

## THE DEFIANCE CAMPAIGN, 1952: SOCIAL STRUGGLE OR PARTY STRATAGEM?

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### The Defiance of Unjust Laws

On 26 June 1952, a campaign to secure the repeal of six unjust laws was launched by a Joint Planning Council, composed of leaders of the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), and the Franchise Action Council (FrAC), an ad hoc organization formed to fight against the removal of the Coloured vote. During the first phase of the campaign 'volunteers' courted arrest by breaking unjust laws; and this led over a four months period to approximately 8,000 convictions in the courts. Thereafter, the campaign lost its earlier momentum, and was brought to a virtual standstill by riots in the eastern Cape, Kimberley and Johannesburg. The proposed strike action, that was to follow the first phase, was abandoned, and the campaign called off.

There has been little discussion of the campaign and many questions still await answers. What did the organizers (and the volunteers) hope to achieve? What led to the launching, and why did the Planning Council chose this particular time? How did they hope to initiate industrial action, and why was it abandoned?

Brian Bunting, a leading member of the South African Communist Party (SACP) listing events between 1950-52 in South Africa that influenced decisions, included: the Suppression of Communism Act; police terror and riots in Witzieshoek (November 1950); the Bill to remove Coloured voters from the common roll in 1951; the formation of the Torch Commando, a white ex-serviceman's organization pledged to defend the constitution (*Kotane*, Ch.10). Some of these events influenced the Planning Council, others must be added, but on the basis of his list, the author could only conclude:

In all this ferment it is hard to say where the impetus for the 1952 defiance campaign originated. It had its seeds in the 1949 Programme of Action and it was at an executive meeting of

the ANC on June 17, 1951, that the decision was taken to invite the head committees of the other national movements to meet it and discuss methods of direct action against the Government's oppressive laws and policies. (*ibid.*, p.180)

To state after twenty-five years, that it is not possible to 'say where the impetus' for the campaign originated, is absurd. There are only a few possibilities: either the events of the time inspired people to struggle against some injustice(s); or there was unrest that lacked focus, and a campaign was initiated to provide that lead; or the campaign was dreamt up by persons to advance the fortunes of their own organization(s). However, it is noteworthy that few commentators (including Bunting) allude to grass root support, and few leaders at the time spoke of popular pressure in justifying the campaign. Yet, it is necessary to ask — even if answers are not yet available — whether there was underlying unrest to which the leadership responded, and whether the social composition of those arrested provides insight into the demands of blacks at the time.

In reconstructing the events leading to the campaign, other questions emerge. Why was the response to the campaign concentrated largely in the eastern Cape, and why did the Coloureds of the western Cape, and the Indians of Natal, stand aloof, although they had been expected to respond in large numbers? In fact, what impact did community leaders have on their respective followings?

Firstly the Bill to disenfranchise the Coloured voters needs investigation, because this brought FrAC, the Joint Planning Council, and the Torch Commando into existence. For FrAC the issue was to stop the Bill and protect the Coloured vote, and with this the other bodies concurred. But defeat of the Nationalists in the 1953 general election became the primary objective of the Springbok Legion and the SACP, and the war in Korea obviously influenced the communists. Many of their members drew parallels between oppression in South Africa and the intervention of the west in Asia. Whatever their concern about local discontent — and this is not in doubt — they were also interested in gaining support for the the cause of north Korea.

## The Franchise Action Council

The attempt by the government to remove Coloureds from the common voters roll was not new. One Bill had been stopped in 1939 after massive rallies in Cape Town and a march on Parliament. The government tried again in 1949, but lacked the necessary two-thirds majority to remove an 'entrenched' clause in the constitution, and in October 1950 announced new plans to proceed with the measure. (*Guardian*, 25 February 1951)

In late 1949 it was said that groups of workers, trade unions and individuals were speaking of the possibility of a political strike. (*Guardian*, 6 October 1949) Finally, in February 1951, after a meeting addressed by S.R. Rahim of the African Peoples Organization (APO), Dr Y.M. Dadoo (SAIC) and Dr J.S. Moroka (ANC), FrAC was set up with 33 members. The Council asked the leaders of the APO, the SAIC and the ANC to campaign against the Bill, and call for votes for all (*Guardian*, 8 February 1951).

At a FrAC conference in the Cape there were proposals for a voluntary tax of 1s. per week to form a fighting fund; the calling of a series of 'vote Sundays'; asking the churches to devote sermons to the issue, and sporting bodies to give up sport for a day. Mondays were declared 'self sacrifice day', when one item of luxury was to be avoided, and the money contributed to the fighting fund; and mass meetings and demonstrations called to popularise these decisions. Dadoo, the main speaker, rejected a call for the boycott of government institutions, because this would only destroy the struggle. 'Boycott was not on the agenda today', he said. 'On the agenda at the moment is practical action'.

At a press conference, Moroka promised African support for the retention of the Coloured vote, and called for a common black front to fight against oppression. He also said that he did not rule out the use of a general strike (*Guardian*, 15 February 1951).

On 22 February a protest day with marches was announced for 20 March. The Food and Canning Workers Union and the Cape Town branch of the ANC pledged their support. The Day of Protest was moved forward to 8 March, with a rally at 5.0 p.m. on the Grand Parade, to be followed by a protest procession. Of the proposed list of 13 speakers, seven were communists. Dadoo in a special message said: 'It is not Parliament who would

decide the issue of the Coloured vote. It is the people on the Grand Parade who will decide it'. In Johannesburg about 3,000 gathered at the Market Square to support the campaign (*Guardian*, 1 March 1951).

One week later G.J. Golding (branded by the Unity Movement as a 'collaborator' when he agreed to serve on the Coloured Affairs Commission, the body which preceded the Coloured Affairs Department — CAD) joined the campaign and was placed on the National Convention Co-ordinating Committee. Together with S. Pillay he issued a statement warning of the grave danger in the Coloured Voters Bill.

On 8 March an estimated 15,000, mainly Coloureds, some brought from the Strand, Paarl and Stellenbosch, paraded at the rally. It was announced that a nation-wide conference on 1 April would decide how to proceed, and that Non-European leaders would meet and place the position before whites (*Guardian*, 15 March). Thereafter the assembly marched, and there was a move in the direction of parliament (repeating the events of 1939), but stewards redirected the crowd.

At the April conference (where 59 organizations were said to be represented) a one-day political strike for all but essential services was called for 2 May (by 133 votes to 11). Shops would be asked to close and parents to keep children at home. Golding and van der Ross led the vote against the strike, saying that as teachers they dare not ally themselves with such action (*Guardian*, 5 April 1951). This ended their participation. Sam Kahn (SACP) told conference that the anti-Communist Act made it illegal to promote a strike to bring about political change; but they were not trying to introduce any political change: 'We want to prevent a political change' (*ibid*). The Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) adopted a different position. Saying that the Bill could not be stopped, they rejected the strike and called for a boycott to make the Act unworkable.

While FrAC prepared its campaign, the (white) Civil Rights League — unpopular with communists and condemned by Edwin Mofutsanyana for not supporting the Witzieshoek defendants because 'no question of civil liberties was involved' (*Guardian*, 21 January 1951) — called a protest meeting in Johannesburg. It was addressed on the vote issue by Margaret Ballinger, Rev. W.A. Palmer, Adv. B.L.S. Franklin, and Julius Lewin, and proposed organising a petition together with the Durban Branch of the South African Labour Party. At the end

of April the Rand War Veterans Committee called for a Hands off the Constitution demonstration in Johannesburg. Witwatersrand University students announced their support (*Guardian*, 3 May 1951).

The strike called by FrAC was postponed until 7 May, when thousands of Coloureds, Indians and Africans stayed away in six designated areas (Cape Town and Peninsula, Worcester, Paarl, Somerset West and Strand). It was claimed by the *Guardian* on 10 May that 100% stayed away in Worcester; 65-70% in Port Elizabeth, and there was a 100% abstention in some Cape Town factories; shops were closed, and 60% of children stayed away from school — despite intimidation from employers and police, and opposition from teachers.

In a parallel (but disconnected) move, 20,000 white ex-servicemen and students and a coloured ex-servicemen's contingent marched in Johannesburg. A.G. (Sailor) Malan a war time pilot ace, and employee of the Anglo American Corporation, led the demonstrations. He demanded general elections and protested against the Bill (*ibid*).

The Coloured leaders had no further plans and called a Conference for 10 June. The *Guardian* shifted its attention to the Torch Commando, which announced a march for 28 May in Cape Town (*Guardian*, 2 May 1951). One week later the same paper reported that 10,000 had marched with torches, and another 75,000 had watched. The gathering passed resolutions against the Bill which were to be handed to leaders of opposition parties. The demonstration ended when police moved in with batons and pickhandles, leaving many injured: some fifty were treated in hospitals, about a third being whites.

The Conference of 233 Coloured delegates duly met. They claimed to represent 71,886 members of 125 organizations (including 68 factories, 15 political organizations, 8 trade unions, 6 sports bodies, and 18 area committees of FrAC). They called for votes for all, and gave FrAC leaders a mandate to conduct mass resistance on a nation wide scale. Conference called for more strikes, local and provincial, with co-operation with other organizations in defence of political rights and civil liberties. In anticipation of the campaign soon to be announced, there was also a call for the organization of a nation wide struggle against the Separate Representation of Voters Bill, the Native Representative Act, the Group Areas Act, the Urban Areas Act, the Bantu Authorities Act, the Native Laws

Amendment Bill, the Suppression of Communism Act, and all discriminatory legislation.

It was decided to set up rural committees, and other forms of struggle were suggested — all using passive resistance: including burning of registration identity cards, resistance to train apartheid, and refusal to obey the Group Areas Act. The Council was empowered to take the necessary action for a continuous campaign of active opposition to all manifestations of apartheid in political, industrial, educational, social and economic life. Cissie Gool was reported as saying: 'the vote is gone, it is buried. But it is not dead. We will revive it'.

Then Dadoo announced that the action to be taken would depend on the political situation at the time, and on the progress made in the Congress organization. Foreshadowing the Defiance Campaign he said:

there was every possibility that in the next few weeks the Executives of the National organizations of the Non-European people would meet to discuss plans on the way in which the struggle should be conducted on a country-wide basis.

These discussions will be taken because every Non-European in the country feels the necessity for such action. We are forced by the policy of the Government to mass resistance ... against every unjust apartheid law. (*Guardian*, 14 June 1951)

However, members of the (now-banned) SACP had other reasons for embarking on an anti-government campaign. In a Presidential address to the 20th Annual Conference of the SAIC (25-27 January 1952) Dadoo stated that the plan for the Defiance Campaign did not rise exclusively from the situation in South Africa:

The plan cannot be divorced from the most serious question which faces the whole of humanity, the question of peace or war. If indeed it were so divorced — and it is not — the plan would be unreal and most certainly ineffective. We must therefore examine the developments that have taken place in the international field.

Since our last conference the danger of world war has not receded ...[there are those in Korea, Malaya, Viet Nam] who

wage a heroic struggle for the freedom and independence of their countries...

The intense desire for peace has found concrete shape in the campaign for a Five Power Peace Pact which has already been supported by nearly half the human race ...[and so on, and on]. It is indeed due to the vigilance and active fight for peace on the part of the common peoples everywhere that a third world war was averted in 1951.

This was reprinted in a Congress pamphlet calling for participation in the Defiance Campaign (Drs Y. Dadoo and S. Molema, *A Call to the People of South Africa*). This was consistent with the ANC's statement on the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, that the war was being fought to maintain bases in the east. The ANC condemned Africans who gave their services in the Second World War, despite the fact that it had fully supported that war from its inception, and said:

The African people cannot be called upon by the Government to fight an 'evil' Communism in Korea where there is an equally evil apartheid to be resisted in their own Motherland. (*Inkundla ya Bantu*, 29 July 1950)

J.B. Marks (ANC and SACP), claimed in his Presidential address to the Transvaal ANC in September 1951 that: 'Peace was the concern of all oppressed people who wanted to win their liberation', and called for a massive campaign to halt the Korean war, planned by those who would plunge the world 'into the greatest blood bath, to satisfy their lust for profit and power'. The war-mongers were the Colonial powers, the oppressors of Africa who exploited its products and its people, and he issued the call: 'Defeat those who plan the new war, and we will have defeated those who administer our oppression' (CAMP, Reel 3B, 2:DA21:30/12. Stress in original).

### **The Torch Commando**

The War Veterans' Action Committee, which was to become the Torch Commando, was organised at the suggestion of members of the Springbok Legion, to enlist the support of (white) ex-servicemen against the disenfranchisement of Coloureds (see Michael Freidjohn, 1976). The first protest, in April 1951, was in

Johannesburg, when a coffin bearing the 'constitution', and wreathes, was placed on the cenotaph. This was followed by a mass meeting of 75,000 people in May, where ex-servicemen demanded a voice in the affairs of the country. They were not ostensibly concerned with the Coloured vote, but pledged themselves to defend the constitution; demanded an immediate (white) General Election, and called on all democratic South Africans to rally to this cause. (*Rand Daily Mail*, 5 May 1951)

A 'Steel Commando', composed of jeeps and other vehicles, was to deliver this resolution to the government. They were to leave from seventeen towns and converge on Somerset West on 28 May, before proceeding to Cape Town. The drive was planned with military precision, but the organizers' intention was only to defeat the government at the next general election. However, an opposition delegation asked the Commando not to demand an immediate general election, because the United Party's electoral machine was in disarray.

Although the Torch Commando was obviously not prepared to engage in a struggle against apartheid, SACP statements were equivocal. Sam Kahn extolled the Torch Commando's positive achievements. Excepting a few trade unions, he said, the Commando was the only white fighting force in sight, and had removed the hopeless fatalism gripping anti-government ranks. They opposed the police state, abuse of state power, censorship, the removal of the Coloured vote, and stood for freedom of movement by leftists and members of black organizations. However, he noted, it had a strong tendency towards emotionalism, and used the mystique of ex-comrades in arms; could not face fundamental political and racial problems, nor come to grips with South Africa's economic problems. Also, the body had 'donned the straightjacket of anti-Communist orthodoxy' and appeased the government by disclaiming the Springbok Legion and Communism (*Guardian*, 6 September 1951).

Then came the rioting after the Grand Parade meeting on 28 May, when Coloured demonstrators marched on Parliament, and left 160 injured. The Commando took fright, and its publicity officer announced that non-Europeans would not take part in a rally on 23 October, called to commemorate the war time victory at El Alamein. *Die Burger*, said jubilantly: 'The Torch Commando, which was born out of the struggle against



apartheid, has fully accepted apartheid in its organization' (quoted in *Guardian*, 18 October 1951).

About 150,000 attended the rally, but the Commando leaders had nothing more to offer. They decided on 17 July 1952, at their First National Conference, to cut down on mammoth torch meetings and turn to house-to-house visits to ensure that all voters were registered prior to the elections of 1953. The members went electioneering, or left the political arena, and splits followed — in Natal over the issue of secession. With the Nationalist victory at the polls in 1953, the Commando was dissolved.

Previously, when the Defiance Campaign was less than a month old, Cecil Williams, a stalinist fellow-traveller and chairman of the Springbok Legion, sought a broad based white front against the Nationalists and called on the Torch Commando to declare a national work stoppage. He said there was no guarantee that the Nationalists would call an election for 1953, or if it did, the chances of their being ousted were slim because the Coloured vote would be removed; a new delimitation would favour the Nationalists; opponents could be banned or proscribed, and hooligans could stop people voting. He said an appeal to both employers and workers was not a strike [which was illegal]. It would make it impossible for the government to continue governing; would unite all anti-Nationalist sections of the population; would prove the government did not reflect the will of the majority; and would show people that power lay in their hands (*Clarion*, 17 July 1952).

### **The Defiance Campaign**

On 21 June 1951 the *Guardian* announced the Defiance Campaign under the headline 'ANC Proposes Civil Disobedience Campaign'. It stated that a programme of action 'for a campaign of civil disobedience and a general strike' against the pass laws, stock limitation in the Reserves, the threat to 'remove black spots', and the whittling down of franchise rights would be placed by the ANC before the other national movements. The campaign was expected to commence on 6 April 1952, the tercentenary of Jan van Riebeeck's arrival at the Cape.

The next report (*Guardian*, 6 December 1951) said that the joint planning council of the ANC and SAIC (Drs Moroka and Dadoo,

Yusaf Cachalia, J.B. Marks and Walter Sisulu), would place a blueprint for action before the Bloemfontein conference of the ANC. On 20 December it announced a plan for mass national action against specified unjust, racially discriminatory, laws unless these were repealed before 1 March 1952. Thereafter, meetings were reported across the country to 'reorganise and revitalise' the ANC. Ten thousand volunteers were to be recruited by 26 June (the anniversary of the 1950 stay at home and police shooting), when the defiance of unjust laws would commence. (*Guardian* and *Clarion*, 13 March-19 June 52)

There was no indication that local regions could sustain a campaign. The ANC membership was low. Karis and Carter (1973, p.427) estimate it as between 7-20,000, and Walshe (1970, pp.402-3) put the Transvaal membership at 4,000, and the national total at 7,000. Since one day stoppages in May and June 1950, the ANC had engaged in little activity, and except for one or two regions, had undertaken no local campaigns (Lodge, pp.36-7). The National Executive Committee reported to conference in December 1951 that the administration was 'severely strained ... due to financial crisis' and unable to retain its sole typist. In the Cape there was no co-ordination, and 'letters of direction' were ignored (Molema papers). The Transvaal had three rival Presidents — J.B. Marks, who had majority support, Seloape Thema and C.S. Ramahanoé — because the constitutionality of the last conference and elections were in dispute (Molema, letter to Kotane, 5 March 1951 - *ibid.*). In Natal, W.G. Champion, the President, and H. Selby Msimang, the Secretary, were at daggers drawn over events following the stay at home on 26 June 1950, and the refusal of Champion to recognise the Congress Youth League (CYL) (*ibid.*).

There was also opposition from the National Minded Bloc, led by Seloape Thema, Champion, Selby Msimang, and others. Msimang wrote to Molema on 13 February claiming that a 'regimented mob' had stampeded the movement into acceptance of the decision on defiance. He warned against the campaign, claiming that the 'ANC is being accused of having surrendered leadership to the Indians', but also because he thought that this was not a well thought out plan. Thema and other leading members of the National Minded Bloc were expelled by the Transvaal ANC (*Guardian*, 16 August 1951) but this did not bring unity to the movement.

## **Dedication and a Prayer**

Professor Z.K. Matthews, ANC leader in the eastern Cape, said at a prayer meeting on the eve of the campaign that the ANC had tried petitions, deputations, resolutions and representations, co-operation with the authorities, appeals to white public opinion and a search for allies among European organizations. None had succeeded and now Non-Europeans were pledged 'to rid themselves by their own efforts of the shackles by which they were bound ...' (Matthews papers).

The first step, said Matthews, was an

act of dedication and prayer. More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. Prayer for us here means dedication, which means we give ourselves to God and to our Nation for struggle. The struggle will be long and bitter, and therefore must not be entered upon lightly, without reflection and without due consideration of the consequences to ourselves and to our people.

The Africans prison population was increasing, because people ignored unjust laws that were intolerable, he said, but this was unorganized and undirected, and did not affect the government. The ANC would direct a campaign that was 'deliberately and carefully planned [against laws] inspired by the policy of racial discrimination.' The campaign would be run on a volunteer basis, and needed the moral and financial support of the people. As for participation, some would be leaders, some in active service, others would provide moral and financial support.

The African people could not engage in armed struggle against the state, which alone had guns, tanks and aeroplanes, he said. Therefore the struggle had to be non-violent, which was not easy, because it needed self discipline and self control, surpassing that of men who fought

behind a shield of modern armour ... It means being prepared to be hit without hitting back, even if one is able to do so, a veritable putting into practice the principle of 'turning the other cheek'.

Many people had counselled against the campaign, he said, because there would be suffering, but they could not suggest any effective alternative to bring about the freedom from oppression that the African people desired. After consideration Dr Moroka had decided that he was unable to call off the campaign. Matthews then asked whether victory would be achieved:

It is difficult for us to say what will happen as a result of this campaign. All we say [is] that other people and other races have been confronted with the same choice which faces the African people today: Liberty or Death, Freedom or Serfdom. We are convinced that the African people will not be found wanting in the day of reckoning. (ibid)

### **Joe Matthews Reports**

The Defiance Campaign, led now by the National Action Committee (of the ANC and the SAIC) began on 26 June. It was claimed in the Bulletin of the Campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws, No.2, that:

The organised acts of Defiance were preceded by great mass meetings ... in cities and towns of South Africa, thousands and thousands of people attended meetings of the African and Indian Congress. Hundreds of ordinary people, workers, traders, students and professional men came forward to volunteer in the struggle.

Professor Matthews did not volunteer. He left South Africa on 12 June for New York, to act as Henry W. Luce Visiting Professor of World Christianity at Union Theological Seminary, and returned in mid-1953. He followed the campaign, partly through letters from his son Joseph (Joe) Gaobakwe Matthews, a leading member of the CYL, and its President before being banned in 1954. (17 letters are in CAMP, Reel 12A, 2:XM65:47/3-19). Writing on 29 July 1952, in what was to become a 'weekly bulletin', Joe said:

The campaign has now got into real stride particularly in the Cape ... The total number ... in jail in the Cape is now roughly 1,300, of whom 870 are volunteers in East London. (2:XM65:47/3)

Financial support from the African people had been unprecedented, and members were being enrolled by the thousand every week. It was expected to swing the small Cape towns into action soon. But in places like Kimberley there was no leadership. In his view,

the Cape is capable by itself of creating a dangerous situation in the country for the Nationalists. Politically that is not, of course satisfactory. A union-wide balance is required and therefore a meeting of the National heads is scheduled to take place soon.

He reported that in the Transvaal there was some paralysis because court charges had originally been for conspiracy, which carried severe sentences. This had altered, and the charges were now proffered under the pass regulations. He had little information about Natal, except that one meeting called by M.B. Yengwa in Nqutu had been banned by the magistrate who arrived with 25 mounted police. But Natal, he said, was far in advance of the Transvaal — except for the question of the Indians.

You see the Indians are perturbed over the fact that throughout this campaign the Congress is not leaning on them at all. Our organization is entirely independent, and if anything we are giving orders to them. Therefore there is noticeable a tendency on their part to be cold towards the campaign. (ibid.)

On 5 August, Joe Matthews wrote to say that the campaign was remarkable in having

released the minds of the people. The people are absolutely sure they are heading for freedom in a few months time. Any attempt to contain them and to explain that the struggle is going to be hard and long is almost regarded as sacrilege. One thing I am certain of — whatever we do get out of this campaign we will make Congress the most powerful organization with a tremendous membership. Even Grahamstown has 300 paid-up. New Brighton also is now 2,700 members, and the volunteers are more than that. (2:XM65:47/4)

Then came nation wide arrests:

On Wednesday last came the sudden swoop on the ANC, SAIC, and the Franchise Action Council, and also on leaders of the movement... carried out simultaneously in all areas at 10 a.m...they are trying to establish some connection between Congress and overseas organizations such as the Communist movements...they are going to be disappointed because Congress is not Communist and they will not find a thing to connect Congress and the Communists in anyway. (ibid.)

The campaign met increasingly tough action from the police, and on 13 August this was discussed:

Volunteers, especially in East London were badly treated; sentences were imposed to the limit fixed by law; lashes were imposed as punishment on all volunteers under the age of 21; and the Nationalist become more and more hysterical in its demand for action against the volunteers...in Grahamstown in the same week there was a baton charge against the spectators to the trials. This was when the second group of 55 went into action. Incidentally Grahamstown has sent in 180 so far.

Matthews said that by the 12th, 2171 volunteers had gone into action, and reported that Mandela, Sisulu, S. Sello and Marupeng Seperepere, (all ANC), Dadoo, Kathrada, Moulvie Cachalia, and N. Thandrey, (of the SAIC), Marks, Kotane, Dan Tloome and James Phillips, (communists or trade unionists) had been charged under the Suppression of Communism Act. Of the arrests he said:

This is the beginning of a great 'conspiracy trial' and we are expecting more people to be arrested. I think the government has completely misread the mood of the people. This seems to be that the campaign can be headed off with the arrest of the leaders. I also thought so a few weeks ago. Today I realise that such an attitude does not take account of the political consciousness of the masses and the extent to which they have been following the progress of the ANC campaign. I have complete faith in the ability of the Africans to produce the

necessary leadership in any given situation. We have put before them a clear cut policy and programme and they will cut through the wiles of politicians and get on the road to freedom no matter what happens to the leaders. The Malanites do not realise too, that the Congress leaders deliberately have moved slower than the masses in this respect — that the masses are calling for mass action in the form of UKUHLALA FHANTSI IIVEKI EZIMBENI [A STRIKE FOR TWO WEEKS]. (2:XM65:47/5)

On 22 August there was news of further arrests (some twenty, including Delizantaba Mji, and Harrison Motlana at medical school) with a preparatory examination in four days time. The campaign in Durban, he said, was 'swinging into action soon' and 'by December the whole of the rural areas including the Transkei will have been organized... This last week-end 488 more Africans were arrested, bringing the total to 2751. Of these 301 were from P.E.' (2:XM65:47/6).

On 3 September he said that he was directing the whole organization and campaign in the eastern Cape from Kingwilliamstown to Fort Beaufort:

I just do not know how to transmit to papa the mood of the country just now. We are in the midst of a decidedly revolutionary situation, and the ANC has not only maintained its initiative but has gained ground in the past few days.

He spoke of the enthusiasm of the crowd both inside and outside the court when Moroka appeared. Thousands filled the open square, and the court was adjourned at the request of the prosecutor, to allow Moroka to address the crowd. At Moroka's request, people left the court in silence. In Natal the first batch of twenty-one were watched by thousands of Africans,

who shouted Africa and marched from Berea to the offices of the ANC to volunteer. I am quite sure that in the long run Natal will beat everybody in the response they get. I only hope it will be possible to keep down the spirit of Chaka and infuse the spirit of Gandhi among the Zulu masses who will experience a great spiritual release as a result of the campaign.

In the Cape we are of course in top form. The organizational lessons of Port Elizabeth are being passed on to every branch in the Cape, and we are already a mass organization run on efficient party lines. The longer the campaign goes, the greater becomes our skill in administration, propaganda, etc. (2:XM65:47/6, and 47/7 — the two are taken together here)

Matthews also said that the membership in New Brighton was 5,000 and more than 21,000 in the eastern Cape. To date, 316 had been arrested in Grahamstown, and the beerhall had been closed by ANC members blocking the gates, praying and singing ANC anthems. He claimed that 'the rural areas of the Ciskei [were] ready for action', and that people would be sent in from the coming week-end. The action of the tsotsis [the gangsters of the time], had declined as the campaign gathered pace. There was some difficulty, he added, in holding back teachers and students at Fort Hare until after the examinations.

On 16 September Matthews wrote that together with Dr J.L.Z. Njongwe (acting President of the Cape ANC) and eight others he had been arrested in Cape Town. This was apparently not part of the Campaign but was 'a political case', and senior advocates had been engaged for the defence. He continued:

We are of course not placing much reliance on the legal battle. Our safety lies in the people and we have complete confidence in them. Especially our masses in the Cape — both rural and urban...

... there has been a transformation that cannot be experienced by anyone not actually present in the country. The Africans are on the March and whatever the result of the present Defiance Campaign even if it ends in total defeat at the hands of the government the country will never be the same again. The government has no solution to the crisis presented by the defiance campaign! (2:XM65:47/8)

On 2 October, with the campaign three months old, he claimed that the march to freedom could not be stopped. The Cape, he wrote, 'is in the centre of the spread of the campaign to the rural areas', and he anticipated control of the Transkei,

the chief reservoir of labour [which would] bring about an entirely new situation in South Africa and render the



demands contained in the Joint Planning Council inadequate and out of date. (2:XM65:47/9)

From the vantage point of the eastern Cape, the Campaign must have looked remarkably successful, and that might account for the lack of critical insight into what was happening elsewhere. Yet, even if there seemed to be a new breath of life in Congress, it could not have been more than a beginning of any struggle for change. To say on the 16th that his safety (in a trial) lay in the people, and to talk of the possibility of taking over the state, was little more than fantasy. Yet Matthews was to write, in all seriousness, that 'we are not making a bid for direct power in the state just now [that is, presently]', and that, he wrote, coloured the attitude of the Transkei. Instead, they were going to consolidate the gains made so far and were preparing 'to meet the government counter-attack which has grown tremendously in scope and extent...'

He continued:

Peddie has sent its first volunteers into action. For the first time the red blanketed African has entered the fight and this will have revolutionary effects on the fight against the rehabilitation scheme. Given a few months I have no doubt that we in the Cape will be ready to meet any challenge by the government short of arms. Already we are in a position to call a strike in the Cape, in which the main towns and a great number of small ones could be brought to a standstill. This is true of the Africans but not true of the Coloured group.

But, there were some difficulties, and some reservations...

a feature of this struggle is the absence of the so-called intellectual group. Most of them are of course teachers and I suppose it is reasonable to excuse them on the grounds that the work they do is for our children. But the whites do not realise that the educated are just not in this thing to the extent that one would expect. I for one am not prepared to tolerate any suggestion that we will give the benefits of the Defiance Campaign to people who do not actually suffer, or work for its success. That is why any discussion must be on the basis not as sections of the Africans, but of the whole people, whatever their class.

He concluded with a note on other groups: the 'Bhengu type of reactionary', and the 'ultra-left Trotskyites' [that is, the Non-European Unity Movement] had been exposed. That left the Nationalist Bloc and its friends, and Dr Xuma. The latter would 'have to declare himself soon. There can be no neutrality lest one is misinterpreted'.

### **The Riots**

It was a bit premature to decide who would get a share of the coming freedom. On 18 October there was a riot in Port Elizabeth, and this was followed by riots in Kimberley, East London and Denver (Johannesburg), extending into the second week of November. The campaign of voluntary defiance ground to a halt, and except for a few symbolic acts (one involving a mixed group that included seven whites) the ANC could not put its act together again. Thereafter new draconian laws made it imperative that the Defiance Campaign be brought to an end in early 1953.

There were two letters on the riots which tell part of the story. The first (2:XM65:47/12) was on 5 November:

The information as far as we in Congress have it is that an African got off the train before it stopped at New Brighton station. He was accosted by a policeman and a quarrel ensued. Two other Africans joined in the argument ...during the course of [a scuffle] the policeman took out a revolver and shot this chap.

When the news reached the location people rushed to the station with stones. The police fired and killed six Africans, and the crowd retreated. That led to an 'anti-whiteman cry', and a cinema, the post office, and 'various shops belonging to Jews in the location' were set on fire. Four whites were killed and two badly injured.

All the leaders of the ANC were not in P.E. on that day, and this is a pity, because they might have been able to check this. But the Youth League fellows failed utterly to pacify the mob. The following day a series of house to house campaigns got the people completely under the control of the ANC leadership. As papa can imagine this riot, coupled with stories about Mau

Mau in Kenya, was just the thing to send the European public into hysterics.

There was a war atmosphere in the town, he wrote, with armoured cars patrolling the streets. Buses were not going into the location but stopping at the outskirts. Armed police rode in trains and buses 'and made it their duty to be unpleasant'. The ANC threatened to boycott all public transport if armed men were not withdrawn and if buses did not enter New Brighton. After two days of total boycott these demands were acceded to. He continued:

The government said they had lost patience, and accused the liberal policy of the P.E. Council for producing this situation. The Council banned ANC meetings and asked the government for a curfew from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m.

We have called a strike in the Eastern Cape from the 10th November, unless the Council withdraws these suggestions. The strike will be total. In the meantime we are continuing to send in batches of volunteers. The Congress cannot be intimidated in its campaign by guns and threats ... We will carry on until unjust laws specified in the Joint Planning Council are removed. The campaign is now truly Union-wide. Even the Transkei has now come within the framework of the struggle.

Carried away in his optimism he wrote:

I hope the government will be warned not to hope for miracles to smash the campaign. Nothing, even armed forces, is now capable of smashing an organised movement such as the ANC. The only thing I am worried about is that groups outside the Congress might start this terrorist thing as a reaction to force and violence on the part of the government. I hope it will not happen but one never knows.

Another letter followed on the 13th, after the riots had spread:

The cause of all these riots is the trigger happy policemen who provoke the people. Now while we have taught the people in our volunteer corps to avoid trouble with the police the masses are not so wise. Everyone of these riots has started off with the

shooting of some African, and that one death inflames the people to such an extent that they retaliate. There is no evidence that they are inspired by Agents-provocateurs who are inspired at discrediting the Defiance Campaign. They are a symptom of the fact that here at the Cape we are not keeping pace with the feelings of the people. They are sick and tired of the Malanites and like all people naturally want what they think is a short cut. Our duty is to direct this feeling along channels that will aid us in the fight. (2:XM65:47/13)

There followed an account of the riots. In Kimberley it had started as a fight between Africans at a beer hall, which turned into an anti-police riot. The Bantu-Batho hall, municipal offices, creche and other buildings in Number 2 location had been burnt out. The ANC executive members in the town were arrested and charged under the Suppression of Communism Act.

Events in East London were different. After Swart, the Minister of Justice, had banned all meetings in the districts of Port Elizabeth, Peddie, East London, Kingwilliamstown, Uitenhage, and later Kimberley, the Commandant of Police gave permission for a prayer meeting at the Bantu Square in Tsolo. Yet, while the service was in progress, the police arrived in trucks and snatched the bible of the Methodist preacher, R.M. Mdubu. They left, but returned a few minutes later and gave the people five minutes to disperse. The African police then assaulted the crowd with batons. In the melee that followed, three people were wounded by bayonets (carried by whites). The crowd scattered, followed by the police, who then drove through several locations, shooting as they went and firing into houses. Several people were killed. There was retaliation, in which three policemen were wounded and two white civilians killed. Municipal buildings and churches that had not supported the campaign were amongst the buildings set alight. The only people who could have stopped the riot, he wrote, were those who were banned.

Matthew's reading of the riots was as flawed as his assessment of the Campaign — of which more will be said below. Few, if any of the riots could have been stopped; partly because of the anger of the crowd, which had been stoked by the expectations roused by ANC campaigners, but mainly because

the government intended shooting the Africans into submission. On 2 November 1952 the Minister of Justice said:

The police have instructions to take drastic action where there is a threat of a clash between Europeans and non-Europeans. They will strike where necessary. So called innocent bystanders should get out of the way when there are signs of trouble. If they are innocent what are they doing at trouble spots? The police have instructions to act, and to act swiftly and they have my support. The organizers of the Defiance Campaign should heed this warning.

And on the 15th he told a Nationalist Party meeting:

I have instructed police officers not to wait until their men are killed or wounded in riots before they fire. They have been told to fire first. (Harry S. Warner [pseud], 'South Africa: Who Provoked the Riots?', *Nation*, 21 February 1953, cutting in Matthews papers, Reel 3 B5.4)

Within 24 hours the police were shooting at Kimberley; and 24 hours later at Denver.

At the Denver male hostel (not discussed by Matthews), there were disturbances after a rent increase was announced. The police were called, but by the time they arrived the situation had quietened. Nonetheless, they sealed the building but stayed at the gates. The inmates saw no sign of trouble, when without warning the police shot volleys into the rooms. Three times they fired, each time catching men who were trying to help the wounded or reach the dying. Then they left, leaving the residents to clear the carnage. (Eye-witness accounts told to Alec Reed, 1953, pp.35-6; Kuper, p.135)

To return to Matthews' letters: on 13 November he wrote about the one day strike in Port Elizabeth protesting against the ban on meetings and the curfew. Large numbers stayed at home, in Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage and elsewhere, and all dock workers came out. (*Spark*, 14 November) It was 'a hundred per cent success', Matthews said:

The whites are mad, and P.E. resembles a city during war time. This is true of many towns in the Cape, including our little Alice. Police, armoured cars, patrols, searchlights, aero-

planes. But we refuse to be intimidated. You see the whites are getting themselves into a state of panic. Shopkeepers in the Reserves are leaving for the towns and all that sort of nonsense in order to create this atmosphere of a South Africa on the verge of revolution. The intention is to enable the government to proclaim a state of emergency and then to take drastic action against the ANC...

[The government had called on the ANC to end the Campaign, but ...] The riots mean that the Campaign must go on and the government must call off its campaign of Apartheid and race hatred ...

Thousands were sacked by the municipality, railways and private firms; the government banned all black gatherings in the major towns of the eastern Cape, and fifty two Africans were banned from all meetings for six months (*Spark*, 14 November). The ANC would defend all those arrested, said Matthews, despite accusations that this proved ANC complicity. However, there was a need for more and more money. 'The movement has become so big now, and expenses so heavy, that we are a sort of government now (sic).'

He added: 'I am afraid there is no possibility of avoiding the crisis of leadership in our ranks', referring to Moroka's stance at his trial, which placed him in conflict with the ANC, and the very campaign he had headed. They would get over it, wrote Matthews, with 'hardly any disturbance but it is rather a pity' (*ibid.*). On 10 December he quoted from the evidence in mitigation, in which Moroka had said that:

he was the grandson of the Chief who had helped the Voortrekkers; and he had always helped needy European students; that he resigned from the All African Convention because it preached non-cooperation with Europeans; he had taken steps to cancel an indefinite strike to be called in the Cape because he felt it would lead to bloodshed ... (2:XM65:47/17)

Moroka said nothing about the oppression in the country, and Joe Matthews did not add any comment. That was hardly necessary: Moroka's political record in the AAC (from which he had been expelled) should have alerted the ANC to the possibility

of his taking this position. They had used him to replace Xuma, but he was always a weak reed.

Matthews was to write one more letter (on 20 November) before the government crack down, and in retrospect the reader can only wonder at its naivety. He wrote first about the strike, saying that the City Council and the Railway administration had imported thousands of Coloured scabs, but they had been incapable of doing the work and had to be paid more; furthermore, many had deserted in the face of local antagonism. Then he concluded: 'As far as P.E. is concerned there are two administrations. The recognised one and the ANC. That is clear even to a political infant'. In a P.S. he added: 'I have sent 18 agents of mine (sic) to the Transkei. Papa will soon hear a lot about the Transkei'. (2:XM65:47/15)

### Denouement

Papa did not hear a lot about the Transkei in 1952; and many political infants (and other observers, too) were not at all aware of two administrations in P.E. But, even if they thought so in mid-November, the situation altered radically by the end of the month. On 30 November, Matthews wrote to his father:

South Africa is now an occupied country in the hands of occupying troops. The Cape in particular is just an armed camp. Little places like Alice are full of them, and they have parades in the villages to overawe the people. We were to have a big special conference at Grahamstown yesterday but the previous day, Verwoerd issued a proclamation banning all meetings throughout South Africa in 'Native Areas and locations'. This measure only allows concerts, religious meetings and meetings by MPs, administration officials, etc. All others must get the permission of the magistrate. So the whole of the Union is now affected and the ANC is virtually forced under-ground. The penalties are very heavy — a fine not exceeding £300 and imprisonment for three years.

They are also adopting a new technique now of just arresting a person and alleging a breach of some law. Then they keep you in jail on the ground that they are investigating, and refuse bail. (2:XM65:47/16)

The next letter came from Greyville, Durban, dated 10 December:

Its such a relief to be away from the tense situation in the Cape. But there is another sense in which it is not good to be in Durban. One does not have here the reassured feeling of having the masses hundred percent behind you. There is a marked difference from the Cape where the people are solid behind the movement. (2:XM65:47/17)

On 7 January he wrote again from Greyville, saying

As regards struggle all I can say is that this is crisis year ... Broadly speaking the idea is to strengthen the organization tremendously. To prepare for the continuation of the organization under conditions of illegality by organising on the basis of the cell system. The continuation of the Campaign and its widening into the mass campaign of industrial Action. I have no doubt that we will make a big advance this year. The leaders of course will have to prepare to go to the Detention Camps by the end of February. (2:XM65:47/19)

And finally, in his last, undated letter:

We have now entered the mass stage of this campaign and this will coincide with certain events. I hope by this time we will be behind bars. I would not like to see what will happen then. I have no doubt at all that by next March all of us will be deported or in concentration camps. That is certain. Papa will have to join us here I'm afraid. There is a big reaction here against your activities [!] (2:XM65:47/20)

### **Where was the Defiance Campaign?**

These letters of Matthews provide information on the Campaign without inhibitions, and on the changing opinions of a prominent Youth Leaguer who also said that he was organising the campaign in the eastern Cape — the one centre in which success could be claimed. It offers insight into the aspirations of a section of the rising leadership of the ANC, and is also a commentary on their naivety and inexperience: challenging the government without any understanding of the power of the



state; contemptuous of the armed forces until actually confronted by force; and believing that the peasants or the workers could respond to a call for action whenever summoned, despite the weakness of the trade unions, and the frailty of rural organization. Govan Mbeki, interviewed at a later date by Mary Benson, was more pragmatic than Joe Matthews. They had not tried to get the people of the Transkei involved, he said, because there was no money for the campaign. (Mary Benson, papers)

Matthews was not alone in many of these illusions. Luthuli said at the opening of the Transvaal ANC conference that 'the Defiance Campaign would continue, no matter how long the struggle or how ruthless the means to quell it, until victory was won' (*Peoples World*, 16 October), and Selby Ngcobo, writing to Prof. Matthews from Durban on 21 October claimed that 'The Defiance on Unjust Laws movement is gaining momentum in Natal where it appeared it was going to flop' (CAMP, Reel 17A, 2:XM66:41/160). Even Dr Njongwe said on 27 October: 'if you hear one day that the Ciskei has also gone into action, you will know that the victory will be achieved within five weeks' (Quoted by Kuper, p.142).

Then, opening the ANC (Natal) Conference on 1 November 1952, after the riots in the eastern Cape, Dr Njongwe was reported in 'Afrika Newsletter' (No.3, 7 November) as saying that the people of the Cape had asked him to say that they were determined, together with the rest of South Africa, to wage this struggle against unjust and racially discriminatory laws. He continued: 'I have been asked "What is the ultimate object of the Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign?" My answer is: "Full citizenship rights for all South Africans."'

The struggle must be short and decisive ... Freedom within ten years is our goal ... We want Freedom NOW. In its initial stages, the Campaign was confined to the towns and cities. Now it has spread to the reserves.

Yet, looking at the available records, it would seem that there were differing perspectives within the ANC and the SAIC, and these changed during the course of 1951-2. In one of its first documents, the Joint Planning Council stated that their aim was only directed at securing the repeal of six unjust laws (Pass Laws; Stock Limitation; Group Areas; Voters' Representation Act; Suppression of Communism Act; Bantu Authorities Act:

Report, 8 November 1951, reprinted in Kuper, Appendix C). They then declared:

*All people, irrespective of the National groups they may belong to and irrespective of the Colour of their skin, are entitled to live a full and free life on the basis of the fullest equality. Full democratic rights with a direct say in the affairs of the government are the inalienable rights of every man — a right which in South Africa must be realized now if the country is to be saved from social chaos and tyranny and from the evils arising out of the existing denial of franchise to vast masses of the population on grounds of race and colour. The struggle which the National Organizations of the Non-European people are conducting is not directed against any race or national group, but against the unjust laws which keep in perpetual subjection and misery vast sections of the population. It is for the creation of conditions which will restore human dignity, equality and freedom to every South African. (ibid.)*

The repeal of the six laws in 1952 would have been a remarkable victory for the Congresses, but it did not envisage any fundamental change in land holding, or in the country's economy. At no stage during the Campaign was there any overt suggestion by leading Congressmen that such changes were being demanded. Commenting on this, Kuper (p.105) says that 'this was to be expected since [there was no agreement on economic policy] and non-white leaders, apart from the left-wing ... do not picture the struggle as a conflict between economic classes'.

A selection from statements produced at the trial in June 1952 of Walter Sisulu and 19 others, are reproduced in Kuper (pp.112-21), and he says of them that the themes were of despair, frustration, suffering and humiliation. But the speeches were non-specific, and except for references to the van Riebeeck celebrations were part of the stock-in-trade of Congress speeches, with attacks on Group Areas, the colour bar, low wages, poor education, and the despotism of a non-democratic government. Speakers condemned disease and mortality rates (Dadoo); insults (Cachalia); hunger and starvation (Kathrada); the rapaciousness of the whites (Moroka); the falseness of the white man's god (Kotane), etc. There were no references in these statements to specific complaints or

demands, nor to the particular issues to which local communities or workers might have responded. (Extracts were available to Congress followers in the National Action Committee's Bulletin, headed 'Afrika Bulletin No.1' [n.d]).

Occasionally speakers lashed out. One African speaker (name unknown) was reported as saying on 19 June:

I know that you are tired of seeing your motherland raped by foreigners from Europe; your mothers, your fathers wakened in the middle of the night by stupid Dutchmen of the platteland ... It is within you to end this system. And your National Congress has said the first step is to defy unjust laws, to loosen the stranglehold of the white leeches. It is within you to get rid of these leeches who are sucking our blood....

Rousing stuff, drawing loud applause, but offering nothing new, and not focusing on issues that could mobilise the audience, any more than the speech of an unknown Indian in March who also drew applause:

They can bring their machine guns, as they did on the 1st of May, and shoot us down — innocent men — without provocation. And what will happen to you if you die? I ask you. My friend let me tell you that when you die they must take the chain off you and you will be free in your death.

Such talk delighted the crowd, but they did not relish the idea of losing their chains through death, nor did it draw them into a campaign that required them to go to jail. Although thousands did attend meetings and rallies, the number of those arrested for defying the law was approximately 8,400, which was not in itself over impressive, particularly as some persons were arrested more than once. (Some defiers in Natal had great difficulty in getting the police to arrest them — but their numbers were small, and they were mostly arrested after several acts of 'defiance': 'Flash', the bulletin of the Natal ANC and Indian Congress, No.54, 25 November 1952). Furthermore, a regional breakdown shows that outside the eastern Cape, where just over 5,900 were arrested, the response was poor. There were 1,600 arrests in the Transvaal (all but 200 on the Witwatersrand); 490 in the western Cape, 125 in the OFS; and 192 in Natal. (D. Carter, 1971; Kuper, using figures supplied by the SAIC in July

1954, provides a similar breakdown). Also most of the arrests took place between the 25th July and 19th October — 4,800 in the eastern Cape, and 940 in the Transvaal (D. Carter, *op cit.*; Lodge, p.46).

In attempting to explain the comparative success of the campaign in the eastern Cape, some commentators suggested that the crucial factor was the close relationship between trade unions and the ANC in the province. (See E. Roux, *et al*, 1953) Yet, although this was probably a factor in Port Elizabeth, it does not altogether explain the fact that while 2,007 resisters came from Port Elizabeth (only some of them trade unionists), 1,322 came from East London, 600 from Uitenhage and the rest from smaller towns and villages in which trade unions were weak, or non-existent. Furthermore, despite the close contact between political movements and trade unions in the western Cape, in Durban, and Johannesburg there was little or no response from organised workers.

Yet, there are strong hints from both Matthews and Njongwe that suggest a need to look to the countryside to find the roots of the success in the eastern Cape. Njongwe referred (in November) to the spread of the campaign into the reserves, and Matthews made several references to the response of the 'red blanketed' worker, and of the populations of the Ciskei and the Transkei.

The position of the reserves in the eastern Cape had been the cause of alarm among commentators, medical experts and administrators alike since the mid-40s, when it became obvious that following prolonged drought from 1945-51 there was widespread malnutrition and a high infant mortality. People poured into the towns seeking work, but living conditions had not improved for many of them: wages were depressed by the large influx, locations were hopelessly overcrowded and housing was miserable. Most kept contact with kin in the Reserves, travelling back periodically, and compounding their bitterness over landlessness and changes in the Reserves with anger over conditions in the towns. They opposed Bantu Authorities, the Betterment Scheme and the culling of cattle, all of which had commenced in the Ciskei as far back as 1939.

There was bound to be some reaction from the people of the eastern Cape, even if there had been no Defiance Campaign. It was this disaffection that must be considered in accounting for the participation in acts of defiance of the 'reds' (migrants) in

the towns, and the people of Peddie (Ciskei). Lodge, op cit., also suggests a linkage, but also has no direct evidence. It is also possible (and here too, the historian must guess) that Njongwe, with his knowledge of the eastern Cape, was linking the struggles in the rural hinterland of Natal with the Defiance Campaign.

Culling had commenced at Nqutu, Northern Natal in 1948, and those with cattle, sheep or goats, had lost large numbers of animals. In January 1951 it was reported that six thousand men had told the Native Commissioner that they wanted more land and would resist further culling (*Guardian*, 13 March 1952), and in June Chief Molife and his Councillors refused to obey culling orders. Two leading tribesmen were arrested and fined £20. (*Clarion*, 5 June) In October, after the grass at a Trust Farm was burnt, men at Nqutu refused to pay the fine imposed on them. The disaffection spread to Nongomo, which was drought stricken, where orders to reduce land allotments and stock were defied and violence threatened if attempts were made to cut down lot sizes. (*Peoples World*, 30 October)

There was peasant discontent throughout in the country, some of it of long standing, and in every case exacerbated by the implementation of the Betterment scheme. In Witzieshoek it led to disturbance in 1951, and in Northern Natal there was open defiance in 1951/2; but in most rural districts, the outbursts and histories of internal faction fighting, through which the discontent manifested itself, still need investigation. The opposition in Natal coincided with, but was not in any way connected with the Defiance Campaign, but in the eastern Cape the frustration and anger found an outlet in the Campaign — and this was recognised at the time. However Joe Matthews was so convinced of his ability to call people into action, and believed so passionately that he was moving the people, that it did not seem to occur to him that the stirring in the countryside had roots outside the campaign he was conducting. Rural discontent in the eastern Cape converged with the ANC campaign, and whether consciously or not, this was tapped by the ANC organizers. Even the timing proved to be significant for people from the countryside, with most of the arrests taking place from mid-winter through to the beginning of spring.

In one respect there was a convergence of rural and urban struggles in this region in 1952, and the effectiveness of the one day strike in Port Elizabeth was testimony of the closeness of the

ANC and the trade union movement. This led to calls in February 1953 for a stay at home 'as the only effective way of fighting the Public Safety Bill and the Criminal Amendment Bill' — both enacted at the end of 1952, to stop further such campaigns (Resolution at Johannesburg Conference of the ANC and the Transvaal Indian Congress, reported in *Eastern Province Herald*, 16 February 1953). The National Executive of the ANC accepted the call for a strike in principle, but did not, or could not, put it into effect. The Defiance Campaign was effectively over, although a small dissident group in Port Elizabeth tried to revive it in June 1953. They started 'organising processions in the evening, preaching to the people defiance of the unjust laws, condemning the leaders for failing to fulfill their pledges', and were expelled from the ANC. On appeal this was reversed (CAMP Reel 15A, 2:XC3:41/74, and 2:XC3:54).

The role of the All African Convention during this period is enigmatic. Leaders like I.B. Tabata had insisted over the years that the centre of the struggle lay in the rural areas, and he spent much of his time agitating against the Betterment Scheme. During July and August 1952 the *Torch* carried numerous reports of angry meetings in the Transkei, in which the peasants were urged to boycott the Rehabilitation scheme, but not to break down fences or act precipitously. Tabata condemned the Campaign as a political 'stunt', and the NEUM (to which the AAC was affiliated) was vociferous in its condemnation of the acts of defiance; but they were so involved in 'exposing' the ANC and SACP, that they could not see what was happening in their own back yard — although it is doubtful whether they would have done anything at the time.

The *Torch* Commando had reached the end of its effective life, and those who had looked longingly to it to offer an effective leadership among the whites were sorely disappointed. Dadoo marked its downfall, in anger if not in sorrow, when he said that he was shocked at its 'acceptance in principle' of the Public Safety Bill — which allowed the Minister of Justice 'to suspend in whole or in part any Act of Parliament or any other law where the regulations conflict with an existing law' (*Leader*, 13 February 1953).

There are several loose points that need to be addressed. As the Campaign unfolded many of the original issues were seemingly forgotten. The Coloured vote ceased to be a factor in

the campaign — and the Bulletins of the Campaign were brought out in the name of the ANC and the SAIC, with no reference to FrAC. There was little response from the Coloured population to the call for defiance, despite the claims that the Coloureds were ready for a fight (e.g. over train apartheid), but they were no different in this respect from the Indians (many of whom had suffered during the campaign against the Pegging Act), or in fact, the overwhelming majority of the African population.

The war in Asia was also a non-issue, and does not seem to have been raised during the campaign despite the initial statements by Dadoo and Marks. It was left to the *Guardian* and its successors (*Clarion* etc.) to pursue this in its weekly columns, and it is doubtful whether this had much effect on men and women in deciding whether to support the campaign.

Finally, it was claimed that whether successful or not, the campaign marked a turning point in the history of South Africa, and also provided the ANC with a mass base. The first contention is debatable and the second needs scrutiny. In comparison with the pre-1952 showing of the ANC, there was a decided change in ANC presence, at least in the towns. However, it seems to have been much less than usually claimed. During the first phase of the campaign there was a surge in membership, but whatever the number initially enrolled (sometimes stated to have been 100,000) by the end of 1953 the total membership claimed was 28,000: 16,000 in the Cape, 11,000 in the Transvaal, 1,300 in Natal and 600 in the OFS. The roundness of these numbers suggests that they were gross approximations, and suspect. However, the organization in the eastern Cape was considerably strengthened, and this accounts for its vitality through the 1950s.

If the national membership of the ANC after the campaign had indeed been 28,000 the income accruing to headquarters should have been £1,204. The actual amount received was £378 (Minutes of National Conference of ANC, 18-20 December 1953, CAMP, Reel 8A, 2:DA14:30/46), and even if allowance is made for money not forwarded, this reduces (paid up) membership to about 7,000, the estimated membership before 1952. Needless to say, conference was told that the ANC was again in severe financial straits, and one year later Congress was dormant. A call by Luthuli to observe June 26 as a day of rededication by lighting bonfires or candles in front of houses ('as a symbol of the spark of freedom which we are determined to keep alive in

our hearts') and Sunday June 28 as a day of commemoration got little response.

Joe Matthews did not end in a 'concentration camp', nor did his father join him there. He was a defendant in the Treason Trial, 1956-8, and he later joined the SACP. He went abroad after Sharpeville, settled in Botswana in the 1970s, acquired substantial business interests and left the ANC.

A phase in the history of the ANC was over, and to set it in motion again Professor Matthews was to suggest that a Congress of the People (COP) be summoned — but that is another chapter, and needs a separate appraisal.

Because there is so much that is debatable about the Defiance Campaign, the last word is given to an unknown Congress author, writing some time later. There is little new in what he had to say, and he offered no reason for the success (or subsequent failure) of either the Defiance Campaign or the COP. It is quoted because of his sober view of their local impact on the organization of the ANC (an undated account, found at the SAIRR by Dave Everatt):

In the Defiance Campaign the greatest political consciousness was aroused throughout the country, in the cities and in the villages but the building of the organization did not correspond to the enthusiasm the campaign had aroused. The organizational machinery was very weak. As a result we did not consolidate our gains. The leadership became alive to this weakness and drew up [a] plan popularly known as the 'M' plan. When the COP campaign was started it was considered that it would create the greatest opportunity to build a powerful movement. Again in this campaign we succeeded to arouse political consciousness but we again failed to build a strong movement ...

Precisely what was meant in the report by 'political consciousness' remained unstated. If it did not lead to a consolidation of the movement, it is not certain how the author could measure this new development. As for the M-plan, outside Port Elizabeth, where it was seemingly applied, there are no records of its being implemented.



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