

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE NON-EUROPEAN UNITY MOVEMENT: — AN INSIDER'S VIEW

Baruch Hirson

Where is the Non-European Unity Movement?

The Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) was launched in 1943, split in two by 1957 and went into terminal decline shortly thereafter. Inactive, if not dead in South Africa during the 1960s and beyond, both sections seem to have been revived in the late 1980s, but have played little part in the political activity of the more recent period.

It might seem extravagant to cover more than thirty pages in this issue of *Searchlight South Africa* to write an account of a movement that seems to have disappeared as a political force. However, besides the fact that it is important to gather together the history of past struggles, there is a more pressing reason for discussing the history of the NEUM. Many of the leaders who were present at the birth of this movement and steered it through its period of activity, were drawn from the pre-war Trotskyist groupings. They tried to conceal their Marxist background, used a nationalist rhetoric and in the process became nationalist leaders. The concealment of their socialist philosophy left them with a false ideology that dominated the work they undertook, undermined their original vision and led them into unnecessary splits. That is now history but the flirtation by socialists with the nationalist movement has never ceased. There were stalinists and socialists of various hues in the ANC (and its ancillary movements) before it was banned in 1960 and socialists in the exile movement. More recently the Inqaba group of Congress Militants and, of course, the Communist Party and the trade union movement Cosatu, have been active participants in the ANC. In every case it has been nationalist ideology which has governed their activity.

Unless socialists can cut themselves adrift from the Nationalist movements and advance their own socialist programme there can be no talk of pressing for socialist objectives. This was something that the leaders of the NEUM ignored in their day-to-day activities and, in so doing, they misled countless men and women who believed that they were working for socialist ends.

Recovering the History of the NEUM

Whatever did happen to the organisation which once claimed to be the premier liberation movement in South Africa and programmatically in advance of all other organisations — in Africa, no less — asserted its right to provide the leadership in the coming struggle for liberation in

South Africa? They claimed that they had formulated the strategy and tactics that would lead to freedom and attracted talented men and women to its ranks. Included in the movement were the Cape African Teachers Association (CATA), the Cape Coloured Teachers League of South Africa (TLSA), the Cape African Voters Association (CAVA), and the Transkei Organised Bodies.

Its supporters abroad, at one stage, included such celebrated personalities as George Padmore and CLR James, two of the most prominent black politicians in the west, and most Trotskyist group in the US and Europe. Its publications, included news-letters, journals, pamphlets and books.¹ There is no shortage of information on the origins and progress of the NEUM but there is only one incomplete history and few memoirs from its members.²

The Problem of Origin

In tracing the origins of any nation-wide organisation there are obvious problems. The delegates who gather to launch a movement do not come with empty agendas. They represent groups with their own presuppositions and programmes and their own conceptions of what should or could be done. Each has its own set of demands, its own constituency and its own social background.

In the case of the Non-European Unity Movement, the name provides one clue to its early history: it was a body which aimed to unite, on a federal basis, members of the three main 'ethnic groups' — Africans, Coloureds and Indians — irrespective of religions, castes, or 'tribes',³ Ultimately, it was said, white groups would also join to help in the formation of one large federated movement. The unifying factors would be a programme of democratic demands and a method of struggle based on 'non-collaboration' and the use of the boycott.

The basis for the programme of the NEUM was conceived within the ranks of the Workers Party of South Africa (WPSA), a small group of Cape Town based Trotskyists⁴ who stressed the centrality of the land question and the demand for the vote in their programme. In 1935, shortly after the WPSA came into existence, there was widespread agitation among the African people over the new 'Native Bills' (to be discussed below), which led to the convening of the All African Convention (AAC). Members of the WPSA saw in this the possibility of propagating their views in a larger constituency than they could otherwise have reached.

Because the credo of the WPSA is so crucial for explaining some of what follows, a brief account of its contents is essential. The WPSA was a Trotskyist organisation and many of the points in its programme were similar to that of other anti-Stalinist, socialist, groups. It attacked international finance capitalism, warned of an impending imperialist war,

condemned fascism, and so on. In analysing South Africa the WPSA tried to break new ground, partly to condemn the Comintern instruction that the CPSA work for a 'Black Republic', a slogan that the WPSA found repugnant.

The WPSA programme commenced with an account of land possession in South Africa and pointed to the concentration of land holding in the hands of big capital. The vast majority of farmers, particularly African cultivators, owned little land. Consequently the programme writers concluded that the central question in the country was the land question, which was 'the alpha and omega', the axis around which the revolution in South Africa would revolve. They called on the white workers to support the black peasants in their demands if they were to have any stake in a transformed society, but gave little attention to the black workers, viewing them mainly as peasants who worked temporarily in the mines.

When the WPSA programme was first drafted in 1934 the great depression was lifting in South Africa and the new industrialism that followed — situated mainly in the Transvaal — had barely commenced. Many of the newly urbanised workers were fresh from the country and were not viewed as a potential base for socialism. Nor did the authors see any place in the coming struggle for the Coloured workers, despite their long history as artisans and workers in light industry. Long afterwards members of the WPSA — now leading leaders of the NEUM — looking exclusively to rural conditions, and continued to speak of the workers as if they were only peasants temporarily in the towns or the mines.

Even more erroneous was the continued description of the Africans in the Reserves as peasants even though they did not produce commodities for the market — and supplied manpower rather than food for the towns. It was only Trotsky's criticism of the WPSA's programme that led to their reexamination of the role of the workers in any future struggle, but this was a concession that was not reflected in their activities. The WPSA also accepted the criticism that their rejection of the Black Republic slogan had been a polemical exaggeration arising from their criticism of the Comintern. But this too did not lead to any changes: the Black Republic slogan was not used in WPSA propaganda nor is it certain that this slogan ever persuaded members of the WPSA to concentrate their work in the nationalist movement. Yet there were links between work in the WPSA and later activities in the AAC and NEUM.

A letter published in the *Spark* in 1938 on problems facing people on the land was to become the basis of policy pursued by members of the WPSA when they worked in the AAC. That is, members of the WPSA had decided that the next step in the reserves was the struggle against the government's plan for rehabilitating the denuded and impoverished Reserves.⁵ There were also innumerable occasions in which members of

the WPSA, in presenting an address to a NEUM assembly, would first quote extensively from one of the WPSA's position papers (which they called 'theses') before turning to the subject under discussion without mentioning that they were quoting from party documents.

Yet crucially, the position the WPSA took, prior to the formation of the NEUM, was socialist — even if their socialism was open to criticism. At no stage did they try to construct a philosophy of nationalism, nor did they resort to crude racial stereotyping and they never claimed that the basic conflict was between white and black. They worked among blacks because they believed that it was from these communities that the forces for change would emerge. Also, unlike members of other movements, they put no faith in American black leaders. They rejected the ideas of the US black leaders, Booker T Washington, Marcus Garvey and du Bois and the west African Aggeri as being reformist or reactionary.⁶ Nor did they espouse any of the ideas, then or later, that have come to be associated with black nationalism. They did not appeal to pan-Africanism, nor to a glorification of blackness; they did not discuss problems of language, or of common nationality, because these were not issues that were thought to bear on the future struggle.

Also, unlike members of the ANC, they did not pay tribute to any religious group or church. Indeed the book *The Role of the Missionary in Conquest*⁷, widely distributed in NEUM circles was, as its title suggests, an attack on the role of missionaries in South Africa as the progenitor of conquest and of mental shackling.

Agitation over Land and the Vote

General Hertzog, Prime Minister of South Africa and leader of the Afrikaner based National Party, had since 1927 urged upon Parliament the need to complete the segregation of the country. He proposed to do this by legislation removing the limited franchise enjoyed by the Africans of the Cape Province, finalising the area of land that Africans could own (collectively), restricting the number of Africans who entered the urban areas and controlling their movements and, in addition, extending the Coloured people's franchise. The last measure was a crude attempt further to widen the gap between the expectations of the Coloured and African people but it was dropped following internal differences in the ruling National Party.

There was opposition to the Hertzog Bills from white liberals and from African groups when the plans were first made public, and again in 1929 when the Bills were placed before Parliament. On that occasion Hertzog failed to secure the necessary two-thirds majority of both Houses of Parliament, sitting together, for the removal of entrenched clauses (that is, the vote) and the Bills were withdrawn.

However, in 1935, the fusion of the National Party and the opposing South African Party of General Smuts made it possible for General Hertzog to secure his two-thirds majority. Yet, despite opposition, reaction across the country was fractured. Some African leaders outside the Cape where there had never been the vote, or where it had been minuscule, were more concerned about the new land division than the loss of the restricted Cape vote. On the other hand there was much agitation among Africans in the eastern Cape who had the franchise — particularly as it depended on their right to individual land holdings.

The most active agitation against the removal of the African vote came from liberal whites, many of them associated with the Joint Councils of Natives and Europeans and the South African Institute of Race Relations and, through the Councils, with the more moderate Africans.⁸ The liberal concern was many-faceted, ranging from those who wanted to retain the *status quo* to those who sought a widening of the Cape franchise and the addition of more land.

Because there was no effective African national organisation at the time it was suggested that Pixly ka I Seme, President of the ANC, together with Professor DDT Jabavu (of the University College of Fort Hare), should convene a conference of African leaders in Bloemfontein, to find means of stopping the implementation of the Hertzog Bills. When Seme withdrew, Jabavu took the initiative and summoned the assembly, known henceforth as the All African Convention, for December 1935.

Delegates arrived from across the country, some representing large groups, others coming as individuals, to deliberate on their response to the Hertzog Bills. They were probably divided on many issues but the official minutes, written and published by Jabavu, reflect only his views. Fortunately there are other accounts. For example the journal *Spark*, organ of the WPSA, describes acrimonious disputes. Jabavu and the leadership wanted a 'respectable' gathering, that would act in a 'responsible' manner and pass anodyne resolutions. The 'young Turks', drawn from the WPSA, the CPSA and others, wanted a more militant stance with the right to reject the Bills *in toto*. Eventually there was a compromise: it was agreed that a delegation should meet with Hertzog in Cape Town, voice the assembly's opposition and report back to a reconvened Convention.

Details of what happened when the delegation met with Hertzog were never fully disclosed but separate meetings of MPs of the eastern Cape secured acceptance of a compromise plan⁹ providing for the election, on a separate roll, of three white 'Native Representatives' for the Cape Africans in Parliament and three Senators to represent the Africans of the remainder of the country. Africans would be elected and nominated onto a Native Representative Council and would be given the opportunity to discuss all projected laws affecting Africans.

Convention met again in 1936 and 1937 and once again the official minutes differ from the accounts given in *Spark* and also in the recently published diary of Ralph Bunche, the black American who spent three months in the country.¹⁰ The editors of *Spark* of February 1936 said that the gathering of December 1935 was 'such a farce, with features so disgraceful, that we would prefer not to write about it at all . . .' But discuss it, they did, and they lambasted Jabavu and his clique for stage-managing the proceedings. The authors said they did not believe that conferences could solve any ills: 'We believe only in the class struggle, in the revolutionary struggle of the masses, and not in resolutions and speeches of so-called national leaders.' A crucial statement which was to be ignored by Tabata and his friends when they took control of the National movement.

Jabavu, a deeply conservative man, meant to steer the Convention along moderate lines but resorted to radical words. It was this that led to him using his presidential address at conference in June 1936 to attack the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. The radicals were furious. This, they said, was meant to conceal the betrayal in Cape Town. They wanted to know what had led to the compromise but the answer was evasive.

Tabata with Janub Gool (later his wife) and Goolam Gool were delegates at the earliest gatherings of the AAC. Significantly, in their report in *Spark* of August 1936 and contrary to later practices in the NEUM, they condemned the leadership for maintaining the AAC as a federal body. This would not allow the African people to speak with one voice, they said. What the WPSA had proposed in its preceding issue was:

a permanent and central body, with a permanent secretary, with branches in every locality, community, district. It must be from the masses, with the masses, for the masses.

Even more significantly, the journal condemned those who said: 'Let us first organise. . . Then, when we are fully organised, we can think of something to DO!! (*sic*)

Given the state of the Reserves at the time¹¹ and the extent of discontent, it was incumbent on a socialist movement to address this problem in earnest. Therefore, despite criticism by the WPSA of the men who convened the conferences and their declaration that the gatherings were farcical, they continued to stress the primacy of land possession in the struggle for socialism in South Africa.

Meanwhile, after years of inactivity, the ANC was formally revived in the Transvaal in 1937. There was no indication then that the organisation had any future. At first its activities consisted of little more than an annual conference attended by a small number of delegates. Its President, Rev Mehabane, was also an office holder of the nearly dormant AAC. However the revived ANC elected Dr Xuma as its President in 1938 and, although he was no militant and did not lead the organisation in any action, he recruited a number of intellectuals.

When the AAC was next convened in 1939, Dr Xuma, its vice president, resigned without offering any reason. The CPSA, having decided that the Convention would be ineffectual also withdrew its support. In the years to come their leaders were the most determined opponents of the AAC and used their influence to prevent unity with the ANC.

The Prelude to War: 1935-1939

There were several factors that made the western Cape a centre of political activity in the second half of the 1930s. There had been the organisation of new trade unions among semi-skilled and unskilled Coloured workers and there was some anti-war activity by persons associated with the CPSA. Working mainly among the Coloured people the party focused on events in Europe and the threat of a world war.

There are few details of the involvement of the trade unions in the political agitation of the time. The one exception being the dock workers who were actively engaged in refusing to load Italian ships when Ethiopia was invaded in 1935/36. The war against Italy generated fury and excitement, most particularly when Ethiopian troops inflicted an initial defeat on the fascist armies. This died away when the Ethiopian army was overwhelmed and defeated. Partly as a reaction to the advance of fascism in Europe (and to a lesser degree in South Africa), there emerged organisation of two mainly Coloured movements, the National Liberation League (NLL) and the Non-European United Front with general democratic, anti-war and anti-fascist demands.

The leadership included several prominent communists and Goolam Gool of the WPSA, but the NLL collapsed in 1938 following large-scale demonstrations in Cape Town against threats to remove the Coloured vote from the common roll. There was an attempt to march on Parliament and the police used considerable force to stop the demonstrators. The leaders, mainly members of the CPSA, sped away in a car, leaving the marchers to take the full brunt of police brutality. Amid recriminations there was large scale resignation from the NLL. James La Guma, leading Communist, and Goolam Gool of the WPSA both left: the former condemning the whites on ethnic grounds, the latter describing the desertion in class terms. But despite the collapse of the NLL Coloureds were exuberant because the legislation was temporarily withdrawn. Some of those involved in the demonstration were to play a part in the movement that was formed in 1943.

South African Entry Into The War

When war was declared in September 1939 in Europe the South African government was split. Leading members of the National Party urged neutrality but more right wing elements, including the main architects of

apartheid after 1948, declared their support for Germany. In a close vote in Parliament those who support the western Allies won and General Smuts became Prime Minister. Troops were recruited but for many months there were rumours about revolts by Afrikaners (many of whom pro-Nazi). There was also Communist agitation, against the war until German troops invaded the USSR, and then calls for African to be armed and used as soldiers in the 'fight for democracy'.

In a joint statement the committees of the ANC and the AAC, supported the war aims of the British Commonwealth of Nations, while urging upon the government that it grant Africans full citizenship rights and mobilize them for the full defence of the country.¹² There can be no doubt that Tabata, following the line of the WPSA, rejected this statement on the war but when addressing the AAC conference on 16 December 1941 he did not condemn the war but restated what (white) Native Representatives were reporting to the government: that all meetings called to discuss the war had flopped. Neither threats nor sweet promises could break the hostility. 'The masses did not wait for Convention to decide that is was not *their* war.'¹³

The AAC now consisted of little more than a few local committees in the Cape and Tabata used his address to attack those who had led the AAC to near extinction. The collapse was not the fault of Convention, he said, but of its leaders who had done nothing and achieved nothing.

Surveys show that throughout the country the African nationalist movement was dormant. Groups that existed and were active were confined to local areas, representing their members in the event of difficulties, providing what leadership was possible, but not linking up with a larger national body. Africans were by no means content: their scope for large scale activity was limited by the collapse or near-collapse of the older organisations like the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa (the ICU) and the ANC. Besides the newly burgeoning African trade unions, the struggles of the time appeared as sporadic riots, local agitation, local rural organisations, and so on.¹⁴

The NEUF, which had first opposed the war, and then switched policy when the USSR was invaded by Germany in 1941, faded into oblivion and, except for the trade unions and the Communist Party, there was little overt political activity inside the black communities. The AAC was inactive and did not seem to exist outside the western Cape committee.

Nonetheless, behind the scenes there was activity. In 1943 the Congress Youth League (CYL) was formed in the Transvaal and was formally launched the following year. Tabata, as will be seen below, must have been aware of this initiative, but he seems to have dismissed the CYL as having no political weight. Dr Xuma, conservative and opposed to innovations, might have felt the same way when he agreed to its formation – but few had noticed the cumulative effects of war on the local economy, leading to an enlarged work-force and massive inflation.

There was a wave of strikes by African workers and this created a mood in which radical thinking could find a niche, allowing the CYL to lead the demand for more militancy from within the ranks of the ANC.

Developments in the Cape

On 26 August 1943 the National Executive Committee of the AAC issued 'A Call to Unity' urging all African groups to unite. Existing African bodies were urged to send delegates to a conference of the Convention. This time there was no attack on the old leaders of Convention, and the Native Representatives in Parliament and the Senate were attacked more in pain than in anger. This was a 'Call' to repair the damage caused by Tabata's attack in 1941.

When the Conference gathered it was proposed that the AAC join with similar organisations of Coloureds and Indians in a Non-European Unity Movement on the basis of a newly published 10-point democratic programme which demanded the vote and covered most of the democratic demands of the day. A Coloured federal organisation had already been planned by members of the WPSA in their campaign against a government plan to set up a Coloured Affairs Department (CAD), similar to the Native Affairs Department, to regulate the lives of the Coloured people and tighten the segregation laws.¹⁵

If it had not been for Kies it is conceivable that nothing would have been done to resist the government's designs, but it seems that he (together with other members of the WPSA) had more grandiose ideas. They conceived of a movement of Coloured people that would operate on the same lines as the AAC and, furthermore, that this new organisation would federate with the AAC and the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) in a broad Unity movement. It was a plan that was far ahead of its time but it seemed to its architects to be realisable.

A preliminary meeting, urged to accept a new federation with Africans and Indians 'to forward our national demands', ended indecisively with a call for a further meeting with other representatives.

In December 1943 a conference of Coloured organisations, including political bodies, sports clubs, community organisations, church groups and others, was convened. There were representatives from the Teachers League of South Africa (TLSA), the NEF, the APO (African Peoples' Organisation) and so on. As in the case of the AAC in 1935 it is not certain that any of the political groups were active. It is also uncertain what presence at the conference implied other than that some committee members arrived. Whether this presence was reported back to the rank and file members is uncertain because there were few occasions on which the groups met. The conference endorsed the democratic programme that the AAC adopted, agreed on the need for a federated movement of Non-Europeans and on strategies to combat the

Coloured Affairs Council (CAC). The new organisation was first named the Anti-CAC. Then, when a Coloured Affairs Department (CAD) was established by the government, confirming the worst fears of the new organisation, it changed its name to that of Anti-CAD.

Years later leaders of the AAC and the Anti-CAD both claimed the credit for launching the NEUM and, although that was a trivial issue, it was a sign of an inner tension that would eventually lead to a split in the movement. Meanwhile it could be claimed that the African and the Coloured people's organisations had been formed or revitalised and that they were united. Yet the unity of the blacks was far from complete. It is doubtful whether groups affiliated to the AAC and ever met together, except at the yearly conferences of the NEUM or an occasional local gathering. The one exception was a joint conference of the Cape African Teachers Association (CATA) and the TLSA.

Where Were The Indians?

The drive for a unified black organisation still required the recruitment of the provincial Indian Congresses. From the outset the NEUM failed to win their allegiance despite early hopes that this could be achieved. This was related, in part, to the style of the Indian leadership, and also to the false hopes placed in new forces within the Indian community.

For some time the larger section, the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) was led by man who belonged mainly to the merchant class. Under constant threat of further restrictions, which would harm their businesses or property rights, the leaders responded by sending petitions or delegations to the government and avoided any signs of 'irresponsibility' or militancy. In this, the policy of the NIC was only marginally different to that of the ANC, the APO, and the AAC. But so complete was the control of Kajeer and Pather, the Indian leaders, that it seemed to be the most backward of all the movements.

A rank and file movement, impatience with the old leadership, emerged just before the war. They campaigned against the government's proposed restrictions on trading and other rights in the centre of Durban's old Indian centre. The campaign was aborted when war seemed imminent but it was the onset of war that led to changes, this time in the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) and the Natal section

Dr Dadoo took up the cry against imperialist war and this was acclaimed, particularly by the Indian youth, who supported the campaigns of Gandhi and the Congress movement in India. He then called for the removal of the conservative leaders in the Transvaal and won a resounding victory. His next goal was for change in the Natal based SAIC. Needing assistance, he met the leaders of the NEUM and claimed that a reformed SAIC would affiliate to the NEUM. Consequently Tabata, Gool, Kies and others assisted in the campaign which led to the election of a

new more radical leadership in Natal. This was a victory that the Cape Town contingent relished. They had assisted in the removal of a timid and compromised leadership and were certain that they had won over the Indian Congress.

The SAIC never joined the NEUM. Precisely what led to the abrupt change was never disclosed. Leaders of the NEUM said privately that Dadoo's membership of the CPSA (which was always obvious) had acted as a barrier to affiliation. This was naive. The members of the WPSA knew that the CPSA had long since decided that they had little to gain from co-operation with the 'Trotskyist' leaders and this was the period in which the Comintern's international campaign against Trotsky's followers had reached its peak. Naive or not, the NEUM, which was supposed to rest on three (ethnic) pillars was left without any support from the Indian organisation. Stalinism had triumphed again and this gap was never filled.

There was one further absence from NEUM ranks. At an early stage the triumvirate (Tabata, Gool and Kies) had travelled to Johannesburg to win the affiliation of African trade unions to the federal body. If they had succeeded they could have claimed that they had working class support, although it is uncertain what they could have offered the trade unions in their struggle for legal recognition, higher wages, or better working conditions.

It was a crucial period for the unions which had just faced a toughening of anti-strike regulations, and new measures that made it more difficult for them to secure higher wages.¹⁶ However, the only trade unionist who responded to the invitation from Tabata, *et al*, was Dan Koza of the African Commercial and Distributive Workers Union but although he gave his personal support to the AAC and the NEUM he did not enrol his union members. He attended one conference of the NEUM as a delegate of a small Trotskyist group, the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa (FIOSA) and reappeared in the annals of the AAC in December 1948 when he joined other leaders of the organisation in talks about unity with the ANC. At that stage he had already decided that there was nothing more that he could do inside a trade union movement that was about to be proscribed by the government.

Despite appeals to trade unions to join the NEUM, there were few discussions at NEUM conferences that focused on trade union problems. Those who spoke about trade union at conferences seemed to know little about the problems and, significantly, the leaders of the AAC were not present at the important conferences of the Council of Non-European Trade Unions in 1944 or 1945, when Koza and his friends called for a national trade union body. Leading members of the ANC and the CPSA were there and played an important part in addressing the conferences, delivering messages, and drumming up support against a national body. It was left to individual members of trade unions (Koza

in particular) to urge the Council to ally itself with the AAC. Given the in-built ANC/CPSA majority this was always vetoed.

The Programme and Strategy of the NEUM.

The leaders of the NEUM, from the platform and in their paper the *Torch*, always claimed that their 10-point programme was the most advanced in Africa. This was absurd. The demands started with a claim to the vote and included a call for full and compulsory education, freedom of expression, the right to untrammelled trade union organisation and similar demands. These were not radical demands for a Nationalist movement — even if unattainable at the time. It certainly did not call for any radical social or economic transformation of the country and the attainment of the vote was meaningless inside a conservative parliamentary system.

Privately leaders of the NEUM claimed that the 10-point programme could only be made effective inside a socialist revolution, but such statements were always made discretely. The one 'concession' to socialist thinking was their attack on 'capitalist imperialism' (and with this they associated the Chamber of Mines). They also claimed that the USSR was a workers state and that the leaders of the USSR, despite problems in the way the state was controlled, was on the side of the oppressed people of the world. But no strategy followed from this and there were no public statements from the NEUM on the war in Europe or Asia. The one-time militant stance of the WPSA on the war was swept under the carpet and a discrete, if dishonest, silence was maintained.

Yet the 10-point programme which was spoken about with such reverence was not only potentially reformist but in its abbreviated and best known form its terms were vague or non-specific. Point 7 on the programme, which dealt with the land question stated: 'the redivision of the land in terms of the above [democratic demands].' It was only in the lesser known 'Explanatory Remarks' that it was stated:

Relations of serfdom at present existing must go, together with the *Land Acts*, together with the restrictions upon acquiring land. A revision of the land in conformity with the existing rural population, living on the land and working the land, is the first task of a democratic state and Parliament.¹⁷

The programme (in its expanded form) was probably more advanced than in any other programme — but avoided all the questions of how the new democratic state was to be brought into existence and, consequently, how the land would be redivided. But, in fact, that was not the crucial question that had to be posed at the time. If the movement was serious in its intent it had to send its organisers across the country to speak to those 'working the land' and provide tactics for opposing existing land legislation. Except for one corner of the eastern Cape this was never

done. Point 7 remained abstract and academic without organisational content. Not unnaturally this was eventually one of the points on which the NEUM split in 1958 – Tabata saying that land could be bought, Kies and others claiming that there could be no private property in land.

The leaders of the NEUM did not advance traditional working class methods of struggle, instead they adopted as their main slogan the call for non-collaboration. That is, they declared that no member or group attached to the organisation could support any government institution or accept membership of the government's 'dummy' bodies. More specifically, the NEUM rejected 'Native Representatives' in Parliament or the Senate, the Native Representative Council, the Coloured Advisory Council, township Advisory Boards, the (Transkei) Bunga or any other body established to advise on events in the Reserves. Any person who co-operated with the government (or its institutions) was a 'quisling' and should be personally boycotted.

This was an austere policy which only had limited success and was often ineffectual. The treasurer of the AAC, Dr (Chief) Moroka, stood for the Native Representative Council and, until that body dissolved itself in 1946, resisted all calls by the AAC assembly to resign his seat. Other members of Advisory Boards were members of the AAC, and remained such, despite appeals to them to resign. Yet persons who were not members of the NEUM were castigated and boycotted when they refused to accept NEUM policy. Members of the CPSA who claimed that they were using the electoral platform to make their demands for change and were elected (despite the 'boycott') to the Cape Provincial Council, or Parliament, were also condemned – for participating in elections and only secondarily as Stalinists.

The boycott was also used to cover the government sponsored pageant in 1952, when the NEUM condemned the 300th anniversary of the arrival on South African soil of the first white settlers under Jan van Riebeeck. Either because of the campaign to boycott the celebrations, or out of apathy, the Coloured people stayed away from the 'celebrations'. For years this was acclaimed as a great victory by members of the NEUM: the fact that at the same time there was a 'defiance campaign', organised by the ANC, which members of the NEUM also condemned and 'boycotted' is ignored. This left the AAC isolated in the rest of the country – but that is still in the future and will be discussed below.

The writings and speeches of the NEUM were redolent with a number of words or phrases that marked them indelibly. All those who were part of the ruling class were 'herrenvolk', there were 'collaborators' [and they were 'quislings', the only principled way forward was through 'non-collaboration'. Yet, again looking forward, when leaders of the CYL called for the boycott of schools to reverse the new Bantu-education, instituted by Dr Verwoerd, Tabata wrote a book condemning the new

blue-print for illiteracy, and also condemned the boycott.¹⁸ The fact that his objection was valid, and that the boycott of schools was a disaster did not lead the members of the NEUM (or those who were most vocal) from calling at every turn for boycotts. It became a universal principle that had to be upheld, irrespective of the situation, or the occasion.

Although the initial leaders came from the WPSA there was no discussion of the social forces that could bring about change, even though the programme of the WPSA following Trotsky's criticism, had spoken of the role of the advanced workers in leading the peasants in their fight for land. In their writings these erstwhile Trotskyists never mentioned class divisions in any but the vaguest fashion. They did say that the leaders of the old SAIC had been 'merchants', and of course the ruling class was capitalist, but there were seemingly no class divisions among Africans. When Tabata wrote his book on the AAC in 1949¹⁹, he avoided any mention of class differentiation except to declare that after 'liberation', the workers would have the right to trade union organisation.

The NEUM had little to say about the struggles of workers or the innumerable strikes during the war years, most of them illegal. They were never able to advance the cause of the workers' organisation except in the broadest terms and they never commented on the bitter fights between the Progressive Trade Union bloc led by Dan Koza) and those who opposed them from within the ANC and the CPSA. Not a word about the worker's leading role in the struggle for liberation that had once been allocated to them in the writings of the WPSA. The one-time revolutionary socialists had adopted the role of populist nationalism using catchwords taken from socialist programmes.

There is little purpose in listing all the struggles that the NEUM ignored or condemned. There was no comment on the bus boycotts in the Transvaal, nor the many eruptions in townships over lodger's permits, victimisations, rentals, and so on. In the Cape, where the leadership was centred, the Anti-CAD agreed to co-operate with the local communists to resist the imposition of apartheid on the trains by courting imprisonment. Yet, when the day of action arrived members of the NEUM withdrew and refused to enter 'White's only' compartments. In a word, this National movement stood aloof from, and was unable to see the need for struggles on the ground. When challenged over this (privately) the contention was narrow and sectarian: it was not our task to enter into every struggle provoked by the ruling class. The aim, it was said, was to prepare a trained cadre that could challenge the state and bring the system down. How this was to be done if they never engaged in popular struggles was never explained.

What I have said does not negate the fact that non-collaboration and the boycott could be powerful weapons, and if used appropriately could be most effective in advancing some struggles. It was the failure to analyze each situation (as in the school boycott) and apply such tactics appropriately, that calls for criticism.

The Rural Population

Before 1943 there were few Africans in the Workers Party and there were few contacts in the Reserves. This altered when the revived AAC won the support of the Cape African Teachers Association (CATA). Lines of organisation in the eastern Cape were now opened to the NEUM – despite the restriction that stopped all open political work by teachers. Tabata, who was a full time organiser (and undoubtedly paid by members of the WPSA), spent part of his time in the eastern Cape, visiting and speaking to students at the University College of Fort Hare, to teachers, and to organisations in the Reserves.

There are few details of Tabata's itinerary, or of his contacts. One story told by Godfrey Pitje, then a lecturer at Fort Hare, is of interest. Tabata met with some members of the CYL who were then students or lecturers at Fort Hare in the 1940s and he outlined the programme and tactics of the AAC. At the subsequent meeting Tabata was informed that those present had been impressed by what he had said but would not join the AAC. If however the members of the AAC joined the ANC and they worked together, they would ensure that Tabata was elected to a top office when they took control of that organisation. Tabata replied indignantly that the AAC was the 'mother body' and, as such, could not possibly join a subsidiary movement.²⁰

The students involved were among those who subsequently supported the 1949 *Programme of Action*, voted Dr Xuma out of office, and effectively took control of the revamped ANC. What might have happened, assuming the veracity of this story, lies in the realm of speculation, and whether Tabata would have reverted to the path of revolutionary socialism if the AAC had entered the ANC must also remain an open question. But it would certainly have altered the subsequent history of black struggle in many respects.

Little is known of Tabata's contacts with peasants but he spoke privately of some he had approached. There it emerged that Tabata was actively agitating against the rehabilitation scheme, urging the policy of non-collaboration and stressing the need for organisation so that resistance could be extended. Tabata spoke of being arrested, described prison conditions and discussions he had when inside the prison yard.

Tabata's position, which he described in the AAC newsletter was the claim that the land was not overstocked, as asserted by government inspectors, but that the land was over-populated. He showed, time and again, that the plans for the future was the creation of camps in which the youth would be concentrated, prior to their being sent out as labourers.²¹

It is not certain what effect he had. The papers and journals that served the ANC and the CPSA never mentioned the problems facing the

people of the Reserves — nor would they quote from Tabata's many articles on the subject. Some peasant movements, including one which called itself the Kongo, did respond. Its leaders appeared at one AAC conference and spoke against the plans being implemented in Pondoland.

When news came of a 'revolt' in the Witzieshoek Reserve (inside the Orange Free State) in 1952, following protests against the compulsory culling of cattle and the erection of fences to keep land fallow, Tabata's main contention seemed incontrovertible: there was a need to organise against the Rehabilitation scheme and against the other regulation being introduced in the Reserves. The snag was that the NEUM had no contacts in the Reserves outside Pondoland. And even there, the loose structure of the NEUM did not lead to tight or consistent organisation.

Indeed, the NEUM never had a realistic plan for organisation, either in the Reserves or elsewhere. It was stated in 1957 that there were to be no centralised campaigns across the country. Instead there were to be regional committees of the NEUM, composed of representatives of all groups in the area affiliated to the central body. These committees would take decisions on local campaigns and organise them. It was the dream (or the nightmare) of people who did not have the slightest idea on how, or where, or when, to organise. Except for one or two districts (or towns) there were often no more than one or two groups connected with the NEUM. They had few resources and could do little more than call on their limited membership to campaign on a specific issue in a restricted region. Nor was it clear what the teacher's organisation was to do if it wished to mobilize its members over a large region. But even if that was sorted out, what was the purpose of a national body, federalised or centralised, if it was not to come to the support of its member groups, or prepare such groups for action?

Yet the 1957 plan was hailed as the master plan: diagrams were drawn to show how it was to work. The whole country would eventually be covered by these regional committees all ready to engage the government in battle. Provided, that is, that there were functioning regional committees. It was in the nature of the NEUM that once it laid down a 'plan' its superiority over all other plans was proclaimed. Although there was no campaigning there was little or no internal criticism, and those who found themselves in disagreement were soon excluded from the movement.

The National Extension of the NEUM

In 1943 the NEUM consisted of groups in the western Cape, Kimberley and in the Reserves of the eastern Cape. One of the first groups outside the Cape to affiliate was the Workers International League (WIL) in Johannesburg, a small Trotskyist group whose main activities were

centred in the African trade unions and the townships. After some debate over the programmatic issue of attachment to a Nationalist movement – a subject that had taxed previous left-wing groups but of which the new League was unaware, the WIL applied for affiliation.²² The debate at the time was determined pragmatically: affiliation to the NEUM was sought in order to reach a wider constituency.

But there was no wider constituency, nor were there campaigns in which to participate. Membership involved attendance, by two or three delegates, at the annual conference of the AAC in Bloemfontein, and then of the NEUM in Kimberley, the geographic shift made necessary by the hope that Indian delegates might arrive.²³

The WIL collapsed in early 1946 and for over a year there was no further presence of the NEUM in the Transvaal. Then, in 1947 a small group, composed mainly of students, met at the University of the Witwatersrand. It attracted some prominent young intellectuals and was known as the Progressive Forum (PF). It functioned almost exclusively as a study group and its activities consisted mainly of selling the *Torch*. In 1952, after the Society of Young Africa (SOYA) was launched by the AAC, a group was formed from adherents of the Forum and branched out into the townships. Furthermore a number of young Indian graduates who were in the PF left Johannesburg for Durban. There they set up the first branch of the NEUM in Natal in the style of the Johannesburg group.

These new groups cut right across the organisational basis of the NEUM: they were not based on the so-called (ethnic) pillars on which the NEUM had prided itself. Nor could they form co-ordinating committees, but that was of little importance because, through the 1950s, there is no record of any significant campaign.

The year 1958 was one of splits and expulsions. SOYA had been wracked by internal wrangling and the leadership of the AAC, determined to control a now troublesome body, expelled the secretary for flouting discipline and supposedly using Marxist analysis in his pronouncements. He was the nephew of Cadoc Kobus (also a former member of the WPSA). Kobus was furious and this precipitated a wider split in the NEUM. At the annual AAC conference in December 1958 the NEF and SOYA were debarred and an Anti-CAD delegation walked out in sympathy. The split was now irreversible. Three years later, with the NEUM irreparably split Tabata launched APDUSA (the African Peoples Democratic Union of South Africa) to replace SOYA.

The Transvaal and Natal groups were involved in no political activity but were affected by the split. Prior to this they had stayed aloof from Congress, from the stay-at-homes and trade union activities. They even stayed aloof from the bus boycott of 1957 in Alexandra Township. This last event is still a mystery. The boycott committee was taken over by former members of the PF, together with an Africanist and the ANC, led

by Alfred Nzo (the current foreign minister) was effectively isolated. There is little doubt that township residents were firmly behind the committee and that they were prepared to fight on. Yet when members of the PF in Alexandra, who were participating in the boycott, were invited to join the committee they refused.²⁴

The Banning of Marxists

In 1950 the government passed legislation banning movements that followed the teachings of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. In a step that was condemned as cowardly the Central Committee of the CPSA met and, with only two dissentients, resolved to dissolve the party. It was claimed that the membership was known to the police and any other step would have led to the mass arrest of all members, whether open or secret. To protest against the imminent passing of the legislation the CPSA called on workers to strike on the 1st of May and, despite opposition from the ANC, received a fair response. The NEUM stayed aloof.

The Trotskyists never stirred. The WPSA had gone underground by 1939, had closed its journal and channelled its activities through the non-socialist NEUM. It is said that the WPSA finally ceased activities as an organised entity in 1953 but this is unconfirmed. FIOSA closed its doors in 1948 and although there are reports about disagreements with the International executive of the Fourth International (supposedly because it would not condemn the existence of the state of Israel) there are other accounts, none of them confirmed.

After the formal closing of FIOSA, the last open group that claimed to follow Trotsky, Hosea Jaffe, one of its senior leaders, found a niche for himself alongside Kies as a leader of the Anti-CAD and of the NEUM. Those that disagreed with the decision to dissolve FIOSA formed a series of discussion groups in Cape Town, usually with the same personnel, but under different names: The Forum Club, the Cape Debating Society, and so on. Although the groups were tiny and the influence of its members was limited there were pungent criticisms of the NEUM leadership. There were also new discussions of the history of South Africa (including a reappraisal by Kenneth Jordaan, of the meaning of van Riebeeck, in answer to the boycott of the government's celebrations) and new answers to the meaning of the colour bar in South Africa.²⁵ The latter appeared as criticisms of essays by Kies and W van Schoor (both leaders of the NEUM) on the origin of colour discrimination and although there were no replies to the papers of Jordaan and no debates in Cape Town, the impact of the essays was felt even in Communist Party ranks in Johannesburg.²⁶

But even more important were the trenchant criticisms of NEUM tactics, on NEUM principles, and on NEUM failure to campaign on vital local issues. Dr Arthur Davids (formerly of FIOSA) was effective in his attack

on the federal structure, and on the description of the boycott weapon as a 'principle'; he was also critical of Tabata's potted history of the formation of the AAC but he did not offer an alternative history and seemed unaware of the criticisms that had appeared in *Spark* when the first AAC conferences were reported.

The Teacher Dominated Movement.

One of the difficulties faced by the Anti-CAD and NEUM — and by the Forum Clubs — was the high percentage of teachers in its ranks. They were restricted by government regulations from participating in political movements and also faced by the possibility of discrimination from conservative headmasters. Obviously, the same problem was faced by the TLSA, the main source of recruits for the Anti-CAD.

Furthermore, teachers were more inclined to discuss and debate than to participate in open political activity. Those who were in the TLSA were remarkable in having taken a radical stance on the question of segregation (or apartheid), on the demand for the vote, and for their alliance with African teachers. All this was part of their armour, but they lacked offensive weapons. They were petty bourgeois and this was reflected in their inactivity and their ideological approach, whatever the radicalism of their words.

Not all the teachers were in the TLSA, but the influence they exerted on their pupils was vast — partly because of their devotion as teachers and partly because their students could respond to their words of defiance. Had they been able to go beyond talk they might have built a movement to challenge the government. However, from the beginning their position was ambivalent. Their task was to educate the youth and in this they were excellent. But the purpose of their teaching was to secure better results and provide the means for their students to integrate into a society that they wished to destroy. They never resolved this paradox.

Anti-imperialism.

All colonial nationalists have used anti-imperialist slogans and this, seemingly, has put them in the anti-capitalist camp. In the light of early proclamations by Lenin and the Comintern such an orientation has led many such groups to a pro-Soviet stance and placed them, again seemingly, firmly on the side of the USSR and against the imperialist powers.

The unstable nature of that allegiance was demonstrated repeatedly when the Nationalist movements achieved their aims and became the bulwark of capitalism, both locally and internationally. This was demonstrated in Turkey, Persia, India, China and so on. The acid test had come in China in 1927 when Chiang Kai Shek turned on the com-

munists and organised workers and murdered them. Several Chinese Communist leaders, and Trotsky in the USSR, had warned of this danger in advance and declared that it was impermissible for revolutionaries to surrender their identity in the Nationalist movement. Such a policy did not exclude the possibility of working in co-operation with Nationalists on specific campaigns, nor an entry into the nationalist movement for a limited time for specified ends. However, at all times, socialists had to maintain the right to criticise the Nationalists and, if necessary, break with them and oppose their activities.

In South Africa this was repeatedly ignored by the CPSA (or SACP as it became after 1953), in early movements like the NLL and the NEUF, and then in the ethnic Congresses. Communist controlled papers became the mouthpieces of the Congress movement. And in turn, members of these movements, subjected to pro-Soviet views in Congress papers and also reacting against attacks on communism in the bourgeois press, adopted an anti-capitalist and pro-Soviet position. Any criticism of the USSR was rejected as bourgeois (or even fascist) in orientation. Members of the SACP encouraged that view.

The position of the NEUM was at once more complex and more simple. The socialists had actually formed a national movement and were organically tied to it, could not (and did not wish to) break free, could not criticise itself and, equally, never did, or could not, conduct a thoroughgoing nationalist campaign.

Although it was severely critical of the SACP's local politics, particularly in its demand that people accept the policy on non-collaboration and the boycott weapon, it changed tack when viewing events internationally. In line with its anti-imperialist orientation, it was anti-capitalist and pro-Soviet. Furthermore in its interpretation of Trotsky's slogan, 'For the unconditional defence of the Soviet Union' it was remarkably uncritical of what was happening in 'the Socialist Sixth of the World'. Similarly, FIOSA, which also accepted the slogan of 'unconditional defence' was almost equally vociferous in defending the USSR against world imperialism. During the Cold War the NEUM was pro-Soviet and a vigorous critic of the USA and its allies.

The acid test to attitudes on international events became evident in 1956 when the USSR sent its troops into Hungary on the pretext that American troops were preparing to invade the country. Although the SACP initially maintained an embarrassed silence in its front paper *New Age*, the *Torch* appeared with a defence of the Soviet action. It was also no accident that the *Torch* condemned Tito and repeated Stalin's strictures against his regime.

On one account there was an initial difference: unlike the communists the leaders of the NEUM did not support the Nationalist regimes of Asia or the new governments in west Africa. Tabata was scathing in the early 1950s in his (private) comments on Nkrumah and other

African leaders and he was sceptical about their abilities to maintain their regimes. This changed radically by 1958 as expressed by W Tsotsi in his Presidential address to the AAC conference — discussed below

Filled with slogans about imperialism, but little grasp of the class struggle or of the basic tenets of Marxism, the teachers mouthed the appropriate slogans and helped create a political culture that was superficial and self-serving. The nationalism of the NEUM was justified, the tactics and strategy were confirmed, and the members debated in classrooms and in their meetings in the NEF. Furthermore they claimed to be Trotskyists (although this was not for public consumption), thought of themselves as Marxists and as part of an international socialist movement. Many spoke of the need for a 'political' revolution in the USSR which would remove Stalinism and provide the leadership for the coming world revolution.

A Personal Intervention

I had joined the NEUM as a member of the WIL, and again soon after the formation of the Progressive Forum. Because of my long association with the movement I confronted Tabata in Cape Town after the *Torch* supported the invasion of Hungary in 1956 and demanded an explanation. None was given and my disaffection was undoubtedly noted.

There were signs of dissatisfaction in SOYA in 1956 and the internal disputes got increasingly acrimonious. Sastri Mda, the secretary of SOYA was suspended, ostensibly because he employed Marxist terminology in his writing and this, it was claimed could get the AAC into grave difficulties under the terms of the Suppression of Communism Act (of 1950). In fact there was a rift inside the NEUM which was not generally known at the time. A wing of the movement under Tabata, embracing a large section of the AAC, had taken a more nationalist position and had adopted a two-stage position on change. First there would be a democratic revolution in which blacks would have equality inside a capitalist state: thereafter there would be a new struggle for socialism. A section of the AAC (including Cadoc Kobus, an early recruit to the WPSA and uncle to the suspended Sastri Mda) and most of the NEF and Anti-CAD, followed Kies and Jaffe who still spoke primarily about the need for the liberation movement to work for socialism. The split enveloped the movement in the Cape and had been taken up inside SOYA. However, although the PF had information about the wrangling in SOYA there was no discussion (at least openly) about the larger problems inside the NEUM. The issues in which I became involved were undoubtedly connected with the general malaise inside the organisation but took a different route.

In 1957, as a member of staff at the University of the Witwatersrand, I joined in the public protest against the proposed closing of the Univer-

sity to blacks. At a meeting of the PF I was condemned for daring to march with staff and students. Did I not know, said my accusers, that I was providing a radical cloak for the 'liberal' establishment? Had I considered the effects of such action? Did I not realise that other members of the PF had all stayed away? It was absurd and I did not return to the Forum. Shortly thereafter I wrote a long essay, under the pseudonym R Mettler, criticising Tabata's book *The Awakening of a People*. In it I took the author to task for failing to provide an economic analysis of the country he was describing, for not offering a class analysis of society and ignoring class divisions among the African people. I also criticised the method of organisation and the 'principle' of non-collaboration.²⁷

The response from leaders of the NEUM to most criticisms was usually total silence but in 1958, faced by internal turmoil, it was felt expedient by the AAC to mount an attack.²⁸ In his presidential address, W Tsotsi — always a supporter of Tabata — used my Mettler article to attack the Kies-Jaffe position, even though there was little resemblance between them and myself. My analysis of South Africa in class terms was rejected by Tsotsi who declared, *inter alia*, that the African professional and business class had to be championed in its demand for a share inside a capitalist democracy.

Following his criticism of Mettler, Tsotsi placed the AAC squarely inside the nationalist camp by reversing Tabata's previous rejection of Nkrumah and his achievement of political independence. He said that he deplored the failure [by Marxists] to recognise that emergent African nationalism was a progressive political force, was genuinely anti-imperialist and anti-colonialism.

In 1957, in line with this reversal, Tabata had raised the agrarian question afresh. The existing policy is was inscribed in point 7 of the 10-point programme, one of the key issues on which the NEUM had always prided itself and which had led Tabata to his concentrated attacks on the rehabilitation (or betterment) scheme. Hitherto it had been assumed that when the programme was put into effect (after liberation) the redivided land would be held collectively. He now announced that land that was to be redivided could be sold as private property.

This shift, which added to the other points of disagreement, split the NEUM in two, was consistent with the embargo on the use of Marxist language and the reconsideration of national movements in west Africa. Nonetheless, alongside the newly enunciated policy, highlighted by Tsotsi's address in 1958, leaders of the AAC reverted at times to the socialist rhetoric of the 1930s.

Looking at the land question with some hindsight it is noteworthy that there were no new investigations of land possession or of population distribution in the rural areas. Nobody seems to have noted that the rural population was neither homogeneous in composition nor uniform in its demands. Yet information on demands was available. Those work-

ing on the white farms (or plantations) were divided between those that said the land had belonged to their forefathers before the settlers came and they wanted the land returned, others who were land labourers demanded better working conditions and higher wages. And on the Reserves the complaints extended from those who wanted more land to those who wanted an end to the new system of Bantu Authorities. In the light of such multiple demands the debate over the right to individual land plots covering a tiny proportion of rural farmers was an indication of the isolation of Tabata, *et al.*

The NEUM and the Congress Movement

Among the campaigns that were condemned by the NEUM was the Defiance Campaign of 1952. In general the criticism was correct. It was absurd to demand that seven unjust laws be repealed when no organisation had the strength to secure that end. The NEUM, furthermore, refused to believe that the government would be forced to repeal any laws by men and women breaking the law in order to be imprisoned. Consequently the *Torch* carried articles describing the campaign as a sham. It was subsequently claimed that the police distributed copies of the paper to passive resisters in the prisons.

Despite subsequent claims the campaign was not successful. Of the 8,000 volunteers who went to prison — some being counted more than once if they defied on several occasions — the vast majority came from the eastern Cape. Except for a few centres outside the East London/Port Elizabeth region the campaign made little impact on local communities. The reason for the relative success in the eastern Cape is open to question but does raise questions about NEUM influence.²⁹ This was one region in which the AAC/NEUM had contacts but did not seem to influence events. Nor was there evidence that NEUM leaders were present, while the campaign was in progress or when it ended in a horrific riot.

From 1950 to 1958 the ANC called a number of stay-at-homes. Some received wide support, others were miserable failures. Each event needed discussion and some warranted support. Others had to be exposed as opportunistic and even contrary to the best interests of the African people. But generally there was a deadly silence in the NEUM press. The events were not mentioned or were summarily dismissed.³⁰

By the mid-50s, or even before, the Forum groups in Cape Town disintegrated. They too fell apart because they never tried to go out to the people with campaigns of action. Arthur Davids and his friends, many of them former members of FIOSA, published a journal *The Citizen*, which was later to support the Liberal Party, condemned the communists (and presumably the Trotskyists) and allowed anti-semitic statements by one of their leading members to pass uncensored.

There were apparently many calls for change inside the NEUM at the time and this led to further divisions. Jaffe called for the end of any reference to racial groups, because it was incorrect to divide people on such grounds. Instead he called for a unitary movement without reference to ethnicity. This was contested by Kies and after a debate Jaffe lost the vote by a narrow margin.³¹ The disputes all belong to the past and are of little interest in themselves. What they do illustrate is the failure of belief in the cause that once seemed so certain. In the social upset (inside the NEUM) small differences grew and split the movement irrevocably. To compound the confusion Jaffe left the country without seeking the permission of his colleagues. The ranks were thinning, the leaders were scattering and the NEUM had ceased to play any significant part in the western Cape. When eventually the schools' revolt of 1976-77 hit the Cape it seems that the NEUM was either ineffectual or isolated. Individual teachers might have offered their support, but the movement seems to have played no significant part. The influence of the one-time powerful teachers League was over.

The Rural Revolts - 1958-60

In the late 1950s there were several rural revolts in South Africa, starting in Zeerust, then in Sekhukuniland (both in the Northern Transvaal), followed by disturbances in Natal and finally a revolt in Pondoland.³² The immediate causes differed in each Reserve: there was agitation against the issue of passes to women in Zeerust, resentment over the appointment of chiefs in Sekhukuniland, and protests against the dipping of cattle in Natal. It also seems that there were incipient revolts in other Reserves but these were either pre-empted by police action, or have still to be discovered by historians. Although there was no one immediate cause of the uprisings, it was fairly evident that discontent had been growing in these regions over government policy and most of the disaffection could be ascribed to the Bantu Authorities Act, which aimed ultimately to ensure that compliant chiefs would be in place to direct local residents towards full apartheid.

The presence of political groups in these Reserves was small or non-existent, although after the first clashes with the authorities (for example in Zeerust) the residents asked for the 'Congress lawyer', or for members of the ANC. There was no NEUM presence in the Reserves outside the Cape and there was no request for their representatives to intervene. However, these events did not seem to affect members. The fact that there was no NEUM involvement was a sign of the weakness of a movement that had spent so much of its energy urging exposure of government policy and organisation of people in the Reserves.

During this period resistance to Bantu authorities in Pondoland was growing and this was one place in which there was a NEUM presence,

and one area which Tabata knew well. How informed he was on events in this Reserve has never been disclosed yet it is inconceivable that he was ignorant of the growing anger. There is nothing in the NEUM press to indicate that a revolt was brewing and the first published information appeared many years later in the book *Armed Struggle*, written by Karim Essak, one of the founder members of the Johannesburg Progressive Forum.³³

The book is generally uninformative and is a strange amalgam of eulogies to Kim il Sung (of North Korea) and varied accounts of the importance of guerilla war. In one brief chapter Essak refers to the people of Pondoland and gives an account of his meeting with members of The Hill, the organisation of Pondo peasants who rose in revolt against the Chiefs and the administration.

Essak says that the men told him that they were preparing for armed revolt and requested assistance from the NEUM. Essak claims that he informed them that a revolt could not possibly succeed and that they should think again. Obviously there would be no assistance from the NEUM. It is doubtful whether Essak would have taken the decision by himself but he provides no further information.

It appears from other sources that the delegation also met with the Congress lawyer, Rowley Arenstein, who was later to appear in court to defend the men, and through Arenstein they met Ronnie Kasrils and Anderson Khumani Ganyile.³⁴ That is, NEUM reluctance to assist led to Congress intervention — although the revolt had to fail and the NEUM was formally correct in warning that the peasants would be defeated. This was once again a classical example of political abstentionism that left the NEUM isolated, nursing theories that might or might not have been correct but with no constituency willing to accept the passivity that was advised.

The story of the revolt, the mobilization of superior armed forces to break the warriors and the co-operation between chiefs and the police has been told elsewhere. What is of particular interest in this account is the split in the ranks of the NEUM. Obviously there were members in Pondoland who could not accept the leadership's directives.

It is not known why the NEUM group in Pondoland rejected official policy and seem to have sided with those that revolted. The most plausible reason would be that local residents were better acquainted with the mood and they responded to the people's action more positively. The one account about this is deposited at the University of Nanterre.³⁵ A document, signed 'Anderson' which appears to be a fourth or fifth carbon copy was sent by the writer, possibly dispatched from outside South Africa, appealing for assistance for the peasants. Extracts are printed as an appendix to this article.³⁶

The most important political events of 1960, outside the Pondo revolt, were those that followed the calling of the anti-pass campaign by the PAC. The call for the destruction of the passes was probably irresponsible and certainly ill considered. The response across the country was sparse and only at Sharpeville in the southern Transvaal and at Langa in Cape Town were gatherings of any size recorded. Inevitably the police shot at a defenceless crowd, killing or maiming a large number. This was followed by a march on Cape Town at which a young member of the PAC, Philip Kgosane, placed himself at the head. Soon after that the government banned the PAC, the ANC and associated groups, A new phase of South Africa's political life had opened up.

The response of the AAC and NEUM, when the campaign was announced, was immediate. In leaflets they condemned the PAC, its policies, and in particular the anti-pass campaign. Having done their duty they retired to the sidelines. There is no record of their participation in any of the events that followed. Phyllis Ntantala (Mrs Jordan), in her autobiography³⁷, tells of hastening to the city centre of Cape Town in her car when she heard the news of the march. This leading member of the NEUM had one objective, to find her husband, Dr AC Jordan, and her son Pallo. She mentions no political objective and does not discuss AAC possible intervention. She was present as an anxious wife and mother. Whether other members of the NEUM did likewise is not known but there is no mention in any document of their preparing any activity.

The ANC was little better. It was in complete disarray, unprepared (despite statements to the contrary), and unable to cope with the events in Sharpeville and Langa. Only the call by Chief Luthuli, the ANC President, for the burning of all passes gained any support. Then, when the police rounded up leading political figures and placed them in detention there was complete paralysis. One attempt at calling a general strike³⁸ was effectively suppressed by members of the SACP and ANC who had escaped the police dragnet. It was this collapse of legal politics, more than anything else, that led to the campaign of sabotage. But that was still a year or two away. There was still the state of emergency to weather.

During the demonstrations by University students in Johannesburg, calling for the release of the detainees, the members of the NEUM in Johannesburg were never to be seen. Kenneth Jordaan and his friends produced a lengthy analysis of the events of 1960 and journeyed to Johannesburg to find friendly contacts in order to intervene. However he was isolated, and did not make contact with the small groups in existence. Then he returned to Cape Town and some time later was in contact with a group that had also emerged from the NEUM and was discussing the possibility of engaging in sabotage. That group, known as the Yu Chi Chin Club, led by Neville Alexander, produced a number of

discussion documents outlining their reasons for turning to such action.³⁹ The members of the group were known to the police, were arrested, and sent to Robben Island. Jordaan, who would have been called to provide evidence for the state escaped from South Africa and his contacts scattered.

But such activity was distant from the remains of the NEUM. At some time Tabata, Janub Gool, and leading members of CATA found it necessary to leave the country. There is a dearth of printed information on those that went into exile and claimed to be leading the movement from afar. Problems that they faced forced Tabata to adopt new positions. Confronted by the Organisation of African Unity's scepticism about his request for funds, Tabata was required to produce evidence of action in South Africa. It is not certain whether this led to an about turn in policy but it is claimed by disillusioned members that this led to the mobilization of some young cadres as a sabotage group. The action was poorly organised, the group was arrested and several were sentenced to imprisonment on Robben Island. This, apparently, did secure funds for the exiled UMSA (Unity Movement of South Africa), as it now called itself.

But the period of exile was fallow. There are few instances in which anything was achieved, either by Tabata, or by Jaffe, or by others who tried to organise support for their cause abroad. Indeed, like all exile groups, and particularly groups that are not engaged in practical and active work, they wrangled, they disagreed, they split or they expelled each other. Those who were once widely known were forgotten by all but the few, and age and illness took its toll. Alongside a movement that is barely remembered, the men in exile (who are still alive) have little or no role in events today, and no place in the politics of tomorrow.

APPENDIX

THE UNITY MOVEMENT IN PONDOLAND

In 1961 a faint carbon copy of a statement from the Publicity Department of the Pondoland Anti-Bantustan Movement was received by the Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International in Europe. It was signed by 'Anderson', who was apparently well known to the Secretariat, with an appeal for help and a request that the document be translated into French, obviously for distribution and publicity. It has not been possible to check the assertions made about AAC/NEUM involvement and we are sceptical about the claims made. Nonetheless we print a short summary in the hope that others might be able to supply further information about the events referred to.

Pondoland, as the writer said, is 16,000 square miles. At the time its population was two million Africans and two thousand whites.

The writer commenced with a lengthy account of the events, since the mid-1950s, which had angered the local population. Yet they were refused permission to meet, to organise or to demonstrate. It was, he said, not possible for more than ten persons to assemble without the magistrates permission.

The issues, said 'Anderson', included 1) The influx Control Act of 1956 which prevented free movement in and out of Pondoland. Over 300 young men, unable to seek work outside the region were forcibly removed to white-owned farms as labourers and subjected to whipping and torture. In 1957 an additional clause made it an offence for young men and women to resist transportation to farms as labourers.

2) In 1957 a Stock Limitation Act forced the compulsory disposal of stock in pursuance of the government's 'betterment scheme'. Shortly thereafter taxes were increased and levies imposed on the people, the proceeds of which went to Chiefs and sub-chiefs. 3) In 1958 the Self-Governing Act was passed — as the first step of the grand apartheid scheme. At the same time press correspondents were refused entry to Pondoland. 4) In December 1959 many young intellectuals, studying or working outside Pondoland were sent back home. Unable to voice their complaints openly they worked covertly, embarked on a house to house campaign and aimed at a mass revolutionary struggle. 'Anderson' said that there was no branch of the ANC in Pondoland and that members of the AAC and NEUM were prominent in the newly formed Pondoland Anti-Bantustan Movement. It was resolved that 'the revolutionary struggle would continue until Pondoland had direct representation in a South African Parliament with an African majority or seceded from South Africa.' It was also resolved that no person would pay taxes or levies.

On 6 June 1960 there was a march of 2,000 residents to Lusikisiki to present the peoples' demands to a government agent. The march was intercepted by police, with a helicopter cover and in the shooting 31 people were killed and 200 injured. The others ran into the adjacent forest and the revolt had begun.

In the ensuing struggle Chiefs were assassinated (or fled), the houses of known collaborators were burnt down as were many government administration offices. Bridges were blown up and telephone lines cut.

The government brought out the air force and apparently US ships were asked to guard the seas lest Chinese submarines brought in food and military supplies(!)

'Anderson' mentioned the names of prominent men who supported the revolt and concluded with the grim statistics of the unequal war. After 15 months of struggle 43 persons were dead, 500 were in prison with sentences up to 15 years, more than 600 still faced charges for murder, arson and incitement. 7,000 were detained in camps without charges being laid.

If the account is accurate many new questions need answers and the course of events need rewriting. However, if the account is false or inaccurate the veracity of NEUM accounts will be still further discounted.

References

1. These included I B Tabata (1950), *The Awakening of a People: The All African Convention*; (1960), *Education for Barbarism*, and (1945) *The Rehabilitation Scheme: the New Fraud*; *Anti-CAD Bulletin*; *The Voice* (of the AAC); *The Torch*.
2. Lee, Franz John Tennyson (1971), *Der Einfluss des Marxismus auf die Nationalen Befreiungsbewegungen in Suidafrika, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Trotskismus und Stalinismus*, Frankfurt Among the very few memoirs there is a typescript by Joe Rassool. See also chapters in my autobiography, *Revolutions in My Life*, WitsUP, (1995).
3. I use the terminology current in the Unity Movement in the 1940s and 1950s. There were few if any objections at the time to describing communities in ethnic terms.
4. See *Searchlight South Africa*, No 10, or *Revolutionary History*, Vol 3, No 3, for a history of the early Trotskyist groups.
5. This letter was found in the files of the Workers Party. It is quoted more fully in *Searchlight South Africa*, No 10
6. The ideas of the US black leaders ranged from those who wished to find a place for Afro-Americans inside the US, to those who called for a 'return to Africa'. Aggrey was a West African who called for the co-optation of blacks into the structure of colonial society.
7. Nosipho Majeka (Dora Taylor) (1952), *The Role of the Missionary in Conquest*. SOYA, Cape Town.
8. See my unpublished seminar paper (1979), 'Tuskegee, the Joint Councils, and the All African Convention', *The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Vol 10, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London.
9. This is apparent from a letter by AB Payne, MP, to A Makiwane, 20 February 1966. Originally in Rheinallt Jones papers, Box 100.
10. See the diary, edited by Robert Edgar (ed), *An African American in South Africa: The Travel Notes of Ralph J Bunche, 28 September 1937-1 January 1938*, Ohio University Press, 1992.
11. This had been described in Government Blue Books and was well known in the country.
12. T Karis and G Carter *From Protest to Challenge, A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964*, Vol 2, p 339.
13. *Ibid*, p 142.
14. The development of the trade unions and the nature of war time struggles are described in B Hirson (1989), *Yours For the Union*, Zed, but that work only offers a glimpse into a much wider picture of local disaffection and reaction.
15. R Hoedermaker, General Secretary of the National Council of Coloured Welfare Organisations, who wrote occasionally in the *Cape Standard*, called a meeting in August 1942 to discuss the implications of the new proposal. He urged that a federated council of Coloured organisations be formed to oppose the proposed CAD. His letter of invitation and the minutes of the meeting are on the microfilm of the Hoover Institute Microfilm Africa 484 DT779ST26, (Rhodes House), Reel 13. SG Maurice and Ben Kies was among the few who attended that meeting as representatives of the New Era Fellowship (NEF), a cultural club established in 1937 and attended mainly by Coloured teachers and students.
16. This is discussed in *Yours for the Union*.
17. Karis and Carter, Vol 2, p 357.
18. IB Tabata (1960), *Education for Barbarism*, Pall Mall.
19. IB Tabata (1950), *The Awakening of a People: The All African Convention*, People's Press, Johannesburg. [This press was set up by myself to publish the book].
20. I was told of this incident by Godfrey Pitje, when he talked about his indecision over joining the PAC and, reflecting back on the origins of Africanism, mentioned Tabata's appearance at Fort Hare. I had no reason to query the veracity of his account.
21. See the AAC newsletter, *The Voice* and his pamphlet, *The Rehabilitation Scheme: The New Fraud*. Tabata's exposures of plans for the Reserves were unique. He seemed to be alone as a propagandist opposed to government plans for the rural population.

22. South African documents outlining earlier arguments against working in the nationalist movement were only found in the late 1980s. See *Searchlight South Africa*, No 10.
23. Because the passage into the Orange Free State was sealed to all Indians (except under exceptional circumstances) the NEUM met in the nearby town of Kimberley, which was in the Cape.
24. See Dan Mokonyane (1979), *Lessons of Azikwelwa*, Nakong Ya Rena, London, for an account by the man who assumed control of the boycott committee.
25. K Jordaan, 'Jan van Riebeeck: His Place in South African History' in *Discussion* (1,5), June 1952.
26. A Johannesburg discussion club was started by members of the Communist Party, but open to members of other groups. Some of the talks were printed in the club's journal
27. R Mettler (B Hirson), 'It is Time to Awake', Johannesburg, 1957.
28. Reprinted in T Karis and G Gerhart (1977), *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol 3, Hoover Institute, p 493
29. See my analysis in *Searchlight South Africa*, No 1.
30. I wrote three documents from inside Congress under the title 'Analysis' (2 issues), and one as 'Lekhotla la Basabetsi'. I also wrote a general survey during the state of emergency in 1960 and subsequently reprinted in 1961 in the British journal *International Socialism*. Produced as a publication of the Socialist League of Africa it was entitled 'Ten Years of the Stay at Home'. A follow-up article 'Once Again on the Stay at Home' appeared in the same journal a few months later.
31. Thanks to Joe Rassool for this information.
32. See Charles Hooper (1960), *Brief Authority*, Collins, Peter Delius, 'Sebatagoma: Migrant Organization, the ANC and the Sekhukuneland Revolt', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, (15,4) Oct 1989; John Copelyn (1977), 'The Mpondo Revolt of 1960-61' unpublished BA(Hons) dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, and James Fairbairn (Jack Halpern), 'Zeerust: A Profile of Resistance' *Africa South*, Apr-Jun 1958. See also Appendix to this article.
33. Karim Essak, *The Armed Struggle*, Dar-es-Salaam.
34. See Jack Halpern, *South Africa's Hostages*, Penguin.
35. Documents of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International housed at the Modern Documentation Centre, University of Nanterre.
36. Anderson was the name used by an Australian Trotskyist who spent some time in South Africa. This might be a coincidence but has not been confirmed.
37. Phyllis Ntantala (1992), *A Life's Mosaic*, David Philip, Cape Town, pp 171-73
38. Details of this event (in which I was involved) can be found in B Hirson (1995), *Revolutions in My Life*,
39. There is a full set of documents of the Yu Chi Chin club at the Modern Documentation Centre in the University at Nanterre.
40. Julie Frederikse (ed) (1990), *The Unbroken Thread, Non-Racialism in South Africa*, Ravan, pp 39-40
41. See for example my article on Kenny Jordaan in *Searchlight South Africa*, No 2