite the obtuseness of the Government and its continual resort to restrictive legislation, they knew that they were a part of the world at large, as *The Passive Resister* confirmed with its frequent references to the United Nations and to events in India. They had the assurance of knowing that they were in step with what was happening in Asia and with what was likely to happen in the rest of Africa.

However this exhilarating understanding between a handful of Indians, Africans and Europeans, was as yet the fruit of a few personal friendships. The wider conflicts continued. Mandela and the A.N.C. Youth League were as determined as ever that Africans must lead themselves and, with Lembede at their head, they were ever suspicious of 'foreign' influences, which they saw embodied in both Indian leaders and in the A.N.C.'s handful of communist members. The Youth League and the young communists constantly clashed and heckled each other furiously. But though the Youth League urged the A.N.C. to act, it was one of the left-wing leaders of Congress who precipitated action.

XII

1946: The Great Mine Strike



In 1946 the Transvaal Chamber of Mines had a great opportunity. These leaders of the mining industry—many of them blessed by a liberal education and therefore with considerable advantages over Afrikaners, and doubtless seeing themselves as upholders of western Christian civilization—were approached by the poorest of their employees, the African mineworkers, and were asked for a rise in pay. The wretched situation of African miners was common knowledge: in Parliament in 1942 all of the Members representing Native interests had warned Smuts of the great unrest on the mines because of the low wages and had said that unless a cost of living allowance were granted, there would be trouble. No allowance was made and the miners had come out in sporadic strikes. In 1943 a cost of living allowance was granted to all African workers *except* those in mining and in agriculture. By 1946 the average cash earning of mineworkers, who, as Donald Molteno M.P. pointed out, were by far the most important body of workers in the country, was £3 11s. 8d. per month, while the peasant income that this had to subsidise was £2 10s. od. per month at the most. Bishop Lavis told the Anglican Synod in the Cape about the 300,000 men on the mines, separated from their families for all but a few years of their lives under the pernicious migrant labour system, and referred to the appalling infant mortality rate among African babies—never less than 150 and rising to 700 per thousand. The Chamber of Mines suppressed a report from the chief nutrition expert of the Institute of Medical Research disclosing startling figures of malnutrition and disease in the Transkei, where more than a third of the people had no land, and no income except what they earned in the mines, where the soil was eroding and productivity constantly decreasing.¹

¹ Evidence by Senator H. Basner in subsequent trial.

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During these years the African Mine Workers Union, which had been initiated by leaders of the Transvaal A.N.C. in 1941, had developed into the first effective organization of African miners under the Presidency of J. B. Marks, the tough, big man, with a battered, kindly face who spoke the language of the common people and could sway a crowd powerfully; who furthermore as a member of the Communist Party had had some political and trade union education after being deeply impressed when for the first time in his life he had seen Europeans taking up the cause of the Africans, when S. P. Bunting addressed a meeting in Potchefstroom location and Marks had volunteered to interpret. The obstacles that had defeated several attempts to organize African mineworkers since James Gumede first failed to do so in 1920, still existed—the mine authorities imposed close supervision and restrictions so that no outsider could enter the compound without a permit and a guide, but besides, many of the miners who came on regular contracts from remote tribal areas were illiterate or disinterested. However the A.N.C. had successfully called a conference of miners and from then on Marks and the Union Secretary, J. J. Majoro, were able to hold regular meetings at the compounds which were orderly and, invariably, attended by police.

As a result of the Union's demand for reforms which followed on the spontaneous strikes in 1942, the Government had appointed the Lansdowne Commission of Inquiry into conditions of employment. A year later, in 1943, the Commission made its recommendations which included a cost of living and other allowances, paid leave and overtime, and increases in wages on each shift. The Government refused to implement the recommendations of allowances and only agreed to a lesser wage increase and overtime. The A.M.W.U. promptly called a conference to which more than a thousand African miners turned up and wanted an immediate strike. The Union dissuaded them on the grounds that the war effort should not be hindered. There followed Government intimidation with the arrests of Marks and other organizers and the prohibition of meetings on mine property, which was yet another formidable obstacle for the Union.

Yet their work continued with Marks doing almost more than seemed humanly possible. Meetings were organized in some of the townships to which mineworkers went on their week-ends off. And there were clandestine meetings at night, in the shadow of the

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mine dumps, when Union organizers and the communists who were always so ready to assist them would address an almost invisible audience, for the faces of the miners gathered around were lost in the darkness, and in the starlight only their helmets glistened faintly. If any speaker said something good he just heard an approving grunt, 'Haugh!' out of the dark.

Nevertheless the Government's embargo gravely handicapped the Union and its income from subscriptions dropped from £120 to £30 a month. And all the time the cost of living was rising with the war, and in the Reserves there was a two years' drought until, by 1946, Marks felt that the Union could no longer hold the workers from striking. He sent for Senator Basner and urged negotiations with the Government, but an interview with the Minister of Labour was fruitless. Basner went on to see the Secretary for Native Affairs. Nothing was done. He saw a representative of the Chamber of Mines. Nothing was done.

At the Union's annual conference in April 1946 the members clamoured to strike. They resolved to demand a minimum wage of 10/- per day, against the existing minimum of between 2/3 and 2/5; 'in accordance with the new world's principles for an approved standard of living subscribed to by our Government at U.N.O.' When friends of the Union criticized this demand as excessive, it replied that the white Trade Union movement had long advocated this wage for unskilled work.

It was at this point that the Union approached the Chamber of Mines, writing three times within two months to the Gold Producers' Committee to put the miners' grievances and demands and to ask for an interview. The committee did not reply. Even when a big meeting of mineworkers was told this by Marks, they still agreed that there should be one more appeal to the Chamber of Mines, but if at this eleventh hour it remained 'intransigent' they resolved that 'the strike will begin'. Marks soberly warned them that they were challenging the cheap labour system of the country and they must 'be ready to sacrifice in the struggle for the right to live as human beings'. On August 7 the Union wrote again to the Chamber of Mines. There was no reply.

At 3 a.m. on Monday, August 12, it was a cold clear night on the highveld. All along the Reef from hundreds of shaftheads African miners surfaced at the end of their shift and walked out in the wintry night, back to the compound. Some, as they tramped

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wearily along, passed others, waiting to go underground. But on seven mines they passed no one. The cages went down empty. The huge fly-wheels stopped. The great mine strike had begun.

50,000 Africans were out! A sixth of the miners. Soon 70,000 were out. The biggest strike in South Africa's history. Lorry-loads of police rushed to the East and West Rand. The Stock Exchange was soon in 'a mild panic' and, not far away from its solid edifice and from the fine modern offices of the mining houses, to an office in a decrepit arcade went men in blankets and men in suits, asking for President Marks, making their reports and seeking instructions. In that shabby small office through the bitter cold of midnight, the volunteers of all races including white and Indian communists, produced leaflets from inadequate machinery. At 2 a.m. each morning the volunteers set off for the mines. The message on their leaflets was brief, 'Ikona Mali—Ikona Sebenza', 'no money—no work'. These were distributed to the miners coming off shift.

By the second day the newspaper comments had begun. The *Rand Daily Mail* under the headline 'A Foolish Strike' spelled J. B. Marks's name Marx, described him as 'intemperate', making 'wild speeches and absurd demands' and associated with communists, while the *Cape Times* spoke of the 'wicked irresponsibility' of agitators calling unfortunate natives out on strike. However it conceded that there might be some justification. The word 'agitators' was thenceforward freely used.

All the compounds were sealed off under armed guard—the strikers were thus put out of touch with the Union organizers and with no news from other mines or compounds. Marks was arrested. The Council of Non-European Trade Unions promptly demanded a general strike within two days. The Cabinet met. The police, with rifles and with batons, began driving men back to work, and on one mine where men stoned them, they fired and wounded six, while four Africans were trampled to death in the resulting panic. The Johannesburg *Star* reported that the survivors 'decided to return to work'. Altogether 83 men were injured that day. The Stock Exchange made a slight recovery. However on one mine—City Deep—the workers, after being driven out of their compound and forced underground, held a sit-down strike a mile down under the earth. This was something new in South Africa's history.

Smuts remarked that he was 'not unduly concerned', the strike

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was not caused by legitimate grievances but by agitators. Senator Basner and Mrs. Margaret Ballinger M.P. at once wired him, expressing shock that such a remark should be made when there were so many dead and injured. On the third morning of the strike, the Wednesday, the *Rand Daily Mail* in a four-column headline announced '4,000 strikers tried to march on Johannesburg', and it went on to say that they were 'armed with choppers, iron bars, knives and an assortment of other dangerous weapons—in a six mile long procession. . . .' Having duly panicked the whites of Johannesburg the report mentioned that when the police cordoned off the road, the 4,000 'sat down and there were cat calls and threats. Then, acting on instructions from Pretoria (the Government), the police drew their batons and charged.' Three strikers were seriously injured while scores had minor injuries. The *Mail* editorial that day (a classic example of how a comparatively enlightened newspaper could obey the unwritten law of the English-language press in South Africa that the gold mining industry was sacred) expressed no regret for the six now dead and the 400 injured, nor referred to the reasons for the strike. It asked 'the average Johannesburg citizen' to consider what would have happened if those 4,000 Natives, 'all of them armed with some weapon or other' had not been intercepted by the police. The police, it said, deserved the public gratitude for their courage and skill. The *Rand Daily Mail* hoped that the Cabinet would not be weak.¹

The 'facts' reported by the *Mail* were challenged by an independent paper, the Labour Party's *Illustrated Bulletin*, edited by Colin Legum, which asked how it was humanly possible for any reporter to determine how many of 4,000 dangerous blanketed marching Natives who were stretched over six miles, were armed. It pointed out that the pictures of the event showed no arms, and further that this great threat was dealt with by forty policemen. But the *Bulletin* had a small and limited circulation.

At this stage in the mine strike, on August 14, the Natives' Representative Council began its annual sitting in Pretoria, forty miles to the north of Johannesburg. The African elected members included some of the ablest and most respected men in A.N.C. or in urban or tribal affairs. Among the A.N.C. members at the time were Z. K. Matthews, the veteran Selope Thema, George Cham-

¹ August 14, 1946.

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pion and Selby Msimang. They had all read their morning papers, they well knew the reality of the hardships that lay behind the strike and, as was the case for all Africans upon learning of the shooting and the baton charges, they felt identified with the strikers. They naturally expected that the Minister of Native Affairs, who usually attended the opening of the Council, would make a statement on this most serious situation. But he was not present, and nor was his deputy who had gone to Johannesburg; the Under-Secretary for Native Affairs took the chair and the proceedings opened in their usual formal leisurely way. A new member, elected from Natal on the recent death of Dr. Dube, was welcomed; a heavy, pleasant-faced Chief—Albert Lutuli.

The Chairman made a speech. He did not refer to the crisis of the mine strike. Paul Mosaka, the leader of the African Democratic Party and the youngest member of the N.R.C., promptly pointed this out, called for a full statement, and asked whether the Government was negotiating with the African Mine Workers Union—if not why not? The Chairman was evasive.

Professor Matthews expressed distress at the lack of any statement on so alarming a state of affairs.

Dr. James Moroka, the distinguished physician who had played such a notable part in the 1936 deputation to Hertzog, emphasized that they regarded the situation as 'very serious', and 'we put the blame on the Government—they treat us like children,' he declared. Then he warned, 'we are not going to tolerate it.'

Selope Thema, now old, and disillusioned by his experiences with whites in the Joint Council, took up Moroka's theme: 'When we say we blame the Government . . . we mean what we say. The Press says that communists and agitators have started the strike, but 50,000 people will not leave their work because of agitation. The cause goes much deeper.' Mosaka underlined this: 'We hold the Government responsible for the wanton shooting which took place on the Reef.' The Under-Secretary for Native Affairs wanted to delete 'wanton' from the records. 'No,' insisted Mosaka, 'it expresses my own feelings.'

The strike went on. The Mine Workers Union and its volunteers worked day and night but increasingly they were depleted by police raids, searches, confiscation of leaflets and arrests. Strikers were arrested and were tried for refusing to work and some had their contracts cancelled and were sent back to the Reserves. When

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the strike committee tried to hold a meeting, the hundreds of Africans who gathered were surrounded by police and given five minutes to disperse on an order from the Minister of Justice. When Coloured and Indian workers in tobacco factories wanted to express their sympathy and began to walk to a meeting, they were turned back by the police, and as they walked away they were baton charged. The procession scattered. Six women lay injured in the road. On the mines the casualties mounted.

Native Representatives and City Councillors tried to rally white opinion but not a single United Party 'liberal' would sign a protest against police brutality, and a request for the miners' right to negotiate with the Chamber of Mines. But from Durban the Indian passive resisters sent £100 for the strike fund.

The Press reports had assumed a certain monotony—4,000 Africans on one mine, 5,000 on another, after clashes with the police 'surrendered and said they would return to work'; 'went underground readily'. In one instance nearly 300 police, some with bayonets, moved into the dormitories of Pondo miners and drove them to work. On another mine 'they drove the Natives stope by stope, level by level . . . afterwards the strikers indicated their intention of resuming work.' The Minister of Justice, Harry Lawrence, had announced that refusal to go back to work might be countered by rifle fire. 500 men from one mine set out to walk from Benoni 'to see the Chamber of Mines', met the police and were 'routed' by a baton charge and sent 'scurrying over the veld'.

In the Natives' Representative Council, with passion and with bitter sorrow the debate went on. Moroka said that there was no doubt at all, the real cause of the trouble was the Native policy of South Africa; until it was changed 'things like this will continue to happen.' To the Government he said, 'You can do what you like, you can shoot us, arrest us, imprison us, but you are not going to break our spirit.'

African Councillors expressed the urgent wish to go to the Witwatersrand, to see for themselves what was happening; they were after all supposed to represent eight million Africans and to advise the Government on their interests. The request was refused.

This was the last straw. All the mounting frustration of thirty-six years broke through in these temperate men. Moroka had long been waiting for the right moment to wreck the N.R.C.; to show it up for what it was. As he described it, 'You sat down there, you

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came with resolutions, you talked until your mouth was dry and that was the last time you heard of it. It was a disgrace; tomfoolery out and out.' The Councillors knew perfectly well that the Government thought nothing of them. Mosaka bitterly pointed out that the Minister of Native Affairs, van der Byl, seldom visited the Council, the Prime Minister had not been near for nine years, resolutions were continually ignored. Thema accused white South Africa of inventing nazism. One Councillor called the N.R.C. a 'dismal failure'. Paul Mosaka summed it up: 'a toy telephone'.

Towards the end of the second and last day of the Council's session, when feelings were high, Moroka rose and asked to put a resolution as a matter of urgency. Unsuspecting, the Chairman agreed. The dignified doctor proceeded, and as his quiet voice read on, and the Government officials present realized what the Chairman had inadvertently allowed, there was a shocked silence. Moroka deprecated 'the Government's post-war continuation of a policy of fascism which' he said, 'is the antithesis and negation of the letter and the spirit of the Atlantic Charter and the U.N. Charter'. Therefore, in protest against this breach of faith, he moved the adjournment of the session and the demand that the Government should 'forthwith' abolish all discriminatory legislation.

The Chairman hurriedly refused the motion. Mosaka tersely interposed: 'How long must gold be rated above human values?'

The twelve elected African Councillors persisted and the motion was unanimously carried; even the three Government-appointed chiefs voted for it. The Natives' Representative Council adjourned.

This was yet one more, the most serious and the most prolonged, effort to be made by African leaders to use constitutional methods for redress of the injustice and wrongs that they suffered. It was the Thursday night. Few miners were still on strike. Press reports continued to mention their return to work; perhaps the most remarkable was one describing 'a general stampede' in which 'the police used their batons freely', and which concluded, 'not long afterwards, the Natives came to the gate and offered to return to work. They marched out and, in a happy mood, went underground.'

Still leaflets were going out under the noses of the police—in bundles of washing, in shopping bags under groceries, in shirt fronts. They called on the miners to keep courage, but courage had

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ebbed, and the strike committee had been incapacitated by the arrest of Marks and several other members. In the background trade unionists and A.N.C. quarrelled. Some of the A.N.C. felt that the strike had been precipitate and should not have been called until the Union had achieved far greater strength, and for this blamed the influence of communists, while Lembede and the Youth League felt that Marks together with Xuma should have carefully organized a country-wide general strike, using the immense feeling generated by the anti-pass campaign. As it was, an attempt to call a general strike in Johannesburg, under the leadership of a Coloured trade unionist and David Bopape, Secretary of the Transvaal A.N.C., fizzled out. Africans had pitted themselves against the biggest industry in Africa, and failed.

The Stock Exchange reported, 'prices rally'. At the week-end, the *Rand Daily Mail* exclaimed: 'Total Defeat' and commented: 'The Native strike has ended just as it was bound to do. Quite a number of strikers have sore heads; a few are dead; and not a single one of the points for which they struck has been gained.' A more constructive editorial was that of the *Sunday Express* pointing out that the present policy was to treat the Native worker rough and tell him nothing, an attitude which would merely ensure that every strike would automatically be a riot. 'Native industrial workers must eventually be trade unionists' it argued 'whether Europeans like this prospect or not.'

The Chamber of Mines was forced to declare something of its attitude in the subsequent trial of the alleged organizers of this strike, although even then it managed to evade certain awkward questions, and access to the minutes of its meetings, which had been promised to the court, was suddenly refused.

The trial was the biggest political trial in the country's history and the fifty-two accused included not only J. B. Marks and other leaders of the African Mine Workers Union, but Moses Kotane, Bram Fischer and other communists, even Dr. Dadoo, who was brought from prison in Natal where he was still serving his sentence for passive resistance.

Several clergymen joined with Native Representatives in launching a People's Defence Fund to support the Mine Workers Union.

In the trial, the defence called the Secretary of the Chamber of Mines, A. J. Limebeer, as a witness and drew from him the evidence that although the Chamber had received letters from the

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Union dated May 6 and 26, June 24 and August 7, 'simply I was told not to reply to them,' though 'it was apparent' to the Chamber 'that there was serious resentment'. He admitted that in a recent strike of white miners there had been no prosecutions, nor any use of force. To a court crowded with spectators, a detective-sergeant reported on J. B. Marks's actions. He admitted that Marks, in addressing a huge Union rally on May 19, had said that the Union did not like strikes, and the meeting had agreed that they should try to open negotiations with the Chamber of Mines and the Government, and that only after a subsequent meeting to discuss the complete failure of any attempt to negotiate, had some of the workers in the crowd proposed a strike.

Subsequently several of the accused were given short terms of imprisonment and the charges against a number of them were dropped but for the communists involved this was not the end. On September 21 the hey-day of the left-wing was abruptly ended when offices and homes of party members, of trade unionists and of the *Guardian* newspaper were raided in nine cities. The police acted on instructions from H. G. Lawrence, Minister of Justice, and from the Acting Prime Minister, Jan Hofmeyr. Other members of the Cabinet said that the raids had taken them by surprise. The Minister of Labour said that he had no idea that the raids on trade unions were going to take place. Not long after the Executive of the Communist Party was arrested and charged with sedition. Kotane was among them. Although the case fell through, as happened in Pirow's day in the early 'thirties, the general impression had by this time been confirmed among whites that African discontent was caused by communist agitation.

However in the Cape and in Johannesburg academics, liberals and churchmen were protesting against the behaviour of the Government and the Chamber of Mines. The Rev. Michael Scott, who was released from prison on the day after Dr. Dadoo, to be given with him tumultuous welcomes by Indians in Natal and in the Transvaal, was just in time for the Synod of the Anglican Diocese in Johannesburg in October 1946. He had worked with the African Mine Workers Union, even addressing some of their meetings on the mines, and he and Father Lunniss of the Community of the Resurrection, succeeded in getting strong support for a resolution calling for the Government to recognize the Mine Workers Union and other African trade unions, and for immediate negotiations

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between the Chamber of Mines and the Africans. The Synod sent the resolution to the Government which refused to act. The Pretoria Synod also called on the Government to recognize African trade unions but it was to no effect. The *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Star* promptly commented that the affairs of the mining industry were outside the scope of the Church.

Meanwhile the Natives' Representative Council's powerful resolution had aroused widespread support from Africans, and Hofmeyr, Acting Prime Minister, wrote to Smuts who was abroad to say that even more serious than the mine strike was the attitude of the N.R.C. which meant 'that the (hitherto) moderate intellectuals of the Professor Matthews' type are now committed to an extreme line against colour discrimination' and, he added, they 'have carried the chiefs with them.' But Hofmeyr told the Prime Minister that he could not see what they could do to satisfy Africans 'which would be tolerated by European public opinion.' A few weeks later he wrote again to report on a meeting with Professor Matthews. He prophesied 'something in the nature of a climb down' and said 'it is clear that some of them at least are now frightened of the possible consequences of their action.'¹ This extraordinarily sanguine conclusion was a measure of his lack of contact with African leaders, for what Matthews, as leader of the N.R.C. caucus, had said was that *if* there were a positive gesture from the Government towards abolishing colour discrimination, the N.R.C. might reconsider its resolution.

At the very time that Hofmeyr was writing the letter, early in October, the feelings of the African Councillors were being forcefully expressed to a crisis conference of the A.N.C. which Dr. Xuma had called in Bloemfontein. On the platform were Matthews, Moroka, Thema, Mosaka, Godlo—a fine and consistent leader from the Eastern Cape who was both one of the founder members of the N.R.C. and a member of the A.N.C.—Kadalie, Msimang, and the newcomer to the N.R.C., Lutuli. After Professor Matthews had reported on the session and on his interview with Hofmeyr, there was grave discussion broken by angry interpolations particularly from Anton Lembede. Among the 500 delegates the predominant feeling that emerged was one of rage: rage at the shootings and batonings, rage at the crushing of the miners' justified protests, rage at the contempt the Government con-

¹ Letters of September 8, and October 7, 1946.

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sistently showed for the N.R.C. This was a new mood and it was exemplified when a resolution suggesting that the N.R.C. petition Parliament, was thrown out with loud disapproval. However Lembede's move for total boycott of the N.R.C. could not arouse enough support. The crisis drew him, the Africanist, together with Moses Kotane, the communist, in proposing a different motion which met with overwhelming approval. This endorsed the N.R.C.'s adjournment, called on the Councillors to attend a meeting asked for by the Government in a month's time, and called for the boycott of elections to the N.R.C. and to Parliament of Native Representatives. It also urged the African people to struggle for full citizen rights, meeting with wild applause. Then there was silence for two minutes, as the delegates remembered the nine miners killed and the 1,200 injured.

The repercussions from the breaking of the strike continued. The African Mine Workers Union never recovered, it was defeated not only by the police brutalities but by the Chamber of Mines which considerably strengthened policing of the mines, while tribal segregation in the compounds was made strict.

Four days before the Government was due to reply to the N.R.C. resolution calling for the abolition of all discriminatory legislation, the Chamber of Mines ran a three-column advertisement in each of the main daily and Sunday papers in Johannesburg, captioned 'Tribal Natives and Trade Unionism'. The policy of the Chamber of Mines, it declared, was one of Trusteeship. Trade unions at the Natives' present stage of development would lead to abuses and irresponsible action. 'A Trade union organization would not only be useless, but detrimental to the ordinary mine Native in his present stage of development.'

When the time came for the Government to meet the N.R.C., Smuts had gone to the U.N., and Hofmeyr again deputised for him. He told them that he was surprised at their 'violent and exaggerated statements'. He claimed that many of the differential provisions in the laws protected Native interests. Changes, he said, must be 'gradual'. He spoke of Government goodwill and desire for African advancement. His remarks amounted to a flat refusal to accede to the N.R.C.'s resolution. Furthermore, he said that Government would not allow a trade union for Native mine-workers. These were the conclusions which South Africa's most liberal statesman, a great scholar and a brilliant brain, put to the

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university Professor, the medical doctor, and the other distinguished Africans with whom he met. Politely they thanked him. He left. They were given time in which to think over his words. He did not return to hear their reply. Professor Matthews, as Chairman of the caucus, made the reply, his pleasant face grim. He said that there had been no advance in Native policy beyond the thoughts of people in 1903; the Acting Prime Minister's statement did not seem to show any intention on the part of the Government to recognize changed conditions. The N.R.C., he clearly stated, 'repudiate Mr. Hofmeyr's suggestion of extremism and recklessness on our part;' on the contrary, he accused, 'these charges could more fittingly be applied to the methods of the Government in suppressing the mineworkers' strike by the unprovoked use of brute force.' He spoke of the intolerable conditions and of how the African people throughout the country had looked forward to the Government reply. But, he said, Hofmeyr's reply was 'apparently oblivious of the progressive forces at work' in the world in general and in South Africa. He concluded, 'It gives no hope for the future.'

Matthews, representing the feelings of the N.R.C., moved that the Council be suspended until the Government could give a more reassuring reply. He was seconded by George Champion, who, in his deep voice, enumerated all the discriminatory laws passed since 1909. It was a long list. One factor that emerged distinctly was that, as Africans became more educated, more urbanized and westernized, so the restrictions against them were increased and harshened.

The debate went on for a week. Selope Thema, still a fine orator, showed himself to be more in tune with the world at large than Hofmeyr when he said, 'The tide in the world is against the white man.' He asked the Government, 'Do you want us to join those forces that are outside, those forces which are out to destroy? If you drive us to that we shall know what to do; but we don't want to do that.'

Dr. Moroka, a tall, slight almost elegant figure, a man with years of life in Edinburgh and in Vienna behind him, also brought realism to bear. The true reason for the Government's refusal, he said, was that it feared the opposition—the Nationalists who were due to fight the next election on the colour issue. 'Until the European people of this country,' he stated, 'realize that we must

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be given an opportunity to rule this country as they rule it, we will never, never, never have peace in this country.' Smuts, he added, had been partly responsible for the Atlantic Charter—'How can he allow the colour bar?' he asked. 'I just cannot understand it. I cannot get into his heart, and find out how after all he has done in the world, the big work he has done for humanity, he can now return to his own country and say that freedom cannot be given to the black people because they will murder the Europeans and want to marry Europeans.'

The Government's actions caused the turning point in the attitude of the African intellectuals.

XIII

1946–1948: African Internationalism vs. Afrikaner Isolationism



Towards the end of 1946 Dr. Xuma made a frontal attack on the South African Government when he took the Africans' case to the United Nations. This was the direct result of the Government's handling of the mine strike and the N.R.C. and the logical outcome of the continual broadening of the Africans' horizon since the first Victorian missionaries had opened their eyes to their place among mankind. Xuma was also influenced by his own cosmopolitan outlook and Indian leaders encouraged him to take the step which was, in a sense, a desperate action but unavoidable for a leader who had met with nothing but frustration from the government at home. He took with him the first petition from the Hereros and other tribes in South-West Africa, protesting against the South African Government's desire to incorporate the Mandated territory.

Although there was no procedure under which he could make a direct petition, he lobbied effectively, helped by Senator Basner and a representative of the South African Indian Congress. It was hard work, both because little was known about South Africa and because they came up against a preconception that General Smuts could do no wrong. However they were helped by the lavish supply of ammunition provided by the South African Government: the mine strike, the regular imprisonment of passive resisters—more than a thousand had already gone to gaol and served terms of several months with hard labour, and the scandal of the African housing shortage. All these events, backed by facts and figures (available in any Blue Book) on the restrictions binding the non-white majority in South Africa and in South-West Africa, made an unanswerable case for Xuma.

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India took the lead in the debates, with Sir Maharaj Singh contributing valuable first-hand knowledge from his years as High Commissioner for India in South Africa. Smuts argued persuasively for white 'civilization' but in the long debates this was revealed as a euphemism for 'domination'. His tragic blind spot was never more apparent: he showed no understanding of the changing world, and of the abhorrence of racialism so deeply felt by many great nations and expressed by President Truman in his opening address, which envisaged justice for small nations and for individuals 'without distinction as to race, creed or colour.' Smuts found the Preamble to the U.N. Charter, which affirmed 'faith in the fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small', frequently quoted against him.

The United Nations' castigation of South Africa has frequently been blamed on the Afro-Asian powers, yet in 1946, when the organization consisted of only 54 nations and Afro-Asian votes totalled 14, the General Assembly voted by 32 votes to 15 on a French-Mexican proposal advocating a settlement of the dispute over the treatment of the Indian community in South Africa; and by 36 votes to none, rejected Smuts's request to incorporate South-West Africa. Eric Louw, one of the Nationalist M.P.'s in South Africa, not having the prescience to know that he would one day be repeatedly placed in even more uncomfortable positions than Smuts, mocked the Prime Minister for his defeat and said: 'Imagine a Boer General (and a British Field-Marshal to boot) employing such poor tactics. A Union Defence Force Corporal would have done better. . . .'¹

Before Xuma left New York he attended a reception at which Smuts was present. Smuts's Secretary recognized him and asked, 'Have you met the Prime Minister?'

'No,' was the somewhat obvious answer from the leader of the A.N.C.

The Secretary took him over to meet the Field-Marshal. Smuts shook his hand and, his left hand holding Xuma by the shoulder, said, 'Zuma [*sic*], my dear man, what are you doing here?'

'Well, sir,' replied the doctor, 'I came here to be near my Prime Minister. I have had to fly 10,000 miles to meet my Prime Minister. He talks *about* us but he won't talk to us.'

¹ *The Struggle for Equality*, P. S. Joshi.

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To which Smuts replied, 'Man alive, let's get together! You know, Zuma, I am a most misunderstood man.'

He added that he had not known that some natives could be like white people, and was about to discuss the Natives' Representative Council when his Secretary drew him away.

Back in South Africa, Xuma was received by the jubilant A.N.C., warmly congratulating him on his great success, and thanking the Indian community for all that Sir Maharaj Singh and the Indian delegation had achieved. Even the anti-Indian Youth League joined in this praise. Besides the events at the U.N., the passive resistance campaign had deeply impressed certain Africans who, for the first time since the A.N.C. had led protests against the pass laws more than twenty years before, witnessed organized resistance to unjust laws. When Ismail Meer was in gaol, he found that African fellow prisoners, who were not at all politically conscious and included hardened criminals, looked upon the Indian resisters with respect and went out of their way to do little tasks for them. By the time Maulvi Cachalia was imprisoned with a batch of nineteen resisters in March 1947, more than 1,600 resisters had gone to gaol.

All these factors helped to bring about a more positive understanding between African and Indian leaders, though strong antipathy continued to actuate the Youth League. A pact to cement the understanding was drawn up—most suitably—in Ismail Meer's flat, and on Sunday, March 9, 1947, Dr. Xuma for the A.N.C. joined with Dr. Naicker and Dr. Dadoo, the Presidents of the Natal and Transvaal Indian Congresses, in signing this agreement to work for full franchise rights and for equal economic and industrial rights and opportunities as well as other freedoms. Three days later Naicker and Dadoo flew to India to attend the first Inter-Asian Conference, carrying with them the good wishes of mass meetings of Africans and Indians—including a message from Anton Lembede. Soon after, the largest demonstration ever held of non-whites, took place in Newtown Market Square, Johannesburg, with Xuma presiding and the crowd unanimously supporting the pact and celebrating the United Nations resolutions—which included the demand for trusteeship over South-West Africa. The great gathering was more immediately concerned with the desperate situation of the hundred thousand Africans by this time existing in the shanties that germinated from the overcrowded

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townships. The worst of these was Tobruk which, in the absence of assistance from Government or City Council, was a vast, indescribably sordid camp in which mob rule had taken over. Michael Scott had been living there illegally to try to help re-establish order, an incident which profoundly affected Africans—Nelson Mandela for instance had never before seen a white man thus involving himself in the very depth of the people's suffering, sharing with them the filth and disorder, and the terror of African gangsters, with none of the basic services such as lighting, sanitation, roads, telephones and police protection, that would have been automatically provided for white workers. Anton Lembede, despite a serious intestinal operation, successfully defended shantytown inhabitants involved in disturbances.

Meanwhile Xuma, fresh from his successes at the United Nations, had been re-elected President-General of the A.N.C., and Calata, Secretary-General.

In May 1947 Smuts sent for an N.R.C. Deputation, which Professor Matthews led. Matthews felt that Smuts needed them to help him out before the next U.N. session, when it was certain there would be renewed onslaughts on South Africa's racial policies. Smuts spoke vaguely about broadening the Council's powers but, always, he came back to the point that anything they might discuss was subject to the final decision of Parliament. He spoke of the possibility of the Council having power to administer the African reserves, and levy local taxes, and appealed to them to think about this, adding, with a paternal smile, 'It is a point for the N.R.C. to chew over.' The Press began to expound on Smuts's 'new deal'. The deputation made it clear that it saw no new deal, no change in policy at all. Its scepticism was justified: a new law, the Industrial Conciliation (Natives) Act, laid down that there would be no trade unions for Africans in the mining, agriculture or domestic service fields; it would be a criminal offence for Africans to organize a union not registered, and strikes would continue to be illegal. This was the death sentence for the African Mine Workers Union and meant that existing multi-racial unions were segregated.

Anton Lembede with Peter Mda and the President of the Transvaal A.N.C., Ramohanoe, promptly addressed a mass meeting in Vereeniging—attended by residents from Sharpeville and other locations—winning unanimous support for the call to boycott

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elections to the Natives' Representative Council and of white representatives to Parliament, and a call was made for the Urban Advisory Boards to adjourn indefinitely. It was Lembede's last public act; within a few weeks he died. He was thirty-three. The A.N.C. had lost three former Presidents during the year—Dr. Dube, Makgatho and Gumede had died. This was the loss of a potential president.

Through Lembede's short life from farm labourer to politician, he had fought illness, driving himself with such energy and carelessness of his body, that he could hardly be persuaded to sleep or eat. Professionally, for all his theatrical manner in court and his staccato laugh, he had been popular with clients and bench alike for his careful ability and his honesty. And although his close friends in the Youth League regarded him as a man of vision, they also realized that he was too moody and inflexible to have kept Congress united had he lived to become one of its great leaders. He was a mass of conflicts—abhorring pretension and with a direct sense of humour that won him friends among simple people and led him to dislike all the new sophistication of urban society, yet with a racial pride that could obscure for him the virtues of someone of another colour. His illness had given him a sense of impending doom; suffering had sharpened his mind and increased his charity and inner strength. His death aroused great sorrow. It was not only so among the youth whom he led, but for Seme too, who was extremely proud of him for all that he had done in building up their law practice. And at his funeral in the Roman Catholic church in Orlando, as well as his close friend Peter Mda, there were Xuma and Dadoo, Seme, clergymen, teachers, Advisory Board members, boy scouts, trade unionists, Native Representative Councillors, and A.N.C. and Indian Congress members, come together to mourn the young leader.

The question arises: what was the significance of Lembede's role in the liberation movement? In terms of action it was small, in terms of influence large. He has been called the 'architect of African nationalism in South Africa', and 'undoubtedly the greatest future leader the Africans have ever had.'¹ After his death, some of his contemporaries were to claim him as the first 'Africanist', insisting that he would have taken their rigid line had he lived. Perhaps so, but it is as conceivable that he might have

¹ *Drum*, January 1954.

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matured otherwise, as did others in the Youth League who in those days vied with him in nationalism. But his philosophical leadership was undoubted, and he was nearer than any other African leader in South Africa to the 'charismatic' leaders becoming popular in West Africa.

At the time of Lembede's death, a less spectacular but equally remarkable a leader was coming forward in the A.N.C.—Gert Sibande, born in Ermelo, a Transvaal village, in 1901, and like Lembede the child of farm labourers and a labourer himself. But whereas Lembede, with his hunger for knowledge, finally achieved legal success and a Master of Arts degree on a thesis concerning 'The conception of God as expounded by Descartes and subsequent philosophers', Sibande remained a farm labourer. These two men, both leaders of the A.N.C., epitomized its strength, a quality in it which gave it continuous life despite its fluctuations. Sibande was brought up in the harsh conditions of the Eastern Transvaal where white farmers on occasion became notorious for their ugly acts. He was unable to go to school, teaching himself to write and read 'up to a point' and fluent only in Zulu. He had several children and was a lay preacher in the South African Apostolic Church of Zion. Although his father had been a member of Congress it was not until 1936 that he himself was activated, when he saw the Hertzog Native Representation Act as 'a bluff', depriving people of their rights. After that, as he increasingly found that the other farm labourers were bringing all their troubles to him, he saw the need for an organization and formed and became Chairman of a Farm Workers Organization. He was by this time living in Bethal, the labour recruiting centre in the intensively farmed maize triangle, where the conditions for labourers were so intolerable that only illegal immigrants from Rhodesia and Nyasaland or drafted labour would go there. Sibande took their many problems to the Native Commissioner who simply blamed the laws. And so he decided that there was nothing for it but to join the A.N.C. and get the backing of a national organization. When he heard that a conference was to be held in Johannesburg, he went there, addressed it and was encouraged to find the audience deeply interested in the troubles of the farm labourers. He returned to Bethal with a copy of the A.N.C. constitution and with membership cards and formed the Bethal branch. It prospered and in 1942 he was elected its Chairman. During the early 'forties it held

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many meetings in the Bethal location and on the farms where the labourers were known to be ill-treated—the latter had to be secret meetings at night. Sibande found that men who had arrived at these farms in ordinary clothes, would have these taken from them, and would be forced to wear sacks even in winter. They worked till long after nightfall and were often locked into the compounds where they slept, and had to eat their food from the floor like pigs. Some of them deserted. Sibande came across some of these deserters: 'What really touched me was this,' he said; 'on this particular day it was very cold. Those people who had deserted were found dead alongside the road. Four of them.' On the same day ninety-nine people on one farm were caught in the rain and had to sleep in their clothes. It was so cold that they could not work afterwards and so the farmer had them arrested and six of them were charged. The farmer then conceded that they were in a bad building, said he would build another, and the case was withdrawn. Sibande would report cases of the ill-treatment of people who deserted to the Native Commissioner but he found that they were promptly arrested, and so he would protest again. Eventually he decided to try other tactics.

It was in mid-winter, in June 1947 that Sibande, the peasant, took a journalist and a priest round the Bethal farms, and told them what his friends and neighbours were suffering. The effects of this tour were to rock the country.

When Ruth First and Michael Scott arrived in Bethal's main street they were met by this big vigorous slow-speaking man who cocked his head slightly to concentrate on the unaccustomed English they spoke. They must have been a conspicuous trio—the vivid quick-moving young woman, the tall sunburnt untidily dressed clergyman, and the shambly-figured African with a huge laugh. Sibande did not seem surprised that they had come and seemed to know at once what they wanted and how to get it. Obstacles did not exist for him. 'You want to meet farm workers? All right,' and into a smoke-filled compound he took them.

And out they came with a story by Scott that was sympathetically head-lined in the *Rand Daily Mail* and throughout the country—Bethal was after all an Afrikaner dorp. The *Cape Times* referred to Scott's 'striking disclosures'; what gave them 'utmost significance' in Government eyes, was the U.N. Session looming up. It was not only Scott who had made the allegations but a

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succession of magistrates, one of whom had described the conditions as 'tantamount to slavery'. Smuts promptly promised investigations of the allegations of ill-treatment of natives. His Minister of Justice, Lawrence, sent squads of police to Bethal. They got complaints from only seven of the ninety-one farms and a handful of white foremen and native boss boys were charged with assault. Lawrence then announced that the inquiry had vindicated Bethal district. He promised the farmers that he would go into the question of supplying them with convict labour and promised that the Government would improve the system of bringing back deserters to the farms. When Sibande and Bopape, the A.N.C. Transvaal Secretary, addressed a meeting of several thousands of Africans in the Bethal location and people in the crowd pointed out that the police investigation was unsatisfactory because Africans feared the police, that indeed conditions were even worse than Scott had reported, and there was a call for a Commission of Inquiry into labour conditions, the Government took no notice. Nor did they respond to a subsequent call from the A.N.C. national conference.

Now Bethal was a United Party seat—a shaky one at that. Besides, since 1943, the United Party had lost four of the eight by-elections to the Nationalists. It seemed suddenly to dawn upon Smuts that he had been rash to rush police into the area and antagonize the farmers, so although he himself had roundly condemned the compound labour system in 1945, his Minister of Native Affairs, Piet van der Byl, now warmly defended it. The Government took no further action in Bethal.

But, in October, just in time for the United Nations Session, Smuts hastily published his 'New Deal for Natives'. This suggested that instead of twelve natives being elected to the Natives' Representative Council there should be fifty, who would discuss 'tentative proposals'. The N.R.C.'s reaction was quick and sharp: it accused the Government of a breach of faith, while Professor Matthews said that the Prime Minister was 'pulling a fast one'. However, when the A.N.C. came to consider the matter, caution won: they decided to give Smuts another chance, and elect men to the enlarged Council. Even Marks, the communist, agreed while the militants who called for total boycott, led by Oliver Tambo, were defeated by fifty-seven votes to seven. Ironically it was the All African Convention under Professor Jabavu which rejected Smuts's proposals outright and called for such a boycott.

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The A.N.C. had just reinforced their as yet tentative international contacts by sending a memorandum to the United Nations and delegates—Marks and Tloome—to the latest Pan-African Congress at Dakar. Smuts's hope that he would convince the U.N. that Africans were getting a new deal was dashed and representatives of the non-white people of South-West Africa and the Union—Michael Scott and two members of the South African Indian Congress—once again could produce more than enough facts and figures of what was taking place in South Africa to win the support of delegates for their cause.

Back in South Africa the two white parties were shaping up for the imminent elections. J. G. Strijdom, Nationalist leader, significantly chose Bethal for a Stryddag (struggle day), when he announced that the white man should always be master in every sphere of public life in South Africa. Smuts was saying that the United Party policy was leadership by the European race as laid down in the Hertzog laws of 1936 which, he emphasized, still stood. To the black bogey the red bogey was added and for the third time since the war the Executive of the Communist Party was arrested for sedition, but despite this gesture on Smuts's part, the Nationalists announced: 'A vote for Jan Smuts is a vote for Joe Stalin.'

George Bernard Shaw, who had twice visited South Africa in the 'thirties, at this time described Smuts's policy as having 'standards of shallow and irresponsible democracy', and as for 'White Africans', Shaw thought them 'very imperfectly civilized' and 'mentally lazy and snobbish'.¹

All the same Smuts had appointed a Commission of Inquiry into the conditions of the non-whites, under Mr. Justice Fagan, himself a former Minister of Native Affairs. Among authorities who gave evidence was a leading liberal academic, Mrs. Winifred Hoernlé, who spoke of the extreme weariness of the African people: the women of Moroka, one of the enormities in the Reef housing problem, were tired out, she said, and the remaining overcrowding of 60,000 people was pointed to as a symptom of widespread social evil which should have been dealt with as a national emergency. There had been riots, with police firing on the crowd, during recent violent resistance to enforced removals of squatters, and three policemen had been killed. Fagan and his Commission made

¹ *The Passive Resister*, December 1947.

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the most careful investigation in the history of the country. It remained to be seen what would come of this.

There were warnings enough for white South Africa—in the growing interest taken in its policies at the United Nations, and from Gandhi in India who said that if the so-called whites retained their prejudice and kept themselves in purdah their ‘attitude of unreason’ would mean a third war. This was recalled at the time of Gandhi’s assassination—a sad blow to the passive resisters in South Africa. Gandhi in a last message to them had said: ‘What the Government of South Africa has done deliberately is not going to be changed suddenly, even for the sufferings of the brave men and women. This is said not to damp the zeal of the fighters but to steel them for long and greater suffering. They must not expect the struggle to close quickly.’ And *The Passive Resister* recalled that in 1910 Tolstoy had written to Gandhi, then in the Transvaal, to say that the passive resistance in South Africa ‘is the most important activity the world can at present take part in, and in which not Christendom alone but all the peoples of the earth will participate.’

The 1948 election would be the test of the civilization of white South Africans, with many of the young men just back from exploits of notable courage in defending freedom and defeating fascism in North Africa and in Europe. Would they see that freedom was indivisible? Xuma had planned a campaign calling for full franchise rights for the non-whites to culminate with a People’s Assembly for Votes for All on the eve of the white elections. It promised to be the one note of sanity, but by the time it came about it had been disrupted by quarrels between nationalists and communists, with the communists wanting one of their united fronts and the Youth League, as Nelson Mandela firmly stated, believing in co-operation, but not unity. However 322 delegates unanimously adopted a Peoples’ Charter which was moved by J. B. Marks and seconded by Nana Sita, a Gandhian leader of the passive resistance. The Charter proclaimed the ‘burning belief in the ideals of democracy’ and introduced a civilized note in the election campaign by quoting Lincoln’s ideal of government of, by and for the people, as well as the U.N. Charter and a smattering of Marxist phrases. It was not only the non-whites—whether left-wing or right-wing—and Gandhi and the U.N. and the militant left-wing ex-servicemen’s ‘Springbok Legion’ that were warning white South Africa; the Roman Catholic Bishop of Natal, the Rt. Rev. Denis

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Hurley, declared that South Africa was doomed to strife and bloodshed unless the European population gracefully accepted an end to white supremacy and accepted equality of all races.

But the United Party were set on their path of segregation and the Afrikaner Nationalists on their ossified version of segregation—apartheid. This had been defined over many years, promising separation not only between white and non-white but between the various non-white groups and prohibiting marriage between races. Natives in the urban areas would be regarded forever as 'visitors', allowed no political nor social rights in the 87% of the country that could virtually be described as European areas.¹ Representation of Natives in Parliament would be abolished as would the Natives' Representative Council. From these major acts of subjugation, many minor discriminations and restrictions would flow. All this dressed up as being in line with 'the Christian basis of our National life' and backed by warnings that churches and societies which undermined the policy of apartheid and propagated doctrines foreign to the nation, would be checked, while the Nationalist Party would not tolerate interference from the outside world.

It was on this platform of apartheid that Dr. Malan and the Nationalists won the election. Afrikaner nationalism, cultivated over fifty years, nurtured in the hot house of isolationism, fertilized with reminders of past defeats—tales of concentration camps—had won its ultimate victory. On the day of the election, the Nationalist Party's supporting organization the Ossewabrandwag, republished its main principles. These included one powerful and skilful totalitarian administration in place of the present diverse parliamentary, provincial and municipal parties, and the reserving of southern Africa for the development of Afrikaner western culture only.²

This was the logical outcome of the British Government's handover of power to the white minority in 1910.

¹ Population: approximately 2½ million Whites, 8½ million Africans, over 1 million Coloured people, under ½ million Indians. Total 12½ million.

Numbers at school (1945): 438,000 Whites, 596,000 Africans, 215,800 Coloured people and Indians; with £16,500,000 spent on White education, £2,300,000 on African, £2,200,000 on others. In 1947 there were 951 Non-Whites at University.

² *Cape Argus*.

XIV

1948: Nationalism Breeds Nationalism



The A.N.C. leaders, imbued, with humanitarian ideals, did not apprehend the power of the conviction that drove the Afrikaner Nationalists, a conviction in their inherent racial superiority, which steeled them against the world and its revolutionary ideas of freedom and justice. As for the English-speaking whites, pre-occupied with making money, they comforted themselves with the hope that the Nationalists must surely modify their anti-British and anti-Semitic tendencies now that they had power and the country's economy to consider. The business community advised, and their advice was listened to by the British and American Governments, 'Don't harden the hearts of the Nationalists.' It might have been expected that after the British Government's experience of the Boer War and the Act of Union it would have known that British generosity and diplomacy would at best be regarded as patronage and something to be exploited, but governments seem indifferent to the lessons of history. The few white liberals continued to think in terms of piecemeal reforms, and like the communists, were powerless to instigate change. Some people welcomed the Nationalist Government as a force to cement its opponents and provoke them into greater militancy.

Certainly boycott, civil disobedience, strikes, non-collaboration, were words increasingly to be heard in the speeches of certain A.N.C. leaders, and for this the rival All African Convention deserves some credit. There was still an element, as represented by the Rev. James Calata, the Secretary-General, feeling that they should accept the Government in power and find a way to cooperate with it in promoting African welfare, while the Joint Passive Resistance Council of the Transvaal and Natal Indian Congresses suspended their campaign, pending an interview with the Prime Minister to discuss the new Government's attitude to the

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Indians. Neither the Prime Minister nor the Minister of Interior would see them and so the campaign went on and, despite constant harrying by white hooligans, 2,300 volunteers had by this time gone to gaol. Vast meetings welcomed Naicker and Dadoo on their release after six months' imprisonment.

At least in those early days there was none of the hypocrisy that was later to characterize the Nationalists' policy. The Minister of Justice, C. R. Swart, gave English-speaking people their first severe jolt when he released convicted war criminals and repealed the National Security Regulations which had hitherto banned members of the 'Storm Troopers'—the Ossewabrandwag, and the Afrikaners' secret society, the Broederbond, from being state employees. Though the Ossewabrandwag did not last long, the far more sinister Broederbond soon permeated the Civil Service, the police, the armed forces, and the Cabinet itself. The bell was tolling all right but only the leaders of the non-whites and their friends in the white community were aware that it tolled for all men.

The first onslaught in restrictive legislation came when the new Minister of Labour, Ben Schoeman, announced that the proposed recognition of certain Native trade unions would be abandoned and that the training of Natives as building artisans was suspended because they were a threat to white builders—this was an obvious response to the Afrikaner voter who feared competition with the African whose aptitude had been proved since he had been welcomed into more skilled occupations in the wartime industries. Government departments were instructed to substitute poor white employees for Africans. The Government quickly rejected the Fagan Report with its recommendations for the amelioration of the evils of the migrant labour system and reform of the pass laws. School feeding for African children was suspended, and segregation enforced on Cape suburban railways, and soon old age pensions and disability grants for Africans were virtually withdrawn, and bursaries for their medical students stopped. The policy of buying land for Africans was reversed and the reserves became static at 12.4% of the countryside— $3\frac{1}{4}$ million morgen short of the area earmarked under the 1936 Act.

In October 1948 the grimness of the outlook brought Africans together: A.N.C., A.A.C., Natives' Representative Councillors, Non-European Council of Trade Unions, and members of the

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Communist Party gathered in Bloemfontein to hear Dr. Xuma gravely addressing them. South Africa stood at the cross roads, he said, one leading to a greater, united and progressive country through inter-racial co-operation and mutual association, while the other led to national suicide—race and colour conflict arising from race bigotry. A clarion call came from Bopape: 'We must use our atomic weapon, withdrawal of labour', which was warmly supported by Peter Mda, the Youth League President.

There was a new note in the speeches which J. B. Marks initiated when he pointed out that there would soon be 400 million people in Asia 'to come to our aid and apartheid will then be a thing of the past.' This theme was taken up by George Champion who, in his bull voice, announced that he would go further and ask the communists in Russia, the Japanese and even the Indians to come and help in the struggle. But the voice of caution could still be heard—the A.N.C.'s Treasurer, Dr. Silas Molema from Mafeking, urged that it was futile to 'shout aloud' until they were organized. However the call for action was reiterated, until the impressive unity became dissipated by procedural quarrels and the heat in the location hall aggravated the delegates until the chairman, Thema, could barely keep order. No doubt the procedural difficulties were simply an outlet for rivalries—though the A.A.C. was still led by Professor Jabavu it had been partly taken over by the Coloured Non-European Unity Movement, based on the Cape Province and tending towards a Trotskyite attitude. But in any event discussion was cut short when the Cape delegates had to set out on the long journey home and the main resolution was left to the A.N.C. Executive to pursue.

So it was that the A.N.C. alone adopted a significant resolution which, in rejecting apartheid, trusteeship, or white leadership—whatever it might be called it was motivated by white domination—called for a mass struggle for national freedom. All differential institutions, including the N.R.C. and the Native Advisory Boards, must be abolished and the right of direct representation achieved—this would be done through a programme of action. However the programme envisaged by the Youth League was so drastic that it was decided to refer it first to the provincial congresses and a committee was appointed to prepare the final programme. Z. K. Matthews and Moses Kotane were on the committee. For all the past talk of boycott and resolutions passed in both the A.N.C. and

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the A.A.C., there had not only been Xuma's personal defiance of a boycott of the Royal Family's visit to Zululand in 1947, but Matthews and Moroka had remained members of the N.R.C. Furthermore the Communist Party had broken the boycott of elections and put up candidates. In the N.R.C. elections, their candidates had been defeated by Mosaka and his African Democratic Party, but in the election of the Cape Western Native Representative to Parliament, when Molteno did not stand (partly because he needed to build up his law practice, but partly because of the African call for boycott), Sam Kahn, a communist solicitor who had twice been elected to the Cape Town City Council, was returned to Parliament with nearly 4,000 votes to his opponent's 754.

But the talk went on and in January 1949 when the Natives' Representative Council eventually met again, it was to hear the new Government's reply to the Council's 1946 resolution calling for the abolition of discriminatory laws. The Government's reply was that the laws would continue; the N.R.C. would be abolished. The veterans, Thema, Champion, and Msimang warned that they were now forced to look to foreign countries for friendship. The Council refused even to consider the agenda until the Minister of Native Affairs put full details of his policy before them. The Council adjourned.

The U.N. Session was just over. The Government as always had been angered by the criticism of South Africa abroad. Xuma said people who 'state true facts' were said by white South Africans to misrepresent facts; the best way to stop this was for the Government to do away with inequalities based on colour. But Eric Louw, South Africa's new Minister for External Affairs, who had taunted Smuts for his humiliation at the U.N., having himself set off with the bold announcement that South Africa would not stand as the accused at the U.N. but as the accuser, was just back, having listened to endless castigation of South Africa's policy from most of the nations of the world, both in its treatment of Indians and of the Africans of South-West Africa. The case of the Indians had been ably put by Dr. Dadoo. Both he and Dr. Naicker had intended going but the Government had confiscated their passports and only Dadoo, who was a British subject, had been able to reach his destination. Dr. Xuma was grateful for this continuation of Indian initiative. But the understanding between a handful of

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African and Indian leaders had not yet percolated through to the ordinary people.

In Durban on Thursday, January 13, as Africans and Indians were queuing for homeward-bound buses at the end of the day, in the Indian market nearby an African boy and a young Indian quarrelled. The African slapped the Indian; the latter complained to his employer who followed the boy into the street and assaulted him. In the tussle the African's head accidentally crashed through a shop window and blood flowed. From the street crowded with bus queues Africans saw an Indian adult assaulting an African child, and they saw blood. They went berserk and attacked every Indian in sight. Late that night uneasy order was restored. On the Friday morning a few Africans threw bricks at Indian shop-windows while amused whites egged them on. And that night all the years of oppression and of poverty that had packed frustration and rage tight down in the Zulu people reached bursting point and they turned on the nearest and easiest target, the Indians—who, as one Zulu leader put it, were people who tended to look down on the Africans (something which the Zulus particularly resented), so that a number of pin-pricks resulting from these incongruous relations had accumulated to give an exaggerated notion of Indian exploitation. Infuriated Africans burnt Indian houses by the score, clubbed their owners to death, raped their wives and daughters. Thousands of Indians fled. Arson and looting continued until police with army and naval forces moved in and over the week-end began to put down the spreading riots.

As soon as the terrible news reached Johannesburg, Xuma, J. B. Marks, Dadoo and Maulvi Cachalia hastened down to Durban, where they found Dr. Naicker with the Meers, the Singhs and other Indian Congress leaders, already working in the distressed areas. There was deepest suspicion to break down on both sides, and George Champion, the President of the Natal A.N.C., as well as Msimang and Chief Albert Lutuli, felt strongly against co-operation with Indians. Xuma argued them round. Meanwhile Ismail Meer and Naicker had travelled about the scene of the riots in a van with an African volunteer interpreting, driving into the thick of the attacks, calling upon the people to stop. Other Indian leaders walked along a street recently torn by riots, and when Indians hiding in the houses peeped out, to see these two leaders talking to an African, they gradually began to gain confidence and

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emerge from their houses. At a conference the leaders of the A.N.C. and the Indian Congress frankly discussed the situation and set up a joint committee, calling upon their people to devise ways of achieving mutual understanding and closer co-operation in their fight for freedom. Even during the height of the riots individual African and Indian families had helped and protected each other, and now, encouraged by their leaders, when tens of thousands of Indians sought refuge in temporary camps, African nurses gave them valuable help.

142 people had been killed—50 Indians and, largely as a result of police and military action, 87 Africans, with one white and four people whose race could not be determined. More than a thousand were injured of whom 58 died, and many hundreds of stores and homes were damaged or destroyed. These riots, therefore, were more terrible than the race riot in Chicago in 1919 when 15 whites and 23 Negroes were killed and several hundred injured, or than the Gold Coast riots in 1948 when 29 people were killed. Kenneth Kirkwood, who made a study of the riots for the South African Institute of Race Relations, said that they 'must be one of the most devastating outbreaks of mass violence in times of peace within a state subject to the administration of peoples of Western European origination.'¹ Yet the Durban riots met with smug complacency from the authorities. Only the A.N.C., the Indian Congress, the Native Locations Advisory Boards, and a handful of academic, liberal, and left-wing whites, drew attention to the grievousness of the situation and to the underlying causes—poverty, lack of homes, inadequate transport, lack of opportunity. The Commission of Inquiry which the Government set up under Mr. Justice F. van der Heever, admitted the slum conditions and poverty—that 70% of the Indians in Natal lived below the bread-line and 'the slum areas on the fringes of Durban are a disgrace to any community which calls itself civilized', for 23,000 Natives were living 'under the most sordid conditions'; yet it went on to express the conviction that the Native was quite content with his lot, that certain Europeans told him he had grievances so he said he had, but really he was happy!

When the Commission refused to allow cross-examination of witnesses, the A.N.C. and Indian Congress, and others withdrew. The Commission entirely rejected the suggestion that recent

¹ *The Durban Riots and after.*

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speeches made by Dr. Malan and other Ministers propagated racial hatred. Instead it claimed: 'One of the most unsettling influences upon the Native mind is the fact that South Africa has a hostile Press abroad.' It rejected allegations that the police failed to suppress vigorously the initial outbreak of violence, and that they failed to use tear gas which would have considerably reduced the casualties. It agreed that while the riots were in progress 'certain Europeans actively incited the Natives to further acts of violence', and regarded the European women 'who went dancing up the street' urging the Natives to 'hit the coolies' as 'degraded specimens of their race'.

Among the causes of the disaster the Commission listed lack of discipline among urban Natives, bad precepts from Indian passive resisters and the racial characteristics of Indians and Africans, with resulting tension. Having indulged in some sarcastic asides against 'intellectuals' and the 'publicist, especially of British stock', who regarded the vote as the panacea for all evils, the Commission recommended 'constant vigilance'. It made no reference to past warnings from responsible officials and citizens that Durban was 'sitting on a volcano' of African slums and discontent. It said: 'Unfortunately South Africa is full of grave and exceedingly interesting problems, many of which are insoluble.'¹

The Nationalists hailed the tragedy; here was proof of their belief in the mutual antagonism of different races and support for their theory of apartheid. The average white's opinion was that the riots showed how 'kaffirs' hated 'coolies', with general sympathy going to the 'kaffirs'. All the more remarkable, therefore, was the magnanimity of Indian leaders throughout. And when an apprehensive calm had been restored, these men and women in the Indian Congress, shaken into a greater awareness of the complexity of race relations, recognized that understanding must be campaigned for; it could not simply grow on its own. In this they gained support from the recently strengthened A.N.C. Youth League in Natal, and Champion and Msimang co-operated. The various leaders addressed meetings at the International Club, and, from the A.N.C., Xuma, Champion, Marks and Yengwa, with Mahabane and Dadoo and Naicker, made joint declarations condemning violence. Out of this beginning gradually came closer co-operation, and in both Natal and the Transvaal the A.N.C.

¹ *The Durban Riots and after.*

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would benefit from the knowledge of Gandhian technique, the experience in organizing and fund-raising ability of the Indians, while the Indians' movement gained much in importance.

The shock of this tragedy might have brought the Government to consider the poverty of the people. Its own Commission had spoken frankly about this, and in Parliament Senator Brookes, the Ballingers and Kahn regularly warned about the unrest that was rapidly building up because of the malnutrition and poverty, and the resentment against recent laws providing even wider powers of deportation and detention of 'idle' or 'undesirable' Natives. In two years 345 policemen had been found guilty of assault on Non-Europeans under arrest, and another 52 were punished departmentally. But the Government was busy propping up apartheid by prohibiting mixed marriages, and forcibly drew South-West Africa within the orbit of this system by virtually incorporating the Mandated territory. Then it was rumoured that African women would have to carry passes and in the mining town of Krugersdorp a riot was sparked off, to be followed by two further riots—one provoked by a police liquor raid, and the other by increased tram fares for Africans—all in the vicinity of Johannesburg. Six Africans were killed, a number of others injured and about three score policemen were injured.

'South Africa has chosen the road that leads to national suicide and racial clashes,' declared Xuma after a year of Nationalist rule. The Youth League felt that the mood of the people was ripe. For too long the A.N.C. had been virtually a talking shop for intellectuals, passing splendid resolutions, dispersing, and returning the following year to find out whether the resolutions had been implemented, getting a certain satisfaction out of the knowledge that they were discussing national affairs and enjoying the social get-together. As for the League's criticism of Xuma, the major disappointment had been his resistance to their thrust for action: action would be taken when the Congress was sufficiently well organized for it, he assured them. And apart from this, he was not a good committee man, he issued statements on his own and seldom delegated responsibility. But there was no doubt that he had, with Calata's help, built a collection of erratic provincial talking shops into a national organization and although it was still far too representative of the urban middle class, it at last had the potential of becoming a mass movement. Xuma's qualities, his strength and

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intelligence and ambitions for his people, and even his defect—his autocracy—had made this possible and he had therefore twice been re-elected President-General. Under his Presidency it had been possible for the youth to initiate a Programme of Action. But now, in 1949, the Youth League had the opportunity they had so long anticipated—it was A.N.C. election year.

On December 5, Sisulu, Mandela and Tambo called on Xuma at his house in Sophiatown. They told him that the Youth League would adopt him as their candidate for re-election provided he accepted the Programme of Action—African nationalism—with the boycott of all the mock forms of representation such as the N.R.C. and Advisory Boards. He warned them: 'We should be careful about Africa for the Africans because we can make ourselves isolationists like the Government we are opposing.' He reminded them that when he had gone to the U.N., he could not have presented the Africans' case without the help of the Government of India. The reflective Tambo urged that they should be able to 'go it alone'. But what Xuma most strongly opposed was the boycott, as he felt that for the existing members to boycott the various Councils would open the way for weaker aspirants. When he found that he had not moved the three young men from their resolve, he angrily told them, 'I don't want your vote, I don't want to be dictated to by any clique.' He felt insulted, as if they were looking for someone whom they could influence and manipulate, and he regarded their action as 'bribery and corruption'.

Between this encounter and the conference which was due to take place eleven days later, the Youth League discussed among themselves who would be suitable candidates. The one man they were agreed on was Z. K. Matthews, who had had a distinguished academic career, was popular, and had played a considerable role behind the scenes in A.N.C. policy-making and was leader of the N.R.C. caucus. However, he wished to concentrate on the affairs of the Cape Congress. As soon as the Youth League arrived in Bloemfontein they held an emergency meeting and decided, somewhat reluctantly, to support Dr. Xuma after all. Their President, Peter Mda, told Xuma they would be supporting him. Perhaps this inspired him in his rousing speech on Dingaan's Day, or perhaps it was the knowledge that away to the north, in Pretoria, the Nationalist Government and tens of thousands of Afrikaners were celebrating the Voortrekker victory over Dingaan and the Zulus, as

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they dedicated their massive monument to the past. In Bloemfontein, Xuma and Selope Thema solemnly led a singing procession of delegates along the dusty location roads to the Market Square. Then Xuma addressed the crowd in his soft voice, his small, neat frame alive with the patriotism that filled him. He referred to the white's celebration of the crushing of Dingaan, Dingaan who was a hero to Africans. At Blood River the Zulus, he said, had died like heroes for the freedom of their people, and the struggle should never be allowed to languish; it must be continued until Africans had a voice in their own affairs. When the true history of the country was written, he declared, Dingaan and his men would not be shown as murderers but as honest defenders of African freedom.¹

The conference opened. The usual excitement of an election conference was intensified by the delegates' experience of eighteen months of Nationalist rule. Through the day they discussed the President's report on conditions. Among the guests in the audience was Dr. James Moroka, who had been such a stalwart defender of African interests when Hertzog and the Cape M.P.'s had tried to put across a false compromise to the Africans. He was still Treasurer of the A.A.C. and in recent years had won African admiration for his forthright speeches in the Natives' Representative Council. When the conference came to discuss the Programme of Action Moroka warmly supported its advocacy of the boycott of the N.R.C. The N.R.C., he said, was an illusion and people must not think they could depend on it. He approved the Programme of Action. His speech met the mood of the people, and several of the Youth Leaguers felt he was just the man they were looking for. In twos and threes they called one another out of the conference hall to discuss afresh the question of a candidate for the Presidency. But Mda could not be found, and as the elections were due to take place at any moment, Ngubane and others, in a torrent of words, urged Oliver Tambo, the League's Vice-President, to make the decision. It was a difficult decision—for one thing Dr. Moroka was not even a member of the A.N.C. and it would be unconstitutional to put him up. But eventually the decision was taken. Dr. Moroka it would be. There was one last question—whether Dr. Moroka would agree.

They went back into the hall to find that he had left. It was

¹ *Rand Daily Mail*, December 17, 1949.

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already evening and the elections were due to begin in about half an hour's time. Tambo, Ntsu Mokhehle, a Basuto leader, from the Fort Hare branch, and another member of the League, hurried to the house in the location where Dr. Moroka was staying. He was asleep. They woke him up and told him that they wanted to propose him for President-General, that there were certain things they wanted to carry forward and that though Dr. Xuma was a fine man he was a great conservative, and they wanted somebody who could take a risk—'To win we must risk certain things,' one of them said. They urged him to dress and accompany them back to the conference. He was unwilling because Xuma was an old friend, but as he thought about it he came to the conclusion that he must not think of anyone else but of the African people, and it was his duty to serve if they needed him. So he went with them, driving hurriedly through the dark uneven roads to the Magasa Hall in Rubusana Street—the small, red-brick hall with its one eucalyptus tree near the door. By this time the packed hall was seething with excitement. Just as they wedged themselves into seats, proposals for the election of the President-General were called for. Two names were put forward: Dr. Xuma and Dr. Moroka. The old fellows almost to a man voted for Xuma, and the young—a vocal lot who by this time had come to be in the majority—for Moroka. The Youth League's unconstitutional *coup* had come off.

XV

1949-1951: The Programme of Action



Dr. James Sebebuijwasegokgobontharile Moroka—his grandmother had interpreted his names as ‘I have come last, having been criminally enslaved, but will bring rain, peace and freedom to my people’—at fifty-eight years was surprisingly youthful: a mixture of homeliness and elegance, with direct charm and intelligence emerging. No orator, he made his points with quiet emphasis and his fine hands were expressive. A great-grandson of Chief Moroka of Thaba’Nchu, benefactor of Voortrekkers, James had attended the village school, but so backward was education in the Free State that he was already eighteen when he went on in 1909 to complete his primary school course at Lovedale College. Encouraged by a Scottish Minister, his parents sent him to the Royal High School in Edinburgh and within seven years he had qualified as a doctor. During those years of the Great War, although he was host to Plaatje and others on the A.N.C. delegation, he took little interest in politics. On returning to the Free State in 1918, as the only African doctor in the Union, he concentrated on his practice. In those days immense prestige surrounded a ‘doctor’—his people regarded him with awe, as indeed did many whites; soon his expanding practice included Afrikaner patients. His wife, Maggie, helped him to develop the farms he had inherited and acquired, and in African eyes they became rich. They built a house—a spacious cool bungalow—which Africans regarded as ‘a palace’. The Doctor worked in the Moroka Missionary Hospital for which he, a good Wesleyan, together with the Barolong Chief, had provided the land. It was the only African hospital with training facilities in the Free State; it also provided the only high school for boys. In 1930 Moroka returned to Europe to study surgery in Vienna, where in his leisure time he enjoyed the music and the countryside. Back in South Africa, this time as a

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surgeon, he found himself prevented by law from using the only facilities existing in the Bloemfontein hospital. As he was the only African qualified, this Provincial law had been passed to prevent one man from having access to his patients in that hospital.

Hertzog's Bills finally shook him into political action in 1935. His determined lead then, and again as a member of the N.R.C. during the mine strike, impressed young Africans; they were willing to overlook his failure to boycott the N.R.C. Like Xuma, he brought professional prestige and independent means to the leadership, enabling him to give time to its demands. Unlike Xuma he soon proved to be a good committee man, co-operative and ready to listen to others. Both the left and right wing of Congress thought him a sincere, determined man, perhaps without much personality, but with qualities to give impetus to the A.N.C.

There had been so much excitement over the Presidency that the election of the Secretary-General came as an anti-climax. Calata's election had been taken for granted since he had filled the role with such devotion for fourteen years, in addition to being President of the Cape Congress for nineteen years. The Youth League had been too busy to think about this secondary appointment. When Calata adamantly declined to be re-elected, the delegates were nonplussed. He regarded the Programme of Action as too 'drastic'; besides he thought they needed a young man. Thus it happened that on the spur of the moment someone suggested Walter Sisulu. The left-wing countered with Dan Tloome. Sisulu was elected by one vote. Older members of Congress regarded this as a second victory for the Youth League. 'Very clever young boys,' remarked one elderly man.

When the National Executive was elected, the moderate Dr. Silas Molema of Mafeking (who had been in Edinburgh as a medical student with Moroka) was re-elected Treasurer-General. The other members included Tloome, Marks and Kotane, Z. K. Matthews, Calata, another Anglican clergyman, the Rev. J. Skomolo, and three active members of the Youth League, Mda, Tambo and Godfrey Pitje, assistant lecturer in social anthropology at Fort Hare. Xuma was also elected but soon resigned; he called it an act of 'political honesty'. His colleagues felt this was added proof of his inability to co-operate in a secondary position.

In a tense atmosphere the new Executive was sworn to vigorous execution of the Programme of Action, which was unanimously

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approved. It embraced proposals from the militant Eastern Cape Congress, but was principally a result of the Youth League's pressure. The A.N.C.'s new policy was to be carried through by a 'total and complete boycott of all the elections under the Act of 1936' and there would be 'strikes, civil disobedience, non-co-operation' to bring about realization of African aspirations.¹ A Council of Action was set up. The first objective was to be a national stoppage of work for one day as a protest against the Government's reactionary policy.

No longer would the A.N.C. have Mayors and Bishops opening its annual conference. The Minister of Justice, C. R. Swart, announced he was studying the natives' speeches and that, in company with Sir Percy Sillitoe, the chief of the British Secret Service, he was going into the question of the growth of communism in Africa. Africans saw Sillitoe's presence as one more act of collaboration by the British Government with the Nationalists.

Walter Sisulu decided he must give up his living as an estate agent; there could be only one task before him. His wife, Albertina, agreed; they would henceforth depend on her wages as a nurse, for although Congress offered him £5 a month, it was soon in arrears. Sisulu was the first full-time Secretary-General. He found a cheap office—a poorly furnished dilapidated room reached through a dark entrance in the business area of Johannesburg. He found a typist and threw himself into the work, bringing to it a dogged drive and his experience of life, which made up for what he had missed in formal education. At forty he still lacked self-confidence, as his edgy manner and anti-white tendencies showed. But even his fiercest opponents granted his dedication to the cause and welcomed his impatience with slovenliness.

The A.N.C.'s first step in implementing the Programme of Action—the one day stoppage of work—was to be on May 1. Things looked promising when, in March, Dr. Moroka paid his first visit to Johannesburg as President-General. He was greeted with ovations, and driven through the streets in a coach drawn by Sofasonke Mpanza's white horses, with J. B. Marks riding alongside. This was all part of a Defend Free Speech Convention,

¹ In the same year, 1949, Kwame Nkrumah defined techniques of 'positive action' for the Gold Coast which included 'the constitutional application of strikes, boycotts and non-co-operation, based on the principle of absolute non-violence.' (Speech on the Tenth Anniversary of the Convention People's Party.)

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organized by the Transvaal A.N.C. and the Communist Party. But no sooner was this successful occasion over than the Youth League found that the communists had virtually taken over the A.N.C.'s call for May 1. Their anger was intense. This was to have been the first such national demonstration that the A.N.C. had ever called for. In a series of furious clashes the Youth League broke up communist meetings. At one, Mandela and Tambo defeated a move by Marks to prevent their speaking and forcibly took over the platform to tell people to disregard the May Day call. The Youth League's new bulletin, *African Lodestar*, equated the doctrines of the Communist Party with the Ossewabrandwag, the Broederbond and the Sons of England—a rejection of all foreign ideologies. It declared that since the workers were Africans and were oppressed primarily because they were African and only secondarily because they were workers, 'it is clear that the exotic plant of communism cannot flourish on African soil.'

On May 1—in spite of A.N.C. opposition, of a Government ban on demonstrations and meetings, and of the arrival of 2,000 police in the Johannesburg area—more than half the African workers stayed at home, while in several areas people disregarded the ban on meetings. In Bethal, where the police behaved reasonably, an orderly procession of 10,000 Africans took place under Gert Sibande's leadership. He had instructed his assistants 'that even if a fly should come and sit on your nose you should not kill it but just move it.' But around Johannesburg the police did not behave reasonably. They broke up gatherings and in the subsequent riots fired on the crowds and baton-charged. Sisulu and Mandela, who were hastening around Orlando trying to persuade people to go home, were almost shot. Eighteen Africans were killed and more than thirty, including three children, were injured. In the outburst of public protest, the greatest shock was expressed at the police failure to use tear gas. Only two days after the shootings was it announced that the Rand police would be issued with it. In Pretoria police broke up an African wedding reception and broke into a funeral to drive away people condoling with relatives; one of the Africans turned to an English clergyman and remarked: 'They treat us like wild animals. Perhaps after all we can get nothing by peaceable means.'¹

¹ The *Star*. Interview with the Rev. J. A. A. Maund, subsequently Bishop of Basutoland.

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The common sorrow and rage decided the A.N.C. Youth League to join with the Communist Party in a demonstration of mourning and protest. There were other hard-headed factors: laws intended to drive people apart were in fact driving them together. One was the Group Areas Act which divided race from race and tribe from tribe and particularly alarmed Indians; another was the Population Registration Act, which defined the race of each individual and particularly hit the Coloured people; but above all there was the Suppression of Communism Bill which, as the Youth League immediately realized, was in fact directed at a far greater target than the two thousand odd communists; its object was to crush the struggle for liberation.

Sisulu urgently called the National Executive and put to them the need for the maximum protest. Yet he and Mandela had some way to go to overcome their own exclusive nationalism, before they found it easy to co-operate with Indians and Whites. They had grudgingly to admit that the May Day campaign had awakened them to the need for the intellectually-inclined Youth League to attain closer contact with the workers who, though inarticulate, were reliably militant and stubborn. Simultaneously Moses Kotane, brought by the Communist Party to be its Secretary in Johannesburg, candidly invited the Youth League to discuss their difficulties. Mandela, getting to know him better, felt that he was 'really a nationalist' and began 'reluctantly' to feel that he had not been justified in believing that communists worked to subvert policies.

There was the other side of the story, with Kotane remorselessly going the rounds of the few Communist Party branches, arguing them out of their anger at the A.N.C.'s unpardonable sin of working against the May Day stoppage. Gradually he won some over.

On May 14, 1950 the A.N.C. and its Youth League came together with the Indian Congress and the Communist Party in an atmosphere of cool mutual suspicion. Sisulu, for all he had done to pursue this unity, could not refrain from harsh reproaches; but Tambo tactfully took the edge off these by putting the emphasis on the common threat of the Suppression of Communism Bill. A Co-ordinating Committee was formed with Sisulu and the thin, tempestuous Yusuf Cachalia as joint secretaries.

On the following Sunday, from Dr. Moroka's quiet verandahed house in Thaba'Nchu, the A.N.C. sent out the first call in its

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history for a national stoppage of work. It was to be held on Monday, June 26.

The Nationalists were stepping up their scare campaign. They had forgotten that in 1913 Dr. Malan had praised Karl Marx and said that 'socialism is but a passionate demand for justice'; since 1936 they had been urging that communism should be made a criminal offence. On June 14, the Minister of Justice, Mr. Swart, announced in the House of Assembly with 'a feeling of trepidation,' that under communist leaders, 'a secret organization amongst the natives' on 'a particular day' would poison 'the people's water supplies' and see that there was no power and light. Others, he added, were being taught 'to be in such a position that they can murder people' on that day. But the *last* thing he wanted to do, he assured the House, was to make people 'panicky'.

On June 26 scores of thousands of Africans and Indians responded to the call of the A.N.C. and allied organizations to protest against the policy of apartheid. In Johannesburg, despite intensive police patrolling, nearly three-quarters of the African workers stopped work, Indian shopkeepers closed their shops. location schools were almost empty, and nearly half the Public Utility bus drivers on African routes stayed at home. This was an unusual achievement. In Durban it was the Indians who led the way; many factories and schools closed; even Indian waiters stayed at home. Although a number of them who stayed away were dismissed and replaced by Africans—a bitter punishment calculated not to improve relations—the good response diminished the suspicion that Indians were simply opportunists. In Pretoria, Bloemfontein and Cape Town there were token demonstrations; in one Natal town, Ladysmith, the seventy-one-year-old Isaac Bhengu, who had been a member of the A.N.C. since 1916, tried to organize a stay-at-home 'so that the white people could realize the value of our labour and have a little bit of suffering,' which would make them urge the Government to meet the African people and 'grant what they want'. His efforts failed.

There was a spectacular achievement in Port Elizabeth. All cargo work was halted, businesses closed, shops, restaurants, hotels, garages and hospitals were short-staffed. Three-quarters of the railway staff stayed away. As one African housewife said, 'You could only see a donkey in the streets.' Three men were particularly responsible for the achievement—Professor Z. K.

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Matthews, Dr. James Njongwe and Robert Mokxotho Matji.

Matthews had been elected President of the Cape Congress in 1949 when he was simultaneously involved in framing the Programme of Action, leading the African caucus in the N.R.C., and becoming Vice-Chairman of the Senate of Fort Hare College. His life story encompassed the experience of Eastern Cape intellectuals from the Boer War to the advent of the Nationalist Government. Born in 1901 in Kimberley, son of a mineworker who subsequently owned a tearoom in the location, Zachariah Keodirelang ('What do I do for Him?') Matthews had been brought up with the idea of serving his God and his people. He went to an Anglican school. His father, a Cape voter, had seen no threat to his rights when the Act of Union went through. Zac and his five brothers and sisters had been among thousands of children to celebrate Union when buns and mugs were lavished on them at the Kimberley Race Course. It was through their cousin, Sol Plaatje, that the family became aware of the implications of the Act. Zac, as a teenager, would proudly accompany Plaatje to the meetings he addressed on the Land Act. But for the next twenty years Zac concentrated on learning, and after winning a bursary to Lovedale, accomplished a series of 'firsts': the first African to graduate in South Africa from Fort Hare in 1923; the first African Headmaster at Adams College; and (through private study) in 1930 first Bachelor of Laws in South Africa, admitted as an Attorney to the Transvaal Division of the Supreme Court. While at Adams he married Freda Bokwe, a fellow teacher from a family of Ministers, musicians and doctors. Life was austere on a salary of £13 a month and in a three-roomed iron house they brought up the first of their five children—Joseph.

So far Matthews's inbred desire to help his people had found its outlet in leading the African Teachers' Organization, along with a friend and fellow-teacher, Albert Lutuli. They both took part in church and missionary conferences. Then, from Adams in the steamy village of Amanzimtoti on the Indian Ocean, Matthews went to Yale University. With an M.A. thesis on Bantu Law and Western Civilization, he went on to study Anthropology under Malinowski at the London School of Economics in 1934. He returned to South Africa after touring Europe and knew he was back when he set foot in Cape Town: it took him an hour to find a tearoom that was not for 'Europeans only'.

The Hertzog Bills deprived him of his vote at the very time when

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he was appointed Research Fellow of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures in London. He was appointed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to be a member of a Commission on Higher Education for Africans in East Africa and the Sudan. He had joined the All African Convention to campaign against the Bills, but his first fully political act was his response in 1940 to the appeal to intellectuals made by Xuma and Calata, when he joined the A.N.C. He was then a lecturer at Fort Hare College in Social Anthropology, Native Law and Administration. In 1942 he was elected to the N.R.C.—remarkable for the Xhosa to elect a Mochuana—and in 1943 was elected to the A.N.C. Executive; his increasing political activity was fortunately approved by the Principal of Fort Hare.

Fort Hare—an all-African college comparatively isolated from other nationalities and from the life of cities—was fast breeding African nationalists. Joe Matthews and Duma Nokwe, both influenced by Oliver Tambo at St. Peter's School, were among founders of a Youth League branch in the college. When Joe led a boycott of the visit of King George VI, he clashed angrily with his father. Professor Matthews was teaching students who would become the embryo of nationalist movements from Cape Town to Uganda. Many of them regarded him as annoyingly conservative. White liberals found him ambiguous; culturally he was so much like themselves, but ultimately he was a Mochuana. Xuma said: 'If you want to know him you must shake the fence very rudely and when he does jump off he will jump off on the right side.' If he did not immediately commit himself it was not because he was afraid but because both his personal and academic training caused him to recognize that there are two sides to most questions. His subtle mind scrutinized the arguments carefully before he acted. One of his friends, a poet, said he was like an essay by T. S. Eliot—full of buts, ifs and ands, because he was trying to be extremely truthful.

In Port Elizabeth he encouraged a fine team. Its President was Dr. Jimmy Njongwe who, as a medical student at the University of the Witwatersrand, had been an early member of the Youth League. A handsome, sober and clear-thinking yet mercurial young man, he was a trifle conservative, with a self-confidence that some mistook for arrogance, and above all an extremely hard worker both in his practice and in organizing the local A.N.C. His

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independence was not always appreciated by some colleagues. He worked closely with the Secretary of the New Brighton branch, Robert Matji, who had been active in the A.N.C. in his home town, Pretoria. Matji, a nervous but attractive and modest young man with slanting eyes, had had little schooling, and in Pretoria found that the only education offered in trade unions or political organizations came from a communist. From 1947 he had worked in a factory in Port Elizabeth; in the local A.N.C.'s activities he was proving to be a brilliant organizer, attentive to detail, perceptive and fair-minded.

New Brighton, where Matji and Njongwe lived, was the main African township with about 100,000 inhabitants. It lies about six miles outside Port Elizabeth. This was the true centre of Xhosa political life since Umtata (seat of the Transkei Tribal Council) virtually provided a rubber stamp for Government. Port Elizabeth was an expanding factory town with the highest concentration of industrialized Africans in the country. The resulting potential political strength was intensified by the fact that they were one people, the Xhosa, with a long history of struggle. Unlike the Zulus and Bapedi they had not been militaristic nor were their chiefs ever dictators. Their society, like that of the Bechuana and Basuto, had been administered through a democratic tribal gathering, the *nkundla*. For a century their élite had been well educated in the missionary colleges of the Eastern Cape. However, although fine leaders such as Rubusana and Godlo had emerged in the past, in the Cape they had generally speaking been lulled politically by the comparatively liberal atmosphere. As a result Xhosa leadership had found more scope in the National Executive of the A.N.C. With the formation of the Youth League branches in Port Elizabeth and East London from 1947, the radical leadership for which the people were now ripe had emerged.

Eastern Cape leaders had distinctive qualities; often passionately religious, a deep sense of being part of the people, and self-effacing: this characteristic had become almost a cult, inherited perhaps from the democratic Xhosa system. This did not mean that there were no personalities among them: there were many—Gladstone Tshume, a volatile Wesleyan; Mrs. Florence Matomela, one of the founders of the reviving A.N.C.'s Women's League, mother of five, wise and daring. There were left-wing trade unionists—Raymond Mhlaba, solid and forceful; Caleb Mayekiso,

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wirily energetic; Mrs. Frances Baard, former domestic servant and teacher, who helped to form the local Food and Canning Workers' Union and who, by 1950, was Secretary of the A.N.C. Women's League in Port Elizabeth.

The Cape Congress was proud that the A.N.C. adopted a salute it had evolved at the instance of the Fort Hare Youth League—four fingers clenched to signify unity, determination, solidarity and militancy, with the thumb up, representing the horn of Africa—Cape Guardafui—to show that Africans in South Africa were a part of the continent as a whole.

By early July, 1950, the Suppression of Communism Act had been driven through Parliament, becoming law on the last day of the Session; rendering the Communist Party illegal (it had already dissolved itself); throwing together any who tried to bring about a social, political or economic change in the country under the definition of 'Communist'; and empowering the Minister of Justice to 'name' any whom he thought communist, and to ban them from organizations, meetings, or areas. The penalty for furthering the interests of a banned organization was up to ten years' imprisonment; and for defying the Minister's ukase, up to three years. Protests though hot and widespread were ineffectual.

Men who had previously belonged both to the Communist Party and the A.N.C. now concentrated on the latter. Despite noisy opposition from the Youth League, J. B. Marks was elected President of the Transvaal Congress (simultaneously becoming Vice-President of the new Transvaal Peace Council). Moroka had supported Marks while Selope Thema, backed by Radebe, protested by forming a National-Minded Bloc within Congress.

Meanwhile neither Matthews nor Moroka had yet resigned from the Natives' Representative Council. With other members they awaited an explanation of the policy of apartheid from the new Minister of Native Affairs. Dr. H. F. Verwoerd made his début before the Council at a time of a new incidence of police shooting. In the Witziesshoek Reserve, land hunger and cattle culling had driven people to angry protest since 1947. The protests had reached a climax in inter-tribal fighting; when police intervened sixteen Africans were killed and forty injured. Dr. Verwoerd spoke aggrievedly of the bloodshed after the Government had in its kindness tried to provide services for the welfare of the people. He went on to lecture Moroka and Matthews, Mosaka, Lutuli and

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the others on apartheid. Did they want to collaborate, or did they want to lead the Bantu and the Whites 'to a fate which will lead to a fight to the death?' The Government, he said, 'believes in the rule or mastery of the European in his area but believes equally in the rule or mastery of the Bantu in his area.' Again there was a last straw—Verwoerd's concluding remark implied that the N.R.C. were not to be allowed to discuss matters of political policy. When he had gone the Council, after a long procedural wrangle with his deputy, unanimously adjourned *sine die*.

All this was somewhat academic as the Government had already announced its intention to abolish the Council. When Moroka and Matthews finally complied with the long-promised boycott, at the end of 1950, their protest had lost its point. However they did manage to stage their boycott before Parliament abolished the N.R.C. in 1951.

On the death of General Smuts in September, 1950, Moroka had said that in the heat of the bitterest political battles which Africans had ceaselessly waged against him, they had been 'irresistibly and continually conscious of the giant nature of his mind and soul.' Moroka and Matthews were consistent in emphasizing the A.N.C.'s desire for people of all races to remain in South Africa and to have freedom. But, as Matthews told a Youth Rally, 'We hate injustice. Injustice must be rooted out of this land.' And for all the fiery nationalism of the younger men, an interested member of the United Party who attended a Cape conference found it crowded with the sort of people seen in church congregations and thought the standard of speeches well in advance of white conferences he had attended.

The A.N.C. was becoming ever more active, with Moroka addressing packed meetings in the usually quiescent Western Cape; with Africans, particularly women, flocking to gatherings in Bloemfontein; with Sibande slogging away on behalf of farm labourers in Bethal. After a useless exchange of correspondence with Verwoerd, Sibande was taking new visitors round the farms—this time a reporter and photographer from *Drum* magazine. Its sensational report at last provoked a Commission of Inquiry. Along the Reef, Marks and Bopape were busy. In the Youth League's branches nationalism flourished. Peter Mda, who had carried on the League's propaganda virtually single-handed, had broken down in serious ill-health, and as the obvious men, Tambo

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and Mandela were too busy studying, a comparative newcomer was elected President—Godfrey Pitje, who unlike the majority of teachers was prepared to take the risk of taking part in politics.

Only in Natal was the Youth League hindered. The equivocal Champion disliked giving the young men scope and quarrelled with Msimang who disagreed with him. The 200 members of the Natal Youth League determined to challenge Champion's dictatorial insistence on appointing his own Executive. They chose Chief Albert Lutuli as a suitable replacement as President. Ngubane had known him as an efficient teacher at Adams College; he was a popular Chief, a good Christian and family man, and his visits to India and the United States to attend missionary conferences and to lecture on behalf of the Congregational Church were an added asset. Besides he was consistent, an appealing quality after Champion's instability. He had the attraction of being a newcomer to Congress politics; an idealist, which was a change from some of the self-seekers who at times had deflected supporters. One young man dubbed him a 'good boy' of missionaries. But this view was soon over-ridden.

On the eve of the elections for the Natal Executive, in 1941, Lutuli was asked to stand. He was unwilling because he knew that Msimang was already in the running and did not wish to displace this loyal leader, nor set off any more of the personality quarrels that for so long had debilitated Natal. Msimang said he was ready to stand down. Lutuli made a further point: 'I am only a green-horn and not keen on involving myself when I know so little about politics.' The Youth League assured him of support. He was anxious to serve his people and so, he told them, 'If this is how you feel, I will try and do what I can.'

On the following day the election took place. Champion and Lutuli were nominated for the Presidency. Lutuli was elected by a small majority. Selby Msimang was re-elected Secretary.

In Johannesburg since 1950 Walter Sisulu had been busy working out ideas for carrying through the Programme of Action. In considering what form the Civil Disobedience would take, not being a Gandhian he wanted it to be 'typically South African and militant.' He talked it over with Mandela to whom he put the suggestion that all races should be invited to join in the action. Mandela disliked this, fearing that Africans would be dominated by other races. But in time he came to agree.

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On June 17, 1951, members of the A.N.C. Executive attended the huge funeral of Dr. Seme, the founder of the A.N.C. The service was taken by the new and as yet untried Bishop of Johannesburg, Ambrose Reeves. As soon as it was over, the Congress Executive hurried from the cemetery. Forty years earlier Seme had planned an organization to 'defend' the African people's 'rights and privileges'. Now Moroka, Sisulu and their colleagues were planning to fight for those rights by non-violent methods. That afternoon they approved the outline of their coming campaign. They agreed to meet jointly with the South African Indian Congress Executive. The two Executives appointed a committee consisting of Sisulu, Marks, Mandela, Tloome, Dadoo and the Cachalia brothers. They prepared a blueprint which Moroka and Z. K. Matthews approved. It was circulated to Congresses throughout the country.

By December 1951 the Provincial Congresses had studied the blueprint—all but Natal where Champion, who had received the plans just before his defeat, had kept them to himself. Lutuli only learnt of the proposed campaign of civil disobedience as he set off for the A.N.C.'s annual conference. There was no time to consult the Natal Executive and branches. All he could do was discuss the proposals with delegates to the conference as they drove to Bloemfontein.

Once again the red brick Magasa Hall in the location was the scene of high drama. But first, typically, it took its leisurely course, with only the Press arriving on time. The next two hours passed in delegates strolling or driving up until all 300, with a handful of reporters, packed themselves into the hot hall. Dr. Bokwe, the Speaker of Congress, was ill; so the delegates elected Chief Lutuli to act for him. This was his first public appearance as an A.N.C. leader. He quickly made a good impression.

The conference began with everybody singing the anthem *Nkosi Sikelel' i-Afrika*. The dingy hall was transformed by the rich, solemn singing. A young English visitor, Anthony Sampson, there on behalf of *Drum* magazine, studied the passionate faces around him—a delicate little clergyman, straining his thin throat with singing; a ragged old man, swinging his arms to the rhythm, gazing rapturously at the rafters; a bulging woman shouting every syllable with indignation. . . .

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*Lord Bless us,
Us Your Children*

As the singing died away, Moroka, immaculate as always, rose quietly, lifted his hand in the Congress salute, and shouted, 'Mayibuye' with a long rumble on the last sound 'Boo—Yáa' and the crowd roared back—'Afriká!'¹ Formalities; then the proposal was put: mass protests on April 6, 1952, Van Riebeeck Day, when white South Africans would celebrate 300 years of white rule. Unless the Government repealed six particular unjust laws, passive resistance would be launched to defy those laws.

The response was clamorous. It was hard for Lutuli to stand up and explain Natal's unreadiness. One angry woman yelled at him, 'Coward!' In the overwhelming agreement that the campaign should be on, it was conceded that Natal should join in as soon as the Province was ready.

The news went round the world. The Africans of South Africa planned to defy the laws. Overseas it was observed that they had emphasized that their struggle was not directed against any race but 'against the unjust laws which keep in perpetual subjection and misery vast sections of the population.' Overseas it was recognized that the non-whites were struggling 'for the transformation of conditions which will restore human dignity, equality, and freedom to every South African.' But in South Africa the whites condemned the decision. Liberals went out of their way to try to dissuade the African leaders from action that they believed would end in disaster. Xuma, the anti-Indian Selope Thema, and Manilal Gandhi (the Mahatma's son who pursued an independent way in Natal), all expressed foreboding. The latter said: 'Congress leaders haven't got the true spirit of sacrifice.' The foretellers of disaster found support for their arguments a few days later when, at the height of the crime wave on the overcrowded, frustration-ridden Witwatersrand, riots broke out between law-abiding Africans and gangs, and between tribal groups; these resulted in the death of forty-one people and injury to hundreds.

Through 1951 the Government had piled one abuse of freedom upon another: making the Suppression of Communism Law retroactive, attacking trade unionists, withdrawing passports, setting up Bantu Authorities in a perversion of tribalism, initiating the

¹ *Drum*. A. Sampson.

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prolonged illegal onslaught on the entrenched clauses of the constitution with the object of removing Coloured people from the voters' roll, and mocking both the widespread protests of the non-whites and the vast Torch Commando protests of white citizens against any change in the constitution.

In this situation how could the leaders of the A.N.C. prove equal to their formidable task of maintaining non-violence?

XVI

1952: The Defiance Campaign



Moroka was studying Gandhi's writings. He practically abandoned his medical practice to travel from place to place. It did not trouble him, he said, 'as I felt I had something much more important for my people than my practice which only concerns patients; I firmly believed that I was doing the work not only for the African people but *everybody* in South Africa, irrespective of whether they liked it or not.' Professor Matthews has explained why Congress chose non-violence—partly because the A.N.C. consisted in the main of Christian people, and partly because it recognized that the proportions of the different races and their permanence, were of such a nature that violence would not solve the country's problems. 'We believe that a violent revolution would leave such an aftermath of bitterness and resentment,' he explained, 'that indeed the country would be unstable.' He also gave as an historical reason: 'the example of the bitterness which has existed between the Afrikaners and the English-speaking people as a result of the Boer War.'¹

The leaders were aware that the Government would probably react with force. But the alternative—to resign themselves to the position—was unthinkable and they were heartened by the practical and moral effectiveness of Gandhi's struggle. Although disillusioned by white liberal leadership they hoped also that by choosing democratic and humane methods, white democrats would be encouraged to join them. But perhaps most important of all was their aim to stir the spirit of their own people and give them confidence in their ability to destroy oppression through a direct challenge to the Government.

On January 21, 1952, from Thaba'Nchu, Dr. Moroka and Walter Sisulu wrote to the Prime Minister, Dr. Malan, pointing

¹ Treason Trial Record.

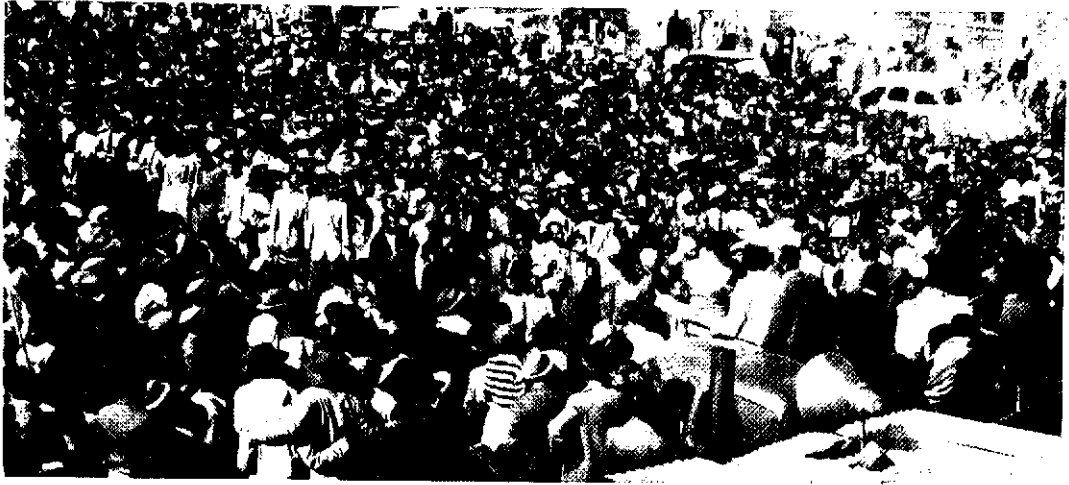
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to the long history of Congress's endeavour by constitutional methods to achieve the legitimate demands of the African people. Instead of responding to their desire for co-operation, the Government had increased repression, to the point where it was 'a matter of life and death to the people'. For the A.N.C. to remain quiet would be a betrayal of their trust. Among the laws that had aggravated the tense situation they listed six—the Pass Laws, Group Areas Act, Suppression of Communism Act, Separate Representation of Voters Act, Bantu Authorities Act, and Stock Limitation regulations. If the Government did not repeal these by February 29, Congress would hold demonstrations on Van Riebeeck day (April 6th) as a prelude to implementing the plan to defy unjust laws.

A week later the Prime Minister's Secretary wrote to Sisulu reproaching him for writing to the Prime Minister rather than the Minister of Native Affairs, and questioning his claim to speak authoritatively 'on behalf of the body known to the Government as the A.N.C.' It was 'self-contradictory,' he said, to claim that Bantu should be regarded as no different from Europeans, 'especially when it is borne in mind that these differences are permanent and not man made.' The Government had no intention of repealing the laws—in any event they were not 'oppressive and degrading', they were 'protective'. If Congress pursued the course indicated, the Prime Minister warned that the Government would 'make full use of the machinery at its disposal to quell any disturbances and thereafter deal adequately with those responsible for initiating subversive activity.'

On February 11, Moroka and Sisulu again wrote to the Prime Minister, pointing out that the A.N.C. at no time had accepted the Native Affairs Department as the correct channel. The point at issue was not, they declared, a biological question but one of citizenship rights. They added there was no alternative for the African people but to embark on the campaign. They re-emphasized the intention to conduct it in a peaceful manner. If disturbances occurred, they said, they 'will not be of our making'.

On April 6, the whites, still locked in an angry constitutional and legal struggle over the entrenched clauses, uneasily united to celebrate the tercentenary of Van Riebeeck's arrival in the Cape. Dr. Moroka compared their view of South Africa with that of the blacks. The whites, he said, saw a vast land they had opened up,



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5a Volunteers are called for—Walter Sisulu speaking

5b The Pledge—r. to 1. Dr. J. S. Moroka, Dr. Y. Dadoo, W. Sisulu,
Y. Cachalia





6a Women Defiers are arrested



6b Natal leader—M. B. Yengwa



6c Port Elizabeth leader—
Dr. J. N. Njongwe

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the mineral wealth extracted, the granaries filled, the factories, the thousands of schools, universities, churches which daily called on the God of Christ; and they saw thousands upon thousands of black men who for 300 years had ministered to them and by whose labour they had achieved this dazzling record of progress. 'But as we look back we see a picture of a different background and colour': how Christian Europeans took land from Non-Christian Non-Europeans; how the Fish River was made a bar between black and white in 1779; the first pass laws passed in 1809; Africans barred from skilled occupations in 1911; from land in 1913. 'We are forcibly reminded that politically we do not exist.'

In Freedom Square in Fordsburg, the Indian centre of Johannesburg, Dr. Moroka and Dr. Dadoo addressed a vast crowd, with Sisulu, Mandela, Cachalia, Kotane, Tloome and Bopape, beside them. Behind them banners were thrust high—VOTES FOR ALL, MALAN REMEMBER HOW HITLER FELL, AWAY WITH PASSES. Under a bright autumn sun the crowd listened intently for five hours. Moroka, robed in A.N.C. colours, was given a great ovation when he urged people to seek freedom together. He frankly expressed the Africans' disillusionment with the Christianity of Europeans: 'To you was preached a religion of love and mutual trust,' he told the crowd, and having trusted their neighbours, this very religion which came from Europeans 'has torn you asunder'. Government efforts to re-divide the people into ethnic groups—this must be resisted—'you are one race'—and the white man's oppression that had caused Africans to look on the Coloured people and the Indians as foreigners, while they in turn had been made to look down on Africans—this must be resisted and 'we must come together or we will not live to see the dawn of the day of freedom.'

Sisulu outlined the plan of action, Moroka called for a pledge of support, 'a solemn oath that we will muster all our forces of mind, body and soul to see that this state of affairs, these crushing conditions under which we live, shall not continue any longer.' This was the quiet Doctor's moment, a moment of fulfilment in the service of his people. He called for 10,000 volunteers. And when he appealed for silence at the end of the meeting, immediately the people were quiet and went away.

All over the country people came together—in Port Elizabeth there was the greatest gathering when tens of thousands met in a

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religious service to pray for freedom. And, as the Bloemfontein *Friend* commented, the country 'breathed a sigh of relief' at the peaceful nature of all these passionately felt demonstrations.

Nelson Mandela, who with Oliver Tambo had just set up a law practice in Johannesburg, was appointed National Volunteer-in-Chief, with Maulvi Cachalia his chief assistant. From the A.N.C.'s dingy office in Johannesburg and from numerous small township houses there and in the main towns, the organizing went on. In Orlando, as in New Brighton, the leaders would go from house to house, explaining policy, sometimes talking all through the night. As always there were the problems of being black in towns catering only for whites. As they travelled about the country perhaps the only train they could catch arrived late at night in a strange town—there would be no hotel for non-whites, no taxis for them, and no telephones in the majority of African houses in the outlying locations. So they would walk the miles out to the location, knock on a likely-looking door, sometimes to find themselves welcomed by an enthusiastic householder but sometimes rebuffed by the cautious. There were occasions when Mandela or Tambo—the sophisticated young lawyers—would find themselves literally stranded in the streets. In Port Elizabeth Jimmy Njongwe proved to be a born organizer, and with his team set a pattern for organizing from the ground up, borrowing cars, sharing in the cost of petrol, covering both country districts and the streets of New Brighton. At public meetings the leaders encouraged people to come forward and almost every street soon had someone to lead it, and enough small donations had been raised for Robert Matji to give up his job in a factory and do full-time secretarial work.

June 26, the anniversary of the A.N.C.'s first call for a stoppage of work in 1950, was chosen for the day. On May 31 the A.N.C. held a splendid banquet in Korsten—the non-white area of Port Elizabeth—to combine this announcement with a welcome to National leaders—among them Moroka, Sisulu, Naicker, Bokwe and Tambo. At one point when a photographer approached a group of leaders, they adjusted their ties and put on their pleasantest expressions, to find he was from the Special Branch!

The banquet was also a farewell to Professor Matthews who was about to go to New York with the approval of the National Executive, who saw the usefulness of having a representative abroad at this time. The Professor was to be Henry Luce Visiting

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Professor to the Union Theological Seminary. The A.N.C. presented him with a brief-case in token of all that he had done.

The world press took up the announcement that the Defiance Campaign would begin on June 26 and reported the prayer meeting that followed on the Sunday, when 3,000 Africans met in New Brighton—other races could not go in to the 'location'. There were no bands, no uniforms, no marching to whip up the masses. The black, green and gold Congress flag blew in a strong cold wind. Women led the singing until the leaders arrived and then they all solemnly sang *Nkosi Sikelel' i-Afrika*. Old bearded men were there, small children in rags watched, and a praise singer, dressed in skins with a cowtail whip and a small assegai, chanted traditional praises to the leaders. From cars the police watched.

Professor Matthews told the crowd: 'Fighting for freedom is not a picnic . . . it is a very painful process and in that fight there is going to be suffering and even death.'

J. B. Marks, in a recorded speech, because Government had restricted his movements, said that the Government had placed the Non-Europeans in a position from which there was no alternative but to fight back. And Dr. Moroka led the people in taking the pledge: to fight for freedom even though it brought them suffering and death. 'We solemnly pledge that we shall exert all our moral, physical and financial effort to attain our objective—the freedom of the oppressed peoples of South Africa.' As he did so he was feeling that somebody had to lead the African people, it was his lot to do it, and seeing that this was so, he must 'do it as efficiently and bravely as possible.' To the crowd he reiterated: 'We do not hate the Dutch or the English, but we hate the oppressive laws under which we are compelled to live.' There was a crying need, he said, to evangelize the Europeans. 'Our struggle is a mortal one, but it is waged on the principle of non-violence.'

At sunset the crowd dispersed, and went home.

Among the gatherings about the country when Congress leaders and their followers took the pledge, was a small meeting in the bare rooms of the A.N.C. office in Durban, an office that was part of M. B. Yengwa's bookkeeping firm, in a building just off the busy Indian shopping centre. The new President of the Natal Congress, Chief Lutuli, was about to take his first political act. He said to his Executive, 'Look, we will be calling upon people to make very important demonstrations and unless we are sure of the road and

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prepared to travel along it ourselves, we have no right to call other people along it.' Yengwa, who had just become Secretary of Natal and who had been inspired as a boy by his father's imprisonment in the 1919 anti-pass campaign, described what happened after that: 'We all said we were prepared and he said too he was prepared, and he asked us to pray. We gave our pledge and we prayed.' For Yengwa, an alert and popular member of the Youth League, Lutuli at that moment was transformed from being Chief into a different man altogether. Previously over-conscious of his duties as a Chief, after that night-long session of discussion, dedication and planning, he was, according to Yengwa who worked closely with him, 'not irresponsible, but prepared to damn the consequences as long as he was advancing the cause of the movement.' Lutuli's conscious decision to take part in the Defiance Campaign had become the turning point in his life.

All this time the forces of opposition were building up, not only from the Government and the United Party but from the white liberals who continued to try to dissuade Congress leaders, arguing that their plans were too ambitious and were inviting Government's fierce retaliation. There was the strenuous opposition from certain groups of Africans. Selope Thema and his splinter movement, the National-Minded Bloc, denounced the campaign as a capitulation to foreign left-wing elements, and declared that Africans were not organized for civil disobedience. But he was old, increasingly unreliable, the editor of a white-owned newspaper, and his influence had grown negligible. The basically Trotskyite Non-European Unity Movement—which had branched off from the All African Convention and absorbed into it a number of Coloured groups, many of them representing teachers—automatically opposed anything that the A.N.C. initiated. But its membership was small, largely confined to the Cape, and its opposition had little if any effect. Then to the enchantment of the Government, a Bantu National Congress was formed. It too rejected the A.N.C.'s campaign and allied itself approvingly with Government. One member of the Government claimed on its behalf that it had two million Bantu members. He did not tell the House of Assembly that this group of Native herbalists had held one meeting at which its audience consisted of six Africans and one white; nor did he tell the House when its leader was imprisoned for theft and forgery.

The most serious handicap to the campaign was the Govern-

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ment's naming of 500 people under the Suppression of Communism Act. Apart from members of the Communist Party the Government had named others as it saw fit. The first to suffer were Marks, Bopape, Kotane and Johnston Ngwevela, President of the Cape Western Congress and a stalwart since the early 'twenties, all of whom were banned for life from membership of the A.N.C. Dr. Dadoo was similarly banned from the Indian Congress.

But though Government action might be a handicap, it was not a hindrance. These men promptly volunteered to be the first defiers. During June they addressed meetings, were promptly arrested and imprisoned for several weeks. And in June, Mandela, having toured the country, went through the enrolment of volunteers with Maulvi Cachalia. A code of discipline in remaining non-violent was put to each volunteer, as well as a code of conduct—volunteers should be erect and alert, with a high standard of cleanliness and the avoidance of rowdiness or any semblance of drunkenness. In Port Elizabeth, Dr. Njongwe, Acting President of the Cape during Professor Matthews's absence, appealed to the public not to participate spontaneously because the campaign must be carried out by disciplined volunteers, who would 'submit to arrest willingly and with gladness in their hearts, knowing that ours is a fight against malnutrition, high infantile mortality, landlessness, deprivation, humiliation, oppression, and against destruction of family life and faith in Christianity as a way of life.'

The Parliamentary session ended—a session turbulent from the Government's persistent attacks on the constitution, condemned for the ousting of former communists from various councils, including Sam Kahn from Parliament, and the banning of *The Guardian*, the left-wing newspaper (which was promptly succeeded by *The Clarion*).

On June 25, in Port Elizabeth, African women, led by the wife of a Minister, held prayers through the day and night. This was in the tradition of women meeting to pray for their husbands and sons before they went out to action.

Very early on June 26, a cold, mid-winter morning, the first batch of volunteers moved out of New Brighton township, accompanied by a crowd singing 'What have we done, we the African people?' The twenty-five men and three women all wore Congress armbands and, shouting 'Mayibuye Afrika' went through the EUROPEANS ONLY entrance to the New Brighton railway

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station. Most of them were young—in their twenties—but two were over forty. Florence Matomela, the militant housewife, was amongst them. As soon as they went through the entrance a white police sergeant came and told their leader, Raymond Mhlaba, that they were contravening the law. He replied that it was a political act and deliberate; the police arrested them and escorted them to the other side of the station which, they noted with satisfaction, meant using the EUROPEANS ONLY bridge. A trainload of Africans drawn up at a platform shouted encouragement and gave the thumbs up sign. The campaign had begun. Mhlaba was sentenced to thirty days' imprisonment and the others to fifteen days.

In the Transvaal Nana Sita, the Gandhian President of the Transvaal Indian Congress, led forty-two Africans and ten Indians into Boksburg location, entering it without permits. They sang 'Jan van Riebeeck has stolen our freedom' as they approached the waiting police. They were arrested. That night in Johannesburg, the A.N.C. held a meeting which dispersed at eleven o'clock, the curfew hour after which Africans required 'special' passes. The volunteers moved out into the streets of the city's commercial area. Police, tensely waiting, came forward to arrest them. Willingly, singing '*Nkosi Sikelel' i-Afrika*', they clambered into the police vans and were driven off to the cells. Altogether 106 people were arrested that day in the Transvaal, among them Mandela and Sisulu. Mandela, as chief organizer, was not meant to defy and was arrested for failing to produce a pass! Subsequently acquitted he continued to organize.

During July more than 1,500 men and women defied—volunteers whom the historian Eric Walker described¹ as being generally decent church-going people, who preceded their acts of defiance by prayer-meetings. Maulvi Cachalia, the Muslim leader working with Mandela in taking on volunteers, got a firm impression that the African volunteers had so readily accepted non-violence because many of them were Christians and 'when they think in terms of Jesus Christ,' he remarked, 'they think in terms of non-violence. I found out that from childhood they would go to church and talk about Jesus Christ and his teachings, and it must have made an impact upon their minds.' In Bethal Sibande led volunteers to gaol and was imprisoned for a month. Leaders' wives were taking part and going to prison—for instance Mrs. Njongwe,

¹ *A History of Southern Africa.*

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a pretty nurse about to have a baby; in Cradock, the thin, quiet Mrs. Calata, leader of the Mothers Union of Loyal African Women, led women in praying on a street corner. Even in the fruit-farming village of Worcester where, twenty years before, Professor Thaele and Ndobe and Tonjeni had been active, there were a few defiers, mostly Coloured people. The Transkei and the mines remained the weak spots in Congress's organizing. Although Sisulu had visited the Transkei, it was under the influence of notoriously cautious chiefs and teachers, either a-political or when they did take an interest in politics usually joining the moderate Voters' Association and the negative A.A.C.

But elsewhere the campaign mounted, stimulated by Government threats, and also by events in other parts of the continent. In Central Africa the recently formed African National Congresses and the chiefs were hotly opposing the idea of Federation, and in West Africa countries moved towards self-government.

During August more than 2,000 volunteers went to gaol, including Cape Town's first batch. One of their leaders was a powerful matriarch, Mrs. Annie Silinga from the Transkei, who was inspired to join Congress at this time and soon was delightedly spending a month in prison.

The national leaders of the campaign were arrested, and this, far from deterring volunteers, spurred them on. Moroka, Sisulu, Mandela, together with Dadoo, the Cachalias, Marks, Bopape and several others, were accused of defying bans under the Suppression of Communism Act. They appeared for the preparatory examination in a court crowded out and surrounded by people singing Defiance Campaign songs. The case was adjourned for several months.

September found 2,358 resisters going to gaol and the Eastern Cape's leaders—Njongwe, Matji, and Mrs. Matomela, among them—arrested under the Suppression of Communism Act and sentenced to nine months' hard labour, suspended for three years. The news of their arrest immediately set hundreds more defying. Port Elizabeth and East London were responding magnificently and some country districts—for instance Aliwal North, under the leadership of the Rev. J. Skomolo—were producing even more women than men among the volunteers. Among the most popular leaders in Port Elizabeth were the Tshume family—Gladstone was a great orator but with a stutter that made him dance with

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exasperation; this became such an attraction with the crowds that his brother, the Rev. Ben Tshume, a Methodist leader, and their nephew Tamie, a fiery youth leader, also tended to stamp when making speeches and became known as the 'dancing orators of New Brighton'. The religious fervour of the Eastern Cape resisters was also a characteristic of the volunteers in the Free State.

The discipline and humour, the rich singing of the volunteers as they went into the EUROPEANS ONLY sections of railway stations and post offices, and from there were driven off to prison, aroused the spontaneous admiration of the outside world. The *New York Times*¹ in doubting whether the saintly method of passive resistance could be applied for long, warned that under the Nationalist Government South Africa was headed for 'shipwreck', and that a solution to the country's problems based on pure racialism was 'false, immoral and repugnant'. The *Economist*² commented that 'the dispossessed have found a powerful totem: nationalism.' But most significant was the report in the *London Times*³ that delegates of the Asian and Arab States in the United Nations had unanimously called for a debate on the racial policy of the South African Government for its 'flagrant violations of human rights involving the arrest of 4,000 people engaged in passive resistance against the segregation laws.'

Lutuli was ready to lead Natal into the campaign by the end of September. Preliminary meetings had been held separately from the Natal Indian Congress out of uncertainty as to whether Zulus were yet ready to co-operate with Indians. Caution was happily confounded by the great attendance of Africans at meetings and processions, led by Zulus and Indians, although the actual number of volunteers was not high. Their technique in Durban was that used in the 1946 passive resistance. Meetings were held as people left their offices at the end of the day. On a platform made of two lorries backed together, Lutuli would lead the singing in his mellow baritone: 'Thina Sizwe! Thina sizwe esinsundu'—We Africans! We Africans!

*We cry for our land
They took it. They took it,
Europeans
They must let our country go. . . .*

¹ August 23, 1952.

² August 16, 1952.

³ September 13, 1952.

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Or Yengwa, his gay countenance lit up, led them in singing—

*Hey! Malan, open the gaol doors, we want to enter,
we volunteers. . . .*

with the chanting pronunciation of 'voluntiya'! These folk songs had become a part of the campaign and often were composed in gaol. The rhythm and the mime that went with them was infectious, and some were sung to familiar hymn tunes or, like *Mayibuye Afrika* to a popular tune like *Clementine*. In Durban they aroused people to an exultant mood as they escorted volunteers through the main streets to the Railway Station. The first batch was led by 'Stalwart' Simelane—a tall thin Zulu with an amused look—and Dr. Naicker. Women were active—Bertha Mkize, a large, well-known crusader, was one, and the wives of some of the Indian leaders, with the Meers and the Singhs well to the fore.

When the municipality prohibited meetings in Durban, Lutuli and Naicker promptly announced a gathering. They were arrested with some of their supporters; not for the first time in the campaign police had to seek their help in dispersing the surrounding crowd. But after being charged in court, the case was adjourned indefinitely and the accused were released.

Not long after, Lutuli was sent for by the Secretary of Native Affairs, Dr. W. W. M. Eiselen, who politely asked him, as a Chief, to account for his participation in the campaign—for his 'asking people to break the law'.

Lutuli firmly opposed this interpretation: 'Not to *break* the law,' he declared. 'To signify in this way our rejection of a particular *kind* of law.'

But Eiselen rejected his explanation that he had kept Congress politics apart from his duties as a Chief. 'You can't be a Jekyll and Hyde,' was his retort as he told Lutuli to decide: he must resign from Congress or from the Chieftainship.

Lutuli went from Pretoria to Johannesburg to report to the Congress working committee meeting in Mandela's house. He told them he had no intention of resigning from either position because in his own mind there was no conflict between the two. The others agreed—'Let the Government act rather than you doing their dirty work for them.' Lutuli went straight on to be guest of honour at the Transvaal A.N.C.'s Annual Conference in Lady Selborne township, Pretoria. From a platform draped

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with the Congress flag, under posters proclaiming FREEDOM FROM WANT, FREEDOM OF THE PRESS, APARTHEID TO H . . . , he addressed a crowd of thousands who cheered his rousing speech and its reference to the campaign's achievement in awakening African political consciousness.

As J. B. Marks and David Bopape, the President and Secretary of the Transvaal Congress, had been banned from the organization, there were new elections. Nelson Mandela, in spite of being banned from gatherings, was unanimously elected President in his absence. The Vice-President who therefore acted for Mandela was the Rev. Nimrod Tantsi, a tall slightly-stooping, courteous man with a broad moustache; the Presiding Elder of the African Methodist Episcopal church, and son of one of its founders. He had been interested in the A.N.C. since its foundation when he was seventeen. After attending a school run by Charlotte Maxeke he had become an organizer for the A.N.C. in the Eastern Transvaal, dealing with the local problems of the farm labourers and miners. From 1938 he had been Chaplain of the Transvaal Congress.

Mandela's stirring presidential address was read on his behalf. Its theme was 'No easy walk to freedom'—a phrase taken from one of Nehru's books.

At this time Mandela and other leaders were approached by two Senators representing natives, J. D. Rheinallt Jones and William Ballinger, who made yet another attempt to restrain the A.N.C., calling on them in the interests of peace, to withdraw their plans. This interview considerably coloured Mandela's attitude towards white liberals. The Campaign was, in fact, intensified early in October with the positive objective of focusing the attention of the United Nations on South Africa. At the United Nations, Michael Scott was lobbying and Professor Matthews was able to attend some sessions with news of the Campaign's progress. The A.N.C. was at its strongest—100,000 paid-up members, whereas a few months earlier there had only been 7,000. The white-owned African Press, usually critical of the A.N.C., had turned from scepticism to encouragement as it found messages of support for the Campaign pouring in from all over the world. In servants' quarters, in factories, in villages, Africans excitedly discussed it. The Afrikaans Press sometimes veered on hysteria; the English-speaking newspapers increasingly carried pictures and encouraging reports.

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The Government, finding that their attempt to cut off the head of the resistance by arresting Moroka and the other leaders, did not have the desired effect, were discussing amending laws to enable them more easily to get at the instigators. But an encouraging rift in the white front was apparent when, in Johannesburg, the new Anglican Bishop, Ambrose Reeves, joined with the four Members of Parliament representing Natives and with academics and other liberals, in calling for a return to the old Cape liberal policy.

October was the peak of the Defiance Campaign.

On October 18, at New Brighton railway station near Port Elizabeth, two Africans who were alleged to have stolen a pot of paint were shot at by a white policeman. After firing twenty-one shots the policeman withdrew, leaving an enraged crowd attacking the station. In the subsequent riot seven Africans and four Europeans were killed (none of them police), and twenty-seven people were injured and much property damaged. The A.N.C. immediately condemned the violence, expressing sincere sympathy for all the families who had suffered, and demanding a judicial inquiry. Sisulu went down to make a personal investigation. Government refused the demand. Everywhere in the Eastern Cape the police were reinforced. Njongwe was away at the time touring the country and recruiting volunteers, while Matji and Joe Matthews were busy in Kimberley. At this point two New Brighton leaders, allegedly influenced by one of the white left-wing, called for an indefinite strike. This call was to cause a serious conflict. Moroka, unaware that Njongwe had not been consulted, blamed him; and Njongwe first heard of the strike call over the radio. It was a curious action from men who criticized Njongwe for pursuing the 'cult of the individual' and for acting without consulting his Executive. The authorities' immediate reaction was to ban meetings in a wide area, to enforce a stricter curfew and—a most provocative act—for the first time in those parts to enforce influx control and the pass laws. Throughout the country protest meetings were held. Meanwhile Moroka and Njongwe ordered that the call be modified to a one-day strike; this turned out to be a remarkable success—a 90% stay-away according to the most restrained among the white newspapers. Important employers—the South African Railways and the Municipality—promptly dismissed thousands of African workers.

Nearby, in East London, the ban on meetings set off a new and

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more ghastly riot. A prayer meeting was charged by the police, the crowd flung stones, the police fired, and, leaving several dead and many wounded drove away through the location, firing indiscriminately as they went. In a paroxysm of fury the crowd turned and killed the first Whites they saw—a nun who was a doctor coming to help the wounded, and an insurance agent. Once again the A.N.C. demanded a judicial inquiry, but the Government even snubbed the Parliamentary Opposition's demand for an inquiry. Congress sent Robert Resha, one of the Sophiatown leaders, to make an investigation in East London. The Rev. James Calata, addressing an African Ministers' Conference, deplored the delay in the appointment of an inquiry. He was served with bans under the Suppression of Communism Act, prohibiting him not only from Congress activity but from religious and educational gatherings for some months.

On November 8, in Kimberley, new riots occurred. Fourteen Africans, including two women were shot dead by the police, and thirty-five wounded. In the thick of helping to alleviate the chaos and suffering that followed were two local Congress leaders—Arthur Letele, a popular doctor (the only one for 30,000 people) and Mr. Sesedi, a butcher and an old man. It was a horrifying experience as they drove around seeing the injured people. People looked mad, with a fire in their eyes; even people Letele knew quite well looked crazy, and he had to tell them to keep away so that he could get to the injured and the corpses. The bullets were whizzing past. Teenagers were milling around saying 'They killed about ten of ours, lets get theirs.' Then they turned to attack the clinic and the new crèche, the beer hall and the Administration Offices. What added to Letele's misery was that this should happen in the middle of the Defiance Campaign, destroying much of the A.N.C.'s work just as they had won so much support. A reserved man with a mildly anxious expression and a soft voice, his gentleness belied tremendous energy both as a doctor and an A.N.C. organizer. In the latter role he had built up the Kimberley branch from fifty to several thousand members. On the day after the riot a convoy of police drove into the location armed to the teeth. Letele was among those arrested. He was charged under the Suppression of Communism Act as well as with incitement to public violence. The police tried to prove that the A.N.C. was involved in the rioting, and failed totally. The second charge

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against Dr. Letele was dropped; on the first charge he was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment suspended for two years.

In an inquiry made by the Kimberley City Council, several witnesses spoke of low wages, restriction on movement, denial of the right to sell their labour in the best market and the need for traditional home brewing rather than recourse to beer halls and illicit shebeens, as causes of the frustration driving people to take the law into their own hands.¹

Government refusal to appoint a judicial Commission of Inquiry into all these riots—including one on the Rand—strengthened a growing belief that *agents provocateurs* had set the Port Elizabeth and Kimberley riots off to provide a pretext for suppressing the passive resistance and to alienate sympathy for the Defiance Campaign. For the first time in the history of modern South Africa the Africans' militant achievement had kept the initiative in their hands. Only violence could rob them of this hard-won initiative.

African support for the Campaign continued despite harsher sentences which included some defiers being sentenced to strokes as well as imprisonment. In October 2,254 went to gaol. In London distinguished men appealed for funds to assist the families of the defiers. At the U.N., despite angry repudiation by the South African Government, a resolution was passed setting up a Commission to inquire into apartheid: the first direct international onslaught on apartheid as such, a fresh encouragement to the Congress members.

Another source of encouragement was Lutuli's reaction when the Government announced his dismissal from the chieftainship. Declaring that he would remain in the struggle, he added that he had embraced the non-violent technique because 'I am convinced it is the only non-revolutionary, legitimate and human way that could be used'. He only prayed that his resolve would be strengthened and that he should not be deterred by 'ridicule, imprisonment, concentration camp, flogging, banishment and even death', for the future might bring any of these.

Although Lutuli's statement had a profound effect on certain liberals—on Alan Paton, the author, for instance—a Congress appeal for white support in its campaign aroused only a few left-wingers in Johannesburg and Cape Town, among them

¹ *The Star*, January 23, 1953.

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Bettie du Toit, a flashing-eyed, dark, young Afrikaner trade unionist who was married to Yusuf Cachalia; and Albie Sachs, a law student and son of the trade unionist Solly Sachs—along with Patrick Duncan, son of the former Governor-General, and Freda Troup, daughter of a respected Pretoria family and author of a book on the Hereros' cases before the United Nations. Their action in defying together with Africans and Indians—who included Gandhi's son, Manilal—gave a new lift to the Campaign and gained world-wide publicity.

Even when the Government proclaimed penalties of up to a £300 fine or three years' imprisonment with lashes for incitement to break the law, volunteers were ready to test the Proclamation. One was Lilian Ngoyi, a youthful handsome forty-year old widow. Brought up in a religious household, her whole life had been a struggle against poverty. After only a year in high school she was compelled to get a job to support her asthmatic father and her mother and brother. She could remember, as a child, delivering washing for her mother to a white family, who refused to let her and her baby brother come into the house; later she saw the woman take her dog into the house. This haunted Lilian. 'Why could an African child not get into this woman's house and there is a dog in her house?' During her family's frequent prayers she wondered, 'Why cannot God answer my parents? Something is wrong. The more we pray the more poor we are.' Years later when the Defiance Campaign began she felt inspired; but when she wanted to offer herself for defiance her daughter was sick in hospital and her mother asked, 'How can you when your child is ill?' So Lilian, thinking back to Abraham and Isaac, called her mother outside and showed her all the lights in Orlando East where they lived and said, 'If all the children in those lights can be saved and my one dies, which would be better?' Her mother replied: 'Even if yours dies, if the rest are saved.' With four other women she went into the European section of the Johannesburg Post Office to test out the new Proclamation. There she wrote a telegram to the Minister of Justice saying that he must remember that South Africa had been a peaceful place and would he please withdraw his proclamations. If not, he should remember what happened in Germany to Hitler and in Italy to Mussolini.

A European man who was standing alongside said, 'Annie, I think you are in the wrong department. Natives don't come this side'.

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So she explained, 'It is because I am sending a telegram to the Minister of Justice and because of his apartheid I must do it this side.'

The others were doing the same. A policeman got hold of Lilian Ngoyi's shoulder, pushed her and said, 'You are under arrest.'

She said, 'You need not mishandle me, because I know I am.'

He put them all into a van and they were taken to the cells. They had never been in gaol before and it was a horrible evening. When the case came to court they were defended by Oliver Tambo. After three remands they were discharged. Her daughter, too, recovered.

At the beginning of December, 280 defiers were gaoled. On December 2, Dr. Moroka, Sisulu, Mandela, Marks, Dadoo and the Cachalias, Bopape, Nana Sita, Tloome and others were tried under the Suppression of Communism Act for their leadership of the Campaign. What should have been the climax to the resistance was soured by a serious disagreement between Moroka and the others. He had disliked the panel of lawyers assisting the A.N.C. because among them were two or three former communists, and he had independently engaged a defence counsel. In a campaign of this nature such an action was unheard of and, furthermore, there were in the panel of lawyers men of known conservative convictions. Moroka's action was the outward manifestation of a long uneasiness that he had felt over left-wing influences from the Indian Congress. The younger A.N.C. leaders attributed his attitude in seeking an independent defence to sheer lack of political awareness, and believed that he had over-estimated A.N.C. power and his own security as an eminent doctor whom the Government would never touch, so that once he was arrested the wind was taken out of his sails. For his part Dr. Moroka said that he had expected to go to gaol.

Moroka was the only one of the leaders to take the witness stand. He pointed out that he was totally against communism, that his aim throughout his career had been to bring about harmonious relations between the races, that he had even contributed funds to enable needy white students to train as doctors and, finally, that he had cancelled the indefinite strike in the Eastern Cape as he had feared it would cause friction and possibly bloodshed.

His appearance in the witness box was another blow to his fellow accused who had understood that in conformity with the Defiance

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Campaign procedure he would not give evidence. Nor did it achieve any mitigation. Mr. Justice Rumpff, saying that the charge had 'nothing to do with communism as it is commonly known', sentenced all twenty men to nine months' imprisonment with hard labour suspended for two years, adding, 'I accept the evidence that you have consistently advised your followers to follow a peaceful course of action and to avoid violence in any shape or form. . . .'

On top of this sentence the Government issued a spate of orders banning leaders—fifty-two of them, including some of the ablest organizers—who from then on were banned for life from taking any part in the A.N.C.'s activities, or in the case of people of other races of their respective organizations. Penalties for infringement were up to ten years' imprisonment. In addition Nelson Mandela was severely restricted by a confinement order to the Johannesburg district for two years and a ban on his attending gatherings. Bopape was restricted nightly to Brakpan and could only be in Johannesburg during business hours to carry on the estate agency that he and J. B. Marks had established since they had both been banned from political activities.

The campaign ground to a halt. Time was needed to re-organize. In any event the annual conference was imminent; five replacements were needed for banned Executive members, but most important was the generally acknowledged fact that Dr. Moroka must be replaced as President-General.



SOPHIATOWN PROTESTS

7a Chief Lutuli Leads A.N.C. Procession

7b Fr. Huddleston with Robert Resha (dark coat) and Ida Mntwana (beret)





CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE
8a The Crowd Listens
8b Their Desires



XVII

1953: Aftermath



The favourite candidate for the Presidency was the dynamic Dr. Njongwe. Moroka offered himself for re-election. Nelson Mandela, after his brilliant success as Volunteer-in-Chief, was another impressive contender. In Natal, the Executive had suddenly decided to propose Albert Lutuli. As one of the Youth League, Ngubane, put it, this was the only effective answer to the Government's dismissal of him from Chieftainship. The twenty-two Natal delegates overcame Lutuli's hesitations to stand. While the Free State declared their intention to support Moroka, the Transvaal and the Cape were divided between Njongwe and Lutuli; Mandela had withdrawn in favour of Lutuli. At this point there was a far-reaching intervention behind the scenes when one of the men who had clashed with Njongwe over the Port Elizabeth strike succeeded in lobbying successfully against his candidature. Thus Njongwe—who had led the Eastern Cape brilliantly until its membership had risen from the lowest in the country to more than 60,000, while its volunteers in the Defiance Campaign had made up the vast majority of the thousands of those arrested—was dropped. The contest lay between Moroka and Lutuli.

The habitual exuberance of an election conference was heightened by the feelings of achievement and confidence that the Defiance Campaign had generated. The Natal lobbying began to have an effect: Lutuli's maturity and his natural authority which Congress traditionally sought in its President were great assets. Sisulu, for one, praised his frankness as exemplified at the 1951 conference when Mda attacked the United States and Lutuli (who was acting Speaker at the time) had vacated his seat to disassociate himself from Mda's opinion; and this at a time when America was unpopular because of its support for the South African Government. Lutuli had also proved courageous in frankly admitting

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Natal's unreadiness for the Defiance Campaign. His Natal colleagues lobbied with conviction based on their personal experience of his tirelessness; he 'throbbed with energy' as one of them put it.

In the end only the Free State remained loyal to Dr. Moroka.

'The Chief' was elected President-General by a large majority. Dr. Moroka saluted him: 'Albert Lutuli is a man who will stand for the rights of the African people through thick and thin.'

Moroka, in spite of the distress that he must have felt at being rejected, was to remain loyal and to say: 'Nothing shapes a man better than the A.N.C. It trims you well for life and its vicissitudes. I became quite a new man after I became a member. I had more interest in the welfare of the people—not that I was not interested before but you know I was looking at it from financial power which is a very selfish thing. The A.N.C. makes life really worth living. You feel that you are alive.'

The conference, taking place in the businesslike atmosphere of the Trades Hall of Johannesburg, went through in an urgent atmosphere as, with the threat of further draconian laws hanging over their heads, rhetoric and resolutions were cut to a minimum. The people of Sophiatown were being threatened with enforced removal from their homes, the Government was proposing Bantu Education, a perversion of education for Africans, new bans were clearly imminent. In view of all that lay ahead many people were asking: how would Lutuli do as the leader? Was he just a functionary?

As for his own feelings, he knew that he was in for a policy of militancy and realized that he was being honoured and yet given a very difficult part. He later recalled: 'I had already been hit hard by the Government but I felt this was a task one had to undertake in the interests of what is right. If you are physically able to carry on, you can't say "no" to a liberation task. It was an overwhelming call of the people and the voice of the people sometimes is the voice of God.'

One thing was certain—he fully endorsed the Programme of Action and regarded the Defiance Campaign as a 'sensible form of struggle'. Had Congress followed a rigid racialist line he would never have been a member; but he was happy to follow its non-racial, non-violent policy.

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Albert John Mvumbi ('continuous rain') Lutuli, at fifty-five was a solid, good-looking man with firm unlined hands. Born in Rhodesia, where his father had been on an evangelical mission, he had been brought up in the Lutuli family's ancestral home at Groutville in the heart of Natal's sugar plantations. Although his uncle, Chief Martin Lutuli, had led the Natal Congress early in the century, Albert's own background had been remote from politics. From absorbing Zulu traditions in the household of his uncle the Chief, he had gone in 1920 to Adams, where he became one of the first three African instructors in the Teacher Training College. He did not therefore have much formal education. At Adams he had met and married another teacher, Nokukhanya—'the bright one'—Bhengu, granddaughter of a Zulu chief. They had seven children. He loved teaching and was a fine singer. With Dr. Edgar Brookes, the Principal, he helped to establish a music school at Adams. In the 'thirties when tribal elders lobbied him to accept the Groutville chieftainship he at first resisted but after two years gave in, for he felt it might be a call of the people. He took over in lean years when sugar farming was hard hit; he proved himself a conscientious chief who revived and led the Groutville Cane-growers Association. The meagre pay he had received as a teacher was greatly reduced when he became a chief. He visited India and the United States and had the brief experience of being a member of the Natives' Representative Council and served on the South African Christian Council.

He thus brought to Congress the qualities of a reflective man of authority. What he lacked in experience of urban society, he made up by his real contact with rural people. And he had a good team in Natal which included Yengwa, P. Simelane, Ngubane and Dr. Zame Conco, one of the early members of the Youth League.

Walter Sisulu was re-elected Secretary-General. His success in a key position in organizing the Defiance Campaign had immeasurably increased his self-confidence and he was becoming more mellow; the warm smile that had hitherto engaged those who knew him well was now known to more acquaintances. Apart from Tambo and Njongwe, several of the Youth League's effective members were now on the Executive—Mandela, Yengwa, Tshume and Dr. Mji—a dynamic handsome young man. The staid Dr. Molema was re-elected Treasurer.

Immediately after the conference, early in 1953, Yengwa was

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one of a batch of defiers to be imprisoned. But as Lutuli found out, enthusiasm for the Campaign had dissipated. All the more heartening for him, therefore, was the experience of being met in Port Elizabeth by 15,000 people who assured him that their spirit was still strong, and there the M Plan which Mandela had conceived, which meant street to street and house to house canvassing and organizing, was being carefully implemented.

As soon as the parliamentary session opened, Swart enacted the Public Safety Act and the Criminal Law Amendment Act, empowering him to suspend all but a few laws whenever he regarded any part of the country in danger, and making it an offence for anyone to take part in defiance of the law. The law embraced an editor of a newspaper reporting an incident inciting people to break the law; likewise anyone giving financial aid to defiance organizations. The penalties were up to three or five years' imprisonment, or fines of £300 or £500, possibly with ten lashes. The United Party opposition approved these laws in principle. As in the case of Hertzog's Riotous Assemblies Act of 1930 and Malan's Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, the majority of parliament approved the extension of Nationalist tyranny.

Thus ended the Defiance Campaign.

The Campaign had been an amazing success, even if the unjust laws remained intact. Of the 10,000 volunteers that Moroka had called for, more than 8,500 had gone voluntarily to gaol despite the intimidating effect of police action, of dismissal by employers, and the propaganda of the bulk of the Press and of the radio. Even some teachers who had done so little before had thrown up their jobs to defy. The United Nations had been inspired to discuss apartheid and the Press of the world had taken the non-white challenge to oppression more seriously than ever before. Even the Government—instead of talking about *Baasskap*—began to talk about Bantustans and self-government for the Bantu. Congress prestige was enhanced; its membership greatly multiplied to more than 100,000.

Perhaps the most significant gain for the A.N.C. was the achievement throughout the country of an immense lift in Africans' self-respect. While Congress leaders had learnt that the ordinary working people were the salt of the movement and were politically conscious, the people for their part felt, as one of them put it, Congress had 'shown itself like a lion'.

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An immediate practical result came from the effect the Campaign had in moving the conscience of some whites. Towards the end of 1952 Oliver Tambo and Yusuf Cachalia, representing their respective organizations, with Cecil Williams, a theatre producer active in the Springbok Legion, had invited white sympathizers to a meeting in the Darragh Hall of the Cathedral in Johannesburg. They hoped that an organization would emerge to educate white opinion and support African aspirations by working alongside the A.N.C. They were greatly encouraged by the immediate response but it was soon clear that there was a division precipitated when the left-wing raised the issue of the A.N.C.'s call for universal franchise. There were those not yet prepared to support this. They set up a study group which became the Liberal Party, led by Mrs. Ballinger M.P., Leo Marquard, the historian, and Alan Paton, the author. The Party affirmed the dignity of every human being, his right to develop, and his right to participate in political activities, with certain qualifications attached to a common franchise. The others formed the South African Congress of Democrats with two former members of the Springbok Legion, Piet Beylveld and Jack Hodgson, as President and Secretary. Former communists joined with non-communists on the National Executive. Their constitution was based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The A.N.C. resisted a move by one of their leaders to form a united, non-racial organization, believing that at this stage each race could better work among its own community, but ready to work alongside the others. As Professor Matthews said: 'We welcomed the existence of an organization of Europeans—the C.O.D.—which would try to do amongst the Europeans what we were trying to do amongst the African people, and we co-operated with them on the basis of their support of our policy.' On the other hand, though they also welcomed the formation of the Liberal Party, as 'a step in the right direction', its qualified franchise aroused the A.N.C.'s suspicions.

The Nationalists, meanwhile, had been returned to power in April 1953, with an increased majority.

Chief Lutuli and other leaders were placed under various bans. After the high confidence generated by the Defiance Campaign, demoralization caused petty divisions. In the Transvaal a section of the Youth League quarrelled bitterly with the leadership for failing to boycott Advisory Boards. In the Eastern Cape the

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factions apparent in the dispute over the strike call, had been strengthened and membership fell by 40,000.

This was the situation to which Professor Matthews returned from New York. He felt it imperative to follow the Defiance Campaign with constructive, unifying action. In the church hall in Cradock, he addressed a crowded Cape conference, making what was to be a historic suggestion: 'I wonder whether the time has not come for the A.N.C. to consider the question of convening a National Convention, a Congress of the People, representing all the people of this country, irrespective of race or colour, to draw up a Freedom Charter for the Democratic South Africa of the future.' Thus all the people would turn from 'sterile and negative struggles to a positive programme of freedom for all in our lifetime.'

From division and despondency the conference was lifted to an exultant mood—responding not only to Matthews's concept but to the singing of James Calata's choir of young people he had trained and for whom he composed the songs. As the delegates joined in, the crowded hall was filled with music. People were so aroused they offered themselves for action then and there.

Soon after, in November 1953, there was further cause for rejoicing. Johnston Ngwevela, the Cape Town leader, through his Counsel, Donald Molteno Q.C., challenged a court sentence under the Suppression of Communism Act. Having lost in the Cape Supreme Court, he went on to the Appeal Court in Bloemfontein. It ruled that as the Minister of Justice had not given him the opportunity of making representations before being banned, the conviction could not stand.

Leaders banned from organizations throughout the country were free! Meetings celebrated the victory and the hitherto-banned made jubilant speeches, knowing they could do so until Parliament met in 1954 when it was sure to amend the law.

At the A.N.C.'s annual conference, held in the pleasant Eastern Cape town of Queenstown, Chief Lutuli was greeted with a rousing ovation. Delegates excitedly agreed to call an early Congress of the People to work out a Freedom Charter. Matthews was asked to draw up a plan and branches were invited to send in their suggestions for the Charter. Another decision was to boycott selected shops and businesses.

A great stir was caused by the appearance of Walter Sisulu and

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Duma Nokwe back from five months' visit to communist countries; Sisulu wearing a high-buttoned Chinese jacket and Nokwe in a peace cap. Sisulu had been to China and to the Soviet Union. His report aroused various emotions. One man who disliked him said it was 'full of fabrications about the benefits Africans would get.' Another fairly conservative delegate, described it as a straightforward report on conditions. Duma Nokwe—the sleepy-eyed but energetic Youth Leaguer, a former teacher who was studying to become a barrister—described his visit to Poland and the Festival of Youth which had also been attended by Alfred Hutchinson, a fellow Youth Leaguer and teacher, and Greenwood Ngotyana. Some delegates took exception to time being given to addresses on such remote topics. The more controversial question was the action of Sisulu as Secretary-General, having gone without Congress sanction. Lutuli and others on the Executive felt the salient point was that Sisulu had not gone as a representative of the A.N.C. The general reaction was more tolerant than in Gumede's day. Some felt it useful for leaders to visit foreign capitals, while those knowledgeable about international politics were divided between appreciation of the Soviet Union's role at the United Nations, and the feeling that Russia's help was of limited effect even at the U.N. Others, again, felt that ideological issues were not at stake.

Sisulu has described how in Israel, their first stop, for the first time they were able to go into hotels and tea-rooms and to meet 'big people'. They were interested in the Kibbutzim. In Rumania he was a guest of Ministers of the Government. It was China that affected him most profoundly. He felt the peasants were the same as many Africans, 'even the type of buildings was like those in Vrededorp or Sophiatown.' People would say to him, 'This is where we used to live and this is where we live now and this is the new life we are now leading.' This excited him when he thought of the slums around Johannesburg, because he felt people were working for the type of life they wanted to live. The tremendous industrialization he felt was 'not like tribal chiefs ordering regimental labour, people were building it up because they believed in it.' Underlining his impressions was the fact that, as he put it, 'you hear propaganda in South Africa and then you get there and see it's different and you get disgusted with people distorting the picture.' He had misgivings about the 'personality cult'. Congress

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had always tried to avoid it. He felt there was in the Soviet 'too much of Stalin in everything.'¹

Like Mahabane in 1927 and Plaatje and Gumede in 1919, he visited London. He met only representatives of societies concerned with African affairs. He returned to South Africa with the knowledge that the greater part of the world was on the side of his people and that a country like China, overcrowded and far poorer than Africa, was working its way to prosperity. At the age of forty-one for the first time in his life he had been consistently treated as a dignified human being instead of as a 'native'.

Those whites who had experienced his suspicions were conscious of a change: he had come to realize that an African nationalist's tendency to assert himself to prove that he was not inferior to the white man was in itself an inferiority complex. Elected Secretary-General as a stop-gap he had proved a sound strategist, willing to accommodate other people's ideas, and ready to lead.

The friends who had arranged his tour were pleased with his increased political maturity. They would have liked to send Nelson Mandela to the United States—there had after all been a thread of American influence on Congress in its formation in 1912 and the impact of President Wilson's Fourteen Points in 1919. But there was the difficulty of getting a visa. Besides the Americans had shown no disposition to invite Congress leaders.

The readiness of communist countries to provide opportunities for travel, for South Africans as well as French Africans, as Dr. Ruth Schachter has pointed out, meant increased awareness of international events. But whereas in French Africa the communist influence hastened a process of consolidation,² in South Africa, while uniting different races, it had a divisive effect when it came to ideology. In the Transvaal for instance the left- and right-wing in two or three of the sixteen Youth League branches kept up a running quarrel. Ironically not only the left-wing borrowed heavily from Marxist sources in its language, attacking the right-wing as 'disgruntled, self-seeking, politically bankrupt [*sic*] and inconsistent weathercocks' in its journal *Lodestar*, but the right-wing in their bulletin, *The Africanist*, also used the jargon, attacking the leadership for a superfluous multiplicity of pacts with insignificant

¹ *The Treason Cage*. A. Sampson.

² *The Development of Political Parties in French West Africa*. Unpublished thesis, R. Schachter.

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organizations, 'Lackeys, flunkeys and functionaries of non-African minorities.' There were other influences: a member of the New Brighton Youth League discussed Christianity's loss of its soul in A.D. 313 when Constantine debased it and used it as a vehicle for ideas of Roman supremacy. *Isizwe*, the New Brighton bulletin, quoted sayings by Diogenes, Howard Fast, Emerson, Steinbeck and Koestler. Which showed that as elsewhere in Africa, African parties are essentially eclectic, taking over, in Thomas Hodgkin's words, 'methods of thoughts, ideas and terms . . . not only from revolutionary democrats and Marxists, but also from Gandhist, Islamic and Christian, as well as from indigenous African sources.'¹—all fused to form a new, nationalist ideology, which though it varies according to local conditions, possesses a certain underlying unity.

Pursuing the comparison it is interesting to find that, despite the Government's attempt to isolate Africans in South Africa, the A.N.C. had many things in common with movements elsewhere in Africa. Its structure had the same chain of authority from central executive to branches and party members, with the still larger body of sympathizers who attended mass meetings and who felt themselves part of the movement even if not formally members. It also had its working committee discussing major questions of policy, and meeting frequently. It had the women's and the youths' sections covering a wide age-range and tending to independent action and radicalism. Trade union activity, however, the A.N.C. left to the left-wing or, during the 'fifties to its allied South African Congress of Trade Unions. It also had developed from an élite party of middle-class intellectuals to a mass party. In doing so it had acquired symbols such as the thumbs up sign and slogans like 'Mayibuye'. The flag, the blouses the women wore, the caps the men wore, the folk songs, the hymns and prayers, all these could be found from West Africa to East Africa to the North. There was a pride too in the 'prison graduates'. Conferences also—with the ritual from the opening anthem through fraternal greetings, executive reports and long discussions, to slogans, songs and public celebrations.

One important weakness of the A.N.C. compared with many organizations in Africa was its failure to maintain a newspaper.

To its credit was its extraordinary consistency over fifty years in

¹ *African Political Parties.*

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holding its annual conference when comparable organizations elsewhere, with a much shorter life, met irregularly. The A.N.C. could also claim to be singularly democratic, disliking charismatic leadership popular elsewhere however much this might make for a strong driving and uniting force.

Two vital factors made all the difference between the situation in West Africa, where nationalism triumphed, and South Africa. One was the large, long-settled white population together with the largely a-political Asian and Coloured populations which altogether numbered half of the African population. The other factor was that in South Africa the white Government controlled a heavily armed, industrialized state. Furthermore, although the non-whites of South Africa undoubtedly had increasing sympathy from the outside world, they lacked the direct pressure of parliamentary and public opinion from Britain which could be exerted on behalf of the colonial peoples.

Had the Defiance Campaign taken part in a British or French-controlled country in Africa (apart from Algeria with its equivalent proportion of white settlers) the outcome might have been very different.

A corollary of this was that though the A.N.C. and parties in West Africa had similar organizational problems—lack of transport, funds, and restrictions—in South Africa these were exacerbated by the inexorable force of the laws and the ubiquitous police. Whereas in Nigeria, for instance, the main party could make an eight month tour of the country, accompanied by brass bands, dancers, speakers, so that they 'touched the lives of hundreds of isolated communities in a way never known before,'¹ in South Africa freedom of movement had not only been restricted for decades by the pass laws, but both movement and freedom to meet were restricted by the Urban Areas Act, the Native Administration Act and the Suppression of Communism Act.

While its fellows elsewhere in Africa were taking part in developing legislatures, the South African situation restrained the rational and mature A.N.C. Yet it seldom became negative.²

One unique factor in South Africa was the role of certain priests who became identified with the non-whites' struggle for freedom in a way that caught the imagination of the outside world. Michael

¹ *Nigeria, Background to Nationalism*. James Coleman.

² Comparisons based on *African Political Parties*. Thomas Hodgkin.

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Scott, declared a prohibited immigrant by the Government in 1951, had been forced to pursue the struggle abroad. Meanwhile Father Trevor Huddleston C.R., a tall brilliant monk with a gift for friendship, found that a love of justice logically threw him into deep involvement in the lives of the oppressed. He worked on many committees with the A.N.C. and allied Congresses.

So it was that on a Sunday in June 1953, he hurried from mass to the Odin Cinema in Sophiatown. It was packed with 1,200 people, protesting against the threatened removal of 58,000 inhabitants from Sophiatown and the other Western Areas of Johannesburg. In nearby locations tens of thousands of Africans were still living in shanties and in tin tanks, yet the Government ruled not only that those Sophiatown people living in overcrowded slum conditions must move, but also the thousands living in solid decent houses. The area was almost unique in having freehold tenure for Africans and a white suburb was encroaching on it: therefore it must go. Sophiatown's significance lay in its being a real suburb—with a heart and life and a spontaneous gaiety of its own—quite unlike the characterless monotony of the endless little barracks of houses stretching for miles in the 'locations'. Many of its threatened residents were in the audience that Sunday morning. As Huddleston addressed them, police, armed with sten guns, rifles and assegais, drew up on the pavement outside. Yusuf Cachalia was about to speak when the chief of the Special Branch of the C.I.D. entered the hall with detectives who grabbed Cachalia and roughly marched him off. The provocative action aroused the audience to a high pitch of anger but Congress leaders at once calmed them down. Huddleston argued with the detectives when they arrested Cachalia only to be warned not to interfere. 'The fierce breath of totalitarianism and tyranny in every attitude, every movement of the police', triggered off in him the determination to use every means open to him to tell the truth, at home and abroad, about the 'fearful lengths to which we have already gone in the suppression of personal liberties.'¹ He became Chairman of the Western Areas Protest Committee, alongside representatives of the A.N.C. and the C.O.D.

¹ *Naught for Your Comfort*. T. Huddleston.

XVIII

1954: Talk of Freedom



The A.N.C. and the Nationalist Government were like two boxers squaring up to each other. All South Africa was the ring.

In Port Elizabeth early in 1954 the New Brighton branch led a boycott of local shops where African customers were badly treated or where Africans were not employed. Outside a shop an African picket in a battered military coat would wait, and if anyone moved towards the door, would hurl the ominous word 'Akungenwa!'—'Don't enter!'—at him. Or a woman who appeared to be window-shopping, or a bunch of kids who seemed to be playing a game, if they saw anyone entering the shop, would bawl 'A 'Ngenwa!'

Major-General Brink, Commissioner of Police, announced: 'I take a very serious view of the matter.' He met senior police from all over the Eastern Cape and the Transkei to discuss the A.N.C.'s moves. Incidentally several shop-keepers met the Congress requests and the boycott was withdrawn. Another small success was an English language-newspaper's compliance with Dr. Njongwe's warning that unless it used 'African' instead of 'Native' Africans would boycott it.

Police raids, bannings, banishments, prohibition of meetings, these were the weapons of the Government. Walter Sisulu, like Mandela declared a statutory communist, was forced to resign from the A.N.C. His successor as Secretary-General, Oliver Tambo, reported on the 'serious crisis' facing the organization. Its finances were in a shocking state—for instance Natal's income that year was just over £88—entirely spent on such modest items as stamps, staples, petrol and telephone calls. New Brighton as usual contributed a large proportion, and Cape Town very little. One Transvaal branch with fifty-two members had £2 19s. od. in hand,

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another had only five active members. Even when Congress hired a national organizer, it could only pay him £15 a month.

Still it faced up to its opponent. In Johannesburg it held a conference with its allies—the Indian Congress and the C.O.D.—to ‘resist apartheid’. Father Huddleston opened it; among the 1,200 present were his Superior, Father Raymond Raynes C.R., and representatives of the Liberal Party. A hundred police armed with sten guns and rifles raided the conference. A senior officer announced that a case of treason was being investigated.

There were occasions when the police were outwitted to the loud delight of the Africans. At a subsequent Congress Alliance conference when the Special Branch arrived the organizers hurriedly sought a ruling from the Supreme Court. Wild cheers followed Mr. Justice Blackwell’s order to the detectives to leave. Again at the Cape Conference in Uitenhage in June 1954, the A.N.C. arranged a public reception, and while the police attentively watched the crowds, the actual delegates slipped away to a secret meeting-place where they deliberated through the night.

The conference was notable both for Chief Lutuli’s presence—his ban having expired—and for the crowd of delegates from the Transkei and Ciskei in tribal dress, some wearing traditional beadwork in A.N.C. colours, some in the red blanket of remoter villages. They mixed in with delegates wearing a uniform of khaki bush jacket and black beret with a map of Africa on the pocket or lapel badge. Professor Matthews welcomed Lutuli: ‘To us he will never cease to be “Chief” Lutuli because his claim to that title does not rest upon recognition by the Governor-General but upon the place he occupies in the hearts of our people.’ He went on to remark in a mixture of sorrow and sarcasm that the police had become the main link between the Government and the African people.

Another occasion when police were outwitted was when Cape organizers decided to meet several hundred miles away in George—a sleepy town inhabited by retired English people—in the belief they would escape interference. However they were followed all the way from Cape Town by the Special Branch, and arrested for failing to produce tax receipts or driving passengers without permits. While awaiting trial, as one of them subsequently reported, ‘We were all, very fortunately, locked into one cell in gaol. Was it not a golden opportunity for us to get down to business!!!’

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But these could be but feints in face of the force that Government could put into its blows.

— Nearly 600 people of all races had been named as communists. Among eighty-six ordered to resign from their organizations were Njongwe, Matji, Joe Matthews, several Natal and East London leaders, as well as leaders of the Indian Congress and Congress of Democrats. Many others were banned from meetings.

Lutuli flew from Durban to Johannesburg to be the main speaker at a great Western Areas protest demonstration in Sophiatown. As he descended from the plane, police served him with a new banning order, confining him to Lower Tugela for two years and forbidding him to attend meetings. Before the confinement took effect he went to Sophiatown; the people marched in thousands past the house where he was staying; he waved to them from the gateway. The glimpse was enough for mutual inspiration and encouragement to flash between him and the people.

Professor Matthews said of him and the others: 'It has been said that it is the tallest trees that have to bear the force of the strongest blast of the wind.' Of Njongwe and Matji he said: 'One day when the story of the Freedom movement in South Africa is fully told . . . their names will rank high among those who by their selfless devotion and their undoubted gift for leadership advanced our cause by an appreciable amount.' Their name was 'written indelibly not on bits of paper which can be confiscated but in the hearts of their people where they are beyond the reach of governmental interference.' Njongwe, ill and on the verge of ruin, had to sell his car and livestock and start again in a small village in the Transkei. M. B. Yengwa, banished to a country district in Zululand, was forced to break his law articles in Durban. Sibande, known as the 'lion of the East' was banished from Bethal. He asked the Native Commissioner, 'Where should I go to?' The official replied, 'I want to tell you this, there is not a single European on the farms who will accept you. The only thing that I can advise you to do is to buy a little cart and a trolley and inspan donkeys and keep on moving. . . .'¹ The Government refused a passport to Professor Matthews to enable him to attend a conference sponsored by the Universities of Chicago, California and Hawaii.

Not only the Government was adept at persecution: the Rev. James Calata was restricted by a local authority from marrying

¹ Treason Trial Record.

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people and ordered to renew his permit for sacrificial wine each month, while his Minister's railway concession was withdrawn. The Transvaal Law Society petitioned to have Nelson Mandela struck off the roll for having been convicted in the Defiance Campaign. Walter Pollock Q.C., a distinguished advocate and Chairman of the Johannesburg Bar, appeared *pro amico* on his behalf. The Supreme Court gave judgment for Mandela and deprived the Law Society of costs. Pollock's action was another factor in Mandela's accumulating experience of white generosity which persuaded him to work with other races. The Cape Bar tried to have Joe Matthews, newly qualified in Port Elizabeth, struck off the roll. Donald Molteno Q.C., successfully defended him on appeal.

1955 opened with Chief Lutuli gravely ill; confined to hospital for many months. The seriously depleted A.N.C. faced a Government led by a new and more relentless Prime Minister, J. G. Strijdom.

The Western Areas Removals were due to start in mid-February. The Minister of Justice was ready with his horror stories. On February 10 he told Parliament the A.N.C. would oppose the removals by 'attacks with firearms; explosives in old motor tyres that would be rolled towards the police; old cars loaded with explosives which would be crashed into the police cars or lorries.' He assured the country: 'the police had reliable information that the natives in Sophiatown were in possession of a few machine guns and revolvers and pistols, hand grenades and home-made bombs.'

This added to the growing interest of the world Press which had begun to respond to eighteen months of protest against the removals not only from residents and Congress but from the Citizens Housing League led by the Bishop of Johannesburg. Many protests had been overrun by the police, enhancing their news value. '*Asi hambu*'—we won't go—was the defiant slogan Congress popularized. Some of the Press found the issue confusing when they compared the over-crowded squalor of much of Sophiatown with the tidy newness of Meadowlands, the area some ten miles further on to which people were to be moved. Perhaps they had not studied authoritative statements from the Bishop and the Institute of Race Relations condemning the removals because they ignored far worse slums in existence since 1904 and because

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they deprived people of freehold. Nor could visitors, in a brief descent on Johannesburg, sense the living organism that was Sophiatown.

The Congress campaign was led by a member of the Advisory Board—P. Q. Vundla—and by Robert Resha, the short, hot-tempered Youth League leader who had lived in Sophiatown since 1940. From being a miner he had become a sports journalist. Resha was frank in admitting that, incensed by police abuse, he sometimes doubted Congress's wisdom in insisting on non-violence. But though he made furious speeches, when he calmed down he conceded that non-violence was the only wise policy.

Two days before the removals were due to take place, at dawn in drenching rain, two thousand police armed with sten guns, rifles and knobkerries, virtually invaded Sophiatown. Resha was on the scene in a moment, Huddleston quickly joined him; the *Daily Telegraph* and *New York Times* correspondents rushed out to be joined by the other pressmen and photographers. Military lorries drew up. Armed police moved into a few houses, stood over the families as pathetic possessions were removed. Families, soaked through, were huddled with their bundles and bits of furniture on the lorries and driven away to Meadowlands. Resha and other Congress leaders exhorted people to stay. Forty families did stay despite the threatening forces. 110 families went. The exuberant community that was Sophiatown began gradually to be torn apart. Over several years it was dispersed until rank weeds grew in its place; only the famous and beautiful church of Christ the King stood amongst the weeds; on one edge the neat bungalow that had been Dr. Xuma's home was left standing, occupied by a white family.

At least the public outcry and the attention of people overseas had ensured that the Government, instead of moving people to bare land as had originally been intended, put them into houses. Besides, it had been delayed from doing so for two years. In a negative way, it was a considerable achievement on the part of Congress and its allies that Government needed 2,000 armed men to move 110 humble families. But the overall failure of the campaign brought fierce recriminations within the A.N.C. Certain Youth Leaguers claimed that they had been ready for action, no matter what the sacrifice; they accused Resha and Vundla of

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defection. Tambo frankly admitted to the National Executive there had been great confusion created by Congress's failure to indicate the type of action people should take, and by their giving the impression the removal could have been stopped even in face of the military operation it had taken to achieve it.

It was a serious set-back for the A.N.C. not only in South Africa but abroad where its stock, so high during the Defiance Campaign, was much deflated.

The right to own land and a home near a town—these were denied Africans because of their race. The right to education in the true sense of the word was about to be assaulted through implementation of the Bantu Education Act. Overseas condemnation of the South African Government had seldom been so persistently expressed as over these two examples of its fanatical determination to drive the Bantu out and away from white society to the perversion of tribalism fabricated by the Minister for Native Affairs. Bantu education, as Dr. Verwoerd made clear in a series of statements, would ensure 'that education should stand with both feet in the reserves and have its roots in the spirit and being of Bantu society.' According to the Nationalists, there was to be 'no place for him (the Bantu) in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour.'¹ Africans would henceforth be educated largely in the vernacular; manual subjects such as tree-planting would be substituted for more academic lessons in primary forms; parents and children would have to clean and maintain classrooms; school hours for pupils in sub-standards would be shortened to three a day with teachers doing a double shift (an advantage in that more children would be accommodated but a disadvantage in that they would get inadequate lessons). African education had always depended on missions for the finest schools; this being a considerable saving in Government expenditure, Government made financial grants to the missions. The Minister of Native Affairs was frank in his intention that he was withdrawing these grants to oust the missions who created 'wrong expectations on the part of the native.'²

Western Areas removals in mid-February. Bantu education in April.

The A.N.C.'s Annual Conference in December 1954 had called

¹ *Bantu Education: Policy for the immediate future.*

² *Hansard V*, 10, 1953.

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upon the African people to withdraw their children from school when Bantu education was implemented. The dilemma was cruel. Parents were haunted by the dread of Bantu education which, as the Women's League put it, was intended to 'dwarf' the minds of the children, but they also dreaded their children being on the streets. They asked the A.N.C.: What alternative are you offering us? What alternative could the A.N.C. offer with resources so thin? Nor could they rely on teachers to boycott the new system; only a few like Ezekiel Mphahlele and Godfrey Pitje, A.N.C. members, were prepared to sacrifice their jobs and their pay. Furthermore provincial and local branches had only three months in which to organize before Bantu education was implemented in April 1955. Lutuli, in hospital, under doctor's orders not to get involved in affairs, anxiously cautioned the Executive that more time was needed to organize. Only three weeks before April 1, the Executive postponed the boycott date. A new, burning crisis arose especially in the Transvaal branches whose plans were too far advanced to withdraw; in the Eastern Cape, too, branches were eager to go ahead.

So it was that in half a dozen towns on the Reef, and in Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage, Kirkwood and other villages, more than 7,000 children stayed away from school. Verwoerd promptly announced that they would never be allowed in school again. Teachers' salaries were withdrawn and the teachers were dismissed from schools involved in the boycott. Elsewhere the confusion had damped people's spirits; the protests were scattered.

Meanwhile the churches also were tragically divided. Only the Roman Catholic Church and the Seventh Day Adventists proposed to raise funds to maintain their own schools. A split among the Anglican bishops left the Bishop of Johannesburg and his Synod almost alone in refusing to allow their school buildings to be used for Bantu education; a policy the Bishop regarded as 'morally indefensible'. Though others condemned Bantu education, most of them sold or leased the schools under their jurisdiction to the department of Native Affairs. In Britain public opinion warmly supported Bishop Reeves when he addressed a series of immense public meetings. There was a generous response to his appeal for funds for family centres to be started in school buildings, so that children could have recreation and be off the streets. Although St. Peter's School and Adams College were

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briefly maintained, Bantu education virtually meant the end to the fine tradition of missionary education in South Africa.

The most that the A.N.C. and its allies could do to try to offset this great evil was to found the African Education Movement. Father Huddleston and members of the Liberal and Labour Parties, the Students' Representative Council, and the Society of Friends, played a part. In England funds were raised by the Africa Bureau, its conservative chairman, Lord Hemingford, having been particularly forthright in condemning Bantu education, his own long experience as a teacher in East and West Africa giving him authority on the subject of education. The Movement founded a handful of cultural clubs in the Eastern Cape and along the Reef. With pathetically limited tools and equipment club 'leaders' (teachers who opposed Bantu education) taught children. There were frequent arrests of the 'leaders'. In one trial a policeman who arrested the teacher admitted pointing his revolver at the children. Despite all the obstacles some of the clubs managed to keep going for two or three years.

Professor Matthews warned Africans who had opposed A.N.C. policy on Bantu education or who had too easily given in to Government intimidation that as the years passed they would come to realize that 'education for ignorance and inferiority' was worse than no education. He feared that this device of the Government to condition the African—to make '*baasskap* acceptable to him'—might succeed just as in Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Spain, where mass media had successfully been used to destroy freedom of opinion, speech and action.

The Government was destructive; A.N.C. creative. Moses Kotane and Maulvi Cachalia were in Bandung, at the Conference of twenty-nine Asian-African States. Although they and the Algerian F.L.N. could not formally represent states, they were seated among the delegates. Pandit Nehru and Colonel Abdul Nasser were among the Prime Ministers with whom they had discussions. The conference meant for the A.N.C. and its allies the positive assurance that the vast majority of the peoples of the world supported their struggle against discrimination and oppression.

The Congress of the People which Professor Matthews had envisaged in 1953 was about to take place; he was Acting-Principal at Fort Hare at the time and could not take part. The A.N.C., forming an Alliance with the S.A. Indian Congress, the C.O.D.,

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the S.A. Coloured People's Organization, and the S.A. Congress of Trades Unions, had invited not only other non-white organizations but a wide range of white parties to take part—even including the United Party for it still hoped they might learn they could never return to power by trying to beat the nationalists at their own game. The United Party did not trouble to reply; even the Liberal Party did not accept the invitation. Of the whites only the Congress of Democrats with a few independent Christians—Father Huddleston, the Rev. Arthur Blaxall, and the Rev. D. C. Thompson, a Methodist—and one or two others took part.

Lutuli saw the gathering as a practical demonstration of what the National Convention in 1910 should have been—a means of thinking creatively about South Africa, of defining more clearly the goal the liberation movement was aiming at. Circulars had gone out for months past asking people in cities and villages, in kraals and locations: 'IF YOU COULD MAKE THE LAWS . . . WHAT WOULD YOU DO? HOW WOULD YOU SET ABOUT MAKING SOUTH AFRICA A HAPPY PLACE FOR ALL THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN IT? A typical reply came from the Rustenburg Inter-Tribal Farmers Association condemning Bantu education, the pass laws and the Bantu Authorities Act, and asking for 'more facilities re cultivation and grazing,' 'to be directly represented in Parliament by own people,' and 'to be given equal education for all races.' The urbanized people of Sophiatown demanded the right to be elected to state, provincial and municipal bodies, for full opportunity of employment and equal pay for equal work as well as the banning of hydrogen and atomic bombs. The most frequent demands were for better or 'adequate' wages, for abolition of passes, and for decent education. After that came better houses and food.

Surprisingly the authorities did not ban the Congress of the People. There were harassing tactics—withdrawal of some of the buses taking delegates from distant places, occasional road blocks, arrest of drivers. The white Press gave it virtually no advance publicity, being preoccupied with a demonstration by the women of the Black Sash at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, in protest against the Government's assault on the constitution. The Congress Alliance had their own advance publicity—innumerable cyclostyled circulars which included a long Walt Whitman-type poem:

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**WE CALL THE FARMERS OF THE RESERVES
AND TRUST LANDS!**

Let us speak of the wide lands and the narrow strips on which we
toil.

Let us speak of the brothers without land and the children without
schooling.

Let us speak of taxes and of cattle and of famine.

LET US SPEAK OF FREEDOM!

**WE CALL THE MINERS OF COAL, GOLD AND
DIAMONDS!**

Let us speak of the dark shafts and the cold compounds far from
our families.

Let us speak of heavy labour and long hours and of men sent home
to die.

Let us speak of rich masters and poor wages.

LET US SPEAK OF FREEDOM!

On Saturday, June 25, 1955, on a battered patch of veld in Kiptown village near Johannesburg, 3,000 delegates came together in response to this 'call'. Just over 2,000 were Africans, with two to three hundred each of Indians, Coloured people and whites. Along the roadside, stalls sold bright soft drinks and mixed confections. One visitor from England thought it more like a black Derby Day than a solemn conclave of revolutionaries, as the crowd rolled up singing, laughing, shouting; wearing gay clothes—men in vivid Basuto blankets and straw hats, women in brilliant saris or in Congress blouses, with a variety of scarves and doeks. It was like South Africa in miniature—doctors and peasants, labourers and shopkeepers, ministers and domestic servants, students and city workers, teachers and housewives. The A.N.C. colours dominated the scene.

Banners announced the identity of branches or carried slogans—**FREEDOM IN OUR LIFETIME, LONG LIVE THE STRUGGLE**. Behind the platform was a great green freedom wheel with four spokes: the A.N.C.—the African elephant; the S.A. Indian Congress—the Indian fox; the S.A. Coloured Peoples Organization—the Coloured horse; the Congress of Democrats—the European Owl; and the S.A. Congress of Trade Unions included people of all races.

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The Special Branch, large men in lounge suits, stood at the entrance to the wired-in enclosure of the gathering, taking photographs of all *white* arrivals. As the meeting proceeded they recorded every word—no matter what—and stared fixedly at the platform through binoculars, though it was no great distance away. There was grist for their mill in the fraternal greetings from other parts of the world which came largely from communist countries and the left.

The most inspiring leaders were absent under bans; when the chairman, Piet Beyleveld, announced that the *Isitwalandwe*—the feather worn by the heroes of the people symbolizing the highest distinction in African society—would be presented to three men, Chief Lutuli, Father Huddleston and Dr. Dadoo, only Huddleston was there to hear the people's cheers.

Throughout that day and the Sunday morning the delegates listened intently to a Freedom Charter read in English, Sesotho and Xhosa, drafted by the National Action Council representing the Congress Alliance. Lutuli had sent a message: he saw the Charter as 'a torchlight in whatever dark skies may overcast the path to freedom.'

The Charter began: 'We, the People of South Africa declare for all our country and the world to know: that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people.' Its aims were: the people shall govern, all national groups shall have equal rights; the people shall share in the country's wealth; the land shall be shared among those who work it; all shall be equal before the law; all shall enjoy equal human rights; there shall be work and security; the doors of learning and of culture shall be opened; there shall be houses, security and comfort; and there shall be peace and friendship.

At one point the amplifier broke down. Delegates cheerfully began to sway and shuffle round the arena in dancing groups, waving their brief cases and black trilbys or their Basuto hats in time to the rhythm. 'A-way with Bantu education! A-way!' they chanted.

Some of the Charter's aims arose out of daily experience—for instance 'the privacy of the house from police raids shall be protected by the law'; 'all shall be free to travel without restriction from countryside to town, from province to province and from

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South Africa abroad' or, 'miners, domestic workers, farm workers and civil servants, shall have the same rights as all others to work.' Some were typical of a social welfare state—'the aged, the orphans, the disabled and the sick shall be cared for by the State'. Some were socialist—'the mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole'. Most of the aims embodied human rights that in many countries had come to be taken for granted. The crowd approved each section with shouts of 'Afrika! Mayibuye!'

Interleaved in the serious business was the singing, powerfully led by Ida Mntwana, the big, fearless, Transvaal A.N.C. Women's leader. There were new songs in the repertoire—one about Bantu education, one about Sisulu's visit abroad, and one, deploring the banning of a leader, which was adapted to each victim in turn.

On the Sunday afternoon the people were absorbed in the proceedings when there came a sound of tramping feet. They looked round to see police, armed with guns, marching towards them. A shout went up from the Congress of the People—a foreign journalist thought it sounded like a shout of joy and relief as if everyone had waited in agonies of hope deferred for the coming of the law. The whole crowd rose to their feet, hands raised in the Congress salute, thumbs pointing at the police, and burst into singing 'Mayibuye' to its gay tune of 'Clementine'. One of the English clergymen present felt profoundly moved; as the police surrounded them it was for him the moment in his life when he felt wholly identified with the vast African crowd around him.

Some of the police slouched about, eating oranges, smoking cigarettes and swinging their rifles. The impact on a man who had observed the cold dignity of the police in Nazi Germany was that this unbuttoned, free-and-easy display of force was somehow far worse. These young Afrikaners seemed to be showing, not simply the carefree confidence of the armed in the presence of the unarmed, but an appalling contempt for the 'kafirs, coolies and kafirboeties'¹ whom they surrounded. He felt that on the slightest provocation they would open fire—and not stop grinning.

Their Commandant went up to the Chairman, Piet Beyleveld. The crowd watched and did not stop singing. When Beyleveld had heard what he had to say, he signalled to them to sit; they complied in a silence that could be felt. Beyleveld announced that he

¹ Friends of kafirs—abuse for whites seen with blacks.

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had authorized the removal of all papers and documents. He appealed to people not to make trouble. The police removed all posters and banners, including two notices at the food stall—SOUP WITH MEAT and SOUP WITHOUT MEAT, and the people herded past tables where the Special Branch took their papers.

Under the pale clear sky of a Transvaal winter evening, the meeting went on. As Special Branch men crowded the platform and doggedly rifled the pockets and handbags of the speakers, the addresses went on—whites speaking with a new emotional intensity; an Indian with high-strung truculence; but the Africans were joyful, almost triumphant. Instead of shouting 'Afrika!' they now stood and sang *Nkosi Sikelel' i-Afrika*. The singers beamed with happiness. A young African girl, addressing the policemen with rifles at the foot of the platform, said into the microphone: 'It's a pleasure for us to have the police in this gathering.' It seemed that in the dreadful, incongruous tension, the jeering policemen and the laughing Africans were teetering on the very edge of violence. Once, the African band in its shabby uniforms with its battered instruments began banging out a compulsive rhythm—the crowd started to sway in a way that looked as if it could have only one climax. But the band changed its tune—the moment passed.

Darkness was coming. The delegates dispersed. The band played gay African songs; then it packed up its dented tuba and its drums and went home.

XIX

1955-1956: Women Under Way



I have started the campaign of the women against passes, we have been holding meetings outside Bloemfontein in towns such as Ficksburg, Arlington, Bethlehem. . . . I hope you people shall not let us down at our Head Office, if there is anything new in the campaign please let us know early not last minute.' So the leader of the Free State women wrote eagerly to the A.N.C. national Women's League, proving herself a true inheritor of the spirit of her forebears in the Free State thirty and more years ago. As the Free State branches extended to Winburg, Thaba'Nchu and other villages, they were proud to be able to provide a typewriter for the 'Mother-body', as they called the A.N.C.

The Government had announced that from 1956 African women must carry passes, the 'verdomde'—accursed—'dompass' that more than any other law in South Africa tormented Africans and that since 1952 had been extended even to boys between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. Strijdom's Government was grimly pursuing the extension of its police state with the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Amendment Act, Native Administration Amendment Act, Natives Urban Areas Amendment Act and Group Areas Further Amendment Act—which not only intensified the suffering of the non-whites but symbolized the absurdity of apartheid and the inefficiency of a Government that year after year had to pass amending legislation to retrieve mistakes or close loopholes. To isolate South Africa further, the Departure from the Union Regulations Act was passed; the Minister of the Interior declaring it would prevent named communists from leaving the Union without a passport to visit communist countries and then to return armed for 'their devil's work'. He promptly refused a passport to Mrs. Jessie McPherson, former Labour

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Party Mayor of Johannesburg who wanted to visit her daughter in Britain, and to an African schoolboy who had been offered a scholarship to an exclusive school in New England.

Lilian Ngoyi, President of the A.N.C. Women's League, and Dora Tamane, were already abroad representing the recently formed Federation of South African Women. Lilian, after living all her life in the slums and regimented locations of Johannesburg, has vividly described her tour. At London airport she was warmly welcomed by friends. When she travelled in a full underground train and two well-dressed Englishmen stood up for her it was 'a miracle', as was the sight of white men with shirts off, digging up roads. In many encounters she felt she was respected as a human being. It was the beginning.

After two and a half months in London she visited East Germany where she saw 'the horrors of war'. On the tenth anniversary of 'liberation' she was taken to Buchenwald. When she saw in the museum the lampshades made of human flesh and pictures of men in the concentration camps, her thoughts went back to South Africa and she thought to herself—when the A.N.C. spoke about peace it was really necessary to discuss it if this is the curse of war. She wrote to a friend: 'Even if I know Dr. Malan was against us as Africans I would never have wished him to be treated as the Germans ill-treated people. If this was European to European how much more if it was European to black.' Another question struck her: 'Europeans brought Christianity to us—how was it possible they should not respect humanity in Buchenwald?'

She went to China, feeling a bit scared as she remembered her father used to tell her the Chinese eat people. But 'it was the direct opposite; the warmth of people with their round faces was most wonderful.' Like Sisulu she was impressed because she could see the two things together; the old conditions and how they were building themselves up after liberation. In a village she met a woman who said: 'Delegate from South Africa, we are free in this country. There used to be placards saying—NO CHINESE AND DOGS.' She told the woman, 'We don't have that in South Africa but wherever there is something nice you see a sign—EUROPEANS ONLY.' They showed her how, under Mao Tse-tung's leadership land that had given forty bags of wheat was now giving a hundred. In two and a half months she visited four provinces; in schools and steel factories she heard the children

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and workers praise the leadership and say it was all through the help of the Soviet Union.

Her impression of Russia, however, was that it was too advanced to have anything practical to say for Africa. What most struck her was the library with thousands of people, even old people, reading there. She visited Moscow University which had so impressed Nokwe, and when she thought of Bantu education she felt very moved. Everywhere people said: 'It is through the help of Lenin and Stalin.' She went to churches and when she asked the women praying about religion being restricted they told her, 'Not everybody is entitled to free worship.' She herself had no high regard for the church in South Africa, but she was not against Christ: 'No, Him I am not against but the way they are using Him.' She admired Christians like Huddleston and Calata and Thompson who lived their religion.

Her last stop was in Lausanne for the World Conference of Mothers on the theme of disarmament. She told about conditions in South Africa: 'We have no peace, though no real war. We have apartheid which starves us and lets us have little bits.' Above all she told them about the Bantu Education Act 'designed to put Africans in an inferior position.' She said: 'Our children have never had compulsory education,' and only 35% went to school. But, she assured the women, her people were continuously struggling for a better life.

When she got back to South Africa she felt: 'I will fight for freedom to the bitter end.' She no longer feared gaol because of what she had seen. Lenin had been banished ten times. 'I am determined. It does not matter what. I am determined to fight for a multi-racial South Africa where we can live in peace.'

She returned to Johannesburg at the end of September 1955 as the Special Branch made fresh and more thorough raids throughout the Union—African, Indian and white Congresses, the Central Indian High School in Johannesburg, Dr. Moroka's home in Thaba'Nchu, Father Huddleston's quarters in the Priory at Rosettenville—all were searched. The warrants declared that the police were looking for evidence 'as to the commission of the offence of Treason or Sedition'.

Undaunted the women went on organizing protests against the threat of the pass laws. Many wives of A.N.C. leaders were in the Women's League—Professor Matthews's wife, Freda, was

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President of the Cape League; in the Free State, Jacob Mafora and his wife were the respective Presidents; Albertina Sisulu, Maggie Resha, both nurses, and Tiny Nokwe, a teacher, were among the local leaders in Orlando and Sophiatown.

At Easter 1954 the Federation of South African Women had been formed. During the few months of freedom the Ngwevela judgment provided Ray Alexander, an indomitable former communist—who as a girl newly arrived from Lithuania had done much to organize trade unions in the Cape in the early 'thirties—took the initiative in calling the preliminary conference. Fatima Meer, Ismail's wife, was a speaker and from Port Elizabeth Mrs. Njongwe drove a carload of women to Johannesburg. From Durban came Bertha Mkize, and Annie Silinga from Cape Town. Ida Mntwana, Florence Matomela, Frances Baard were all active. As happened in the formation of the Congress of Democrats, the white initiators suggested a multi-racial organization with individual members, but the A.N.C. insisted that people should join only as representatives of affiliated bodies. Thus it was possible to work closely with other groups without being dominated by them.

The Women's Federation of the Transvaal planned its first big protest against the pass laws for October 1955. One of the African women, Margaret Gazo, a real old warrior from Springs, referred to the demonstration of 1,000 women of the Black Sash in June: 'The European women went to the Union Buildings and did not invite us. Now we will go and we will invite everybody.'

Two days before the Women's Federation protest was due, the Transportation Board refused licences for the buses engaged to drive them to the capital city. Desperately Helen Joseph, one of the Federation leaders, drove with Robert Resha to all the centres of organization, telling people to go by train and somehow to raise the much higher fares. In Brakpan, for example, £200 had to be raised for train tickets. Yet on the day, from all over the Transvaal, two thousand women, most of them Africans, converged on the beautiful terraced gardens and the world-famous government buildings. Lilian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph were leading them. Pretoria City Council had refused permission for a meeting—the women therefore simply sat in the amphitheatre until the leaders felt it was time to go when they at once followed.

Africans are undemonstrative and seldom embrace in public

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but when the Brakpan women got home they found their men waiting, and as they got out of the train, the men flung their arms around them, while a band played a welcome.

In Durban too the women—at first two hundred, then a thousand—were protesting to the Native Administration Department; and in Cape Town they marched through the streets. African men might be reluctant to see their women suddenly so independent and militant, breaking out of the conservative family structure, but though taken aback they were nevertheless proud. Walter Sisulu had observed the Union Buildings protest and asked: ‘How could they *dare*?’ The fact was, as Mrs. Ngoyi, mother of three, explained, ‘Men are born into the system, and it is as if it has become a life tradition that they carry passes. We as women have seen the treatment our men have—when they leave home in the mornings you are not sure they will come back. We are taking it very seriously. If the husband is to be arrested *and* the mother, what about the child?’

Early in 1956 when the Government began to issue passes to women it was a time of drought and famine in the reserves. In Winburg in the Free State, many women were tricked into accepting passes—or reference books as the Government had retitled them. Mrs. Ngoyi rushed there to explain the implications. When the Native Commissioner next came hundreds of women marched silently to the Magistrate’s court and burned the books. Though it was not yet illegal to refuse them, it was illegal to destroy them; the women were arrested. All over the country women collected money for their defence and went on with their protests—by May 1,200 women in Germiston had demonstrated, 2,000 in Sophiatown and Newclare, 4,000 in Pretoria, 350 in Bethlehem, and so it went on. In Evaton, near Vereeniging—where for more than six months people had been boycotting buses against increased fares—2,000 women walked seven miles to leave 10,000 protest forms with the Native Commissioner.

All this happened despite the usual obstacles. In Kimberley women organizing protests were dismissed from their jobs and went to Basutoland; without their leadership the protests dropped to half the size. Permits for meetings were often refused. One active organizer turned out to be a police informer. Mrs. Annie Silinga, the big cheerful asthmatic Xhosa in Cape Town, had been addressing meetings from the Grand Parade to Worcester, despite

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being arrested and imprisoned several times. Her work was brought up short when she was banished to Namaqualand. In a few months she was back, only to be arrested again, this time for leaving her home in Langa outside Cape Town, to earn money picking grapes for a few days in Paarl. (In certain circumstances it was illegal for Africans to be away from their place of residence for more than seventy-two hours.) She was sentenced, but on appeal won her case; the judge establishing that she had lived in Cape Town for more than fifteen years and therefore had right of residence.

The Cape Town women asked if Mrs. Ngoyi could visit them. The Secretary of the A.N.C.'s Women's League replied, 'I wish to point out to you the difficulty confronting the President. She is a person with a big family to support and has nobody helping her. We feel that a three weeks' visit means to her three weeks of having no money to support her family.'

Due to the lack of funds much of the organizing had to be done by correspondence with stenographers and typewriters nonexistent. One Free State member wrote to another ordering twelve Congress blouses. One woman in hospital between two operations wrote to another, 'I am a temporarily caged bird. . . . Chum can you contact a few people to go round the ward sowing the seeds of the Freedom Charter for the soil has been prepared for them?'

In these ways the women prepared for their greatest protest. In August 1956 all over South Africa—from Bethlehem to Ermelo, from Paarl to the Reef—women packed their suitcases and hat boxes with the care and enjoyment they always put into such big events, and set off for Pretoria. In Port Elizabeth they raised £800 for the fares and filled two coaches in the train, while from Durban twenty-three of them set off in cars owned by Indian friends, driving through the night and singing as they went. Lady Selborne township near Pretoria threw open its doors and provided a grand concert.

The authorities announced that the women were forbidden to go in procession through Pretoria.

Early on the morning of August 9 there was therefore no procession. Instead there was something far more moving. Everywhere there were women, not more than three in a group, dressed in their Congress blouses or their saris or their bestwear, some with baskets of food on their heads, some with babies on their

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backs, striding purposefully through Pretoria towards the Union Buildings, eager to tell the Prime Minister what they felt about the pass laws. In October 1955 2,000 women—now, a year later, ten times as many. Twenty thousand women converged on the grassy slopes below the Union Buildings. Then, thumbs up, they moved up the hill between the pine trees. At their head were Lilian Ngoyi in Congress blouse, Helen Joseph in a dark suit, Rahima Moosa in a glamorous sari and Sophie Williams, a young woman partly Chinese, in Congress colours. Behind them came the provincial leaders of the A.N.C. Women's League followed by a throng in gay colours. It took two and a half hours to file up and assemble in the great amphitheatre.

The Special Branch, some of whom had travelled on the same trains from other centres to watch the women, were there as usual. Civil servants came out to stare, and the Press to record.

Lilian Ngoyi had the honour of knocking on Mr. Strijdom's door. Her left arm was weighed down by a vast bundle of protests. Four leaders with her were similarly laden. The Secretary came out, said the Prime Minister was not there and took the forms. Mrs. Ngoyi said afterwards: 'We were very very angry. We had written to the Prime Minister to say we were meeting him. Now look at all the expenses!' They rejoined the women in the amphitheatre and told them what had happened. The women rose to their feet. They stood with hands raised in the Congress salute for thirty minutes, to make their silent protest. Not a single child cried. There was complete silence. Then they burst into song, the spontaneous exalted song of the Africans, singing the warrior's song of the women of Natal with new words—'Strijdom, you have struck a rock once you have touched a woman.' They sang '*Nkosi Sikelel' i-Afrika*' and they dispersed.

'That was a marvellous thing in Pretoria. Oh, it was really a nice time!' one of the Port Elizabeth women said in recalling the occasion.

Many of them went on to attend the second national conference of the Women's Federation in Johannesburg. Several of its founders, including Ray Alexander and Fatima Meer, had been banned and could not be present. Among the messages that the conference received from overseas was one from Father Trevor Huddleston C.R., who had been recalled to England a few months before and who, in wishing the conference every blessing,

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added: 'My heart is in Africa and always will be. You are ever in my thoughts and in my prayers. God bless you. Mayibuye Africa!' There was a message too from the Black Sash regretting that under their constitution they could not for the present be associated with public demonstrations but wishing the Federation success in their striving for a better future for *all* children in South Africa.

The women discussed their progress. Fifty thousand had joined in widespread demonstrations during the past year. But they agreed this was small in a population of twelve and a half million. Mrs. Ngoyi urged the need for work in the reserves, on the farms, the need for education in the laws and their effects. She concluded her address: 'Strijdom! Your Government now preach and practise cruel discrimination, it can pass the most cruel and barbaric laws, it can deport leaders and break homes and families, but it will never stop the women of Africa in their forward march to FREEDOM DURING OUR LIFETIME!'

The Prime Minister did not look at the petitions that twenty thousand women had gone to such lengths to deliver to him. They had been promptly removed from his office by Sergeant Johannes Vermaak of the Special Branch.

If the women were frank in assessing their failures, so also was the 'mother-body'—the A.N.C. In all-night sessions leaders endlessly analysed organizational shortcomings and sought remedies. A sober assessment was made of the Congress of the People when, soon after it had taken place, in July 1955, Lutuli and Matthews were given a first-hand report by the Joint Executives of the Congress Alliance. They agreed that at no stage had they managed successfully to link the Congress of the People with the day-to-day struggles of the people; nor had they succeeded in interesting more than a handful of rural people, factory workers and miners.

But when the Freedom Charter became the centre of a furious dispute in the A.N.C., it was on different grounds. The dissident members of the Transvaal Congress had formed themselves into the 'Africanists'. When the Charter came up before the annual conference of the A.N.C. which endorsed policy, in December 1955, the Africanists launched an onslaught on the entire Charter. Their principal criticism was that the preamble spoke of South Africa belonging to all who live in it. They felt the land belonged to the African people and that only after the rule of an African

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majority had been accepted, could others be naturalized and accepted as Africans or else foreigners. They claimed to be the guardians of the fundamental principles of the Youth League formulated in 1944. Yet its land policy at that time had envisaged the division of land among farmers and peasants of *all nationalities*. They made use of a letter from Dr. Xuma supporting their line—his views had evidently changed since his disagreement with Mandela, Sisulu and Tambo on the policy of African nationalism; while their outlook had broadened, his had narrowed. The Africanists argued that the A.N.C. was not carrying through the Programme of Action—it still had not boycotted Advisory Boards. Professor Matthews argued that the Freedom Charter was a development of the Programme. The quarrel swept aside criticisms of the Charter which Lutuli and the Natal Executive had framed. These concurred with its general principle—a socialist basis to the State—but strongly urged full explanation of what nationalization and other factors meant to the rank and file. There were further suggestions for what they regarded as ‘an all-time document’ unnecessarily padded with detail. In the heart of the quarrel a journalist from the *Bantu World*, which had tended to support the Africanists, was turned out of the conference whereupon members of the overseas Press walked out in protest against this hampering of Press freedom. An abrupt end was brought to the dispute when the election of officers had to be made before people dashed off for their trains on the Sunday evening. So rigidly did the A.N.C. follow its traditional procedure for the conference that the Charter—instead of being considered early on—had taken its place after all the formalities. Professor Matthews, in the chair, agreed that a special conference should be called early in 1956 to pursue the debate.

Lutuli was re-elected President, Oliver Tambo Secretary-General, and Dr. Arthur Letele Treasurer in place of the banned Dr. Molema. Mrs. Ngoyi was elected to the Executive—the first woman ever to be on. To the ten Transvalers on the Executive (who included Gert Sibande and several of the left-wing of the Youth League) the Cape had only four members, Natal three, and the Free State one.

Meanwhile Strijdom at last had succeeded in destroying the constitutional safeguards entrenched in 1910. He extended powers of banishment to 500 local authorities, and his Minister of Justice

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threatened the arrest of 200 people, with ominous hints of treason. Chief Lutuli, from his exile in Groutville, powerless to make the personal intervention that might have been effectual, could only warn Congress not to dissipate energies by 'indulging in a fight on "isms".' It was not simply an argument between 'right' and 'left', but between Africanism and inter-racial co-operation. The conference in Easter 1956 which was supposed to compose the dispute, was chaotic. Although Tambo and Nokwe had been lobbying and a large majority was sure to ratify the Freedom Charter, its details and the recommendations of the Natal Executive were lost in the quarrels. A lot of time was taken up by the Africanists deploring the majority refusal to boycott Advisory Boards and criticizing a Commission of Inquiry which had been appointed to consider a recent expulsion from the A.N.C. This had been held under Joe Slovo's chairmanship; the Africanists condemned it as unconstitutional, an A.N.C. member should have presided. Lutuli, saddened by the wastefulness of the disputes, was himself the object of public attacks from another source; Jordan Ngubane, who felt the Charter was part of a plan whereby the left was accustoming Africans to the type of society they wanted. He said Lutuli was being used by the left-wing and Indians working alongside the A.N.C. to be in a better position to gang up against the Africans. Lutuli, he asserted, had been committed by the left 'to ridiculous policies so as to make him the laughing stock of the world.' Lutuli, who so disliked personal controversies, remained silent. The State Information Department lost no time in quoting Ngubane in order to defame the A.N.C. Eventually Lutuli did reply. Ngubane's approach he described as one of narrow nationalism which undermined the A.N.C.'s broad alliance. Ngubane, long recognized in the A.N.C. as a theorist rather than a man of action, and fiercely anti-communist, left the A.N.C. to become the most prominent African in the Liberal Party. Patrick Duncan also took up Ngubane's theme; as he was also a well-known member of the Liberal Party there arose a suspicion (which Lutuli expressed) that attacks on Congress might be a way of getting recruits for their Party.

The Freedom Charter had by this time become a matter of principle and the genuine criticism people wanted to make on points of detail were lost. It thus became a victory for the left-wing who for the first time succeeded in bringing socialism into an

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A.N.C. programme. However the fears of some African leaders that the left-wing would try to replace the A.N.C. by a permanent Congress of the People were not realized. Nor were the hopes of those socialists who had seen it as an opportunity of reaching thousands of new people and establishing the Peace Movement on a mass basis throughout the country, to which end they had purposely adapted their slogans to the conditions of South Africa.

In the Cape the internal troubles were concerned not only with the issue of the Charter but the fact that the Secretary had become secretary to one of the Bantu Authorities, Chief Matanzima. He was therefore expelled from the A.N.C.

The small victories that the A.N.C. and its sympathizers achieved from time to time should not be lost sight of. For some years there had been campaigns against increased rentals in the non-white townships—in November 1954 for instance Father Huddleston had opened a conference of the Women's Federation protesting against proposed increases. Subsequently legal action was taken against the Minister of Native Affairs and the proposal was withdrawn. Another example was in Port Elizabeth where several Congress leaders were threatened with banishment by the City Council; the A.N.C. organized protests and, largely through the devastating pen of a man in an iron lung, the banishments were not effected.

Christopher Gell, while Under-Secretary to the Government of the Punjab, had been stricken with polio from the shoulders down. Given only a few months to live in 1946 he had settled in South Africa with his wife, Nora, who came from the Transvaal. Conservative by nature, he was precipitated into action by reading Press reports about Transvaal farmers' ill-treatment of their workers. He soon came to realize that this was a small chip of the iceberg of the social state of the country and through articles and letters to the Press he began to campaign vigorously, with acute analysis. It was as if his will to live was strengthened by the imperative need to resist the evil at the heart of South Africa's system. This together with his wife's determination that he should live and the ingenuity she, a physiotherapist, developed in treating him, prolonged his life. His name was well known in South Africa by the time they moved to Port Elizabeth in 1955. As he was carried out of the plane he heard women singing—a group of the

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A.N.C. Women's League and Indian Girl Guides had come to welcome their champion.

Had he not been compelled to live mainly in his iron lung, he would have spoken from the A.N.C. platform. All he could manage was to spend a few hours each day freed of its encumbrance; it was during these hours that Congress leaders came frequently to consult him. But this time was limited because he could only breathe by using his throat muscles; talking quickly tired him and he felt the least exertion for several days after. However this restriction had one advantage: all the frills of social exchange were eliminated and Gell established a direct relationship with any newcomer immediately: the result was a stimulating frankness and, more, a sense of communication that gave to each short visit a rare significance. The frankness could explode into a sharp curse for anyone muddling or evading a task but his sense of humour—and also the fact that his impatience was invariably justified—took the edge off possible resentment. Propped up in his bed, all of himself was concentrated in his bony amused face and his brilliant intelligent eyes—soul force, as his close friend B. B. Ramjee put it. He loathed people's pity and said as he was living on borrowed time he wanted to use it as usefully as possible. He would never accept charity so his friends would show their gratitude in other ways—the laundryman would do his washing for half price, when coal was short the coal merchant sent extra, and his Indian friends, on noticing the paraffin boxes in which he kept his voluminous files, gave him two filing cabinets.

Several A.N.C. leaders were regular visitors and would sit beside his bed while the Gell cat—a perpetually pregnant tabby—would doze at the foot of it. One was Temba Mqota, a tall slight young man remarkably like an El Greco subject, one of the men whom Gell's pen had rescued from banishment. They naturally talked much about South Africa, with Mqota impressed by the concrete facts that Gell could quote and back up by telling him—'look in *that* file for *that* paper' or giving him the page number of a relevant book. But what Mqota particularly liked was to discuss the Bhagavad Ghita, or the music of Bach, or Schweitzer (although Mqota, the politician, criticized Schweitzer's political backwardness he thought his concept of reverence for life a great philosophy). So a lifetime friendship grew between the two men and perhaps the fact that Mqota had his own struggle against illness—

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T.B.—enhanced their deep mutual understanding. Joe Matthews, during the years of serving his law articles in Port Elizabeth, was another of Gell's friends; and when Govan Mbeki arrived in Port Elizabeth as local editor of *New Age*, the left-wing newspaper, Matthews urged him to get to know Gell. Mbeki—an exceptionally able man, dedicated to the verge of ruthlessness—was suspicious of Gell, thinking he was a Liberal; for a long time he avoided him. But when they did meet he found him 'very fine', and after that they saw each other often. The reason Mbeki felt Gell to be different from other whites was 'you could read as it were that the man was genuine, there was nothing up his sleeve. One got satisfied with discussions with him, with his writings.'

These men not only valued the clarity of Gell's thinking in which he trained himself while confined in the iron lung, but his ability to see through wishful thinking and to pierce dogma. He could expose the foolishness of the rigid inflexibility of some of the left-wing and equally he had no illusions about the A.N.C., its failures, its personality conflicts, its problems in face of tribalism, and the preoccupation of most Africans of getting adjusted to urban life. His experience in India was helpful. Without visiting the townships his empathy was such that he knew what it was like to be African, to have one long problem, from birth to death, whereas the average white had everything laid on from the start.

Among the laws he exposed with his vitriolic but always factual pen were the Bantu Education Act, and the Group Areas Act on which he was probably the greatest authority in the country, suggesting the tactics in the campaign to try to defeat the Government or at least delay the enforcement of the law. He also carried on a running battle with those white liberals who advised Africans to compromise with the Government. Many of his articles were published in the Port Elizabeth *Evening Post*; these were received with squeals of delight in the townships: 'What,' they would say, 'this white man!' One night an African choir came to his home to sing for him in gratitude. They could not all fit into his bedroom and overflowed into the hall and drawing-room. They sang the song he particularly loved, *Nkosi Sikelel' i-Afrika*. He was overwhelmed by their gesture. For their part, when people got fed up in the struggle, they thought of him and picked up their courage and energy again.

In October 1956 the Government's *tour de force* in defence of

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apartheid, the long-promised Tomlinson Report which was to be its 'blueprint', appeared after six years' investigation. The Inter-Denominational African Ministers' Federation, led by the Rev. Zaccheus Mahabane, the former President-General of the A.N.C., by the Rev. James Calata and other well-known clergymen, summoned a conference of four hundred delegates from religious, social, cultural, economic, educational and political bodies (including Chief Lutuli and Duma Nokwe representing the A.N.C.) to discuss the Report. They unanimously rejected it. They demanded the repeal of discriminatory laws, sang *Nkosi Sikelel' i-Afrika* and *Mayibuye Afrika*, standing with thumbs up! The A.N.C. influence was apparent in the resolutions as in these symbols.

This was the time of the invasion of Suez and the invasion of Hungary. The attack on Suez by two imperialist powers touched deep emotions. The crushing of the Hungarian rising was viewed in the reflex to an invasion of African soil. An Anglican priest in the A.N.C., the Rev. W. S. Gawe, wrote to a Queenstown newspaper to say that Africans felt the fate of the people of Hungary was dwarfed by the sufferings of the people of Kenya, 'ruled by strangers'; at least in Hungary people shared on equal terms in the administration with the 'so-called oppressors'. This emotion strengthened left-wing influence in the A.N.C. Executive report. Whereas Lutuli, Tambo and Conco, shared the view expressed in a note by Lutuli condemning the 'ruthless intervention of Soviet Russia', the final report read: 'We believe that every nation is entitled to settle its own affairs, including the people of Hungary. The A.N.C. feels a sense of disappointment and regret at the bloodshed in Hungary, and sincerely hopes that peace will be restored without delay in this country.' Under the circumstances they reserved final judgment on the situation in Hungary until the air was cleared of obvious partisan charges and counter-charges.

The space that Hungary, the rearming of Western Germany, and other cold-war issues took up in certain Congress reports was grist for the mill of the Africanists who accused the Executive of being wastefully diverted into foreign ideological conflicts. It was also grist for the Government. Not long after at a small private meeting of the A.N.C. in Johannesburg, after Elias Moretsele, the President, had given instructions to freedom volunteers, Resha, the vigorous chief of the volunteers, spoke. 'When you are

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disciplined and told by the organization not to be violent, you must not be violent,' he cautioned. But, 'if you are a true volunteer and you are called upon to be violent, you must be absolutely violent, you must murder, murder, murder—that is all!' His flamboyant harangue met with tremendous applause. Secreted in the room at the time was a Special Branch microphone. Resha's impetuous remark was a crumb of juicy grist.

Thirteen days later, at sunrise on December 5, 1956, throughout South Africa, in cities and in villages and locations, there was a knocking on doors. This was the beginning of the notorious Treason Trial.

XX

1956-1957: Treason?—and Decline



The Chief and the 'Prof.' in the Fort! As the news leaked out—dawn arrests, secret flights in military aircraft transporting Africans, and Indians, Coloureds and whites, from Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Durban, to be imprisoned in the Johannesburg Fort—for the first time since the Defiance Campaign, the A.N.C. and its allies were again in the world news. Afrikaner Nationalists approved their Government's vigilance 'in face of a dangerous plot'; English-speaking businessmen felt sceptical as they mounted the golf-tee; Africans felt proud of leaders they had often thought ineffectual. As the arrests swelled to 156 a Stand By Our Leaders movement grew, under the chairmanship of Father Martin Jarrett-Kerr C.R. (Since the departure of Father Huddleston he had become similarly identified with the non-white peoples.) Sisulu, Mandela, Tambo, Nokwe, Resha and Sibande, were among the Transvaal accused and so was Moses Kotane—but Marks, Bopape and Tloome were not. The Rev. James Calata was there and Father Gawe, along with Mrs. Baard and Mrs. Matomela, Tshume and Mqota and others from the Eastern Cape. From Natal came M. B. Yengwa, Dr. Conco, 'Stalwart' Simelane and Archie Gumede, son of the former President of the A.N.C., as well as Mrs. Mkize. Ida Mntwana and Lilian Ngoyi were both there. The oldest of the accused was John Mtini, a seventy-year-old, tiny man with a benign toothless smile, who came from Cape Town with the indomitable Annie Silinga and a relative newcomer to the A.N.C., Archie Sibeko, twenty-eight years old, slanting-eyed with infectious fierce vitality, who had rejected his training as an agricultural officer because it meant being employed by government and had gone into trade union work. Joe Matthews had been arrested in Durban. Robert Matji, who had been with him at the time, had briefly gone

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into another room and thus escaped arrest. He promptly went to Basutoland where before long he was elected to the Basutoland National Council.

Though the intellectuals of Congress were represented, the backbone of the movement—drivers, clerks and labourers—made up the largest number. One or two of the Africanists were included. Friends kept apart by one ban or another could see each other again—Mandela and Meer, Chief Lutuli and Dr. Naicker, Gert Sibande and Ruth First.

The Government accused these people of being members of a conspiracy inspired by international communism to overthrow the South African state by violence. Its object clearly was to intimidate and to render the accused impotent. Its action had the opposite effect. The accused—the majority of the leaders of the true opposition in South Africa—who had hitherto been separated by lack of funds or by bans, were now enabled to confer, as Lutuli put it, *sine die*. More important, the mass arrests gave a tremendous lift to the A.N.C. and its associates, who had previously been in a somewhat demoralized state. The arrests, moreover, proved as never before that the resistance movement in South Africa was above race; that black, white and brown were united against white domination. As never before liberals, Christians and socialists came together in organizing the Treason Trials Defence Fund; first launched in Durban on the day after the arrests. Alan Paton, the Bishop of Johannesburg, and the Labour Party M.P., Alex Hepple, joined with a leading member of the Institute of Race Relations, Dr. Ellen Hellman, and Judge Frank Lucas, in organizing the fund.

As a result, the A.N.C.'s annual conference on Dingaan's Day (December 16), despite the suddenness of the forcible withdrawal of all the leaders, had a large attendance of delegates in singularly high spirits. Patrick Duncan brought fraternal greetings from the Liberal Party. The police, fully armed, were there, of course; they seized documents, and for a time the atmosphere was tense.

On December 19, 1956, the day after the conference ended, the Preparatory Examination of the Treason Trial opened in the Johannesburg Drill Hall. From 5 a.m. vast crowds gathered in the surrounding streets, led by men and women carrying sandwich boards—WE STAND BY OUR LEADERS. A choir sang Congress songs, and leaflets were distributed calling on people to

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remain non-violent. Through the crowd the vans of prisoners were driven—with the inmates singing as hard as they could, unable to see the crowds but aware of them from the noise. That day refugees arrived in South Africa from Hungary; one of the Johannesburg newspapers carried a headline about them: WE ARE IN A FREE COUNTRY NOW — THE REFUGEES CRIED. This was part of the weird incongruity marking South Africa's tyranny. Inside the Drill Hall, the boss of the Special Branch turned up in a kind of palm beach suit as if he was on his way to a game of bowls. There was a gay, Christmassy atmosphere. The prisoners, all races mixed up together, looked like delegates at a conference. Immediately behind them on identical rows of chairs sat the public. When there was a break in the proceedings, prisoners, friends, the Press and the lawyers all mixed freely together—smoking, talking and sucking peaches. The whole day was marked by confusion and inefficiency. The police gave up attempting to impose order after one of them—in trying to separate the sheep from the goats—had angrily ordered one of the prisoners off the premises. On the arrival of the Magistrate it was discovered that not a word could be heard—the Drill Hall was designed for sergeants' voices—so the court adjourned until the next day. Laughing and singing the accused left, piled back into the prison vans and were driven away. The Fort where they were imprisoned had originally been built by the British to keep the Boers out of Johannesburg.

The next day the crowd was greater than before. Only a minute proportion could be accommodated in the public gallery. Inside the Drill Hall the Prosecutor was droning on, in a voice that over the inadequate loudspeakers sounded as if he were dictating in a room next-door; outside the people were in high spirits—African women dancing jigs under their vast umbrellas; African youths striking clownish poses to tease the policemen. The accused were trying to accustom themselves to the voice of the Prosecutor when suddenly there was a roar, a sharp burst of gunfire, and screams. An African woman among the prisoners jumped to her feet—she seemed to grow immensely tall—and with her eyes wide shouted: 'Oh, NO!' One of the men wept quietly. The accused began to surge forward to be held back by the police. The Magistrate hurried from the court. The Bishop of Johannesburg rushed from the Hall and into the street. The police had baton-charged the

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crowd and, after a gasping lull, people had thrown oranges and half bricks; the police, panicking, had fired. The Colonel in charge angrily ordered them to stop. Suddenly the Bishop and Alex Hepple—both small, mild men—could be seen right among the straining crowd of black people, calming them wonderfully. As the people began to disperse the Bishop crossed the road towards the Press who were watching, recognized the B.B.C. correspondent and thanked him for his Christmas card. Meanwhile the Colonel was angrily reprimanding the police. Although the young men looked not at all crestfallen, nobody among the reporters could remember a time when they had been thus publicly rebuked by one of their officers for firing on Africans. The journalists watched a white policeman, who had been bitten on a finger, carried away by his comrades as if his back were broken. Twenty-two people, most of them Africans, were taken to hospital. The authorities had learnt nothing. It was 1919 all over again.

Released on bail, the accused had a temporary respite when the court adjourned until the New Year. The head of the C.I.D. had remarked that the maximum penalty for High Treason was death, but the leaders of the A.N.C. could understandably return home in sceptical gaiety for, looking back on the Congress record for thirty-five years, could this be treason?

The Prosecutor had forecast that the preliminary examination would last between six weeks and two months. It was to last for ten months. What the London *Times* described as the 'darkness and confusion' that prevailed, has often vividly been described. It could perhaps be summed up by Lewis Carroll's 'Barrister's Dream' from *The Hunting of The Snark*:

'And the judge kept explaining the state of the law
In a soft under-current of sound.

The indictment had never been clearly expressed,
And it seemed that the Snark had begun

And had spoken three hours, before anyone guessed
What the Pig was supposed to have done.'

Once the logic of the Barrister's dream is understood, the logic of the Treason Trial is plain.

The focus of the Prosecution's case was the policy of the A.N.C. between 1952 and 1956, with the Freedom Charter the key document. In all the muddle of the tens of thousands of documents seized at innumerable meetings and during innumerable police

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raids—there had been a thousand raids alone in the few months following the Congress of the People—and in the farcical incoherent evidence of many of the police witnesses, every wart on the face of the A.N.C. was to be studied through a strong microscope.

The Prosecutor said that he would prove that the accused were all members of the National Liberation Movement whose speakers had propagated the Marxist-Leninist account of society and the state, and that the Freedom Charter envisaged steps in the direction of a Communist State and, if necessary, was to be a prelude to revolution. The Defence not only repudiated that the Charter was treasonable, criminal, or a step towards a communistic state; it would positively declare the aim of the Congresses as expressed in the Charter and would contend that the trial was a political plot. It was not 156 individuals who were on trial 'but the ideas that they and thousands of others in our land have openly espoused and expressed.'

Against the background of the Trial the people of Alexandra township were inspired to walk again. In January 1957 the township was once more faced with a rise in bus fares. The A.N.C. had for long held weekly meetings at which people discussed their problems and grievances and the minimum wage claim of £1 a day which the A.N.C. and its ally S.A.C.T.U. originated began to catch on. But £1 a day was pie in the sky and it was the extra pence a day which aroused people to action. A mass meeting in Alexandra decided to boycott the buses. Tennyson Makiwane, one of the A.N.C. members on trial, and Alfred Nzo had addressed the meeting, and Nzo was among the A.N.C. members involved in subsequent actions. During the four months that the people walked, some of their local leaders went to the Drill Hall at lunch time for consultation with the A.N.C. leaders on trial. Sympathy and solidarity boycotts were started by the A.N.C. in Port Elizabeth, East London, Sophiatown, Lady Selborne and Randfontein. The obdurate Minister of Transport said that this was a political act. The Port Elizabeth A.N.C. agreed and asked, so what? In Johannesburg, the Bishop—who had rapidly earned African confidence by his blunt practicality and refusal to separate the social and religious from the political—was in the thick of the negotiations between boycotters and the Chamber of Commerce. Despite the intervention of self-styled leaders including, to the regret of his former colleagues, Dr. Xuma, who was consulted by the

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Government, it was the people's own elected leaders in Alexandra who brought the boycott to a successful conclusion in April.

Between 1957 and 1958 the women of Zeerust in the Western Transvaal, were rising in spontaneous, profoundly felt, resistance to the pass laws. There was no doubt that the recollection of the Defiance Campaign, the new spirit aroused by the Treason Trial, and individuals who had attended Congress meetings, played a part. Often the country people would claim to be members of the A.N.C., when they were not card carriers but simply knew about it and were proud of it. In any event, the Government were always ready to blame the A.N.C. for such resistance; blame that in African eyes amounted to praise. The Zeerust protests¹ spread into a revolt against Bantu Authorities—against the local tyranny given to stooge chiefs and their henchmen.

Meanwhile the Congress boycott of Nationalist firms went ahead, with particular success in Port Elizabeth's non-white townships. So nervous was one tobacco company that it obtained an interim interdict restraining the Congress Alliance from distributing leaflets calling for the boycott. In the Eastern Cape an A.N.C. boycott of oranges—because local farmers paid bad wages—was also successfully maintained and wages were raised slightly.

In mid-1957 from the Drill Hall Lutuli and the A.N.C. called for a stay-at-home on June 26 in protest against apartheid and in support of a S.A.C.T.U. call for £1 a day basic wage. It was a daring act when they were tied up in the Treason Trial and unable to take any direct part in the organizing. The stay-at-home proved to be a remarkable achievement—80% successful on the Rand, with wide response in the dock area of Port Elizabeth, and token demonstrations in certain other towns. Protests against the extension of pass laws to women went on. For instance in one small Transvaal dorp, Standerton, after a demonstration 900 African women were arrested, and later released.

The Preliminary Investigation went on. For most of the time the boredom was acute. After seven months the Prosecutor announced: 'I am now going to call evidence of actual violence during the Defiance Campaign of 1952. I will show that bloodshed and incendiarism were engineered by the A.N.C. . . .'

Everyone sat up. Into the witness box walked a confident, bespectacled, middle-aged man, Solomon Mgubase. With some

¹ For an excellent account see *Brief Authority* by Charles Hooper.

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aplomb the Crown led evidence from this witness who they said was a lawyer. He told the Court: 'Mr. Sisulu and Mr. Bopape' would 'arrange for ammunition and a certain gas powder' as part of mau mau in South Africa, when Europeans in the Transkei would be murdered. He added that he had heard Mr. Resha say that the gas powder would 'be used by secret soldiers to be trained in the Transkei.' So he went on, to the blatant diversion of the accused, when they were not enragedly reflecting that for this they were separated from their families, had sacrificed their jobs, were on trial for their lives.

Had the highest law officers of the Government believed in this rigmarole? If so it was not only staggering but tragic. Their witness had his antecedents briefly and precisely elicited by the Defence: Mgubase was no lawyer, he had served four terms of imprisonment for forgery or fraud, he had once been a police interpreter. Perhaps it was the usual contempt with which the Government treated the people of South Africa that led to such imbecilic fantasies being put forward in a court of law. Having failed there, the Crown tried to pin a charge of organizing a 'Cheesa-cheesa army'—'burn-burn'—on Dr. Arthur Letele—so ludicrous in face of the doctor's quiet integrity that the Defence could angrily declare it 'as foul a conspiracy as ever disgraced our courts' without rebuttal from the Prosecution.

At home in Kimberley, Letele's charming wistful-eyed wife, Mary, formerly a nurse, had started a private practice in midwifery to supplement their dwindling savings and make the time of separation go faster. Like many wives she was in the A.N.C's Women's League, and had carried their youngest child, Tumela, with her in the women's protest to the Union Buildings. When her husband had been imprisoned for defying in 1952 it had made no difference to their neighbours. Now, with the charge of Treason hanging over his head, she found their middle-class acquaintances aloof, an experience that pained her; however the ordinary people remained warm and kind. Letele, like other professional men, was able to practise but the majority of the accused—representing the mass of the A.N.C.—as unskilled workers lost their jobs and, with no savings to fall back on, their wives could at best take in extra washing. The Defence and Aid Fund did all it could to help but priority had to be given to maintaining the high level of defence.

The months dragged on; the strain on the men and women in the

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Drill Hall stretched tight. One day Joe Slovo, conducting his own defence, protested to the Magistrate on a legal point. There was a sharp exchange to which his fellow accused listened intently. The Magistrate charged him with contempt of court. A dull growl escaped from the accused. They rose from their seats; it seemed as if they must surge forward towards the Magistrate. In a moment Chief Lutuli was in control, calm and commanding: 'Sit down, sit down!' he insisted. An ugly moment had been averted. The Magistrate told all those who wanted to register their protest to come forward. Subsequently not only were none of them prosecuted, but Slovo won his appeal against the charge.

Lutuli's authority was unquestioned—he united them through the most intolerable moments; as chairman of their Liaison Committee, he played an important part in consultations with the Defence team and the Defence Fund's organizers.

On September 11, 1957 the Preparatory Examination closed. The Magistrate found 'sufficient reason for putting the accused on trial on the main charge of High Treason.' Meanwhile the accused could return to their homes to await trial.

XXI

1958: Isms and Fragmentation



The excitement of the accused to be going home was tempered by a disaster—riots broke out in Johannesburg townships—more than forty Africans were killed or died of wounds, and scores were badly injured. The Government having once again refused to appoint a Commission of Inquiry, the City Council did so. The former Chief Justice, the Hon. A. van der Sandt Centlivres, led the inquiry which found among the root causes of the unrest the policy of ethnic grouping imposed by the Government; the effects of the migrant labour system; the breakdown of parental authority; rampant lawlessness and inadequate police protection; the utmost discomfort in trains in which Africans travelled to and from work; poverty; and lack of educational and vocational training and facilities for recreation and opportunities for employment for youths.¹ The Minister of Justice rejected the findings as of no practical value.

For years the A.N.C. had struggled to organize in the townships amongst this lawlessness and violence, had tried to unite people of different tribes, had even given potential tsotsis² a sense of dedication in fighting for something beyond personal ends. But through eight years of increasingly harsh and widespread bannings, culminating in the virtual immobilization of established leaders in the Treason Trial, gaps in its organization were being filled by men without political experience. Some abused their new position of responsibility; some, harried by the constant attention of the Special Branch and lacking confidence, got out of their depth. The Transvaal suffered most acutely as a result. Over the years it had come to be taken for granted that Johannesburg was the centre of the National Executive. The Eastern Cape in particular com-

¹ *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1957-1958*. Muriel Horrell.

² Toughs; often juvenile delinquents.



9a The Women Hold a Meeting in Orlando



9b The Treason Trial Opens in Johannesburg—Bishop Reeves in the Crowds



10a Lilian Ngoyi



10b Florence Matomela



10c A Common Occurrence. Argument with the Police—Joe Matlou of Youth League

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plained of the domination of the Transvaal in the Executive itself. Following the 1955 election the composition was Transvaal ten, Cape four, Natal three and the Free State one. Transvaal leaders had a reputation for making bold calls to action without proper preparation—a circular would go out demanding ‘The Pass Must Be Resisted,’ but without saying when or how.

Things came to a head at the end of 1957. The Transvaal conference was badly mishandled, people entitled to vote were disqualified, and the procedural wrangle was exacerbated by the fact that several branches known as the Petitioners were already dissatisfied with the financial statement. They were joined by the Africanists in vehement demands for reform. The Africanists were also impatient for more militant action from the A.N.C. They were given a protracted hearing in the A.N.C.’s annual conference in December 1957—under the chairmanship of Govan Mbeki—and raised only five out of 305 delegate votes in their attack on the ‘communistic’ Freedom Charter. The widespread anger at the Transvaal Executive’s actions gave them an access of strength. The dispute was due to be settled at a special conference called by the A.N.C. National Executive in February 1958, but here again the Transvaal Executive failed to answer the Petitioners’ complaints. Violence resulted. Africanists raided the Congress office, seizing furniture and documents ‘to save the Organization’, and Josias Madzunya, from Alexandra township, made off with the Congress car, after someone had assaulted the driver. Subsequently quarrels in Cape Town and in Port Elizabeth ended in brawls. In Cape Town the trouble was the lack of any outstanding personality to give a lead, while in Port Elizabeth one branch suspected another of trying to dominate.

Lutuli and other national leaders for the moment could not intervene. They were deeply shocked by the disputes and their outrageous destructiveness. There were troubles enough without quarrelling amongst themselves. In Zeerust and in Sekukhuniland there were tragic upheavals as people opposed Bantu Authorities and the pass laws, while in the Transkei and in Zululand people began to stir. The Government’s reaction—instead of seeking to discover what caused peaceable people to sacrifice everything in protests—was to let loose armed police in the areas and to blame A.N.C. ‘agitators’ for the disturbance. In fact it was a weakness of the A.N.C. that it failed to rush representatives to these rural areas

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at the first sign of discontent. The people had suffered to the point where they could bear no more. But they had no organization. The A.N.C.'s involvement consisted in Mandela, Tambo and Nokwe being prominent in many of the ensuing legal actions. From March 17, 1958 the Government banned Congress from these rural areas, penalties for infringement being a fine of up to £300 and/or imprisonment of up to three years.

In the early months of 1958 the Women's League, aided by the A.N.C., and by Father Jarrett-Kerr, took part in protests against apartheid being extended to the nursing professions.

What was in fact a victory for the A.N.C. became somewhat obscured in all these happenings and currents: the Attorney-General had withdrawn the charge of High Treason against Lutuli and Tambo—the A.N.C.'s senior leaders—and fifty-nine others. It was a vindication that Lutuli received with mixed feelings for, he said, 'the truth is I would be happier to see the whole thing through with my comrades.' He should therefore have been free to give the leadership the A.N.C. sadly needed at this time. But he was absorbed in supporting a call for a stay-at-home protest made by a workers' conference to coincide with the coming Parliamentary elections in mid 1958. There were widespread misgivings as to the wisdom of this call when the A.N.C. was suffering from disruption and when the white elections could not be a popular peg on which to hang such a demonstration. The Congress Alliance insisted; the A.N.C. went ahead. The Africanists actively opposed the call and their opposition was emphasized by the United Party-supporting Press who regarded the call as an embarrassment to the party. The result was an ignominious failure in all areas but Sophiatown and one or two villages which achieved a substantial stay-away. Lutuli called it off. The one asset had been that non-white demands had been more widely discussed than during previous elections. The Nationalist Party was returned with seven additional seats from a 90% poll; Alex Hepple, the Labour M.P. who had been a consistent fighter on behalf of non-whites in Parliament, was defeated with all his colleagues as well as the three Liberal Party candidates. In Johannesburg and Cape Town forty-eight members of the Congress Alliance were charged with inciting people to protest during the stay-at-home; after protracted trials five were sentenced to between four and twelve months' imprisonment, others were fined.

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The Congress Alliance's misjudging of the mood of the people led to a further loss of prestige for the A.N.C. The leaders, it was widely felt, were out of touch with the people. Lutuli was now ready to try to resolve the organization's dissensions. But the Government had banned all meetings. The trouble went on fermenting.

It seemed as if the men involved in the two factions had forgotten the Government and its oppressive policies as they attacked each other through their respective bulletins. At its December 1957 conference the A.N.C. had revised its constitution: its stand for the 'creation of a united democratic South Africa on the principles outlined in the Freedom Charter' had been hotly attacked by Africanists who declared the Charter emanated from 'vodka cocktail parties of Parktown and Lower Houghton'—the upper class white suburbs in Johannesburg where some of the left-wing intellectuals lived. Africanists claimed that Professor Matthews had 'unequivocally disowned' the Charter. For his part he could not think what all the fuss was about—the Charter 'did not seem to go much beyond African Claims formulated in Xuma's time.'

'Africanism' had an obvious emotional appeal especially to younger men, not only in a negative retaliation to Afrikaner nationalism but in positive identification with what was happening in other African countries. The A.N.C. on the other hand, as Mandela put it, took account of the concrete situation in South Africa. They realized that the different racial groups had come to stay, but insisted that a condition for inter-racial peace and progress was the abandonment of white domination: their goal being to win national freedom for African people and to inaugurate a society where racial oppression and persecution would be outlawed. The most extreme of the Africanists, Josias Madzunya, a bearded rebel in a long tattered overcoat, taunted Congress leaders for being 'puppets and tools, agents and touts and lackeys and flunkies of their white and Indian masters.' Sisulu's attitude was: 'You judge a man by what he believes in and by what he does.'

There were whites who were becoming attracted by the Africanists' anti-communist line and saw in them a force that could break the Congress Alliance. It was a curious dilemma for liberals that the generosity of the A.N.C. towards whites derived largely from the readiness of white leftists to be identified with the Africans'

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struggle since Bunting's day. The debate grew more heated as it went on.

The whole state of the Union strengthened the left. According to the Marxist prognosis as described by John Strachey, South Africa provides a classic situation for communist activity. All one needs to do is insert the word 'African' in each of the key phrases: unemployment endemic; misery of wage-earners and peasants ever-increasing; the violence, hysteria and general irrationality of the governing class mounting, fascism being established in a capitalist country.¹ To the whites, the blacks are the lower class. South Africa also combines factors analagous to the industrial revolution of Great Britain and to the Nazis' rise in Germany, situations which provided fertile soil for a Marxist solution. Another analogy, broadly speaking, lies between tribalism and the *concept* of communism in common ownership of land and 'democratic centralism'.

Marxists could genuinely share the African aim of a people's democracy—an intermediate step to their eventual target of a soviet system. Had the Labour Party of South Africa been socialist from the start, the country's history might have been different.

In the A.N.C., communists were judged by their actions over twenty or more years. Dr. Xuma, for all his quarrels with communists in the 'forties, had found that J. B. Marks was 'neutral and did not push communist views'. Father Calata had found the communists in the A.N.C. '100% loyal' and Lutuli regarded Kotane as a man of admirable judgment and maturity. Mandela's view was that 'in spite of the criticism of communism as a creed, the record of those men from the point of view of sacrifice in the interests of African freedom was very praiseworthy indeed.' Professor Matthews summed up: 'The panic over communism existed for a long time and from time to time Congress branches discussed its influence and whether people would have dual loyalty. It was resolved on the basis that anyone who subscribed to the constitution was free to become a member.' When people had complained about the left-wing he would ask, 'Have they gone against any resolution?' 'No,' the complainants would say, and add, 'but these fellows are very active, they get into office, when there is work to be done they are always first to do it.' To which Matthews would reply: 'Meet them on their own terms. Be tough

¹ *The Strangled Cry.*

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and determined. The only way you can deal with them is by you yourself knowing where you are going.'

Attempts by the white left-wing to push their dogma met with the Africans' fundamental nationalism. As one former communist among the Africans remarked, 'Give a fellow Marx and he won't come to communism.' A series of three cyclostyled lectures showing a distinct Marxist influence prepared by one of the white left-wing, was sent to a few A.N.C. branches where they remained untranslated and virtually unread—later adding to the Special Branch's already bulging files of confiscated documents. The permutations to which Marxism was subjected can be exemplified in two quotations. One, an essay by a half-educated miner, told the story of 'Mr. Marx and Mr. Engels'. It described Marx as following 'the footsteps of the son of God who is the topic of the Holy Bible, when he criticized the capitalists and enslaving of other people, speaking of freedom for all people on the world saying "do unto thy neighbour as you would like him do unto you".' The same writer, giving examples of people who had achieved freedom, listed the Poles, Russians and Chinese, along with the Irish, Persians and Palestinians. A more sophisticated approach was apparent in a lecture given by Joe Matthews to a Youth League Summer school in Durban in 1954. Matthews, while at the University of the Witwatersrand, had been confronted by the challenge of Marxist fellow students—impressively versed in their interpretation of history and in their dogma. Just as he had read other books from cover to cover—the Bible from Genesis to Revelation—so he read Marx. In his lecture he compared South Africa with pre-revolutionary Russia, saying that only through a revolution which ushered in complete equality and an end to racial discrimination and national oppression, would it be possible to create a solidly united multi-national state—such as the Soviet Union. The only weapon, he said, in the hands of the Africans and other oppressed people was the creation of powerful National Movements 'based on toiling masses and led by revolutionary intelligentsia.' Of the slogan 'Africa for the Africans' he subsequently said, 'We do not reject it at all . . . we are only keeping the slogan in reserve while we build up our strength . . . but it is our slogan.'¹

Ultimately the left-wing was always faced with a force—the essential conservatism of African national life, based on a binding

¹ Treason Trial Records.

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system from nation to tribe to clan to family; beyond this was the African's belief in God, displayed in his higher life and deeper customs; a more significant force than the Christian teaching underlying the education of most middle-class Africans, even if weakened by the erosion of tribal and family life.

The left-wing could be grateful to the Government for attributing to communism all militant opposition and for the frequent attacks by both the authorities and the capitalist Press on 'communists' which gave the ordinary African a strong impression that there must be good in it. Besides the left-wing's own Press consistently reported local African affairs and ceaselessly and courageously attacked the Government for its treatment of non-whites in a way that the white Press did not.

Through its identification with the non-whites, the white left-wing found an audience for its approach to foreign affairs, giving the African people a sense of identity with the peoples of Russia and China. At the conference founding the Women's Federation, Hilda Watts, the former Johannesburg City Councillor, spoke mainly about the hydrogen bomb and the destruction of Hiroshima; of all the suffering that both cold or hot wars led to. In an age when such a subject has been debased into virtually a series of slogans, it is difficult to understand the freshness and the depth of feeling with which many African women responded as they thought of all that the vast sums wasted in armaments could mean in providing education, better housing and medicine, but particularly food for their children in a country where malnutrition was rife. Fraternal greetings coming from communist countries or left-wing organizations—but also from Huddleston, Scott, Canon John Collins, African States and certain members of the British Labour Party, gave African conference delegates the warm glow of knowing all these friends existed in the world outside.

The significant influence in world affairs came from two sources. One, the depth of African identification with the struggle of Africans elsewhere in the continent; this surfaced when Italy attacked Ethiopia, when Britain and France attacked Suez, when the Algerian war broke out; so that people asked: 'Who is oppressing the Africans in Africa? Who has colonies here in Africa? Who is extending passes to our women? Is it communists?' The other source, which had become for intellectuals the yardstick for judging the outside world, was the way countries voted at the United

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Nations. When apartheid was discussed they observed that year after year many of the western nations supported the South African Government; the communist countries never. One Christian in the A.N.C. commented: 'Even men who are anti-communist find it difficult to see much to criticize in Russia's policy towards Africa and are bound to find a lot to criticize in western policy.'

When it came to the day-to-day struggle against the Government, whether someone was a communist or not was simply irrelevant to most Africans—identification and friendship was what mattered. From the start, as in French Africa, the left-wing had won the trust of Africans 'by behaving in ways the Africans had never seen Europeans behave; they were personal friends and comrades, rather than superiors'.¹ Lutuli explained: 'Now we don't know communism; all we know is that those men and women came to us to help us. I don't deny that some might have ulterior motives; all I am concerned about is that they came to assist me fight racial oppression, and they have no trace of racialism or of being patronizing—just no trace of it at all.' The latter was something not often appreciated by liberals; African politicians were quick to sense any sentimentality of approach. Also they liked the optimism of the left-wing, however much it was regularly proved to be unjustified! Optimism was one quality Marxists had in common with Christians—the logic of their respective faiths gave them both a belief in ultimate victory.

Of the impression some liberals had that the A.N.C. was dominated by white leftists, Professor Matthews said there were so many South Africans accustomed to pushing the African from pillar to post that they could not credit his being able to do anything on his own initiative. The A.N.C. was the senior partner in the Congress Alliance; to think they would allow themselves to be dominated was an insult.

In the Liberal Party there were an increasing number of individuals who showed themselves ready for sacrifice, and with whom some of the A.N.C. leaders were happy to work. But the suspicion that liberals wanted to lead Congress instead of joining in the struggle as allies was slow to die. Then to liberals joining with the A.N.C. meant working alongside the C.O.D., some of whom

¹ *The Development of Political Parties in French West Africa*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Ruth Schachter.

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jealously guarded their entrenched position. Always the first to volunteer, offering abundant energy and a readiness to suffer, the dedication of the C.O.D. gave them a leading part in committees despite their small numbers. Though not all of them were socialists, on occasion their insistence on introducing extraneous issues was sharply divisive—for instance the Korean war was pushed forward in one area during discussions planning the Congress of the People. Whatever the reason for their tactics the effect was to make successful co-operation with other organizations difficult. But in the final analysis it was the courage and comradeship so generously offered by the left-wing that counted.

Representative of the A.N.C.'s attitude to white Christians was Chief Lutuli's message of deep regret to Father Huddleston upon his recall to England. The Chief told him, 'You have challenged Christians most uncomfortably to live up to the tenets of their Christian faith.' Christian discipleship as both Huddleston and Lutuli saw it involved setting at liberty those who are oppressed, uncompromisingly resisting the injustice at the heart of the State. Lutuli warned Christians against hypocrisy and double standards, adding that 'it is not too late for white Christians to look at the Gospels and redefine their allegiance.' But, he said, 'in South Africa the opportunity is 300 years old. It will not last forever. The time is running out.'¹

Scott, Huddleston, Jarrett-Kerr, Blaxall and now Reeves, lived their faith undeflected by fear of being tarred with the communist brush. Father Huddleston 'again and again' said he found himself 'more able to understand and better understood' by people on the left-wing than 'amongst practising Christians.'² Though sometimes he felt his name was being used, his first thought was for the African people.

Christopher Gell was another Christian of this calibre. As a sophisticated intellectual with no illusions, who had studied the political struggle in South Africa more thoroughly than most, he believed left-wing policy was closer to nineteenth-century radicalism than to twentieth-century cold-war ideological communism; that its driving force was not Marxism, but detestation of the colour bar and the fact that there had been only the Communist Party to go to when opinions were being formed. He

¹ *Let My People Go*. Albert Lutuli.

² *Naught for your Comfort*. Trevor Huddleston C.R.

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clashed with Patrick Duncan who publicly warned the A.N.C. about communist ascendancy. On a later occasion Duncan's criticisms brought a reply from the Liberal Party Chairman, Peter Brown, who made it clear that Duncan did not represent the Party's view. Brown was to write that he had no doubt there were communist members of the A.N.C. but there were also nationalists and liberals and even conservatives in its ranks, all of whom had decided 'to sink their ideological differences and fight together their common enemy apartheid.' He appealed: 'Let us sink our ideological differences for the moment and get on with the job of disposing of the devil we know, and who daily rides roughshod over so many of our rights, rather than dissipate our energies in boxing a shadow which may never develop into anything more substantial.'¹

The Government was about to investigate these very questions in the Treason Trial. On August 1, 1958 it opened in Pretoria. The ninety-one accused were charged with High Treason or with alternative charges under the Suppression of Communism Act. All pleaded not guilty. The Prosecutor was Advocate Oswald Pirow Q.C., the Minister of Justice during the 'thirties. The Defence team was led by a man acknowledged to be the most brilliant advocate in South Africa, I. A. Maisels Q.C., and among the others was Bram Fischer Q.C., who had helped Dr. Xuma frame the 1943 constitution. Sisulu, Mandela, Sibande, Dr. Conco, Nokwe, Mrs. Ngoyi and several of the Eastern Cape people were among those still on trial; Mrs. Joseph was there too, Leon Levy the S.A.C.T.U. leader, and other whites and Indians long allied to the A.N.C.

The A.N.C. had a fresh link with the outside world—one of great significance—in the presence of distinguished observers sent by the International Commission of Jurists. One of them remarked that not since the Reichstag trial in Berlin—with the exception of the Nuremberg trials—had a trial attracted such international attention.² Also present was Professor Erwin N. Griswold, Dean of the Harvard Law School, who wrote in the *London Times* that the real opposition in South Africa was on trial. He met and was deeply impressed by Chief Lutuli who was attending the trial and

¹ *Contact*. June 13, 1959.

² *The South African Treason Trial: R. v. Adams and others*. L. J. Blom-Cooper in the *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*.

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remained clearly the leader even while sitting in the public gallery.

A week or two later Lutuli addressed a meeting of Europeans—the Pretoria Political Study Group—who had not before invited an African to speak to them. As the Chairman was introducing him, about thirty whites burst into the hall, the leader making for the platform and shouting: 'We will not allow a kafir to address this meeting!' They assaulted Lutuli and the chairman and women who tried to protect him. Foreign Embassy representatives were present as well as overseas Press correspondents; the quiet dignity of Lutuli's reaction, his insistence on giving his address and the temperate manner in which he put the African case, enhanced his reputation at home and abroad.

Two days later Mr. Strijdom died. Dr. Verwoerd became Prime Minister—the man who, more than any other, had caused bitter suffering for the non-whites of South Africa.

Christopher Gell, the man who had done as much to try to alleviate that suffering as anyone—who had fearlessly and brilliantly exposed the evil in Verwoerd's policy—had recently died. Just before his death he gave an instruction: 'Scatter my ashes in the bay on whose strong tides no man can impose the bestiality of apartheid. One day our shores will be cleansed of the ghastly aberration and then the sea can wash me up on the beaches of South Africa to live in peace.'

Ruth First, writing in *Fighting Talk*, said that his death left 'an aching void . . . he was as much part of the Congress movement as any volunteer who went to prison during the Defiance Campaign, or branch official who participated in the hurly-burly of political activity in the townships. . . . There were some who thought he went too far—but they were generally those who themselves never dared go far enough.'

But what Gell himself would have liked best about the tribute was its conclusion: 'The tens of thousands who were spurred by his example will go on fighting his fight.'

In one of the innumerable running battles in the fight there were two small victories to chalk up: in the Treason Trial the Crown had dropped the alternative charge under the Suppression of Communism Act—a notable event also in view of the debate on 'isms'; the Defence had also achieved the recusal of one of the three judges. The charge of High Treason remained—flowing from a 'conspiracy pure and simple'.

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At the time the wives of several of the accused were taking part in a series of anti-pass demonstrations. Among them was Winnie Mandela—a beautiful social worker who had come from Pondoland to take her degree in Johannesburg. It was shortly after her marriage to Nelson Mandela that she with hundreds of others was arrested. The overseas Press reported on the good humour of the redoubtable women. Nearly 500 of them marched in a half-mile column, many with babies on their backs, singing and giving the A.N.C. thumbs up sign. As soon as they were arrested they climbed happily into the police vans, some calling out: 'Tell our madams we won't be at work tomorrow!' Three thousand women went in a disciplined protest to the City Hall. Sporadic demonstrations had gone on in various parts of the country during the past two years, but in face of the intimidation and wiliness of the authorities great numbers of women were being persuaded to take out passes. As a result of the Johannesburg demonstrations 1,300 women were convicted and sentenced to between £3 and £50 fines and from one to three months' imprisonment, with suspension in some cases. Winnie Mandela, Albertina Sisulu, Maggie Resha and other leaders' wives served two weeks' imprisonment then paid a fine. But the A.N.C. had not planned efficiently; no one knew what its policy was supposed to be, whether women should remain in gaol or be bailed out. Many women ready to serve their sentence were angrily disappointed when they suddenly found themselves bailed out. The target for the protests had been 20,000 but only a few thousand took part.

1958 was a bad year for the A.N.C. The long delayed conferences to try to resolve the dispute with the Africanists were at last held in the latter half of the year when the ban on meetings had been raised. Lutuli presided at a conference which aimed to re-unite the Western Cape. He had small success. One of the left-wing was elected President through largely trade union support and three branches broke away.

The Transvaal A.N.C.'s crucial conference took place in November. National leaders presided—Oliver Tambo in the chair, calm and conciliatory; Chief Lutuli giving the address which warned against the 'dangerously narrow African nationalism' growing with its encouragement to people to return to a 'tribalism mentality'. To which Zeph Mathopeng, a jovial Africanist leader, getting on in years, retorted that South Africa was divided into two

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groups—oppressed and oppressor and ‘there can be no co-operation . . . the whites must go back to Europe.’

Charge and counter-charge; recriminations and tempers rising. Josias Madzunya, who had been expelled for his part in trying to break the 1958 stay-at-home, forced his way up to the platform in an angry argument with the credentials committee. He insulted Tambo and Lutuli. Two other leading Africanists recently expelled, Potlako Leballo and Peter Molotsi, brought supporters. Journalists who had been warned that the Africanists were planning a show-down were finding ample material. Tambo had decided that the best strategy was to allow them time and scope to have their say, particularly as they were accompanied by a number of blanketed men carrying weapons. Through the night the argument went on. Lutuli, always anxious to understand the other man’s point of view, sick at heart at the divisions, leaned over backwards in trying to retrieve the Africanists. The genuine grievances against the Transvaal Executive were lost in the abuse and uproar.

Next morning when the conference opened the atmosphere was tense but quiet. The A.N.C. had ensured that the Africanists’ team of blanketed men was outnumbered; both sides had their strong-arm stewards. The credentials committee pursued its weeding out of the expelled men. The Africanists left. They held their own meeting not far away from which they sent a message to the conference: ‘We are launching out on our own as the custodian of A.N.C. policy as formulated in 1912 and pursued up to the time of the Congress Alliance.’

The gulf, tragically, had proved too wide to bridge. In the final clash it was as if the senior leaders were above a brawl that their followers had engaged in. Lutuli and Tambo had had no part in the undemocratic actions of the Transvaal Congress that precipitated much of the trouble. Robert Sobukwe, the emerging leader of the Africanists, remained in the background. A tall, forceful man with a deep voice, he impressed favourably all who knew him. First active in the A.N.C. as a student at Fort Hare, his revolutionary language attracted young men. Leballo, a former member of the A.N.C.’s Orlando East branch and a volunteer in the Defiance Campaign was regarded as the brains behind the Africanists’ tactics. A tough, wiry young man, as a member of the Native Military Corps he had served in the army in the Middle

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East and been imprisoned for leading a mutiny against the system. Peter Mda, since his illness and withdrawal from the A.N.C., had been in touch with the Africanists. They claimed Anton Lembede as their prophet, a claim rejected by Tambo who had known him well and declared he was a national not a sectional leader.

Fragmentation was a familiar story in mass movements but nowhere could it be more disastrous than in South Africa, where the only forces to gain by it were those maintaining white domination.

However for the A.N.C. the long misery of disruption seemed over. The new President of the Transvaal was Gert Sibande. At the national conference held in Durban a month later, in December, 1958, there was an astonishing upsurge of confidence. Lutuli was re-elected President-General with Oliver Tambo his deputy and Duma Nokwe, the tenacious, deep-thinking young barrister, Secretary-General.

The complaint that the Executive's annual report had focused too largely on foreign affairs had had an effect. The focus this year was on Africa. It stated that A.N.C. foreign policy flowed from the Bandung Declarations. Delegates were excited to hear about the historic Pan-African Conference being held in Accra. The A.N.C. was one of its sponsors with Ezekiel Mphahlele, the author, there to represent it, as well as an American sympathizer—Mrs. Mary-Louise Hooper—who had been deported from South Africa for her identification with the A.N.C.

In Accra the A.N.C.'s call to boycott South African goods was taken up.

In Durban the A.N.C. decided to prepare for a long and bitter struggle against the pass laws—'The main pillar of our oppression and exploitation'. The A.N.C. had emerged 'more tightly knit and more powerful', the liberal journal *Contact* commented. It had been a triumph for Chief Lutuli and Oliver Tambo.

XXII

1959: Resurgence Under Lutuli



Lutuli, after the years of being shackled by one ban or another, could at last lead freely again. The All-African People's Conference held in Accra in December 1958 had called for an Africa Week to arouse Africans everywhere to the changes sweeping the continent. On April 15, 1959 Lutuli addressed an overflowing meeting in Durban to launch the week. The crowd listened to messages from Prime Minister Nkrumah and from Julius Nyerere. At the end of the week widespread enthusiasm culminated in a vast gathering outside Johannesburg, with most of the crowd in tribal dress. It was like a carnival with gay processions led by A.N.C. volunteers carrying the flag and banners alongside pictures of Nkrumah, Azikiwe, Nasser, Nyerere, Kenyatta, Mboya, Banda and Lutuli. The crowd—17,000 strong—listened to an address by Oliver Tambo, wearing Pondo blanket and straw hat; Duma Nokwe proclaimed: 'In South Africa we say "Inkululeko". In Tanganyika they say "Uhuru". But it means exactly the same thing—freedom.' It was a great day!

A few days later the indictment against sixty-one of the accused in the Treason Trial was quashed—an added cause for celebration; of the original 156 arrested, only thirty remained on trial.

Lutuli went off to address an overflow meeting in the small town of Ladysmith. Then Cape Town where welcoming crowds escorted him from the train to the Grand Parade. Cape Town suddenly came to life. A series of crowded meetings greeted Lutuli with ovations. Perhaps the most spectacular was that organized by the Congress of Democrats in the Rondebosch Town Hall; a thousand people—a third of them Europeans—packed into a hall built for 600. Many Africans gave up their seats as a gesture of welcome. Lutuli's theme was 'European fears and non-white aspirations'. He assured the audience: 'We are not callous to the situation of the white man in this country, who entertains certain fears—fears that

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culturally, politically and economically he may be swamped and may lose his racial identity because of our numerical superiority. But must the white man, because of those fears, be excused for refusing his fellow man rights? . . . The question is not the preservation of one group or another, but to preserve values which have been developed over generations and to pass those values on to generations to come.'

His lucid, uncompromising approach inspired real enthusiasm. As he left the hall Annie Silinga led the crocodile of men and women of all races that followed him down the street, singing 'Somlandela Lutuli'—we will follow Lutuli. Swinging and swaying in the traditional steps—one, two, three, kick—Annie, ample-bodied, eyes shining, waving to friends, laughing enormously—'we will follow, we will follow Lutuli . . .'

And in the small and comparatively subdued house meetings arranged by the Black Sash women, Lutuli made a profound impression—'an astonishing performance' one of them recalled.

One of the potential young leaders of the A.N.C. said of Lutuli at the time of the hooligans' attack in Pretoria, his 'nobility made him tower above his assailants'. In seven years of leadership he had come to appeal equally to the peasant and to the intellectual; to Christians and to the left. 'He has some magic of attraction,' said one follower, stressing his understanding attentiveness in response to the many problems people took to him; while a dogmatic member of the left remarked: 'Lutuli has so much respect for you that you respect him.' This was true of Africans, of Europeans and of Indians—who found him a tower of strength. 'A man of maturity with a noble, generous temperament,' said one liberal.

A 'triumphal tour' was the Johannesburg *Star's* description of Lutuli's visit to the Cape. The Transvaal was to be next.

In May, a week before Lutuli was due to address a mass rally in Sophiatown, the Special Branch called at his small farm and handed him a banning order. This time it was for five years. Verwoerd and his Government clearly could not stand his soaring popularity. They banned him immediately from attending gatherings; from June they confined him to the Lower Tugela area.

Nor dared they allow the A.N.C. freedom of expression. Thirty-six hours before the great rally was due the Johannesburg Magistrate banned all meetings on that day—May 31. Congress promptly switched the rally to the 30th. On the morning of the

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30th the Magistrate banned all public meetings that afternoon. Only a private conference could be held.

The people were undeflected by these paltry acts. Lutuli, with three days to go before his confinement took effect, set off for Johannesburg. A huge crowd of cheering, singing supporters saw him off at Durban railway station. The Government might ban him from voicing his thanks, how much more telling then was his silent smiling appreciation as the train pulled out. All along the line there were people who waved and sang Congress songs, and when the train stopped, brought him gifts of food.

And in the Transvaal the crowds massed, singing 'Somlandela Lutuli', and wildly cheering when Lutuli raised his hand in silent greeting. The Special Branch were everywhere. Serenely, Lutuli moved through the people but to the A.N.C. conference of 900 Africans packed into the small Gandhi Hall, his brief message expressed his real emotions: 'I have a feeling of anger and disgust,' he said, at the Government's ban on the great rally. 'I can promise you there will always be an A.N.C. to speak for the African people, despite reports from Cape Town that my Congress is expected to be banned soon.'

Under the leadership of Tambo, Nokwe and Resha the conference discussed plans for opposing the pass laws, taking encouragement from the fact that the bare announcement of their economic boycott of Nationalist products had induced one large firm to reinstate African workers victimized after the previous year's stay-at-home. The women's anti-pass protests were 'heroic and inspiring' the conference agreed. They resolved 'to campaign to the limit of our ability against the pass laws'; they decided immediately to inform the masses about the laws and their effects.

That evening the police again intruded; mounted the platform and demanded copies of all documents. Resha had urged on the people Lutuli's desire that they should not be provoked. Though they sang defiantly they did not obstruct the police. Tambo emphasized: 'We do not have any subversive documents.' He praised the remarkable discipline of the delegates. Their own restraint clearly elated them.

The next day the crowd at the conference had so multiplied that people had to stand in the passages and outside the hall. They heard a report on the continued ill-treatment of farm labourers, particularly on potato and maize farms in the Transvaal. Twelve



11a Accused of Treason—Prof. Z. K. Matthews and Chief Lutuli



11b Potato Boycott begins



12a The Author with Nelson Mandela



12b Chief Lutuli receiving the Nobel Prize

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years after Sibande and Scott had made their disclosures, conditions were as bad as ever. Indeed worse because recently the Departments of Native Affairs and Justice together with the South African Police had devised a scheme whereby unemployed Africans or petty offenders were induced to accept labour on farms. As a rule they were sent to farms where the owner was so notoriously bad an employer that he could not get labour in any other way. The atrocious abuses under this system had been disclosed by a Johannesburg attorney, assisted by the Black Sash. There were still cases of farmers or their 'boss-boys' beating labourers until they died or were severely injured. The conference also heard how men had been virtually abducted to farms, how several farms visited revealed labourers locked up at night to prevent them 'escaping'; kept in over-crowded badly ventilated huts, they had to sleep on filthy blankets or lousy sacks. Half drums were brought in at night for sanitary pails. There was little water for drinking, less for washing. Food was mainly mealie-meal.

The delegates gave vent to their horror at this suffering of their fellows and when Resha called for a ban on the buying of potatoes they wildly applauded; they demanded a full investigation into the condition of farm workers in those areas.

Between speeches the delegates sang 'Somlandela Lutuli'. The new banning had further enhanced his prestige. During his brief visit to Johannesburg, restricted though he was, he got a powerful feeling that the country was awakening politically. Durban welcomed him back tumultuously. The great receptions, he said, 'give me a feeling that I can carry with me when I go into my temporary retirement.' Driven by J. N. Singh, he was seen off by Alan Paton and other friends in a convoy of cars filled with people of all races. They passed through the lush sugar-covered hills of Natal's North Coast and the overcrowded villages with their brightly sariied Indians. Singh drew up at a rough dirt road straggling off the main road through fields: this was Groutville reserve. It was an offence to enter the area without a permit. Chief Lutuli got out, gave the Congress salute to his friends and walked, upright, into his exile.

Though his colleagues might visit him, and journalists and even sometimes distinguished visitors from abroad, this would relieve the isolation but could never compensate for Lutuli's feeling of being 'cut off from what you like, contact with people'. This, he explained, not only 'keeps your spirits up', but more

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important it 'really gives an insight into their feelings, what they are thinking, and then your own views too are corrected and you can plan things more realistically'.

Lutuli's previous bans had met with little protest outside the Congress Alliance and Liberal Party. Now the white Press of South Africa came out with banner headlines and editorial criticisms. Eminent citizens protested against the 'palpable injustice'. There were protest meetings of all races in Johannesburg and Durban. The Africanists, too, condemned the ban.

To the Government Lutuli was a peculiarly dangerous man: he, more than any other African leader in the country's history, had profoundly affected the whites. The Government dreaded that whites should come to know and understand Africans as individuals, and therefore lose their fear of them.

Next Tambo and Nokwe, Lutuli's deputy and Secretary-General, were banned from gatherings for five years. Nokwe had already suffered as a barrister under the Group Areas and Native Urban Areas Acts which barred him from having chambers in the city. Resha, the A.N.C.'s press relations officer, was banned from gatherings and in addition confined to the Johannesburg area for five years. Gert Sibande, Transvaal President, banned from meetings, was banished to Komatipoort. Oscar Mpetha, the Cape President, was similarly banned and also confined. It was not only the leaders—all the time the backbone of Congress was being attacked: in one area where two people had been shot dead by the police twenty Congress members had been arrested and bail of £50 each was urgently needed—but they did not even have enough to bail out one man. From another branch the chairman had been banished, from others organizers had been banned.

However accustomed A.N.C. leaders had become to such setbacks, these were particularly grievous blows coming just as Congress had been reinvigorated and was in the thick of organizing an extended boycott and the anti-pass campaign.

The Government took no such action against the Africanists who toured the country holding meetings and recruiting members. They had shed the wild Josias Madzunya and were evolving a positive policy. In March 1959 they established the Pan-Africanist Congress. Three hundred delegates unanimously elected Robert Mangaliso—'wonderful'—Sobukwe, lecturer in Zulu studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, as their President.

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In his address to the conference he said the P.A.C. aimed 'politically at the government of the African, by the African for the African, with everybody who owes his only loyalty to Africa and who is prepared to accept the democratic rule of an African majority, being regarded as an African. We guarantee no minority rights because we think in terms of individuals not groups.'

Africanist foreign policy was he said an endorsement of the view of leaders such as Nkrumah and Mboya—positive neutralism—a rejection of totalitarianism. In economics they believed in 'the equitable distribution of wealth', aiming, as far as he was concerned, at 'equality of income'. The Africanists believed that there was only one race, the human race. In a subsequent statement on the Africanist attitude to Europeans, he said, 'We have admitted that there are Europeans who are intellectual converts to the African's cause, but, because they benefit materially from the present set-up, they cannot completely identify themselves with that cause.' Indian leadership, he wrote, was drawn from the merchant class 'tainted with the view of national arrogance and cultural supremacy'. He wished 'coolies' would reject this opportunist leadership and produce their own. 'In short,' he said in the words of Tambo to Xuma, before Tambo had had the experience of working alongside Indians and whites, 'we intend to go it alone.'¹

The Pan-Africanist Congress's aim was to unite and rally Africans on the basis of nationalism and to fight for the overthrow of white domination, thus achieving an Africanist democratic society. Potlako Leballo was elected National Secretary.

The consolidation of Africanist feeling in this party was a significant political event, but all except a handful of whites pursued their ostrich course, absorbed in their living and in their sport. For almost any white person South Africa remained a delightful place to live in. For Africans there was intensified discontent and serious upheavals. People had fled from the Zeerust area to Bechuanaland to escape the combined menace of police and Government-supporting chiefs: mass trials went on during the year. In Sekukhuniland it was the same story. In the Transkei, the enforcement of Bantu Authorities had set off what was virtually civil war. In Pretoria police baton-charged a peaceful meeting of African women. The A.N.C. was gravely concerned about the new pattern of police baton charges, and in some cases of the use of

¹ *Contact*. May 30, 1959.

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firearms by the police when dealing with peaceful demonstrations. They complained to the Minister of Justice. Other political and church bodies wrote to the Minister demanding a public commission of inquiry into the Pretoria assaults. The Minister refused. The Government bought eighty Saracen armoured cars.

There was the annual tightening up of repressive laws. Apartheid was forced on universities despite six years of widespread protests from academic authorities at home and abroad. The Minister of Bantu Education took over Fort Hare University College. The great tradition of a college that in some forty years had produced many of Africa's most notable leaders was destroyed. Professor Matthews could stay on provided he resigned from the A.N.C. He refused. He resigned from Fort Hare. At the age of fifty-seven, with children still to be educated, he gave up salary and pension and, with his wife, Freda, who had been librarian and music teacher at the college, he began a new life. For the first time he practised as a lawyer for which he had qualified twenty-eight years before.

The Treason Trial of thirty defendants continued. The Prosecution's case had steadily narrowed down until it was limited to proving the intention of the accused to act violently. On May 12, 1959, the Minister of Justice said, 'This trial will be proceeded with, no matter how many millions of pounds it costs . . . what does it matter how long it takes?'

All the while poverty gnawed at the lives of Africans. Some 80% in the urban areas lived below the breadline. Kwashiorkor—malignant malnutrition—continued to kill many African children, yet the Government continued to refuse school feeding to African children. The African infant mortality rate from 1957-8 was 159.66 in seven towns while the white rate for the whole country was 29.4 per thousand. The average African income was £20 a year against the white's £400—the third highest in the world after the U.S.A. and Canada.¹

¹ Lutuli dealt with the Government's boast of the advantages of apartheid. He compared what was spent on the different races:

	3m. Whites	10½m. Non-Whites
Housing	£64½ million	£30 million
Food subsidies	£85 million	£41 million
Education	£150 million	£37 million
Pensions	£81 million	£35 million
Children's allowance	£9 million	£5 million

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The Government chose this time to raise African taxes by 75%. Already Africans were liable for tax from the age of eighteen whereas whites paid it from the age of twenty-one. Unlike whites they had no reduction in tax for married men with families. Unlike whites they had to pay tribal levies, in some areas hospital levies, municipal fees and hut tax. In country areas Africans were liable for ploughing, grazing, and dipping fees. But for them failure to pay tax was a *criminal* offence: in 1957, 177,890 Africans had been arrested and tried, an increase of more than 50,000 over the previous year. Meanwhile, Government and employers held each other responsible for deciding on wage increases, thus shelving responsibility. An inter-departmental committee disclosed that wages for Africans in commerce were: for 6,416 men between £51-£60 per annum, for 24,940 between £61-£70, for 47,744 between £101-£110, with only 159 men getting more than £180 a year. On farms cash earnings were estimated at £29 17s. od.-£49 1s. od. per annum.¹

In Durban poverty was driving people to an extremity of despair. In the Cato Manor shack settlement women complained of their husbands' grossly inadequate salaries. They complained that the administration provided no lights and no sewerage. And they complained about nightly police raids, of a constant invasion of their privacy; a deep loathing for the police—both for their personal behaviour and as instruments of the oppressive laws—had taken root. A peaceful protest by women and children having proved virtually ineffectual, their grievances centred on the system of municipal beer halls. Throughout the country for decades resentment had simmered as the law preventing Africans from brewing traditional beer cut deep into their traditional forms of hospitality, but some of the menfolk, instead of giving their wives the little money they earned, drank it away in the beer halls. The women argued that the halls should be closed and that they should be allowed to brew; that furthermore this would supplement their husbands' pay. The official reply was a refusal to close the beer halls and a reminder that police raids were the law of the land. The discontent exploded on June 18, 1959 when some 2,000 women had gathered to tell their grievances to a local official and, as in Pretoria, towards the end of the meeting the police broke up the crowd with a baton charge. As in Pretoria there were women with

¹ *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1957-8*. Muriel Horrell.

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babies, some fell, some were seriously hurt; the predictable result—rioting. A.N.C. leaders calling on people to be non-violent, were powerless to stem the rage; through the night the rioters, including teenagers, burnt municipal buildings and vehicles. The beer hall, however, was preserved—the police shot and killed three Africans who tried to attack it. The disturbances simmered then spread. Only an hour's journey away was Chief Lutuli; restricted, anxious and frustrated. He appealed for peace and promised that the A.N.C. would do all it could to find a solution in submitting the people's grievances to the authorities.

The Director of Bantu Administration in Durban stated that the basic reason for the riots was the poverty of the urban Bantu. He appealed for wage increases, pointing out that not one of the City Council's 7,700 unskilled African employees could afford the rent charged in one of the new townships. A senior official rejected his contention that the riots were caused by poverty and criticized the Municipality for inadequate control.¹

In Natal the whole countryside was rising. The boycott of beer halls had caught on and women picketed them in a number of municipalities. The response of the authorities was to intensify police action against illegal brewing in Durban. As usual the Government refused a judicial inquiry into the disturbances at Cato Manor. In the rural areas the frustration and anger over the accumulating grievances focused on the dipping tanks for cattle which women were forced to maintain by unpaid labour. Throughout the tense province three-quarters of the dipping tanks were destroyed. Sometimes the protests took the form of orderly deputations to the Bantu Commissioner, sometimes they were violent. In Pietermaritzburg police broke up the women's picketing of the beer halls by baton charges; the reaction in a nearby area was to burn down all the Bantu education schools. The A.N.C. and the Natal Indian Congress condemned the violence, and appealed for an end to such demonstrations. But a chain reaction had been precipitated. The upheavals went on. Hundreds of women were gaoled—in one village a gaol built for 115 prisoners held 482. Police trying to disperse a crowd of women found them kneeling down and praying in front of them. The police arrested the entire crowd—nearly 400 women—who were fined £35 or four months' imprisonment. None paid the fine; subsequently

¹ The Municipality announced small wage increases soon after.

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all were freed on appeal. Through the mass trials the spirit of the women of Natal remained uncrushed.

The A.N.C. had been quick to send volunteers to the main trouble spots to win support for clear-cut demands and to mobilize people in a disciplined movement. A remarkable young leader had emerged—Margaret Mnqadi, a beautiful young doctor, a Roman Catholic and a most respected and loved member of the community who was prominent in the A.N.C. Women's League. Although she was quiet and self-effacing she was renowned for her courage.

She did much to attract new members to the A.N.C. People flocked to join it and against the troubled background the June 26 'Freedom Day' celebration at Currie's Fountain—the historic meeting ground of the great Indian gatherings in the 1946 passive resistance—was one of the largest in South Africa: estimates varied between 20,000—50,000 people. The huge crowd cheered lustily when a message was read from Lutuli renewing the boycott call. Despite the mass of bans and confinements earlier in the year the Congress was on a powerful upward surge. The potato boycott was a great success—a substantial achievement since potatoes were a staple food for Africans. In markets all over the country they were piling up despite attempts by Government and farmers to break the boycott. (Subsequently the boycott, combined with protests from the Black Sash and other organizations, brought the Government to introduce reforms to the farm labour system—albeit limited ones.)

In June the Minister of Justice resorted to one of his periodic scare announcements: the A.N.C., he alleged, were planning to assassinate Dr. Verwoerd!

Two months after the first outbreak at Cato Manor, in mid-August, Dr. W. W. M. Eiselen, Secretary for Bantu Administration and Development, toured Natal, consulting officials and magistrates. He declared that the senseless destruction could only be understood against the background of the 'sustained and exaggerated criticisms of everything the State does for the Bantu. . . .' He blamed the A.N.C. Simultaneously a senior police official said the A.N.C. were directly responsible for organizing the defiance, an allegation rebutted by Lutuli with a reminder that Congress was against violence. In fact the A.N.C.'s volunteers were going out to organize the discontent into a disciplined move-

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ment. In remote areas they found people spontaneously giving the thumbs up salute, singing Congress songs—particularly ‘Somlandela Lutuli’—even wearing Congress uniforms. Consequently, when the A.N.C. convened a special conference in September, people from the rural areas flocked to Durban. Nearly half the thousand delegates came from forty-five rural areas—an achievement in which Dr. Mngadi played a large part. The Government should also be given credit because—with its system of Bantu Authorities creating chaos in the tribes—it provoked people into joining the A.N.C. Membership rapidly mounted. In Natal trade unions were also becoming more effective under the leadership of Moses Mabhida—the A.N.C. Vice-President. But this was the women’s hour and at the conference, under a bright red banner saying **MAKABONGWE AMAKOSIKAZI**—we thank the women—sat the leaders: prominent among them was Miss Dorothy Nyembe, twice imprisoned in the Defiance Campaign, leader of the Natal women in the Union Building’s protest, and only recently released from the Treason Trial.

In Pretoria, the Trial continued. The corner stone of the Prosecution’s case—the Freedom Charter—along with every conceivable document any member of the Congress Alliance had composed or read in the previous six years, had been minutely studied. A Pole, an expert on Communism, had been imported from Switzerland. The verdict of Professor Joseph Bochenski, D.D., Ph.D., on the Freedom Charter was that although communist phraseology was not used in it, it was probable that it had been formulated by communists because of such proposals as land being shared amongst those working on it—a step advocated in the ‘National-Democratic revolution’ by Lenin towards ‘a socialist revolution’. However the Professor added: ‘There is nothing (in the Charter) to compel the reader to conclude that this is a communist statement.’ It was declared to be ‘a moderately socialist programme with stress on liberal theses’. For an expensively-imported expert witness this was not what the Prosecution had exactly hoped for.

Somehow morale continued high among the accused. Philemon Mathole—mine striker in 1946, grocer in Moroka township, defier in 1952, father of eight with a widowed mother and his late sister’s three children dependent on him—though the three years of the Treason Trial had killed his small business, could nevertheless

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arrive in court grinning broadly. Asked how he did it he explained: 'Physical culture. I get up in the morning, do my exercises, have a wash, put on my clothes, put on my smile, come to court.'

The Treason Trial brought new associates from the white camp to the A.N.C. and strengthened bonds with old friends. Among the latter were Alex Hepple, leader of the dwindling Labour Party, Father Mark Nye of Pretoria and Bishop Reeves. In line with the A.N.C.'s anti-pass plans, Reeves had achieved a Consultative Committee of Fourteen Organizations including the A.N.C.; it ranged from the Black Sash to the Congress of Democrats. There might be people in church circles who disapproved of the Bishop's involvement in 'politics', but from the dispossessed and their leaders he met with singular respect and affection. In the committee work—whether it was the Treason Trial, the earlier bus boycott committee, or the most recent Committee of Fourteen Organizations—he invariably had carefully thought through the agenda, arrived punctually with definite ideas, and was impatient with the woolly-minded. Some thought him too dictatorial; but most responded to his refreshingly direct leadership which had been lacking for so long. He also had an uncompromising faith. It was not surprising that despite his dislike of some of the ideological assumptions of the left-wing, he got on well with them. He made it clear he would not endorse decisions and plans already arrived at. Nor did he find evidence of their trying to exploit the situation to their own ideological advantage. It was partly due to his influence that the legal team for the defence of the accused in the Treason Trial was of such a high calibre.

1959 was drawing to a close. Police harassing continued ceaselessly. One of the latest victims was the Vice-President of the A.N.C. Women's League, the indefatigable Mrs. Elizabeth Mafekeng, mother of a large family. Because of her belligerent fight on behalf of African trade unions, she was banished from the Cape to a remote area. She managed to escape to Basutoland where she settled. From Cape Town the A.N.C.'s ablest leader, Greenwood Ngotyana, was among those 'endorsed out', leaving a gap in the A.N.C.'s organizing there.

'Endorsing out' was the Government's euphemism for driving out Africans from urban areas to reserves under the notorious Section 10 of the Urban Areas Act. No African might be in an urban area for more than seventy-two hours unless he or she had

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resided there for fifteen years or worked with the same employer for ten years, or had a discretionary permit to reside and work there. Endorsed back to the reserve the victim of this law would be driven by poverty and lack of opportunity once again to an urban area—to be re-arrested. Often if the person endorsed out were married, it meant splitting up the family. The Western Cape had been hardest hit by Section 10 when the Government declared it a preserve of the white and Coloured people and regularly endorsed thousands of Africans out. In South Africa nearly half a million Africans—almost one in twenty of the total population—were convicted under this law and the pass laws each year.

Action was what the African people wanted. That is why for the third time in a few months they flocked to an A.N.C. gathering in Durban for the annual conference on December 16, 1959. A new factor was the number of peasant women who attended the conference. Rules were waived to enable them to speak. Margaret Mnqadi introduced them as her sisters. Zulu women who would normally be loyal supporters of their Paramount Chief announced, 'We recognize only one Chief, Lutuli.' Another impressive feature was the clearly apparent understanding between the Africans and Indians present—for those who had experienced the rabid antipathy at the time of the 1949 riots this was a constructive achievement for the Natal A.N.C. and the Indian Congress.

Despite the enervating heat of Durban's summer the conference proceedings moved rapidly to a climax. When a message was read from Lutuli, advising careful consideration before taking action, it was swept aside by a delegate who rose and urged: 'Let us force our leaders into a tight corner! If they still think in terms of strategy we think in terms of action.' Thunderous applause followed. The theme was action. March 31, 1960 would be anti-pass day. Mass anti-pass demonstrations would follow in May and June.

A week after the A.N.C. conference had taken place the Pan-Africanist Congress held its first annual conference. They decided to launch a campaign against the pass laws. The slogan would be: 'NO BAIL, NO DEFENCE, NO FINE.'

XXIII

1960: Africa Year in South Africa



Africa Year. From South Africa when Africans looked to the North they saw new States burgeoning. And their cause was beginning to be taken up by the newly-independent States.

During January in Tunis the second All-African Peoples' Conference resolved to boycott South African goods. In Britain the call for boycott from the Congress Alliance and certain individuals in the South African Liberal Party aroused the Labour and Liberal Parties, the Trades Union Congress and certain co-operative societies, to support the newly-formed Anti-Apartheid Movement in its campaign for a boycott of South African goods. In Cato Manor the poverty was unabated; the police liquor raids continued. A constable trod on a woman's foot; the avenging crowd killed five African policemen and four white policemen.

During February from Groutville Chief Lutuli warned South Africa that African resentment was high. In Cape Town Mr. Macmillan shocked some and delighted many when he told the Government and the people of South Africa about the 'wind of change' that was sweeping across the continent. A typical A.N.C. comment, however, was: 'We'll see whether he means it when Britain votes at the next U.N. Session'. In the event this scepticism proved to be justified.

The A.N.C.'s plan for the anti-pass campaign reached its second phase when it joined the Committee of Fourteen Organizations in a deputation to the Johannesburg City Council, to demand the abolition of the pass laws. A mass poster demonstration followed and pamphlets stating the case for condemning and abolishing the pass laws were widely distributed.

Robert Sobukwe and other leaders of the P.A.C. were touring the country. They found fertile ground especially in two areas—the

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Southern Transvaal and the Western Cape. Thousands of African women with their children had been endorsed out of the Cape Peninsula—sent away from their husbands and homes. The husband was then labelled a 'bachelor' and forced to live in bachelor 'zones' in Langa—a township in the sand flats eight miles from Cape Town. Langa—supposed to house 5,000 people—in fact had a population of 25,000. Only 1,870 were women. Of the 20,000 men, 18,000 were housed under bachelor conditions. Into this obvious hot-bed of frustration and discontent came a handful of young, able P.A.C. men. Nana Mahomo came as a student at the University of Cape Town in 1957 but his real task was to organize for the P.A.C. He concentrated on building up leaders who came to live in the 'zones', young men in their twenties. One of them was Philip Kgosane from Pretoria, who was studying medicine but soon abandoned his studies to take over when Mahomo went North. Their activist approach, their demands that Africans immediately throw off the pass laws 'to go it alone' found a ready response.

On March 13, Stanley Uys, South Africa's outstanding political journalist, warned in the Johannesburg *Sunday Times* that a crisis point had been reached in South African politics. The tension in Parliament, he reported, was so thick it could almost be cut with a knife.

On the 18th Sobukwe announced that within seventy-two hours the P.A.C. would launch a campaign for the abolition of the pass laws. They would call for a minimum wage of £35 a month. Thus, by ten days, they had cut in on the A.N.C.'s call. They also added £5 to the A.N.C.'s aim of £1 a day minimum wage. Sobukwe urged people to leave passes at home and to surrender themselves to the nearest police station. This, he promised, was the first step in achieving 'freedom and independence' by 1963. He instructed people to observe absolute non-violence. He invited the A.N.C. to co-operate. Nokwe, as Secretary-General of the A.N.C., replied that Congress would not support 'sensational actions that might not succeed. . . .'

March 21, Monday morning, 7 a.m. Barefooted and determined, Sobukwe led a group of P.A.C. leaders to Orlando police H.Q. offering themselves for arrest for destroying their passes. They were immediately put into the cells. Thirty-five miles away, in Sharpeville, the African township of Vereeniging, and a few other

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areas of the Southern Transvaal, and in Langa, altogether about 50,000 people responded to the P.A.C. call. Natal and the Eastern Cape, strongholds of the A.N.C., produced a negligible response.

In Evaton nearly 20,000 people inviting arrest were dispersed when Sabre Jets and Harvard planes dived menacingly low over them. And—at a time when Dr. Conco, giving evidence for the Defence in the Treason Trial, was saying that African people commonly held the view that the police shot first—the law-abiding people of the model township of Sharpeville were gathering in their thousands outside the police station. As the morning wore on the crowd which journalists found ‘perfectly amiable’ appeared to the police increasingly menacing. At 1.40 p.m. seventy-five members of the South African police force fired about 700 shots into the crowd, killing sixty-nine Africans and wounding 180. Most of them were shot in the back. At 4 p.m. a thundershower washed away the blood in the street outside the police station.

At 6 p.m. a thousand miles away, in Langa, some 10,000 people gathered beside the bachelor ‘zones’. After a day of rumours and deflection of demonstrations, they believed the police were about to answer their demands that the pass laws be abolished. A fateful misunderstanding existed: many of the crowd were unaware that public meetings had been prohibited, on the other hand the police officer in charge of the force that came—a man said to be quiet and steady with a fine record—was unaware that the crowd was expecting him to make an important statement. He ordered them to disperse, gave a three minutes’ warning which few could hear, and led his force of sixty armed policemen in a baton charge. Stone throwing, another baton charge, more stones, then the order to fire! Two Africans were killed, forty-nine injured. That night the crowd went berserk, burning Bantu education schools and public buildings in the township, killing a Coloured driver whom they encountered.

SHARPEVILLE LANGA flashed around the world.

Although in other countries—Algeria for instance—there had been far worse casualties, there had not been such an outburst of horror as shook the world on this occasion. The increasing abhorrence felt for South Africa’s apartheid policies and the persistent non-violence which the A.N.C. and its allies had pursued for nearly fifty years, had deeply stirred the international conscience. In unprecedented actions, the Security Council of the United

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Nations, the United States Department of State, members of all parties in Parliament in Britain, and the Dutch Government, deplored the police action and the policy of apartheid from which it flowed. They sympathized with the African people. Dr. Verwoerd praised the police, and declared that the riots were not unique. Mr. de Wet Nel, Minister for Bantu Administration, remarked that race relations were better than ever.

In the first anguished shock Chief Lutuli and Professor Matthews called for a national day of mourning. The A.N.C.'s bitterness over what it regarded as the P.A.C.'s precipitate action was absorbed in the common sorrow. On March 27 Chief Lutuli, feeling that the A.N.C. was challenged to do something to rally the people to a higher pitch, burnt his pass publicly in Pretoria, to be followed by many others. A few days later the pass laws were suddenly suspended; for a wonderful moment it seemed that the campaign had brought victory. Learning that the Government was determined to ban the A.N.C. and P.A.C. the National Executive of Congress met and decided that Oliver Tambo, their Vice-President, should go abroad as 'ambassador'. He set out at once, without a passport, making for Bechuanaland, Tanganyika and London.

A nation's mourning found its outlet in the vast funerals for the victims of the shooting, and in the countrywide response to Lutuli's call for a stay-at-home strike of mourning. Then the anger took over—rioting broke out in Johannesburg and in Worcester.

The pass laws were on again.

On March 31—the day when the A.N.C.'s anti-pass campaign had been due to begin—the Government blanketed the country with a State of Emergency. As mass arrests began, with almost all leaders imprisoned, in Cape Town police were driving Africans back to work with swinging batons and sjamboks; in demonstrations in Durban four more Africans were shot. The imagination of the outside world was caught by the spontaneous march of 30,000 Africans to Parliament in Cape Town. At a time when the country was in a state of emergency, when police were trigger-happy, when white South Africa was shaken as it had never been shaken before—when the African people were stronger than at any time in recent history, this march of 30,000 people was a remarkable event. The leader was a young student, dressed in shorts; this was Philip Kgosane. For a brief moment he captured

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the spirit of the whole movement. Then for a week, two weeks, the African labour force of Cape Town struck. This in the sleepy Cape, the safe haven, remote not only from the rest of the world but from the rest of Africa, its barriers of mountains protecting its Mediterranean rocks and vineyards. What might have been achieved had Lutuli called for a *nation-wide* strike for a week or more?

Day after day as the police and army swooped, rounding up thousands of anonymous Africans to be imprisoned alongside their leaders, the enraged leaderless protests went on. Saracen tanks, armoured symbols of the hated Government, patrolled the townships arousing a vindictive anger which sprang from terror and bewilderment. By April 9 the death toll was eighty-three non-white civilians and three non-white police, while 365 non-white civilians and twenty-six non-white police were injured. No white policeman or civilians were killed; sixty were injured.

In the middle of it all the Minister of Justice called for calm. The Minister of Finance called for immigrants. The Minister of Native Affairs declared that apartheid was a model for the world.

The one Minister who showed momentary misgivings about Government policy—Paul Sauer—was quickly brought to heel. Mounting protests from South African industrialists and leaders of commerce were ignored by the Government. A white man tried to assassinate Dr. Verwoerd.

Mandela, Sisulu, Nokwe and other leaders involved in the Treason Trial, as well as Lutuli who was giving evidence, were imprisoned in Pretoria gaol. Professor Matthews, who should have been Visiting Professor to New York State University at the time, was in East London gaol with Dr. Njongwe and sixty-eight other men and eight women. James Calata, lately installed as a Canon of the Cathedral Chapter of Grahamstown—the first African to receive this honour—was in the nearby Port Elizabeth gaol where the conditions revived his old illness. In Cape Town the indomitable Annie Silinga was as usual proving 'very troublesome'—so the wardress said! Johnston Ngwevela—the elderly leader who had been amongst the first to defy in the great Campaign, simple and inarticulate, a True Templar who as a child had played and swum with white children—found that apartheid meant what it said. Many people whom the police sought had found refuge across the borders in the High Commission Territories—

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Joe Matthews in Basutoland, Dr. Conco in Swaziland; others making their way through Bechuanaland to the North. Yet in South Africa the A.N.C. called again for a renewal of the struggle against the pass laws.

On April 8 the Government declared the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress 'unlawful organizations'—a 'serious threat to the safety of the public'. Parliament outlawed these organizations representing the mass of the people of South Africa by 128 votes to sixteen. The four Native Representatives and members of the newly-formed Progressive Party were alone in voting against the Bill. The penalty for furthering the aims of these unlawful organizations was imprisonment for up to ten years.

January 8, 1912—when the Native National Congress was founded one of the delegates had said, 'We felt wonderfully optimistic. To us freedom was only round the corner.' Forty-eight years and two months later—after persistently countering the open force of successive Governments by civilized methods of struggle, and at a time when their fellows elsewhere in the continent were becoming Prime Ministers—the African National Congress of South Africa was driven underground.

The A.N.C.'s last action—a typically creative reaction to the cruelty and suffering of the previous two weeks—had been to call for a National Convention to lay the foundations of a new Union of South Africa.

Epilogue I

1961: Verdict on the A.N.C.



In the Union almost every political leader of the opposition—the former A.N.C. and its Allies, the Liberal Party, and the former P.A.C.—was detained. The net dragged in many people who had not been involved in politics for ten years or more, and even two missionaries. No radical opponent of the Government could feel safe.

As usual prison conditions for the Africans were disgusting—over-crowded, often intolerably filthy, with rusty tins for food that was bitter pap—and in the majority of cases were marked with the coarse brutality that the system breeds in its wardens. Yet the diary kept by one of the left-wing leaders of the former A.N.C. recorded other facets of their life as well. They sang freedom songs and had daily discussions on a remarkably Catholic range of subjects: the pass system; music; marriage; Afrikaner Nationalism; sex education; should ancient customs and religions be restored after freedom?—a lively discussion revealing that apart from the few on the far left, the majority regarded the restoration of customs as essential. When they discussed leadership the essential qualities, they agreed, were ‘personality, dignity, alertness, knowledge, intelligence, sincerity, perseverance, determination, restraint and humility’.

Before long, in this particular prison, they were moved into better surroundings although the gaol food met with curses all round. There were good moments: the knowledge that ‘our own men abroad, such as Bishop Reeves and Oliver Tambo and others were sparing nothing of themselves to show up the brutality of this philosophy of racial supremacy’. (Although Bishop Reeves’s departure for Swaziland had been a blow, their disappointment was encompassed by their respect and gratitude.) Then, once again, came Africa Day, April 15, ‘magnified into a historical

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landmark' when a warder brought in a new broom which literally did sweep clean. The Defence and Aid Committees under the presidency of the Archbishop of Cape Town—distributing food and warm clothing to the detained—'sealed bonds of friendship between the Africans and that section of the white population which realizes that the narrow racial nationalism of the Nationalist Party cannot work in the world of today.' The diarist exuberantly recorded the Trinidad dockers' refusal to handle South African goods. There were the gaol officials in whose moods the detainees took great interest: one, after demanding to be addressed as 'baas', called for mutual understanding as he told the detainees they might be there for two or even five years. 'Remember,' he added, 'thirty years ago we Afrikaners were in a similar position to yours.' The Africans were fascinated by the mental turmoil this revealed.

Bechuanaland's constitutional changes were announced in London and this modest advance pleased even the far left even though the chiefs' influence would still prevail. The rise of the bank rate, the crisis in Pondoland, the Congo, all these were among the subjects that cropped up. And there was the warmth of comradeship so that when some detainees were released after three months, the parting 'aroused feelings of tenderness'.

May 31, 1960—half a century of Union. In Natal Mrs. Lutuli, Alan Paton, Manilal Gandhi's widow and Fatima Meer led the fasting and prayers to remind the country of all the thousands still in gaol. The whole of the Ohlange Institute which Dr. Dube had founded took part and through the night hundreds of Africans joined Indians in worship.

The leadership of the A.N.C. and the P.A.C., according to the *Rand Daily Mail* on August 25, had 'withered away'. Six days later, after five months' detention, the remainder of the political detainees were released. Within two weeks according to the *Johannesburg Star* an A.N.C. caretaker committee had formed cells. Ten days later leaflets appeared attacking the pass laws. All over the country UHURU—the freedom slogan of East Africa—was written large: in Port Elizabeth, in Alice, on the Durban Esplanade, on the floor of a post office and the front wall of a gaol, and across Oxford Road in Johannesburg's upper class suburbs.

These signs displayed the contempt felt for the edict that to further the aims of the A.N.C. was a criminal offence. Besides, if anything was furthering its aims at this time, it was the Treason

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Trial instituted by the Government. In yet another example of South Africa's weird outlandishness A.N.C. leaders and members—at the invitation of the Crown—were daily expounding the now-banned organization's policies and describing its activities. The trial was dragging through its fifth year. The *Manchester Guardian* had aptly described it as 'a political trial pursued with pitiless pertinacity'.¹

The A.N.C.'s programme was the essence of the trial, yet its senior leaders, Albert Lutuli and Oliver Tambo, had been dismissed before the proper trial had begun. The Freedom Charter had been allowed to fade into the background. The 1949 Programme of Action had become a major issue. In the last resort the Crown's case depended on proving violence in the policy of the A.N.C. Attempts to discover violence in its campaigns against the Western Areas removals and against Bantu education had failed as had an attempt to link Congress with the riots in the Eastern Cape and Kimberley in 1952.

There remained the object—as the Chief Prosecutor, Oswald Pirow, Q.C., stated just before his death in October 1959—of proving that 'the accused must have known that the course of action pursued by them would inevitably result in a violent collision with the State resulting in its subversion'. Involved in this was the question of the feasibility of non-violence in South Africa. The A.N.C.'s failure to avert the Western Areas removals was part of its failure to plan for the eventuality of the Government putting down non-violence by violence.

Robert Resha's 'murder murder' speech—his illustration that people should be so disciplined that if told to be violent they must murder—had become a prize exhibit. The Prosecution's conclusion, from this and a handful of other speeches, that A.N.C. volunteers would be shock troops for a bloody revolution, was roundly rejected by Chief Lutuli who pointed to the volume of evidence that volunteers in fact distributed leaflets and helped in organizing for passive resistance.

Lutuli, tired and ill from strain after his arrest and imprisonment in the Emergency, could only spend two hours a day in the witness stand.² Led by Advocate Maisels, he was questioned about

¹ November 15, 1956.

² An additional strain was his trial for burning his pass—he was eventually sentenced to a year's imprisonment or £100 fine. The fine was paid by friends.

Verdict on the A.N.C.

the A.N.C.'s attitude to the 'East' and to the 'West'. He said the tendency was to judge nations by their attitude to apartheid at UNO. The question of equality was very important and this probably was why the Soviet Union appeared to provide a pattern; but China, he said, played a more important part in their minds, because it was a non-European country that had suffered a form of oppression and achieved freedom. India also stood high in Congress circles, not only because it had gained freedom but because of its early lead at the U.N. on the question of apartheid.

As for the A.N.C.'s leftist language—he himself had used this and he had supported the Peace Movement because he understood it pursued a course that was very necessary.

M. B. Yengwa another witness for the Defence, re-read economics in preparation for his evidence. 'It was like preparing for an exam,' he was to explain. He thought: 'Maybe on my evidence the fate of these people hangs. But more even than that was the responsibility to give the truth and to be able to show that they were not guilty as I honestly felt. I should show that Congress was an open movement, that its aims were precisely what we were telling the world.'

There were interesting occasions for him, for example when the Crown asked him about the Freedom Charter's proposed division of land—would Congress confiscate or compensate?

Compensate, he replied.

Where would the money come from?

Where the Government would get money for its Bantustans.

There were moments when he couldn't keep the laughter out of his voice. And he was able to make some points such as asking if any reasonable Government would sit back with thousands breaking the law in protest, and not do something to consider their grievances.

Mandela gave evidence. Four years earlier, when the Trial had begun, he had given observers an impression of being something of a playboy, handsome, well-dressed, gay. But over the years he—like Lutuli—had grown with the demands of leadership. It was not just the articulate attack of his evidence and his political intelligence, nor his inbred authority—it was something far deeper. The encouragement and support of his wife, Winnie, was an important factor. During his evidence he was asked whether he had become a communist. He replied: 'Well, I don't know if I did become a

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communist. If by communist you mean a member of the Communist Party and a person who believes in the theory of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, and who adheres strictly to the discipline of the Party, I did not become a communist.' He had read Marx, he said, and was impressed by the absence of a colour bar in the Soviet Union, by the fact that it had no Colonies in Africa, and by its strides in industry and science. He was 'very much attracted' to socialism but had not studied it deeply. Questioned about a one-party system he said it was not a question of form but of democracy; 'But if democracy would be best expressed by a one-party system, I would examine the proposition very carefully. . . . In this country, for example,' he pointed out to the Judges, 'we have a multi-party system at present, but in so far as the non-European people are concerned, this is the most vicious despotism you can think of, I can think of, at the present stage of world history.'

Questioned on Congress tactics he explained: 'The Congress, of course, does not expect that one single push to coerce the Government to change its policy will succeed; the Congress expects that over a period, as a result of a repetition of these pressures, together with world opinion, the Government—notwithstanding its attitude of ruling Africans with an iron hand. . . .—will bring about a realization of our aspirations.'

One of the points that the Prosecutor frequently raised concerned Congress documents referring to the oppressed in other countries without condemning their use of violence. Mandela explained: 'Look, let us take the example of Kenya. We were concerned there with the fact that there was a colonial war. We condemned—we regarded Britain as an aggressor. We had never heard of the Kikuyu invading Great Britain, bombing their cities, bringing death and destruction to thousands of people by robbing their best land and breaking up their political organizations. These things Great Britain did in Kenya, and our concern was that Britain must leave Kenya. We were not concerned with the methods which the Kikuyu people used.'

The Crown asked: 'They were irrelevant?'

'They were absolutely irrelevant to us. Our own method here is non-violent, and they are the best judges of what method they should employ, it is not our concern.'

As for Sibande, his unobtrusive courage was clear as a Defence

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advocate led him through his story of membership of Congress, the story of police victimization, of banning and banishment and imprisonment. Of his ten children seven were still dependent on him but since 1953 he had never been allowed to settle in any municipal area. He was asked by the Defence: 'I wonder if you would tell me, as a result of your twenty-odd years in the A.N.C., have you today a home?'

'I have no home.'

'Occupation?'

'No.'

'Have you anywhere you can live with your children?'

'No, My Lords.'

The character of this illiterate peasant according to an observer was 'magnificent'.

The Eastern Cape was represented in the Defence case by two of the accused. One was Milner Bonakele Fred Ntsangani, in his late thirties, tall, light-skinned, wiry, with a mocking smile; once a butcher's boy; once Chairman of the Eastern Cape Youth League; draughts champion of the Treason Trial lunch hours and winner over the local non-European police draughts champion, a relevancy, if an ironic one, in view of the lengthy cross-examination that the Prosecutor subjected him to on a remark he had made in a speech in which he called the Special Branch 'traitors'. He gave as good as he took, if not better, and the Crown lumped him with Resha for 'insolence'.

The other defendant from the Eastern Cape to testify represented their religious strength and A.N.C.'s backbone, being a worker and fearless. Simon P. Mkalipi had only reached Standard Four in school. In the Defiance Campaign and since, he had frequently been imprisoned—for leading an unlawful procession, using a microphone without a permit, addressing a religious meeting declared unlawful, this last resulting in eight months in gaol from which he had been extracted to be charged with Treason. He was fast losing his sight, very slow-spoken with a great deep voice. When a question was asked he would spend a few minutes eliciting what it meant, giving the impression he was going to evade it, and all of a sudden replying with what one of the Defence called 'a back-hand swipe'. He was asked what he knew of the liberatory struggles in other countries. He replied: 'Well—if—I remember reading in a book before the American Republic was

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established, I think the Americans revolted against the British. And they had fought for their liberation. But I don't agree with the way to which they fought, because there they took arms.'

He had left the Methodist church in 1953 when the Minister had objected to A.N.C. volunteers wearing Congress armbands to church. Mkalipi said Ministers of religion in the army had preached to people with uniforms on their bodies in 1940.

One day, in the late afternoon, the Prosecutor was trying to elicit from him that Congress felt a violent clash with the State was ultimately inevitable.

'No I do not accept that,' he said firmly. . . . 'If we are strong I expect the Government to turn to repent as King Nebuchadnezzar . . . chapter 3 Book of Daniel, verse 28.'

One of the Judges asked: 'Well, what happened there?'

'If the Court would give me a Bible I could tell the Court what happened there.'

At that point it was time to adjourn.

The following morning the Court was wanting to cross-examine him, when his deep voice cut in first: 'My Lords, there is something that you asked me yesterday to make comment on, what I quoted from the Bible, I wonder if you are still interested to hear?' And he opened the Bible he had brought: 'My Lords, so as to make sense, I'll start from verse 21 to 28 in the Book of Daniel chapter 3. "Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen and their hats, and their other garments and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace . . ." ' And on he read, slowly and reverently, about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, whom Nebuchadnezzar cast into the fire: ' "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God".'

The red-robed Judges sitting in a court that had once been a Synagogue—a factor that had not seemed relevant before—trying the reader for high treason, could not very well interrupt him reading from the *Bible*.

' ". . . Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego . . ." '

There was only one man in the Court, Mkalipi, as he concluded: ' ". . . and yielded their bodies—that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God." Now, My Lords,' he said in exposition, 'these three men defied a commandment by

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their king, who had set up an image in the plain of Dura, to be of gold to be worshipped as God. Now according to the Hebrew belief, although they were under captivity, they did not see it—deem it fit to ignore the living God through an idol.’

The Prosecutor asked: ‘Mkalipi, you place your Defiance Campaign on a par with that? Is that what you tell your people, that if they defy the laws of the state, that they are acting in the same way as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did when they defied the law to pay homage to an idol?’

To which he replied that it was through seeing what the power of God was to these men, that he had got the belief and power to go ahead. Yes, he did place the Defiance Campaign on a par with what those people had done.

The case had come to rest on the ability of the Crown to prove that the A.N.C. had advocated violent policies. Eleven rank and file members gave evidence. They included a fifty-seven-year-old tailor from Kimberley, a lay preacher from Cape Town, men and women from cities and villages and townships. They were pitted against the best legal brains the Government could produce, but they knew what they were talking about and the bogeys the Prosecution sought—violence and communism—were not to be found. Though there was a scattering of anti-white or anti-Afrikaner speeches on the record, they were leavened with African humour—when we get into power even the Dutchers will get education and they won’t have to send their boys into the police any more!

Of all the A.N.C. spokesmen clearly the biggest intellect was Z. K. Matthews, and it was he who, with great finesse, concluded the evidence of witnesses for the defence.

Asked about the nationalization envisaged in the Freedom Charter and whether he personally believed in it as a solution to economic problems, the Professor replied: ‘No, I am not myself particularly enamoured of nationalization. We have a certain degree of experience of it in this country in connection with the Railways. As a user of the Railways myself I wouldn’t say that nationalization has been particularly successful. . . .’ Anyway it was ‘entirely wrong to suggest that these clauses in the Charter were due to communist influence—the same idea was once suggested by Schoeman, Minister of Transport, to nationalize mines, banks and key industries,’ he pointed out. It was ‘simply a world trend’.

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A Defence advocate put the Crown allegation that the bulk of the non-European population 'is likely to respond more quickly, more irresponsibly and more violently to illegal agitation than would be the case with a group whose general standard of civilization was higher.'

The Professor replied: 'I'm a little sceptical about the use of this word civilization being higher; I don't know in what sense the word "higher" is used . . . but my own impression would be that even the so-called more highly civilized groups, subject to the same conditions to which the Bantu are subject in this country, would I think react more violently.'

With regard to the Crown allegation that on occasion the accused had 'deliberately created an explosive situation', Matthews retorted that an explosive situation had been created by the authorities and 'existed, I should say, since the State was created in 1910.'

There were times when it seemed the Prosecution did not see the implication of what they were asking. In pressing Matthews on whether the Defiance Campaign would not result in violence, the Crown asked him to make the 'assumption' that there would be mass arrests and the 'powers that be are not a responsible government but a government which is reckless—which is bent on spilling blood. . . .'

He replied that he would not make that assumption. . . . 'I would have thought that they would enter into negotiation with the leaders. . . .'

'What possible basis have you got for that belief, Professor?' the Crown asked. 'In the light of the history of this country as you see it? What possible basis have you for that belief. . . .'

'I don't quite understand. . . . We are talking about hypothetical things.'

'Yes?'

'I don't see why your hypothesis is any sounder than mine,' the Professor replied.

When the Crown read to him a document alleged to be by one of the A.N.C., suggesting that the Bible be used as an effective instrument against fascism and that the energy which the mass of people put into religion should be harnessed to the movement, Matthews pointed out that the idea of using the Bible was not peculiar to the writer of the document, adding, 'I can remember

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that certain factions of the Dutch Reformed Church have tried to use the Bible to support the policy of apartheid. ’

When the Crown read an attack by A.N.C. members on ‘Imperialist America’ attempting ‘to drag the world into a rule of violence . . .’ he commented: ‘No doubt many people of the A.N.C. have been concerned about the activities of America, the formation of power blocs in the world; with America on the one side and Russia on the other side, this is likely to lead to a world war, and I don’t think it is peculiar to the A.N.C., and I do hold that the people who engage in formation of these power blocs—I think it is a crime against humanity to run the risk of creating such wars.’

America, he added, had created the Nato alliance and the Seato alliance and had bases all over the world, whereas he did not know about Russian bases. But his remarks did not involve approval of the internal régime of Russia, he supplemented, for the A.N.C. had not had information about that. What they knew about was Russian delegates supporting the Afro-Asians in condemning colonialism. As for propaganda material from Rumania, Egypt, the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, there was ‘no harm’ in Congress receiving copies—‘As a matter of fact,’ he mused, ‘I think some of them might regard it as a nuisance receiving all this mail.’

In cross-examination he added: ‘I am not personally anti-American. I have twice visited the U.S. and I found the American people very progressive and a likeable people,’ but he had felt very disappointed in their attitude to Africa between 1952 and 1956.

As for Britain’s role, it was a great colonial power and its Government had passed the Act of Union. In the last five years, however, it had done more to grant self-government than in the fifty years before.

The Bandung Conference in 1955, he said, had been regarded as very important indeed by the A.N.C.

Earlier, replying to Mr. Justice Bekker, Professor Matthews agreed that the A.N.C.’s aim of universal franchise would mean the end of white supremacy, and said that it had been realized that the white supremacists would not really concede this, but even they would not be impervious to political and economic issues. Up to now the campaigns had not been on a sufficiently wide scale nor were they sustained, but if the A.N.C. were stronger, even the white supremacists would talk. It was not a question of bringing

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them to their knees; the A.N.C. did not want to dominate them or to become top dogs. He recognized the difference between South Africa and such countries as Tanganyika, Ghana and Nigeria, where the authorities had for a long time taken the view that self-determination could not be granted, but had finally granted it. The world wished for and was working for the extension of self-government to a wider group of people. The A.N.C. had stressed the need for sacrifice, because working for political emancipation *always* involved sacrifice—money, time, hardship, loss of career, dismissal—even death.

But Congress was optimistic: 'Our optimism was based upon the fact that this is not the only Government that has been relentless in the history of political struggle.' Others had been determined not to give in to attempts made by their oppressed subjects, 'and they have subsequently done so.' He mentioned India, and pointed out that 'governments usually act as a result of pressure.'

This was in line with a reply given earlier in the Trial by his friend Chief Lutuli. The Prosecutor had said: 'Mr. Lutuli, I also want to put it to you that you never expected that the white oppressor [*sic*] would ever accept or accede to your demands?'

Lutuli replied: 'My Lords, I wouldn't be in Congress if I didn't expect that white South Africa would some day reconsider. That is my honest belief. When, My Lords, I cannot say.'

On March 29, 1961, in an electric atmosphere the Court assembled. Mr. Justice Rumpff, handsome, impassive, prepared to give judgment. Nine years before Sisulu and Mandela had been in the dock before him on trial with other leaders for their part in organizing the Defiance Campaign. He had said: 'I accept the evidence that you have consistently advised your followers to follow a peaceful course of action and to avoid violence in any shape or form. . . .' Now they stood before him again alongside their fellows. Now he stated that although there had been some violent speeches by A.N.C. members—'a minute percentage of the total number of speeches made'—and although the A.N.C. under its 1949 Programme of Action decided by illegal methods to achieve 'a fundamentally different state from the present', the Prosecution had failed to prove that the A.N.C. 'as a matter of policy intended to achieve this new state by violent means'. And although the A.N.C. had had communist members before 1950, and 'a strong left-wing tendency manifested itself' between

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1952-6, there was no proof that it had become a communist organization nor that it had been infiltrated by communists.

Judge Rumpff asked the accused to stand: 'You are found not guilty and discharged,' he stated. 'You may go.'

Epilogue II

1961-1963: An Indestructible Spirit



Outlawed—but momentarily triumphant—at the Treason Trial Court in Pretoria on March 29, 1961, the vindicated A.N.C. leaders with their allies and followers joyfully sang *Nkosi Sikelel' i-Afrika*—Lord Bless Africa. They swept their tall senior counsel—Israel Maisels Q.C.—high on to their shoulders as people cheered and danced and hugged each other and wept.

Outlawed, but honoured: in Oslo on December 10, 1961, Chief Lutuli, in the presence of King Olaf of Norway, was presented with the Nobel Peace Prize for 1960—a symbol of the world's respect. He accepted the Prize in the name of the 'true patriots of South Africa', giving credit for the Africans' policy of non-violence and non-racialism to the leaders of the A.N.C. who, over fifty years, had set the organization 'steadfastly against racial vaingloriousness'. In his rich baritone he led the distinguished gathering in singing *Nkosi Sikelel' i-Afrika*. The A.N.C.'s anthem had indeed become the anthem of Africa.

Outlawed, but abroad its representatives travel more widely than ever before—Tambo, Nokwe, Kotane and Resha lead a small team with bases in East Africa, North Africa and London. Also they regularly attend the United Nations, propagating Lutuli's call for economic sanctions to bring the South African Government and white electorate to their senses before too late.

One advance was achieved in 1961 at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference. The United Front in exile (the A.N.C., the S.A. Indian Congress, and the P.A.C.) lobbied against the projected South African Republic being re-admitted to the Commonwealth so long as the policy of white supremacy prevailed. A strategic cable to the London *Times* from Chief Lutuli, a powerful article in *The Observer* from Julius Nyerere in

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Tanganyika, together with contributions from Bishop Reeves and others, paved the way for the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' demand that apartheid be abandoned. The South African Government chose rather to leave the Commonwealth. At the subsequent annual debate on its racial policy at the United Nations, the delegates for Britain and Australia for the first time voted against South Africa. The South African Government, feeling the cold draught of isolation, clung desperately to its membership of the United Nations and accepted ever fiercer condemnation rather than walk out.

Meanwhile in South Africa former members of the banned A.N.C. continue to be subjected to relentless persecution. For instance Canon Calata—although he had not had a Congress membership card since 1956—was imprisoned for twelve days in 1961 (under a new law enabling the Government thus to hold people without charge or trial), and was charged with furthering the aims of the unlawful A.N.C. The grounds? Two pictures of A.N.C. deputations, hanging on his wall as they had done since they were taken some twenty years before. One was of the 1942 deputation to the Deputy Prime Minister (picture facing page 65). For this 'offence' Canon Calata was sentenced to six months' imprisonment, suspended for two years. His appeal to the Supreme Court of Grahamstown was dismissed. The Bishop of Grahamstown commented that a sentence on such grounds 'makes our laws appear ridiculous in the eyes of the civilized world. If it was not for the suffering and the indignity, it would be very amusing that such a sentence had been passed on a highly respectable citizen.' Calata, sixty-six years old now, his strong thin face heavily lined but his deep, hoarse laugh as much of a tonic to hear as ever, remarked: 'I feel no breach of my conscience . . . I have become used to persecution and I am leaving it to God who can turn it to some good.'

It is in the nature of many Africans to believe in good overcoming evil in the end. They have another consolation—they are able to laugh at the whites.

Leaders of the women are among those placed under the most rigorous restrictions—Lilian Ngoyi and Florence Matomela are two who for five years have been confined to the townships in which they live. Something of their spirit is shown by Annie Silinga. A policeman weary of having to pursue her reproved her:

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'No, Mrs. Silinga, you are too old, you can't go on with this.' But she does go on. In between the restrictions clamped down on her, she returns to her family and to her obstreperously painted little house, done in lemon, pink, blue and green.

A singular case—barely reported in South Africa—was the trial of Duma Nokwe and eleven other men, charged with helping to achieve the objects of the banned A.N.C. The State seemed unaware of the irony of thus charging members of the Liberal Party, the Progressive Party and even the former P.A.C., who were among the eleven. On the very day of the Parliamentary election in 1961, when white voters were freely expressing their political views, these men were being sentenced to a year's imprisonment for advocating one man one vote, abolition of the pass laws, no taxation without representation and compulsory education. However on appeal they won the case—a decisive victory.

Another small victory, achieved through internal protest combined with overseas pressure, came with the Government's ignominious admission that its police had violated the Basutoland frontier and kidnapped Anderson Ganyile, an A.N.C. member who had been active in Pondoland. (Though certain members of Congress sought refuge in the High Commission Territories, by far the majority of leaders remained. One of them, asked why he did not go abroad, replied: 'It is so exciting here.')

In 1960, it had seemed that the movement for liberation must surely be numbed by the outlawing of the A.N.C. and P.A.C. and by the long imprisonments of the Emergency. At this critical moment Nelson Mandela was freed from successive bans for the first time in nine years. After the long imposed silence his magnetic forcefulness came as a revelation when he addressed the All-In African Conference held in Pietermaritzburg early in 1961. The conference, which included a remarkable attendance from Pondoland and Zululand, elected him leader of a National Action Council of African leaders, and renewed the demand for a 'truly' National Convention to establish a new Union of all South Africans. If the Government did not comply, there should be a three-day stay-at-home; thus also African opinion would be felt at the time of the establishment of a Republic of white South Africans.

In May 1961 Mandella called the three-day strike. Whereupon the Government called out police, army, commandos, citizen forces

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and Saracen armoured cars. As white civilians were sworn in to be special constables and gun shops sold out their stocks of revolvers to whites, police arrested thousands of Africans throughout the country and pursued their leaders, imprisoning many under the twelve days' provision. Some, including Mandela, eluded them. From underground he renewed the call. He toured the country, organizing, seeing both supporters and opponents. He even wrote to the leader of the United Party, Sir de Villiers Graaff, pointing out that the Africans' call for a National Convention had achieved the support of the newly-formed Coloured Peoples' Convention, and that many of the English language newspapers and several churches as well as prominent academics and white citizens were suggesting such a Convention. Where, he asked, did the United Party stand? Graaff did not reply.

As May 29 drew near, the English language Press suddenly swung from objective reporting of the call, into warnings against it. The *Rand Daily Mail* reported a secret plan for the non-whites to invade cities. Mandela's denial was rejected. But the greatest blow at this time, when African feeling was strong, when the Coloured people were promising to give support as never before, was the decision of the former P.A.C. to oppose the stay-at-home.

On the eve of the stay-at-home, authorities warned that strikers would be sacked from their jobs or endorsed out of towns; police would move into the townships in force to drive residents to work. During the night helicopters flew low over townships flashing searchlights down on the matchbox houses and rough roads. Police and army were ready. A sudden undeclared state of emergency again took hold of the country.

Yet, despite this massive intimidation, on Monday, May 29, 1961, hundreds of thousands of Africans risked jobs and homes to respond to the call. In Durban Indian workers and in Cape Town many Coloured workers also stayed away. (The South African Broadcasting Corporation, which had deteriorated over the years into a Government mouthpiece, repeatedly announced all was 'normal'. On May 30 it announced that all had 'returned to normal'.) And on May 30 in Port Elizabeth—after night-long organizing in the townships—there was a 75% strike. In several areas a significant response came from African schools which struck in a chain reaction to the call. However in terms of world-wide impact it was not a success and on the second day Mandela called

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it off. In secret interviews with overseas journalists he conceded partial failure; but, he said, the massive mobilization of armed forces by the State had been a 'striking testimony of our own strength and a measure of the weakness of the Government'.

This was a turning point in South Africa's history. In face of the naked force with which the Government thus crushed their peaceful demonstrations, Africans were coming to consider it futile to rely on non-violent methods. The violence of the State was about to provoke counter-violence. It was symbolic that in October 1961, at the very time when the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Chief Lutuli was announced, sabotage broke out. This was 'a political demonstration of a formidable kind', one leader said, from people 'unshakeably determined' to win freedom whatever the cost. (During 1962 and 1963 the sabotage grew more efficient and evidently its organizers were trying not to harm *people*.)

And symbolic of closer ties with African states was the tour made by Nelson Mandela. His natural authority enhanced by his years of political and legal experience and by his militant leadership from underground, he conferred with heads of State throughout the continent, and went on to London, where he met the leaders of the Opposition—Hugh Gaitskell and Jo Grimond. For the first time in his life he was free from white oppression and arrogance. In Addis Ababa, early in 1962, he addressed the conference of the Pan-African Freedom Movement for East, Central and Southern Africa. He reinforced the demand for economic sanctions, and affirmed: 'The centre and cornerstone of the struggle for freedom and democracy in South Africa lies in South Africa itself. . . . It is first and foremost by our own struggle and sacrifice inside South Africa itself that victory over white domination and apartheid can be won.' Secretly he returned to South Africa to continue his work underground, brilliantly evading the nation-wide police net. But in August 1962 they at last succeeded in capturing him. His blazing courage was shared by his wife Winnie who, undeterred by the long separations and by police raids on her home, went on addressing meetings, inspiring people, until the Government confined her to Johannesburg.

For nearly twenty years Mandela, Sisulu, Tambo and others had worked tirelessly. In October 1962 Mandela was sentenced to five years' imprisonment: for inviting the people to stay-at-home and for leaving the country illegally. In its report on his self-

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conducted defence *Die Transvaler* placed on record his belief that later generations would believe him guiltless and not a criminal. He told the court: 'When my sentence has been completed I will still be moved by my conscience to resist race discrimination.' Meanwhile Sisulu, with Kotane, was among the first to be placed under house arrest, the Nationalist Government's latest barbarity; then in March 1963 he was sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment. And, though the new Minister of Justice, Balthazar Johannes Vorster, with his vicious far-reaching 'Sabotage' Act was outbidding his predecessors in imprisoning, banning, and restricting, the protests continued: J. B. Marks, who for ten years had been banned from addressing meetings, joined in the 'Free Mandela' protests the moment his latest ban ran out, while in the Bechuanaland Protectorate leaders of the former A.N.C. based in London and African capitals met with others from inside South Africa to plan the next stage in the freedom struggle.

Fifty years earlier, in Bloemfontein in 1912—responding to Pixley Seme's call—frock-coated chiefs, intellectuals and tribesmen had first come together in the humble location hall and as a symbol of their new unity and their aspirations they had first sung *Nkosi Sikelel' i-Afrika*.

They had been hopeful. What has come of their hopes?

There was the Land Act—restricting millions of African peasants to small tight reserves. These, during the fifty years, have grown ever more crowded, denuded, struck by famine; until recently they were shaken by the worse disaster—the Government's travesty of Bantu 'self-government' which drives asunder tribes and clans and families as those willing to capitulate to Government tyranny clash with those who refuse.

There were the pass laws—the hated 'verdomde pass'—which deny a man's personal freedom as a right, and turn him into a criminal; far from being relaxed over the years, they came to be extended to youths and women. From 1951 to 1960 more than 3½ million Africans were convicted under these laws.¹ They still take their daily toll, draining humanity of its self-respect.

There were Hertzog's Segregation Acts—accomplished only with the collaboration of General Smuts and United Party M.P.'s who represented many African voters—which entrenched the separation of man from man, robbed the few Africans who

¹ Statement by Minister of Justice, February 1962.

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had them of their votes and introduced a travesty of representation as a sop to the white conscience.

African progress which was made despite every obstacle—whether in education, commerce, industry, or political organization—was met by white resistance; the more advanced the Africans became, the harsher the restrictions against them.

The A.N.C. had to face forces they had not conceived of: racial fear was one. Yet history shows that the black man has had far more to fear, has suffered far more at the hands of the white man, than the contrary. Perhaps the whites sub-consciously feared retribution?

As powerful a force was greed: an elemental force that economists might dress up in other terms when it came to the mining industry maintaining cheap migrant labour, and the crushing of the African mine strike of 1946. Dr. Moroka's poignant wish—to understand how Smuts, after all he had done in the world 'for humanity', could 'return to his own country and say that freedom cannot be given to the black people'—could have no fulfilment. In 1946 Smuts had advanced not one step from 1906 when he had shifted 'the intolerable burden of solving that sphinx problem to the ampler shoulders and stronger brains of the future'. Thus he seemed blind to the new era brought about by the war, with its extension of self-determination to Asia and Africa, the rejection of racialism, and the surge of nationalism. The Africans, however, were not blind, with their 'Claims' based on the Atlantic Charter, their appeals to the United Nations, and their contacts with the Pan-African movement. The Indians were not blind. And the Afrikaner Nationalists and sinister Broederbond were not blind. They glimpsed the new era and they dreaded it. And the inevitable happened for which the Act of Union had surely paved the way in 1910: the Afrikaner Nationalists came into power in 1948.

Then to financial greed was added a more terrible force: racial pride. Hitler willed '*Deutschland uber alles*'. The Afrikaner Nationalists will '*die Volk sonder alles*'.¹

From these forces flowed the persecution, the poverty, the malnutrition, the violence that beset the everyday lives of the majority of South Africans; so wasteful, so *unnecessary* in a country so rich and beautiful. The A.N.C. had to contend with these forces and

¹ The Afrikaner people without all the rest—alone.

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these effects; as well as further effects—the activities of informers and *agents provocateurs*, the escapism of many Africans who turned to strange religions, to the selfish pursuits of middle-class society in the townships, or simply to drink.

In assessing the A.N.C. certain conclusions are clear. During five years in the Treason Trial the organization was subjected to an exhaustive scrutiny by the finest legal minds in South Africa. Its minor weakness was obvious: inefficiency—the ramshackle office where time and energy were spent in wrangling about what happened to that £5 13s. od. (not that they found any hint of speculation). A major weakness—exemplified in the campaign against the Western Areas Removals—was its tendency to work on slogans rather than through real analysis. And, unlike the S.A. Indian Congress which coped with some success with the bread and butter problems of the people, the A.N.C. was not always alive to the ordinary people's desires.

But if some of its leaders were not close enough to the people others, like Sibande, were right in amongst them—when not severely restricted. One strength of Congress was its range—from the peasant Sibande to the professor Matthews—men with every political viewpoint and with wide contacts. Courage and continuity—these were assets. Its further strength lay in the men of first-rate calibre who led it and whose characters and ability were brought to light during the Treason Trial. This strength could be a weakness however, for while it drew the best educated and better-off members of the community, men who had much to give, they also had much to lose; more than the ordinary worker. And this meant that some of them lacked militancy. Such men, in any decent society, would have fulfilled themselves in quiet academic or religious fields—Dr. Dube was one, Dr. Xuma another. Yet they did not, as they might so easily have done, settle for the comparatively prosperous life that their professions could ensure for them. For them there could be no satisfaction without dignity and no dignity without a struggle for freedom. The Rev. Zaccheus Mahabane, now eighty years old, white haired and alert, is busy in the role for which he was cut out—leadership of church councils. Professor Z. K. Matthews, active as ever, became in 1962 a representative of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, paying frequent visits to Africa.

Running through the story of the A.N.C. is the reminder that in

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human relations people with strong personalities can seldom 'serve' without dominating. The human struggle thus becomes a battle of personalities. Dr. Seme almost brought the A.N.C. to grief through his egotism. Yet among several examples more than adjusting the balance were Father Calata and Albert Lutuli; they kept above personal conflicts, often seeming to respond to the supernatural force by which they sought to be guided. Lutuli grew with the toughening situation. His maturing was visible—his face became noble, his bearing commanding. The quality of selflessness was also apparent among the left-wing: Walter Sisulu, for instance—heavier in middle age, with a blunt black beard—regularly arrested and imprisoned on one doubtful charge after another, steeled by each new attack to a harder resolve to overcome the forces of the racial myth.

In face of the dread evil of racialism, the A.N.C.'s greatest strength and achievement is clear—its refusal to be driven by the racialism of a society based on white supremacy to an equally damaging racialism. To the end it contained a creative quality.

And if Dr. Seme failed personally in the 'thirties, his earlier achievement is what matters more. The founding of the A.N.C. was a positive act of unification rare in South Africa's history. It was sad that he did not live to see its finest moment but, almost blind, he died shortly before the great non-violent Defiance Campaign in 1952.

Under the South African sun sportsmen play golf and tennis and swim. The mines make great profits—to the satisfaction not only of Johannesburg commercial houses but of the City of London and Wall Street. The Nationalists have been quick to make inroads into big business and commerce. The servant problem is more troublesome than before, but still less troublesome than in most countries in the world. It is indeed a delightful place to live in.

For the oppressed peoples and the handful of the white dissenters the future looks blacker than ever. Many are imprisoned, banned, banished or under house arrest. The 'Sabotage' Act, with its death sentence and heavy penalties for almost every known kind of political activity, hangs threatening over an anxious people. It has successfully intimidated the Press and bookshops from publishing or circulating the words of Chief Lutuli or others of the banned. Only in the outside world can their diminishing voices still be heard. The South African Defence Force, according to

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the Minister of Defence, has been increased to twenty times its size of two years ago; by 1965 its fully trained specialist troops will be more than trebled. The police have been reorganized to greater efficiency, the Special Branch reinforced.

It is not only in these overt ways that the Nationalist Government is creating a forcing house of violence. The social disruption caused by apartheid has ensured an upsurge of ugly gangsterism, menacing to black and white alike; taking terrible form in the Western Cape of POQO—'we go it alone'. Then through the Bantu education system generations of frustrated children are being produced, their minds stunted by the perversion of education imposed upon them. Under the bright sun Dr. Verwoerd is producing a nation of tsotsis.

Britain too bears a heavy responsibility. Her misconceived act of liberal generosity in 1910 has not been forgotten; nor have her long years of voting with the South African Government at the United Nations. But worst of all in the eyes of Africans and white dissenters were the British Government's continued sales of military aircraft and other arms to the Nationalists.

When will the United States act upon their declared beliefs? In 1961 their delegate to the United Nations announced 'in unmistakable terms' that 'the United States abhors and actively opposes apartheid'. What form will that *active* opposition take? It is not only modern Congress leaders such as Lutuli and Mandela who have called for sanctions: Dr. Xuma, before his sudden death in 1962, disclosed that he had recently lobbied in several African capitals and at the United Nations for economic sanctions. The alternative to this comparatively peaceful application of force is to allow South Africa to disintegrate into inevitable racial chaos, which, as the American delegate warned, could 'rock the entire continent'. African and Asian states are ready to act but lack the necessary power. Time is short if those with the economic means are to prove their civilization by putting an end to the 'ghastly aberration' of apartheid, as Christopher Gell saw it. Such intervention, as Tolstoy saw it, would be the 'most important activity' the world could take part in. The United Nations have paved the way sixteen years after the A.N.C.'s first appeal to them: in November 1962 by sixty-seven votes to sixteen the Assembly called for sanctions to end apartheid and by ninety-six votes to none called for a U.N. presence in South-West Africa.

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Meanwhile ahead in South Africa lies the 'long and greater suffering' that Gandhi foretold, the suffering, even to death, that Lutuli and Matthews could foresee. But, as Mandela said on being sentenced to five years' imprisonment, 'If I had my time over I would do the same again, as would any man who dares call himself a man.'

The South African Government could outlaw the *organization* of the African National Congress—its uniforms, its thumbs-up sign, its slogans. It cannot outlaw its spirit. Whatever the failures and the startling brief successes of Congress; its amorphous nature; and the paradox at its heart, between muddle and division and strength and vision; its great spirit lives on. One leader, on being asked what it felt like to be in Congress, explained: 'I became so much a part of it, the question should be, how does it feel to be yourself? It is the group feeling and the feeling you are living for some future—it is very exciting and a tremendous inspiration.'

Over the years the Congress leaders maintained an extraordinary level of humane action. In face of their civilization the Nationalist Government appears dangerous and stupid in turn; at once pathetic and terrifying in its self-chosen isolation from international society and civilized standards. Communication with it on normal terms becomes increasingly impossible.

Albert Lutuli has said: 'South Africa is a heroic country.' In it the A.N.C. and its associates symbolized all the conflicting forces in the world today: black, white, brown, Christian, Jew, Hindu, Muslim, pagan, communist, capitalist, liberal. Although it was the negative force of opposition to apartheid that brought them together, nevertheless they came together as nowhere else in the world. Pixley Seme saw the Native National Congress in 1912 as a force to unite the African tribes. We have seen it, as the African National Congress, however imperfect, uniting people of all races. This has been the A.N.C.'s contribution to humanity.

Source Books

The following books were particularly referred to in studying the background:

PROLOGUE	<i>The Unification of South Africa 1902-1910</i> , L. M. Thompson
CHAPTERS 1-4	<i>The African Yearly Register</i> , ed. T. D. Mweli Skota
CHAPTER 2	<i>Native Life in South Africa</i> , Solomon T. Plaatje
CHAPTERS 3-7	<i>Time Longer Than Rope</i> , E. Roux
CHAPTERS 11-20	<i>The Struggle for Equality and Unrest in South Africa</i> , P. S. Joshi
Several chapters but particularly CHAPTERS 9 and 15	<i>The Treason Cage</i> , Anthony Sampson (to whom I am also grateful for his own Memorandum on the A.N.C. and several articles on its leaders from <i>Drum</i> magazine by various authors published during 1952-3)
CHAPTER 20	<i>African Political Parties</i> , Thomas Hodgkin
	General historical background: <i>A History of Southern Africa</i> , Eric Walker <i>The Politics of Inequality</i> , Gwendolen Carter <i>A Handbook of Race Relations</i> as well as subsequent Annual Reports from the S.A. Institute of Race Relations by Muriel Horrell

Invaluable historical material came from the writings of H. Selby Msimang (e.g. *Contact*, April 2, 1960), of Professor Z. K. Matthews in a series of biographies in *Imvo* during 1961-2, and from A. W. G. Champion. Chapter 12 relies much on unpublished material from Lienel Bernstein and N.R.C. reports. For Chapters 14-Epilogue I the Treason Trial records were consulted.

In addition, books that refer particularly to the A.N.C. are: *Let My People Go*, Albert Lutuli's autobiography *If This Be Treason*, Helen Joseph and pamphlets include Julius Lewin's *The Rise of Congress in South Africa*; and an *A.N.C. Handbook*.

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