MAIN TOPIC:

DISA/Aluka Topic #320: PAC 1959-1994—Before 1960

Links should also be made to the following topics:

DISA/Aluka Topic #300: Recurring Debates in Liberation Politics—Definitions of Nationalism
DISA/Aluka Topic #305: ANC 1944-1964—The ANC Youth League
DISA/Aluka Topic #309: ANC 1944-1964—Congress Alliance and ANC-SACP alliance, debates

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A. P. Mda

Ashby Peter Solomzi "A. P." Mda (1916-1993) grew up in the Herschel district of the Transkei. He was prominent among the founders of the ANC Youth League in 1943-44, and served as its president after the death of Anton Lembede in 1947. He opposed the influence of the Communist Party and became a partisan of the Africanist movement within the ANC. He worked as a teacher while qualifying as a lawyer. Avoiding a police dragnet in April 1963, he fled to Basutoland (later Lesotho), where he established a law practice in Mafeteng.

This interview, which took place on January 1, 1970, at Mda's home in Mafeteng, was conducted by Gail M. Gerhart, a graduate student at Columbia University, USA. Others present were Elliot Mfaxa and P. L. Mfanasekaya Gqobose (PAC exiles), and John Gerhart. Mda's wife, Rose, sat in the background listening for several hours in the afternoon, but didn't participate. The interview began at 9:30 and went on, with an hour's break for lunch, until 6:30 in the evening. Mfaxa had gone with the Gerharts to Mafeteng the previous day to request an interview. Mda was very willing, but requested that a tape recorder not be used, saying he might hear the tape played back to him in court someday. Gail left him a list of about 15 questions, and he used these as a point of departure the following day. These notes skip around in places because they are a compilation of Gail's notes and John's. Direct quotes are indicated with quotation marks.

How was the ANC Youth League formed?

Mda had taken time the night before to prepare some notes on this question, and for about the first hour he lectured from his outline. He said the founding of the League could only be understood against the background of World War II and the "social and political ferment" of the time. He wanted to set it in a broad context. War production was a spur to industrial growth, and this in turn spurred the growth of African trade unions. The Non-European Trade Union Council was already in existence, but it received a new impetus at this time. This renaissance in African unions brought about increasing competition between the proponents of the Fourth international and the Communist Party to capture and control these unions. The League argued against both Stalinism and Trotskyism, pointing out to the black workers that

the interests of the white workers would never coincide with their own and would always in fact be contradictory. This made it appear as though the League was preaching a racialistic doctrine, but we were only basing our arguments on the actual situation, on "the facts." (At at least one other point in the interview, Mda made the point that arguments that appeared racialistic to some were only arguments that followed from hard "facts.") A dilemma for the white Labour Party.

At this time there was a qualitative rise in thinking about African goals, prompted by the war. The very slogans of the government, that the war was to save freedom, save democracy—the slogans of the Atlantic Charter—these caught hold in the minds of Africans.

At the same time in white politics, this period saw the rise of Malan's Purified Nationalists. Anti-Semitism was a strong element in the thinking of this movement. Eric Louw was especially prominent in this. In response to this, the Smuts government made a point of taking a very anti-Nazi line on the Jewish question, highlighting the whole problem of racism. The Purified Nationalists drew up a program in 1942(?) in which this contrast was clearly set out. It was their blueprint for their future regime, which of course eventually came to pass. The Atlantic Charter promised independence to dependent nations. These universal concepts were taken by thinking Africans and applied to their own situation in South Africa. This presented them with a tremendous challenge, both to theorize in applying these principles, and to organize to embody the principles in organizations for action. It was "the golden age of schemers and planners." The new ideas soon "found formal expression in organizations." The ANC document "Africans Claims" was one expression of the ideas.

The Atlantic Charter exposed the racism of the Nazis, and denounced it as a negation of all Western values. I was strongly for an anti-racist, anti-Nazi platform, and Smuts himself "dangled the horrors of Buchenwald" in front of people to help make his case against the Nats [Malan's Nationalists]. The Atlantic Charter made Africans feel the need to state their own goals, and this was the origin of "Africans Claims," which partly paraphrased the Charter, applying it to the South African situation.

New thinking was accompanied by new organizations. Organizations that were old "dressed in new garb." The "busiest bodies" were the communists, but "the poor devils" got off to a poor start because of their anti-war stand following the Hitler-Stalin Pact. They then had to make a "volte-face", and say it was not an imperialist war but a "peoples' war." Both the African nationalists and the Trotskyites were critical of this reversal. The Trotskyites remained anti-war throughout and continually attacked the Communist Party (CP) for its stand. Despite the contradictions of the CP, they still exerted a big influence.

The AAC [All African Convention] was not a new organization, but it took on "new garb." Unity between the AAC and the ANC had been undermined by this time because of disagreement on the boycott issue. The AAC had been "pushed out of the arena" by the ANC, and this had given the Trotskyites in the Cape a chance to infiltrate the AAC, up to 1943 when the 10-point program was issued and the NEUM [Non-European Unity Movement] formed. The Trotskyites were by this time more or less an indigenous movement, mostly coloured intellectuals who resented the positions of importance held by middle-class whites in the CP. They publicly downplayed any link with communism. They might have had actual links with international communism through some individuals, and at least originally they received some funds from Britain. They captured the AAC about 1943. The Trotskyites were very proud of their doctrines, though they tended to downplay the communist source.

The Non-European Trade Union Council at this time was trying to coordinate African unions, mainly on the Reef.

The African Democratic Party was the most important immediate factor in bringing about the rise of the Youth League. The ADP originated in a personal clash between Paul Mosaka and [ANC president] Dr

Xuma, "more personal than otherwise." The Trotskyites tried to capture the ADP, but it made a narrow escape. At their founding conference the ADP put out what Mda called, rather vaguely, a "moderate-militant" program. He later said that they didn't really have very many ideas, and that they weren't really challenging the ANC in terms of ideas. At the conference, the Trotskyites put out their own critique or challenge to the ADP, in an effort to capture the leadership. But this effort boomeranged because it set both the *Bantu World*, under the editorship of Selope Thema and the *Inkundla*, under Jordan Ngubane's editorship, onto the ADP, denouncing it as communistic. These men were anxious to destroy the ADP, and the Trotskyite move gave them the opportunity. This attack largely succeeded and the ADP quickly declined while the ANC and the Youth League rose. The ADP, Mda thinks, was founded in September 1943.

The chaps in the ADP were about "our age", and we observed that they could do whatever they liked while we were still stuck under the "heavy hand of Dr. Xuma." Some young people from the ANC were actually drawn off into the ADP. The old guard saw this threat, and it helped them accept the notion of a Youth League in the ANC. The ADP was not the only immediate influence, but it was the most important one. Of course the "old guard" didn't see the idea of a Youth League in the same terms as we did. The young people in the ANC didn't care anything about the program of the ADP, they just liked the idea of running their own show. We couldn't "prance around the country" like the people in the ADP. Later in the Youth League we let people go abound the country on tours. We "chafed" under the leadership of Xuma, George Champion and Z. K. Matthews.

Xuma's position was an important factor, especially his doctrine of "national unity." By this Xuma didn't mean the concept of national unity that was held by "Christians, Liberals and Communists," a concept that stressed interracial cooperation. Rather he meant African unity, referring to the Africans as a nation. Xuma was "not a non-believer in Non-European unity" but at this stage he was propounding "pure African unity." Earlier Xuma and Matthews had been the hope of the AAC—and of the Trotskyites who hoped to use them. But instead they gravitated back to the ANC. This prompted vicious attacks on them from the Trotskyites—the AAC and the NEUM. These attacks drove Xuma back toward a concept of "pure African unity." So after 1939 he moved increasing toward a position of African nationalism. This is not to say that Xuma was ever anti-white or anti-Indian or anti-coloured. But this bad experience with the AAC helped to strengthen his adherence to nationalism, and in this way Xuma helped to lay the basis for the later doctrine of Africanism.

The rise of the League was due to social and economic as well as political conditions, and was paralleled by a rise of youth in religion and commerce. The ADP gave us a militant challenge. The ADP didn't attack the ANC as such, but only the old guard leadership. This prompted the young ANC members to also start jabbing out at the old guard, much as the PAC was later to do with their attacks on the ANC and policy of "leaders in front."

Paul Mosaka was brilliant and was respected by young members of the ANC. But he had no personal magnetism, and in fact had a "negative personality." Mosaka was "older than us, but younger than Xuma." The growing school of young African intellectuals with ideas of African nationalism sought an organizational way of expressing themselves. "What better vehicle could come along than an ANC Youth League?" Mosaka appealed to students and graduates because he had had such a brilliant academic record. But he had no real ideas or personality—only brilliance.

The Youth League was also influenced by the NEUM, with its idea of a spelled-out program. This was an attractive notion and had a strong impact on the youth. They wanted a program for "building the nation." (Note, for example, Ngubane's column in *Inkundla* called "Building a Nation.") Politics was the most urgent thing, but we also wanted to mobilize all other resources in the struggle for national liberation, including cultural forces. The youth saw that the Africans held decisive power through their labor. They

saw the mobilization of the African people as the key to emancipation, democracy. To "harness" their power was the key. The main focus of the struggle would be political, through a political party, and based on mass action. What they needed was a clarification of ideology, political philosophy, a total perspective.

The old guard didn't believe in mass action. This was later what the PAC said of the ANC, when the youth were demanding that the leaders be in front, not following slowly behind while the people went to jail.

There was a growing generation of intellectuals looking for a platform, a program, for organizational expression. And not just intellectuals; also "advanced businessmen and workers." Their objectives may have differed somewhat from those of the young intellectuals.

The Youth League was seen as a means by which the whole ANC could be changed from within, and reformed. We wanted a definition of goals, of where we were going.

How conscious were the youth of political developments outside South Africa, in India, for example?

We weren't well informed on events outside at that point. For example, our knowledge of what Gandhi had done came afterwards. We did not know a pan-African conference was being held in Manchester in 1945. The South African press tried not to show Africans too much about revolution in other countries, to let the "good Natives" be "spoiled". Also the government was not keen on letting Africans go outside the country to study. Little was known of outside events, but when Africans did learn of foreign struggles, they felt an affinity with them, particularly with Nehru, and with the Indonesians in their independence struggle. There was some sense of the march of nationalist ideas. We wanted our own leader to be like Nehru.

Was there any attempt to foster a faith in the coming of a messianic leader for Africans?

Yes. We tried to foster the idea of destiny. But despite the Christian tradition, which gives people the idea of a messiah, most people didn't accept this notion, "not that we didn't sometimes try it." But we didn't want any "cult of personality." This was what we had seen with Xuma and his "heavy hand." We didn't want anyone pretending he was better than the rest. The people hated such an attempt by anyone. Though Christianity laid a basis for belief in a messiah, people didn't naturally take to this idea. Within our own Youth League group, we didn't want anyone putting himself above the rest. (It was difficult to tell if this was sincere or false modesty. By all accounts, the group ranked Mda and Lembede "above the rest", and Ngubane and others have said that Mda attempted to build Lembede up—before his death as well as after.)

The first person to mention or suggest the founding of a Youth League, as far as Mda can recall, was an "ambitious young fellow", later a founder of MRA [Moral Re-Armament], Manasseh T. Moerane. Before this chap mentioned it, and others began talking about it, the idea hadn't occurred to me. I did not originate the idea of a League. Together with me at that stage were Jordan Ngubane, Anton Lembede, Oliver Tambo, William Nkomo, Lionel Majombozi, Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and others. We began to discuss this idea together, although of course we were in the meantime busily organizing for the ANC itself. I was living in Orlando [in Soweto] and organizing there, having lived there since 1938. Moerane is now editor of *The World*. He has never really been an African nationalist.

Ngubane approached Lembede and they drew up a Manifesto for the League (Here John got that Ngubane and Lembede were asked by the rest to draw one up). We regarded Ngubane as a philosopher, or "he had some pretensions of being one" and "we flattered his pretensions." "He impressed us." The hand in the

Manifesto was Ngubane's, but the ideas were also Lembede's. "The hand was Ngubane's mostly." I would be able to tell if I could see the document today. The ideas toward the end I think were largely Lembede's.

Lembede was slightly older than me; he was born in 1914 and I was born in 1916. Ngubane was born in 1917. I never told Lembede that he was older than me; "I never allowed him to play big."

Lembede was then teaching at Heilbron. Before he had been teaching at Parys and Newcastle. When we first met in 1938 he was at Newcastle, at Mariannhill in Natal.

Ngubane claims that Lembede derived most of his political ideas from you. Is this true?

This is an oversimplification and not really true at all. Lembede and I had much in common. But we also often differed in our views, and perhaps it was our differences that attracted us as much as anything. At the time, Lembede was much taken with Mussolini's ideas, "corporatism". We discussed this, and fascism and Nazism, to try to formulate our ideas about these philosophies.

At the time we claimed the Manifesto was "a work of genius" (laughter). In the Youth League Manifesto, the ideas which can definitely be ascribed to Lembede are the ideas about pan-Africanism, and about how the leader must be the manifestation of the people's will. Looking back now we can only laugh at some of our excesses, at some of the language we used. The League was formed in 1943.

Is Congress Mbata correct that the original impetus came from a group that came together to discuss the candidacy of Self Mampuru?

No. Mampuru was a "politically bankrupt" man and not a person to whom we ever would have been attracted. Mbata was a friend and supporter, but wasn't really in the group; he was "not of our caliber" at the time. Mampuru was an ADP hanger-on; he could never have formed a group around himself. Peter Raboroko has also claimed that he was the one who called the original meeting, but this is nonsense. Raboroko was in TASA [a teachers' association], but only joined the Youth League later. Raboroko's role in history is established; "it needs no embellishments." He had a "clearly demarcated role and an important one."

The 1943 ANC conference had given us the "green light." The Manifesto was produced in March 1944, and the League was actually launched in April 1944.

Ngubane was fond of Lembede, but had a "condescending" attitude toward him because of some of Lembede's "crudities." Ngubane didn't like the crudities of Lembede's style. Ngubane perhaps doubted Lembede's creative genius, although he loved him personally and there was no malice in his feelings towards Lembede, no malice in his saying that I gave Lembede his ideas. But this opinion expressed by Ngubane isn't really justified, "isn't entirely justified."

Lembede lived in the Free State at a time of great ferment there among Afrikaners. This was a time when there was a strong Germanic influence, that is the influence of Hitler. We must not forget that the Afrikaners were still developing their own philosophy all along while we were developing ours. Verwoerd himself was schooled in this growing Afrikaner nationalism. "Verwoerd attracted Lembede," not in his ideas so much as in the line he followed; the "hammering, consistent, relentless, uncompromising line" in the journalism of Verwoerd appealed greatly to Lembede. Verwoerd had a column in *Die Transvaler* which, in English translation, was called "Daily Events." Lembede could read Afrikaans—he had taught himself—and he read this column avidly and discussed it with Ngubane who could also read Afrikaans.

Lembede had also read *Mein Kampf*, and Hitler's propositions on the nature of leadership had a direct impact on Lembede's thinking. After Lembede had "stormed" and broken up a CP meeting in Orlando, giving a speech that swung the people to his side and put the communists on the run, *Inkululeko* said "Hitler may lose the war in Europe but he has found a convert in South Africa." This was sometime in 1944 or 1943. Edwin Mofutsanyana launched a scathing attack on Lembede in the Communist press. Lembede was "overjoyed" and laughed heartily at this; he thrived on such attacks. He was far from being a fascist or a Nazi, or a follower of Hitler or Verwoerd. "My usefulness was here." "I was sharply anti-Nazi, anti-fascist I didn't tolerate any form of admiration for them. I clashed with Lembede and argued with him until he ceased to seem to be taking this fascist/Nazi line. I wanted to "frighten him" away from the philosophy of these men; I wanted for him to see nothing good in them. I wanted to turn him away from these ideas and these heroes.

"Lembede took my word in many things," and was very respectful and loving toward me. He never wanted to clash openly with me, but in private we had terrific arguments. He would attack other fellows publicly and he could be "wild and merciless." But he was always gentle with me, "as soft as a newly wedded maiden." This gave others the impression that I was steering him from behind the scenes, but in fact we clashed in private.

I didn't want Lembede to have any ideas—such as admiration for Hitler—which would damage him as a leader. Until I began to set Lembede straight, he would quote *Mein Kampf* that a leader must be this or that. It was Hitler's concept of leadership—not Hitler's other ideas—that impressed him.

What I gained from Lembede was this: Lembede was a "tireless student." But I was the "testing ground" for his studies. We would have deadly clashes. He would read philosophy, and I would read it too in order to discuss it with him. We read Nietzsche, Engels, Marx, Bertrand Russell, etc, and even *Holism* by Jan Smuts; also Descartes, Ruskin, and many others. To purify, clarify, simplify his ideas, Lembede tried out his reactions to all these philosophers on me. This gave me discipline, and added to my scholarship—though "I am not really a scholar." We argued endlessly. Lembede was doing his MA thesis on the idea of God in philosophy from Descartes to the present. As he read the philosophers "we traversed them together, not as friends but as enemies." This helped me clarify my own thoughts, and I read more widely than I ever had before.

What he got from me was the ability to generalize, and to move from a philosophy in the abstract to its implications for a social situation. From me he learned how to apply his "great store of knowledge" to the African situation. Otherwise it might just have been "eclecticism" but this wasn't the case when it was applied. We found that the "airy philosophies" of the past were applicable to the problems of Africa. I couldn't have done all this without Lembede.

I decisively influenced him to espouse nationalism as a solution to Africa's problems. I can't say that he might not have eventually come to the same conclusions on his own. He had great potential and could have developed in any direction. Who knows? But I influenced him then. The answers we formulated weren't just based on sentiment—though there was sentiment in them. They were based on this disciplined discussion.

Lembede had been temporarily out of the political stream, and I introduced him back into it. At this time. Lembede was serving articles with Dr. Seme.

How would you evaluate Xuma's total contribution to the ANC?

Xuma was "a principled leader within the limits of his liberalism." He had integrity; you couldn't buy him—he was much too proud for that. His main aim was "peaceful recognition" for Africans. "He hungered for recognition from the authorities," for the showering of praise from the white press and liberals. "The high point of his life" was at the UN [in 1946] when Smuts touched his shoulder and said, "what are you doing here, Xuma (Zoo-ma)?" He believed that given a chance, Africans could achieve anything equal to anyone else. He felt that Africans had to struggle—through their leaders—for increased concessions. The masses were only to exert a general pressure, but the main thing was the leaders' efforts to negotiate and win concessions step by step. We felt that he didn't understand the nature of the struggle, that he didn't understand the forces arrayed against African progress.

Within these limits, Xuma made great strides, particularly against tribalism. When he took over the ANC there was the Natal Congress, the Transvaal Congress, the House of Chiefs, etc. It was still called the Native Congress, and the structure was "feudal." He destroyed the autonomy of the Provincial congresses. He therefore really created the ANC, and laid the basis for a powerful mass organization. Xuma's style was condescending and paternal; however, "he dealt a deadly blow at tribalism."

But as we moved along we found it was not possible to carry Xuma with us. The youth had to make a "bitter choice". We hoped that he would change. In November of 1949, I sent Mandela and Sisulu to Xuma's house in Sophiatown, to persuade him to run on our platform. "He gave them short shrift." He was too adamant, so we accepted the inevitable. Even at Bloemfontein we made approaches to him, but he rebuffed us; he rebuffed me.

Unfortunately, the horse we now backed—Dr James Moroka—proved too "naïve." He was sincere, but he proved vulnerable to undermining by the communists.

in January 1948 I became the head of the Youth League.

How was the Program of Action written, and what part did Robert Sobukwe play in writing or promoting it?

I had in fact been acting head of the League since the death of Lembede. I was then at Roma on a brief contract, lecturing on Native Administration and on the 19th century "Age of Revolution" in Europe. I was together there with C.D. Molapo, now a Senator here in Lesotho. (Here there was some confusion about the dates.) From Roma, I returned—after spending 7 or 8 months there—to Johannesburg in November 1947. I had already decided to go for law. I did not attend the January '48 conference and was elected Youth League president in absentia. I had originally gone down to the Cape from Johannesburg so that I could study Latin and begin to prepare myself for law. My plan had been to return to Johannesburg and serve articles under Lembede, but our plans were shattered by his death. I was still in the Cape when I was elected.

While I was League president, Tambo, Mandela and Sisulu were on my Working Committee, along with some others. My first task as president was to clarify our stand vis-à-vis communism and liberalism. We had to have a clear stand vis-à-vis other groups. So in early 1948 I wrote the "Basic Policy of the Congress Youth League" and presented it to the others for their suggestions. They approved of it without making any changes, so although I wrote it, it became "our" document, and not identified as mine.

The communists in the ANC were powerful. They could get funds, and they had a powerful propaganda machine in the communist press.

I began to organize the Youth League on a nationwide basis. Until then it had been largely a Transvaal affair. We had sent around Ngubane's and Lembede's Manifesto to Fort Hare and other places outside the Transvaal, but now I actually went on tour around the country, touching Natal.

At the time the Youth League was formed, Ngubane was a sub-editor of the *Bantu World*, in Johannesburg. Later he went to Verulam to work with the *Inkundla lase Natal*. We had clashed with the old guard there in Natal, especially Champion, who accused the youth of "sneaking into his province." I had some fierce clashes with Champion, and sometimes I avoided going places where I might meet him. "He released tirades against us."

In 1948 I established contact with Godfrey Pitje, a teacher at Orlando High School. At about this time, Pitje went to Fort Hare as a lecturer (in anthropology?). Fort Hare was then the seat of the NEUM, its "citadel." Professor Ntloko was its leading light there. So Pitje as a Youth Leaguer was breaking ground there for us. And the League began to take root, especially through Sobukwe who was head of the Student Representatives Council (SRC). Also on our side were Joe Matthews, Dan Siwisa, T. T. Letlaka, and later Z. B. Molete and J. N. Pokela. There was a Fort Hare branch, as well as a branch of the mother body at Alice.

I went down to Fort Hare myself in April 1949 for the first time. That was when I first met Sobukwe, although we had previously corresponded. The Fort Hare Youth League branch was formed in August 1948.

At this time there was already a cleavage in the mother body between African nationalists (including Dr. James Njongwe, A. S. Gwentshe, J. M. Lengisi, Judah Fazzie) and others who were inclined toward the liberals or the communists. The branches which were nationalist (in the Cape?) were happy to get chaps from Fort Hare to come over and speak. But until my first trip to Fort Hare in 1949, April, I had left this all to Pitje and Sobukwe. Fort Hare hadn't been included in my original organizing tour mentioned above.

In 1948 the idea of a program was being promoted everywhere, and different branches were working on the idea. The Nats came to power in May 1948 and many people—white liberals, youths—began to call for a National Convention. One of the people promoting this idea was Ngubane. He corresponded with Edgar Brookes, Arthur Blaxall, and others about it. (Later, Mda mentioned that Ngubane had always been strongly under the influence of Brookes, who had been headmaster at Adams College when Ngubane was a student there.) So Ngubane mooted the idea of a National Convention to me, but I said it would only be possible if it were organized on the basis of a program of some kind; that is, we should go into it with our goals already defined. I really don't remember the details of this period and these events well. I don't actually recall just what I told Ngubane about the idea of a National Convention.

In any case, there was an unmistakable upsurge in the Youth League at this time, 1948; the paper called *The Lodestar* was begun, and I made my tour. The tour was unfortunately limited by lack of funds, so that it didn't include many places, e.g. Fort Hare.

About this time there was a meeting between the ANC and the AAC at Bloemfontein. Sometime between June and October 1948 I had a clash with Ngubane. Ngubane wanted closer unity between the ANC and AAC, and I had rebuffed some young members of the AAC. Ngubane wanted unity; he was a liberal, tempered with nationalism—but always basically a liberal. Brookes had a strong influence on him. But Ngubane was without question a patriot; it would never be correct to call him a "sell-out." He was always for progress. His position was always "pragmatic". When I rebuffed some young spokesman of the AAC, Ngubane took me to task for this and pooh-poohed the idea of African nationalism as a solution. There was a fierce clash. I finally went down to Natal to see Ngubane. I was touring the province again, and I went to where he was staying at Mooi River. He was very ill with asthma, and he attacked me for nearly

killing him in his illness, by putting this nationalistic line to him as a challenge. I tried to explain the doctrine of nationalism to him. About this time, some of Ngubane's friends had written him and condemned him for splitting, for arguing with me; so he then agreed to join us, and tone down his line.

(When Mda mentioned the *Lodestar* above, he had also mentioned a paper called *The New African*, which had been written or begun by Lembede. Could he have meant the *African Advocate*?)

At the ANC Annual Conference of December 1948 there was great enthusiasm for the idea of a national program, except among the old guard—Xuma, Selope Thema, Selby Msimang. In August of 1948, a Youth League branch was formed at Fort Hare, and from that date on the Fort Hare students played a very important part. They were especially important in looking into the history, the background of African achievements; they were in a position to look at the problem of defining cultural goals. There was also much discussion of "definitions" of nationalism. They had considerable scope in the new movement, the Youth League. because it was their own. I, as President, allowed them to "prance around the country", being creative and pushing the new slogans. Lembede had coined the two slogans “Africa’s Cause Must Triumph” and “Freedom in Our Lifetime.” Sobukwe coined the slogan “Remember Africa” when he was at Fort Hare. The branches at East London, Stutterheim, and the Eastern Cape generally gave the Fort Hare men a platform. Elliot Mfaxa and his brother in Stutterheim, Gwentshe and Njongwe in Port Elizabeth and East London were especially receptive to these chaps.

Then in 1949 I went down to address the students at Fort Hare. In my speech I was quite vicious against my opponents (presumably the NEUM). I don't know what kind of impression I made there—I heard conflicting reactions later. I spoke, and then there were questions. There was much “wrangling” over what I had said. Some people like Z. K. Matthews had come to hear the speech. “I might have cut a poor figure.” The older liberals didn't approve of the new-fangled ideas of the nationalists. At this time I was quite sickly.

From Fort Hare, ZK and I went up to a joint meeting of the ANC and AAC in Bloemfontein. We didn't want this unity, that is the Youth League, "and we produced some obstacles in the way of this unity," though openly we kept quiet. We thought that people in the ANC like Matthews only saw the AAC as led by men like Professor D. D. T. Jabavu and didn't see the growing influence of the Trotskyites. Later, Tabata in his “African Awakening” ("Awakening of a People") quotes some of my speech at this unity conference. At one point I misspoke and instead of using the word total I used the word "totalitarian." I then corrected myself in the speech but Tabata quotes me as having said "totalitarian" in order to show that I was a dangerous fanatic of some kind, yearning for dictatorship. He accused me of being a "black fascist."

I then charged the Fort Hare, Transvaal, Natal and other branches to make suggestions for a program of action. They all submitted suggestions. Ngubane also submitted suggestions, at my urging. The formulation that Fort Hare came up with was synthesized with my own ideas and presented at the Cape provincial conference in 1949 (in June?). At this conference, the youth got a platform. They were represented by Sobukwe, Joe Matthews and others. We left that conference “flushed with victory,” or so we thought. Some senior members there were also in favor of a program.

The mother body then appointed a committee to look into all these suggestions, an “omnibus committee.” This committee eventually came up with a version that modified the more African-nationalist version we had formulated in the Cape. The committee included Moses Kotane, David Bopape, Z. K. Matthews—who did the actual wording of the final draft—and myself and some others. I think I was the only representative of the youth there; I'm not sure. But even if I was alone, I could “hold those fellows.” I think there were between 7 and 9 altogether appointed to this committee, at conference. The fact that

Kotane was on this committee made it possible to claim later that Kotane had been one of the authors of the Program.

This committee was appointed at the annual conference of December 1949, and we met there during the conference. Not even the communists could have completely distorted our program, although they did succeed in modifying some of our "jargon"—this was missing in the final version drafted by Matthews, in the committee. It was a matter of give and take. Kotane and Bopape tried to argue that a doctrine of African nationalism was like apartheid; they wanted to make modifications. There was quite an argument and "I nearly asked them to go outside." At an earlier time, they and the communists had even opposed the idea of self-determination for African states, and had called it "racialistic" to argue for independence. But at this conference they didn't speak directly against the program; they only sniped at it. The omnibus committee didn't dare strike out the nationalist clauses because the nationalists had the support of the conference as a whole; several times I threatened to take the wording to the floor. They did manage to "water down" the wording, however. Finally a statement on which we all agreed was presented to the conference.

At this time we weren't yet using the term "positive action." That came later. The Cape version contained the idea of "non-collaboration," perhaps being influenced by the ideas of the NEUM. This was watered down in the national version of the Program. At that time "we weren't in love with civil disobedience." We didn't agree that it was achieving anything to turn the other cheek. We also didn't want to give any ammunition to the communists, or let them get the initiative. The communists favored mass action if it seemed to favor their purposes, but usually the whites were against it because they were afraid things would get out of control and they would lose their hold. This was the same kind of thinking that led Patrick Duncan to join the Defiance Campaign. He was afraid it was becoming "racialistic" and he didn't want there to be a gulf between whites and Africans. Whites were afraid of things that were all-black. He of course wasn't a communist, but the behavior of whites tended to be along these lines. Duncan's action in the Defiance Campaign was an embarrassment to the communists, since no white communists had defied. At a later stage he said that the non-white communists delighted in the Defiance Campaign because it gave them a chance to exert their own initiatives without having whites direct them.

Right from the start the communists tried to undermine the Program of Action. The communists valued Parliament, the Advisory Boards and the Provincial Councils, the very bodies the Program vowed to abolish. So the communists tried to sabotage the Program. They could use Moroka, who didn't really understand what the Program was about. Sisulu at this point was devoted to the Program. It was the Defiance Campaign that brought in differences, began cleavages between us, Sisulu and others.

How can the change in attitude by Sisulu and others be explained?

Because of the Defiance Campaign, communists came into closer personal contact—in their work, in prison—with Africans who weren't communist. A working relationship developed. This greater contact brought about a natural mutual trading and absorption of views. Prejudices were broken down. The communists had a way of "pumping a man up," flattering him, making him feel as though he had ideas, as though he was a messiah even greater than Marx. They achieved extraordinary results.

Moroka "crumpled" in the wake of the Defiance Campaign. Clauses in the Suppression of Communism Act made confiscation of property a possible penalty, and Moroka was afraid of losing his property. Under this pressure Moroka crumbled and began to try to persuade whites (e.g. at his trial) that after all he wasn't so bad—he had helped give some white boys scholarships and so forth.

How would you evaluate the contribution of Lutuli to the ANC ?

In 1952 Joe Matthews and Robert Matji, who is now in Lesotho, had told Dr. Njongwe that they would support him for the presidency. But then they passed through Natal, and at the Annual Conference they ended up supporting Lutuli. In Natal, they spoke in favor of Lutuli. But the competition for the presidency shaped up between Njongwe and Lutuli.

Lutuli's strength was that he had tremendous "zeal." He could never crumble like Moroka. He had "Christian strength." He was a “nonracial Christian”, and he had an impact on all groups—not just Africans. His style was characterized by "an absence of hardness." He wasn't tied to any positive program, and platform that he was wishing. He didn't have the hardness that would have followed if he had been promoting some definite line. He always stressed that change would come through a change of heart. Liberal whites really responded to him, and many of them would have accepted him as prime minister in preference to Verwoerd or Vorster. His speech that he gave in Cape Town to a largely white audience showed this. The Afrikaners saw him as “the thin edge of the wedge.” They couldn't attack him on personal grounds, so to show that he was still "just a kaffir" they sent some thugs to assault him at a meeting in Pretoria. They kicked him and he fell down on the platform.

He brought "Christian fortitude" to bear upon politics. "He made courage fashionable."

Was he ever criticized for not breaking his ban and going to jail?

No, not for this. But he was criticized for having no clear program. His courage and integrity were never challenged. Later, he wasn't hostile to PAC, and he even praised Sobukwe. But his Working Committee made him attack PAC publicly sometimes.

Lutuli wasn't a "field man" who went to the people and organized at the grass roots. Others, including the communists, could use him to create an image for the ANC for the benefit of Christians and Liberals. They were the ones who went out to the people and could speak in Lutuli’s name. They built him up, both as a human being and as a politician, into something greater than he really was. One of the reasons Ngubane became so "cynical and vicious" in his attacks on Lutuli was because he, Ngubane, had built Lutuli up, "studiously" built him. But Ngubane didn't really have a right to be so critical because as he was building Lutuli he hadn't also given Lutuli a program to work from. Ngubane's attacks are to some extent justified. It is true that Lutuli did sign things that he had never seen, for example the Freedom Charter.

My health was bad between about 1949 and 1951 and I was given treatment by Xuma and others for heart trouble and gastric ulcers. Njongwe also gave me treatment.

The split in the ANC really began around 1952; perhaps not "split" but different "streams of thought" resulted from the presence of different ideological schools in Congress. The ANC was a "fighting ground" for these ideas. It ceased to be the convenient recruiting ground that the communists wanted it to be.

I was sick on and off in 1948 and 1949. My Working Committee put a lot of work on my shoulders; they tended to give the drafting of things to me. Eventually I had to "retreat" because of my health; I was overworked. For the Annual Conference of the ANC in 1951, I was asked to speak on the implementation of the Program of Action. Being sick, I could not attend this conference; Mandela was asked to speak in my place. Then Mandela came to me and asked me to draft a speech for him. So I prepared "an analysis of the situation in the country."

Was this the document presented in the Treason Trial, called "The Analysis"?

(Mda here became rather cagey and refused to say that it was, but admitted that it might have been.) "They," i.e. the communists, invited me to come to the trial and identify this document, or claim it. They were inviting me to put myself in the dock! (laughter)

Mandela used this document that I had drawn up. Since I wasn't at the conference, I don't know how or to what extent Mandela used it. Later Mda said "I assumed he used the whole thing." This was then presented to the conference as a document from the Working Committee. (NB: Letlaka says this document of Mda's was suppressed in the Working committee as too radical, and never got to the conference as a whole.)

What was the content of this analysis? Was it also a plan for action?

It was an analysis and also a plan. (Mda was clearly reluctant to discuss this until he was pressed on it.) The plan was to launch various kinds of actions which flowed from the Program of Action, but which were more specific than the Program itself. It included a plan to launch a national press, to launch a fund drive. These had been mentioned in the Program of 1949. The plan included provisions for the starting of an actual campaign for the boycotting of Advisory Boards, and parliamentary and provincial council elections. We regarded civil disobedience as negative, as passive submission. It was "anti-revolutionary" because you couldn't strike back. You had to turn the other cheek.

How did you feel about the Defiance Campaign as an implementation of the Program of Action?

(The answer which followed seemed rather contradictory). We didn't particularly like the idea of it, but we went along with it and supported it. (It was not clear here or elsewhere who he meant when he said "we," and in most cases he seemed to be using this to avoid using "I.") We hoped that the Defiance Campaign would produce violence. (He didn't use the word "hope" but that was the idea.) We anticipated that it would. The violence would be initiated by the authorities. This violence would lead to greater and greater suppression, and eventually to violence coming from the Africans themselves. There might be chaos—the blowing up of bridges and other things. (At this point Mda seemed to lose some of his caution about discussing these things; the ideas he was expressing seemed to lose any immediate connection with the subject of the Defiance Campaign.) I was never a believer in nonviolence. White rule is violent by nature, the situation itself was inherently violent. We wanted our people to understand this, to see the nature of their oppression. Perhaps in India, or with an Eastern mentality, people can accept non-violence, turning the other cheek, but we couldn't see our people ever adopting that as a philosophy. We recognized nonviolence as a method of struggle, and we saw that in South Africa it had even brought a measure of success when used by Indians.

We saw the Defiance Campaign as following from the Program of 1949 in a sense, but "we didn't like it." Indians and communists were involved in it. They threw themselves wholeheartedly into it. For the communists, it gave them an opportunity for leadership without being directed by whites. Whites had no role to play.

Earlier on the subject of violence he said he thought human beings by nature were nonviolent. Look at how weak their small hands are, what feeble creatures they are, not built for violence. Of course they use science to create violence, but by their nature they aren't themselves violent. Violence is initiated by the state, it is an instrument of the state. Our people had to come to appreciate that, to see the nature of the struggle as a violent one.

The Defiance Campaign was anti-revolutionary in the sense that it was "passive" resistance; you couldn't hit back. We anticipated that repression would provoke violence and accelerate the struggle. There might be bombings, burning, riots, though not a full revolution. We didn't believe in the slogan of nonviolence,

though "we mouthed it." A full revolution wouldn't have succeeded at that point. There was a danger in making the people accept a policy of nonviolence. This kept them from seeing the real nature of the struggle. Naked force is the means of power in a fascist state: that is the reality, and the people had to be taught this. They had to be prepared for it. We had no illusions about the power we were struggling against. For some, nonviolence wasn't merely a tactic; it was an end, a religious act. They saw it as Gandhi had. But I doubted the ability of Africans to turn the other cheek for any length of time. Nonviolence was a short-run tactic. Perhaps it was different for Eastern religions, but not for us. We acknowledged the success of it in India.

The Defiance Campaign accelerated the cleavage in the ANC, but it also created new sympathy among communists for the views of African nationalism, at least among African communists. So the Campaign brought about a kind of cleavage among the communists, between whites and others. The communists were constantly evolving, going through changes, just as we were. But this led to the capture of many of our leaders by the communists. This growing sympathy of the communists towards us brought about a growing rapport, interchange of ideas. Mandela and Sisulu and others gradually began to see the communists as people who weren't so bad after all. Between 1952 and 1963, the Communist Party went through several transformations. The Congress of Democrats became a recruiting ground for the CP, but at the same time it was infiltrated by the police. It was therefore both a source of strength and weakness for them.

Could the Communist Party in South Africa have ever been described as "revolutionary"?

No, definitely not. They weren't really revolutionary, although "they had pretensions." They had several powerful theoreticians, especially Yusuf Dadoo and Jack Simons. We could outdo the Liberals in noise, but not the Congress of Democrats. The COD produced some real radicals who challenged the African nationalists seriously. But the COD was the beginning of the demise of the CP, because of infiltration, Gerald Ludi and so forth. The struggle of the Defiance Campaign generated sympathies of the Communists toward the African nationalists, but also created more respect among nationalists for the communists, because of their active participation. But the Communist Party "was neither really communist, or really revolutionary." It was continually beset by contradictions. All in all, it "delayed the evolution of a truly progressive struggle," one which could have helped the whites and coloureds as well as the Africans. We delayed until the forces of fascism were already too strong. While the Nats were building their strength, we were lagging behind, partly on account of the confusion caused by the communists. They had "injected zig-zags and contradictions" into our movement, into the liberation struggle as a whole. This delayed us, so that we failed to build our own strength in time. This also happened in Lesotho, where communism had a retarding effect on the nationalist struggle.

The aim of the communists in the Defiance Campaign was to destroy us, i.e. the African nationalists. We had to really struggle to keep our sights on African nationalism as the goal, the Program of Action as the program. They were trying to take over the show and change things.

How was the Bureau of African Nationalism formed?

The Defiance Campaign and this internal struggle was the background for the formation of the Bureau of African Nationalism. It grew up simultaneous with the Campaign, in an effort to keep our goals clear. We found it necessary to emphasize our differences in order to preserve "our group." It was necessary to change the interpretation of the Defiance Campaign which was being put forward by the communists.

The Bureau first grew as a "secret organization." The first bulletin was "splashed" to the whole country, and everyone was asking where it had come from. We kept quiet and didn't admit to its authorship.

Joe Matthews says you published some attacks under the pseudonym of "Africanus" and he squelched you, silenced you. by exposing the authorship of this tract. What was behind this?

I don't remember this at all. Matthews is "quite capable of lying." "Africanus" was a pseudonym used by myself, but also sometimes by the government when it printed false pamphlets. It was even used by Matthews himself. It is quite possible that Matthews attacked me and I didn't know about it. If I had known about it, I would have replied very strongly. I wrote under that pseudonym only in certain publications, never just in miscellaneous tracts.

Matthews didn't know about the Bureau. He was not in the inner group of the Youth League, and had nothing to do with beginning the Bureau. (Mda seems to harbor a strong dislike for Matthews.) Matthews is a "fence-sitter." He later joined the Communist Party, probably in 1952 or just after, although even before that he was "hobnobbing" with them at the time of the Defiance Campaign. Matthews was "brilliant, but a copy-cat." He could read a book, then repeat the whole book back to you.

Did he ever speak against his father in public?

No. I don't think even in his heart he could have thought anything bad of his father, though of course I don't know that as a fact. Joe always wanted to be known as a theoretician, and in fact he was later regarded as such, as a leftist theoretician. He wrote an article or a pamphlet at some point called "Africanism and Zikism." (Perhaps "Africanism or Zikism.") This was after he had got ahold of some literature about Nigeria. But he was "like his father, a fence-sitter." He was "a megaphone, an apist." Though he hadn't been a pan-Africanist upon reading something about Zik he could sit down and produce a pan-Africanist document. He was "a mimic." He sniped from a safe distance.

The Bureau was established in January 1952 before the Defiance Campaign. It was a "voluntary, self-dedicated service by a group of African nationalists." Over time, the publication of the Bureau became more and more open, blatant. Its initial issue was hailed. Several thousand copies of each issue were roneoed. At first it was secret, and those involved professed innocence. Nationalists hailed it as their voice. Sobukwe contributed to the bulletin at a later stage, when he was in Standerton. The bulletin died around 1953 or 1954, and was superseded by *The Africanist*, with a short time in between when the *Pioneer* was published, edited by Leballo and William Jolobe. The Bureau's bulletin was issued in East London, and Mfaxa and his brother were involved in putting it out.

I first met Leballo in 1949, at the time he was teaching in Ladybrand. I think Leballo was then running a branch in Ladybrand. I don't specifically remember having met Leballo for the first time at the 1949 Annual Conference, and we know we met there, but then I was meeting many people.

The Defiance Campaign showed some "alarming tendencies" in the ANC to us, especially the ability of the communists to win over "some of our seasoned fellows."

How did this come about?

The struggle brought us together, and when we were together prejudices tended to fall away. Prejudice can be a defence against something you don’t know about. An esprit de corps grew. The Campaign gave the communists an opportunity to introduce other people to Marxist ideas. You know, Marxist ideas can have a power/impact on oppressed people. Because Marxism is analytical, it appeals to a person's intelligence and tells him why he is oppressed. But it isn't only that; it is also a prescription for action, a "modus operandi for change." The idea of the dialectic appeals to the intellectual, Marxism answers difficult questions, without leaving room for doubt.

Prejudice is a powerful guard against communism, and that is why the churches try to inculcate this prejudice. But when the prejudice is broken down by something, often there isn't any stronger defence behind the prejudice, and this leaves the person open to communism. It is better to understand the communists and admit their merits, and to stand on your own criticism of them—not just follow a blind prejudice. Sometimes it is good and necessary to scare the people against communism because the people are not always capable of reasoning; but in the long run it is better to teach them to understand communism for what it is. The majority of people are not intellectuals, so sometimes it is all right just to frighten them, e.g. tell them about horrors in Russia. This is what the church does.

I myself am in no way prejudiced against communists. Many are personal friends of mine, or were. I just disagreed with them. (N.B. This kind of judiciousness and fairness, in both substance and tone, ran through nearly everything Mda said; every position he took appeared to be based on careful thought rather than impulse.) I myself always argued against churchmen on this point. I believed that the church was one of the best "apostles of communism" in South Africa; I used to tell the priests this, and it made them furious. The church supports the perpetuation of ignorance and the status quo. The communists can score by attacking the church. Italy, the strongest Catholic country in Europe, also has the strongest Communist Party.

(Later, I said I thought he was perhaps a bit harsh on those former Youth Leaders who had grown closer to the communists, and didn't give them sufficient credit for their patriotism. He seemed a little taken aback by this implied criticism.) Even after the time when I and Mandela, Sisulu and the others were in "different folds," I maintained friendship and mutual respect for them. I knew that those two would never tolerate any talk against me within their own circle. Up to a point, they continued to defend me. My attacks on them continued to be quite sharp, and even could be called "vicious" at times. I got this habit of sharpness from Lembede; Lembede was regarded by some as "a crank" in this respect, in that he loved argument and contention.

But to go back to the developments in the ANC, the tendencies that I saw during and after the Defiance Campaign caused me to be pessimistic. I saw that the communists had resources. I was "skeptical" of our chances of maintaining control of the ANC. The communists had not just money, but also a press. They also had social pull; they could "sweep people away" by the glamour of associating with whites. If you went along with them, you would yet the opportunity of dancing with white girls, going to parties, even kissing white girls—in private, of course. You could "stay in fine hotels" (abroad, presumably?), be "in a fine social setting." We didn't have, couldn't offer, any of these advantages.

Did you have a strategy to change the ANC from within during the 1950's? And at the time of the PAC break-away, were you in favor of the break?

I can remember a meeting in Pretoria—at which Gqobose was present—and also Dr. Peter Tsele, where there was discussion of the need for an Africanist party. This was around the time of the controversy over the Freedom Charter. "I was against it," i.e. against a new party. Before the Freedom Charter, and before *The Africanist* began publishing, that is between about 1952 and 1955, there were already "voices clamoring" for a new party. But the idea that the ANC could be transformed from within was still there. There was a very strong belief in the inevitable survival of the ANC. People would comment that other groups had come and gone, but the ANC had always remained. There were "the trappings of reverence" around the ANC; it was almost like a church. People regarded the ANC with a decree of "fetishism" that had nothing to do with the freedom struggle. There were two schools among African nationalists. One had faith in being able to supplant the communists; the others had lost faith in it and advocated a new party. The ANC looked viable still. It had withstood so many challenges. There was a sense of fatalism in attacking the ANC, that the ANC would still come out ahead.

The formation of the PAC was part of a natural "evolutionary process." It was not a "haphazard event." It grew out of a long struggle of ideas, and only sometimes a struggle of personalities—but mostly ideas.

Eventually there was a definite bid by the youth to take over the ANC. This would have succeeded if the people in power hadn't resorted to "thuggery" and open forms of violence, including murder. We didn't think the cause of party unity was worth the physical sacrifice of some leaders, our own boys. The new bid for leadership became more and more open. The Africanists now had their own paper, and their own program, as expounded in *The Africanist.* In the Transvaal, Leballo and others had strong popular backing. It was clear that the ANC old guard—i.e. the ANC's "new" old guard—was prepared to use even thuggery to hold on to their positions.

Were the banned leaders still the actual leaders of the ANC?

Yes. Banned men continued to attend meetings. Johannesburg is a wonderful place for disappearing. You could just vanish and attend a meeting and the police couldn't necessarily find you. The old leaders who were banned continued to make policy.

Mandela was a communist, but he never admitted this openly. A court could never have proved that he was an actual member.

How did you know he was one?

I knew it from my own talks with him, and also from "hearsay." The CP had "earmarked" Mandela to counterbalance the influence of Sobukwe. To be a communist was reprehensible in the minds of most of the people, as well as illegal, so Mandela had to "remain clear" and hide his communist views. He had to keep up the appearance of being a nationalist in order to compete in the popular mind with Sobukwe. At his trial, he even imitated Sobukwe, practically verbatim, in saying he didn't recognize the authority of the court. This was a communist tactic. They were even willing to murder to keep themselves in power.

What was your reaction to the news of the break in the Transvaal?

I wasn't emotional when I heard about it. I accepted it as inevitable, though I regretted it. It divided the people at a crucial time. But I accepted it and anticipated it even.

After the break, a delegation was sent to my place at Engcobo. The delegation consisted of Sobukwe and Mfaxa. They came down to look for me, but at the time I wasn't there. So they went ahead with their plan for forming a new organization. It was suggested that I should become a leader in this new party this suggestion even came from Sobukwe. PK (Leballo) was an "old schemer" and together we had created "cells" of Africanists everywhere. We could have taken over the ANC through these had it not been for thuggery organized at that Transvaal conference. and at other conferences.

Was there pressure on you to take a role in the PAC?

Not pressure, just the "suggestion" by Sobukwe. It may have appeared to some as though I was very critical of the break. But I was always critical. There was no foolish "patting of backs" (i.e. in my approach to anything). I was always against anything that smacked of "chauvinism or fascism." I felt that African nationalism was a force—a democratic force—for the seizure of power by the African people.

Did you share the PAC's belief in the possibility of a future non-racial society in South Africa? Could this follow from a revolution in which Africans came to power?

(Perhaps this was put in a slightly provocative way. Mda got quite excited on this point; what followed was a bit garbled, but I think our notes reflect the gist of what he said.) We had our "utopia" and the ANC had its "utopia". Their utopia was that someday we could magically "sit down to tea with Verwoerd." It was our utopia versus theirs. But we were more pragmatic than utopian, and more pragmatic than they were. We asked, how are Africans going to get what they want? We want freedom, and we want it at all costs. "We don't want violence," we just want freedom and we are willing to pay any price to get it. Freedom came first, by whatever means, including death. We were not trying to build up any theoretical case against whites. Our view was based on a "ruthless" took at the facts. The ANC accused us of being racialists, but they weren't looking at the facts with the same objectivity. The communists had "muddled thinking," which stemmed from their failure to look ruthlessly at the facts. Our analysis was based on facts, not on sentiment either for or against whites or Indians. (I dropped this subject, perhaps too soon, as the discussion seemed to be getting acrimonious in tone.)

Have you always been a proponent of pan-Africanism? Can you trace the background of the pan-Africanist element in PAC ideology?

I will just start with the period that we are considering here, the 1940's on. At the time of the Manchester conference in 1945 with Padmore and DuBois, I was not aware—we were not aware—of these events taking place. I don't know if Lembede knew about it. He never mentioned these events on the outside to me, never mentioned events in the rest of Africa. We learned of these things later. Lembede had read very widely; maybe he'd more information.

Lembede coined the word "Africanism." At first, I thought he equated this term with the concept of African nationalism. I proceeded to popularize the term with this concept in mind; it "reached the heart and the mind more intimately" than the term "African nationalism." (Here John got the opposite, that Mda pushed and preferred the term “African nationalism.” Ngubane's unpublished manuscript supports this latter view). (Somewhere here Mda referred to Lembede as "Lembs"—his nickname.)

One of Lembede’s talents was that he could give "powerful content" formulation, "substance" and impact, to a new idea. He could take an idea and shape it into a form in which it would appeal to people, have an impact on them.

Later his concept of Africanism developed beyond merely African nationalism. He began to talk of South African "independence" as one stage of Africanism, or of Africanism as a kind of stage in the future, beyond independence, when there would be some kind of unity of Africans everywhere, "or even of Christians" everywhere. Lembede himself did not use the term "pan-Africanism."

Gqobose here said that pan-Africanism as a doctrine became more important toward the date of the actual founding of the PAC, when Ghana had become independent and other countries were moving that way. Gqobose first read Padmore's *Pan-Africanism or Communism*? in 1958 (the PAC office in Maseru now has a copy). Mda and Mfaxa also said they had read it. Before then we weren't aware of much, though Ngubane's and Lembede's Manifesto contained the idea of African unity.

Did Lembede use the actual word "Independence"? What did he mean by it?

Yes, we used this word, meaning essentially democracy or majority rule. We used the word in 1949. There was no idea of racial exclusiveness in it. As Sobukwe later made clear, it didn't necessarily mean rule would be by blacks only. As Sobukwe said, if would be quite possible for black voters to elect a white man to parliament. Perhaps "in the first stages" after independence, whites might prefer to stay in their own areas, for "cultural" reasons. But eventually we felt prejudices would break down and true democracy could be achieved. Look at the Manifesto for references to pan-Africanism. These are an

indication of how we thought of it at the time. As we learned more about other African independence movements, nationalism assumed a more pan-African scope. Earlier, people didn't know much about the rest of Africa, but they knew it was "our continent."

I later learned of Padmore's book, but up until then (the late 1950's?) I had only seen Padmore's communist writings, from his early period. The CP circulated these and suppressed the writings after Padmore's conversion.

The PAC borrowed many ideas from the All African People's Conference in Accra (December 1958). We already used the word "independence" before any countries in Africa were free, but later we took other ideas, meanings, from the rest of the continent.

Might there have been a statistical argument for pan-Africanism? If South African whites were seen as a percentage of the total population of Africa, their claims seemed much less significant.

(They all took up the point. Gqobose, and to a lesser extent Mfaxa, were adding comments to the discussion by this time.)

Mda: We reject the idea that any of South Africa belongs to the whites. "They have no claim to any of it," to any of its resources. Gqobose: The whites are welcome to stay here and enjoy human rights like anybody else.

The arguments that the whites arrived in South Africa at the same time as the Africans, these arguments of Vorster, are nonsense.

So you don't believe that a seventh-generation white South African has any legitimate claim to anything here?

Mda: We don't care about these "finer points." We start from the historical argument that this land belongs to us. We are the indigenous people. But this historical fact is only a starting point for our case. That isn't the be-all and end-all of our argument. After we come to power, whites are welcome to stay and enjoy equal rights; but they can never claim any special rights.

Are you confident that this could be accomplished without bitterness?

Force is an instrument of governments, not naturally an instrument of individuals. (The idea came across throughout of violence and revolution as an impersonal force.) Of course violence and revolution are the "stock in trade" of the human race historically, but evil governments give rise to them, not people themselves. We can achieve democracy in South Africa without bitterness. Once injustice is righted, there is no reason for people (i.e. Africans) to harbor bitterness, or violent feelings.

How was the name chosen for the PAC?

A number of suggested names were voted on at the Inaugural Conference. Mfaxa said the name came from the Cape; Gqobose thought it had come from the Transvaal, that in Port Elizabeth they had decided to suggest the name "the Africanist Movement."

Returning to the race question, Mda said whoever came here came as human beings and should live like humans. We recognize that the whites are here, and we don't care how or when they came. The real question is where do we go from here? We have tried not to become embittered, to keep our human touch.

Did you oppose the launching of the pass campaign in 1960?

In September 1959 I was invited to come up from Engcobo as the guest of honor at the PAC national executive meeting in Bloemfontein. I went and addressed that group for a "number of hours" – perhaps 3 or 4 hours, and the occasion gave me an opportunity to size up the PAC leadership. I had met many of the leaders, but not all of them, and this was my first chance to meet them as a group. "I got a healthy respect for them," though some were quite new to me.

Over the next few months, I visited some centers in the Eastern Cape—Stutterheim, East London, Grahamstown—I went to Grahamstown at the time that I was admitted as an attorney, just after I had recovered from my illness. On these visits I had "far-ranging discussions with the youth" who had opted for PAC. This was my opportunity to size up the new leadership. I was impressed by the group at Port Elizabeth, which included Gqobose. They were strong there in the face of harassment from the ANC, because it was an ANC stronghold.

I then returned to Engcobo, and later went to Herschel and to the Transvaal where I addressed some youth meetings at Orlando and several other places, including Evaton where Z. B. Molete and Joe Molefi were my hosts. Some chaps came over from Sharpeville and Vanderbijlpark to attend.

PK Leballo was "trailing me" all this time (laughter). I don't know why. Maybe he wasn't quite sure what I would say to these groups. Maybe he didn't trust me. This was close to the "launching conference" of December 1959. At that conference I was barred from attendance by Sobukwe. Sobukwe said I must meet them after the meetings. This must have been Sobukwe's decision. At night we went to PK's place and discussed different things, including some "legal aspects" of saying certain things. (i.e. what you could say in public without being liable to prosecution.) Sobukwe wanted some "custodian" to be in the background, a custodian of the party’s philosophy.

I do not recall that I was positively against the idea of the campaign against the pass laws. Gqobose: I remember that all you said was that we should remember the strength of the ANC.

I wrote an article in the last issue of *The Africanist*, promoting the idea of the campaign—the last issue, that is, before the launching.

In your discussion of legal aspects, did you discuss the slogan of "no bail, no defence, no fine"?

This slogan has been misinterpreted (All three concurred in this.) Right from the start we saw this slogan as a limited thing, not as the absolute dictate that some later tried to say it was. The ANC “junta”—not really a junta but a "bureaucracy"—had created a gulf between the leaders and the people. They were "clinging to power" against all opposition. Every time there was a demonstration they would organize it, then run out or pay bail, leaving the masses to take the brunt. The youth had reacted against this. The PAC wanted to bridge this gulf between the leaders and masses.

Our people were generally afraid of going to jail because they knew how terrible the jails were.

It is true there was later some criticism when lawyers were hired or bail paid. But we didn’t see this ass a loss of face. This slogan was a tactic before the launching of the campaign. We abandoned it without apology, and most people understood the reasons. A general has to be free to lead his troops. The slogan wasn’t a policy; it was merely a tactic.

What would have happened if there had been no shooting at Sharpeville?

If there had been no massacre, and if the ANC had “thrown in its lot” with PAC as Sobukwe had invited them too—but Nokwe encouraged ANC to take a very hostile attitude and only later encouraged Lutuli to burn his pass—“what almost happened would have happened.” Passes would have been abolished. This would have undermined the entire system of white power; negotiations would have begun, and “the doors of power would have opened.” Once passes were abolished, “anything could have happened.” The passes are the foundation of the whole industrial system. The undermining of this system perhaps could have led to a more liberal government coming to power, and then to a final dispersal of power.

Do you think the PAC underestimated the power of the government to maintain its hold?

They didn’t underestimate government power—we were well acquainted with that; what they did perhaps do was to overestimate their own strength. They also underestimated the destructive power of the ANC at this point. The PAC expected funds that never came, from trade unions abroad.

Some people in PAC have accused Ngubane of sabotaging the campaign by failing to produce the pamphlets. Is this true?

I’ve heard about this, but I don’t know the details. (Here he became quite vague, at least in contrast to his clarity on most points.) In the heat of the preparations, some people may have misinterpreted Ngubane’s actions. Maybe Ngubane had no intentions really of sabotaging the campaign. You know those Indian printers are sometimes difficult. Now did Ngubane come to the Transkei? (This asked rhetorically.) Yes, I think he did. Later, of course, Ngubane hailed the campaign, after it had been launched. He worked for it, more than even I did, writing in the press and so forth. So it is hard to believe that Ngubane would have engaged in any “chicanery,” though there are some people who are fond of slandering him. “Chicanery” could have taken place,” but I just don’t know.

Raboroko “found himself here (in Lesotho) in January 1960.”

In a history of the PAC, would you have any objection to having your role described as fully as possible?

(The answer to this was very elaborate, but added up a suggestion that he’d prefer to have his role downplayed for the sake of the struggle itself.)

You know, the struggle still continues. The times we have seen and are seeing now might be easy in comparison to times we may see in the future. Of course there are lulls in the struggle, and the present may seem like a lull; no, there are no lulls, only the lull of death. There are no lulls in the struggle.

But to be lost, sometimes, is better. Lenin was lost during his long seclusion in Switzerland. What if he had been captured or killed as he was crossing Germany? There would have been no Russian Revolution. What if Mao had been kidnapped or killed during his long seclusion in China? There would have been no long march. (We let these remarks pass without comment; there was no mistaking their implication.)

(At an earlier point in the interview, I had asked Mda some questions about his own background.) I was born in 1916 at Herschel. My father was a "petty chief" there, a headman. He was a shoemaker. He had done to Standard 6 [eighth grade], and taken a course in shoemaking. My mother had done Standard 4 or 5, I don't remember which. She was a teacher. In those days it was possible to be a teacher even if you had only done Standard 4 or 5. My interest in politics came from my father. As a headman, he went to many *pitsos* [local traditional councils], and he would take me along to listen. I had my own horse as a child, and I would ride along with him. I was an only child. (This seemed to be contradicted later when he

referred to writing a letter to his younger brother. Perhaps his brother was a lot younger, so that he was an only child for a long time?)

Why did you choose teaching?

In those days a "good child" wanted to become a teacher or a minister. If you wanted to be anything else, you were very suspect. These missionaries would frown on you. After primary school in Herschel, I entered a school called Maria Zell in East Griqualand, which is in the Transkei. That school had three programs: Junior Certificate ("JC" or tenth grade), matric, and a teachers' course—which is the one I took. From there I went to East London for a time. In 1937 I went to teach at the Sacred Heart school in Germiston location. In 1938 I moved over to Orlando and began teaching in a Catholic school there.

Rose Mda later said that she had been a student at Orlando High School when she met AP and they were married. He was then teaching in Orlando. She mentioned that she had been very good in her studies there. She later trained as a nurse. Now she can't get work as a nurse in Lesotho, so she has recently begun a small shop/tea room near Mafeteng.

The Mdas have five children: a son, 21, twins (boys), 18, another son and a daughter. [One son, Zakes Mda, became a prominent writer in the 1980s.]

Did religion have any effect on the shaping of your political interests?

Yes, some. Christian teaching contributed to my appreciation of democracy, and perhaps to my dislike of communism, though I would prefer to ascribe that to more rational reasons. I was always very argumentative when it came to religious matters. I gave the priest a very hard time; I told them they were "the best apostles of communism in South Africa." The nuns liked me.

Mda seemed a little reluctant to talk about his background, as though he was embarrassed by it, particularly the undistinguished quality of his formal education. His degrees are from the University of South Africa. But he related it in a straightforward way, without apology or explanation. Later when he said, in reference to his relationship with Lembede. "I am no scholar," he seemed to be mentally adding "as you can see by my education."

When we first arrived at Mda’s house New Year's morning, there was a plumpish middle-aged African sitting in the living room. As this man was exchanging some greetings with Gqobose, Mda pulled Mfaxa outside. When the two of them came back in, Mda excused himself and said he had to take Mr. So-and-so down to a certain place in town. When they had gone, Mfaxa explained that the man was a police informer as well as being the local postmaster. Mda later commented that the man looked like a "numbskull" but that he wasn't. His assignment was to keep an eve on Mda for the border police. Gqobose told us later this man was murdered during the Lesotho “coup” of January 1970, i.e. a few weeks after our visit. Mda said most people around Mafeteng regarded him as an ordinary citizen, or at least an ordinary refugee, but that the police knew very well who he was.

While Mda was gone, Gqobose told the story of Mda's escape into Lesotho. In 1963, following the Leballo press conference incident, there was a huge country-wide swoop on PAC people. Mda was picked up in the round-up. At the (Herschel?) police station he was put in a police line-up, and a witness was instructed to pick him out, as number 4 in the line. Just before the witness came into the room. Mda had a premonition about this and switched places with another man in the line-up. The other man was "identified" by the police witness. Mda was released, and—in Mda's words later—I "came flying into this country," with almost nothing but the shirt on my back. Mda laid low for some time in Quting province in southern Lesotho—a very remote, mountainous area—and then moved to Mafeteng sometime around

1965(?) He recalls in 1963 or ‘64 hearing that an American lady—presumably Gwendolen Carter—wanted to interview him, but he was still lying low in Quting and didn't want to be interviewed. His family joined him after 1963 (perhaps after he came to Mafeteng?)

(Just as we were near leaving. Gqobose raised the question of what role Sobukwe had "assigned" to Mda.)

I referred to the tour of party centers that I made prior to the conference of December 1959. I was at home just before the tour (could he have meant after?) and received a letter from Sobukwe "outlining my role"—not saying that I must do any particular thing specifically, but said I must keep our philosophy safe. He said our beliefs would survive as long as some of us were still on the outside—that some could be “inflexible towers of strength,” while others had changed and weakened in the “vagaries” of the struggle. He said I could define my own role and position, as long as I maintained myself in a "strategic position." I was never ordered to hide by Sobukwe. It was suggested that I should always be free to lead the youth. I was free to hang myself, commit suicide if I wanted. I wasn't bound to anything by "the Prof" [Sobukwe]. I was only given the responsibility of "conserving" our philosophy.

I know that some people say that I am a coward, but in the last analysis I am not a coward, I don't think. There are just lulls in the struggle. It is true that during the time of the PAC I was never in the "forefront" of the youth.

Gqobose: there is a story that in 1959, Mandela asked someone in the PAC if Mda was in favor of the establishment of the PAC. When Mandela was told that A.P. was in favor of it, Mandela said "then the ANC is dead."

Mda: Mandela and I always maintained a mutual respect. We had a “friendship of the heart if not of the head.”

The Mdas live in a solid but very modest 4 or 5 room house on the outskirts of Mafeteng. The front room serves as a living room and also as Mda's law office. When one visitor arrived during the afternoon, Mda introduced us as some people who had come to discuss a case. He says he handles all types of cases, mostly petty civil eases, including stock-theft. It only brings him a small income. There were no books in the front room other than a few legal manuals.

He expressed interest in the published histories of African politics, and asked us to send him copies of *From Protest to Challenge*, Gwen Carter's *Politics of Inequality*, Edward Roux's *Time Longer than Rope*, Mary Benson's *The African Patriots*, and Ngubane's *An African Explains Apartheid*. He had never heard of Benson's book, and also wasn't aware that Ngubane had written a book. He also asked us to send copies of the Youth League Manifesto and the Basic Policy of the Youth League. He wrote this all out so we wouldn't forget what he had "ordered."

The subject of the bantustans came up, and Mda commented that everyone knew they were a "total fraud," but that they might eventually turn out to be something the government never intended originally. These territories will demand their independence, and for the government there will be no going back.

Mda is a small man—about 5'6"—slight, but with the beginnings of a paunch. Except for a more than normally alert expression, he is quite nondescript in appearance. His smile is broad, with lots of teeth and gums, and when he laughs he seems to be all mouth. He is the same age as Gqobose, about 53, but looks much younger and could even be taken for a man in his late 30’s—not a wrinkle or grey hair. All his motions are quick, precise and businesslike. He gives the impression of never saying or doing anything by

accident. His articulateness and vocabulary were extraordinarily impressive, and his reputation as a tireless talker is obviously well-founded. There was a tone of extreme objectivity and modesty in nearly everything he said, almost as though he was discussing events in which he had been a detached observer rather than a participant. At times his instinct for cunning maneuver and manipulation showed through, particularly when he spoke of trying to match wits with the communists. Before the interview began, he assured us that he would distinguish between those facts he was sure about and those where he was in some doubt. He stuck to this throughout and only once—when he began to talk about Ngubane and the pamphlets—did he seem to be pretending that he had forgotten something.