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**Archie Sibeko's**  
**ROLL OF HONOUR**

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**Archie Sibeko's**  
**with Joyce Leeson**

# **ROLL OF HONOUR**

**Western Cape ANC Comrades**  
**1953-1963**

**University of the Western Cape**  
**in association with Diana Ferrus Publishers**

First published in 2008 by  
University of the Western Cape  
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## POSTSCRIPT

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to all those many people who encouraged me to write these tributes to my old comrades who gave up so much of their lives so that South Africa would one day be democratic and free. Many helped me by jogging my memory and in giving me all sorts of practical help with my mission, but there are some who did even more, particularly to do with the pictures, and those I must mention by name. They are:

- Helen Frankenberg, Koleka Hani, Lumko Huna, Althea Mcqueen, Bonisile Malindi, Christopher Marabalala, Humphrey Maxegwana, Kuze Mqalo, Nomvuyo Mtyekisane, Zolile Nqose, Shula Mngeni Sibeko, Zola Siphiwo Sibeko, and Mcebisi Skwatsha.
- Andre Mohammed, Lailah Hisham, Esther Van Driel and Graham Goddard of the UWC-Robben Island Mayibuye Archives.

My wife, Joyce Leeson, worked with me throughout, editing and ordering my memories and then word processing the final version.

Special thanks to Prof Philip Hirschsohn of the University of the Western Cape for assisting with compilation and layout of the final document.

I can only say thank you very much to all these comrades, friends and family and hope that they feel the result was worth all their efforts.

# FOREWORD

The selfless and heroic contributions and sacrifices made by numerous men and women during the most extreme period of repression in our country and province have contributed towards the freedom we are experiencing today.

During the 1953 to 1963 period the liberation movement in South Africa changed from a passive and careful approach to a much more aggressive and militant movement. The Apartheid State's much harsher and more aggressive forms of repression and discrimination necessitated a response from the liberation movement.

This also brought about unity amongst all racial and cultural groups fighting for freedom in our country and laid the basis for non-racial struggle in South Africa and the adoption of the Freedom Charter. This unity had been given meaning with the signing in 1947 of the Doctors Pact by AB Xuma, President General of the ANC, GM Naicker, President of the Natal Indian Congress and Yusuf Dadoo, President of the Transvaal Indian Congress.

This was followed by the launch of the Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign in 1952 and the formation in 1955 of the Congress Alliance, composed of the ANC, the SA Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Congress, the Congress of Democrats and the SA Congress of Trade Unions.

The Defiance Campaign and the response of the Apartheid state required men and women with commitment and courage to take forward our struggle for freedom. The clampdown of the

Apartheid State through stricter pass laws, the State of Emergency, treason trials and detention without trial did not deter our leaders or these gallant men and women. Instead, it served to mobilise more people for freedom.

The stricter pass laws, and particularly the announcement in 1955 by the Apartheid government that women must carry passes, resulted in the historic Women's March of 1956.

These defining events of our liberation calendar brought to the fore many men and women from all over South Africa who played a critical role during this period but whose names are in danger of being forgotten.

We therefore want to thank Comrade Archie Sibeko for writing this important tribute to the activists of the Western Cape Region from 1953 to 1963. He was in the Provincial and Regional leadership of the ANC at that time until he was sent overseas for military training. He is therefore able to tell from his own experience the stories of many heroic ANC men and women who gave so much, in some cases their very lives, so that we can enjoy the freedom we have today. This book will ensure that their names and their efforts are forever captured in history.

Whitey Jacobs

Western Cape MEC: Cultural Affairs and Sport Recreation

# PREFACE

While completing this invaluable collection of personal profiles of political activists, Archie Sibeko lamented that “our people do not value the importance of documenting their stories”. In this book he has stepped into the breach, and not for the first time. Future generations of South Africans will be indebted to him for ensuring that the personal contributions of his fellow union and ANC comrades in the Western Cape between 1953 and 1963 are documented and saluted.

After completing school at Lovedale, Archibald Mncedisi Sibeko moved to Cape Town and soon became deeply involved in the trade union movement and politics. Like many Cape Town unionists at the time his union and political activism were inextricably linked. He became secretary of SARHWU and was a founder of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), when the country’s first non-racial trade union federation was established in 1955. He was also a regional leader in the African National Congress.

After his acquittal in the 1956 Treason Trial, Archie was placed under house arrest but remained active in the struggle for worker and political rights, working with the comrades that he pays tribute to in this unique compilation. Not surprisingly, after the African National Congress was banned he was among the first to join Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) in the Western Cape. Soon thereafter he was arrested but was sent into exile by the ANC for military training while out on bail.

He left behind his children and first wife and comrade Lindiwe, whom he never saw again. After undergoing military training Archie became a Camp Commander when MK's first camp was opened at Kongwa in Tanzania. In this role he continued to work closely with many comrades from the Western Cape that are profiled in this book. Later, he spent most of his years in exile in SACTU mobilizing the international trade union movement to support the struggle against Apartheid.

On his return to South Africa in 1990, Archie once again became active in SARHWU and was elected Deputy Chairperson of the ANC in the Western Cape. After suffering a minor stroke, he returned to his home in the United Kingdom. In his retirement over the past decade or so, Archie has made a concerted effort to document his personal experiences as a union and political activist and leader. He wrote his autobiography, *Freedom in our Lifetime*, with his wife Joyce Leeson, and co-authored *A Fighting Union: An Oral History of the South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union* (SARHWU) with Margaret Kiloh. The artwork on the cover is testimony of another of Archie's many talents.

This book is invaluable as it documents the contributions at grassroots level to political and labour struggles of ordinary comrades that might otherwise have gone unrecognised. As there are very few comrades from the 1953-63 period who are still alive, Archie's Roll of Honour will undoubtedly be precious both for historians and for the families of those whom he has honoured.

Prof. Philip Hirschsohn  
University of the Western Cape

# INTRODUCTION

What follows is a roll call of comrades who took part in the struggle for a free and democratic South Africa. It is based on my experiences in Cape Town from when I settled there in 1953 until I was sent abroad by the ANC in 1963.

Some of them died, then or later, at the hands of the police, whilst being tortured. Others survived but suffered physical or psychological damage beyond recovery as a result of the activities of the Apartheid regime.

I am one of the lucky few persons who are still alive and well and feel strongly that we need to record the history of the supreme sacrifices that these comrades made.

They gave the only precious thing that they had, their lives, so that we could enjoy today a free and democratic country.

It was a marvelous experience to work with such people. 1953 to 1963 was probably the darkest period of our struggle. The regime was at the peak of its power, prepared to enforce its inhuman system of Apartheid, whatever the cost to the lives of black people, yet some of the comrades could always make you smile, so that you forgot how dangerous and difficult the situation was. For example, they would make us laugh with outrageous ideas about how we could hit back at those who were persecuting us.

We had many fronts on which we had to fight for our basic human rights. Our lives were insecure in every way and the regime did everything they could think of to make them more so. For example, when they were enforcing the hated policy of forced removals of black people from their homes, they made sure they did it in the winter. In the cold and the rain people would be dumped in the so-called resettlement areas with only tents for shelter. Of course the first victims of the illnesses and deaths that followed were young children and old people.

Others, individual men or women or whole families, were deported to rural areas, where there were no jobs, no available land and no housing. People were abandoned there to die.

Banishment to remote areas was also used, especially for leaders who were regarded as likely to cause trouble wherever

they were. People like Ben Baartman were banished to places where they had no connections in the hope that they would die there. Some did, but Ben and others did not. People who were 'foreign natives' according to the authorities, were deported. Elizabeth Mafekeng was one of these, sent to Lesotho.

The other harassment inflicted on us was at work. This funny country had labour legislation which recognized some people as workers, with some rights, but excluded others, in fact the majority of the workforce, because of their black colour. For instance, black workers had no right to strike and their unions were not recognized and could not negotiate on their behalf.

These comrades I am writing about were leading the struggle under these difficult conditions. We could see no light at the end of the tunnel, but the struggle continued.

The South African state was so powerful and had the resources to oppress us only because the so-called democratic western world supported the Apartheid regime. Apartheid was able to give many western companies marvelous profits. This was particularly the case for the arms industries and those who traded in our cheap agricultural products. This only began to change when the ANC decided to send people around the world to win the support of workers and other progressive people to put

pressure on their governments to stop this support.

Probably each of the comrades I am writing about here deserves to have a whole book written about them, and perhaps some people will be able to tackle that enormous task one day. Meanwhile, I am just compiling a roll call, with a few notes about each person, to ensure that their names and their powerful contributions are not forgotten in the new South Africa that they spent their lives struggling for.

# 1 BEN BAARTMAN

## *Worcester ANC Branch*

Ben was born in Molteno, in the Eastern Cape on 1st March, 1924. His father was a farm worker, amongst other things driving a tractor. His pay was between one and two pounds a month. He was a one of a big family, with 4 brothers and 2 sisters. They all lived on the farm, where there was no school.

Luckily for Ben, the farmer that his father was then working for decided to move and take Ben's father with him to a farm about 15 or 16 miles from a school in Cambridge, near East London. Ben was about ten years old and it was only then that he started school, walking there and back each

day, and he was only able to get as far as Standard Two.

While he was still at school he started working as a golf caddy, and later as a garden boy for which he earned ten shillings a month and plates of food.

He got his first real job when he signed up with a recruiting agent and went to work as a miner in the Springs gold mine in Johannesburg. There he came across one of our great leaders, JB Marks who was the first president of the African Mine Workers Union, a leading communist and an ANC leader too. This encounter influenced Ben

greatly. When he went home to Molteno, where his family were living again, the people found him changed, and thought he was asking too many questions about why things were as they were. This worried his mother who did not want any trouble, but more importantly attracted the attention of the police who threatened him with the sjambok.

After another contract in the mines he was expelled from Johannesburg because of his involvement in a strike, and he decided to go to Worcester, 50 miles outside of Cape Town where mates he knew from Molteno were working.

When he got there he soon found an old friend, Joseph Mpoza and found that he had the same way of thinking as himself. Joseph was already involved in the ANC and Ben joined too. Together with others, including Julius Busa, Joseph Ngulube,



George Mpinda and Joe Ndamoyi they went on to build the Worcester Branch into the most important ANC Branch in the Western Cape.

Worcester was the site of a big textile factory, the Hex River Textile Mill, employing more than 2000 African and Coloured workers, belonging to a French company. Ben went to work there. He joined the Textile Workers Industrial Union and helped to organize the union in the factory and then led struggles to improve the poor pay and conditions that existed. He was clever enough to know that if you are not strongly organized you will soon be out of the factory gate if you present serious demands to the employer. One of the strengths of the work force was the unity between the black and coloured workers.

Ben was one of the founder members of the local SACTU Committee in Worcester, and was elected Chair at their first meeting. The textile workers were then working

closely with the powerful Food and Canning Union, led by Ray Alexander.

These young men, Ben and his comrades, worked strategically to organize Worcester. They divided up responsibility for the trade unions and the ANC, with a Coordinating Committee led by Ben. They actually included in the Coordinating Committee an Indian woman called Issa Dawood whose family had a shop. They used to meet at her place and she helped to raise money for leaflets etc. Later Issa was arrested during the Treason Trial, the only Indian woman to be arrested in the Western Cape.

Ben came to be regarded as very troublesome by the authorities. He created a high level of political consciousness in all the communities around Worcester on the farms and in the factories and mills. Touching the farm workers in particular was not to be

tolerated. The ‘boers’ (farmers) were the main constituency of the Afrikaaner Government and the supply of cheap, docile labour on their farms had to be protected by all means. I was not at all surprised when they banished him to Zululand.

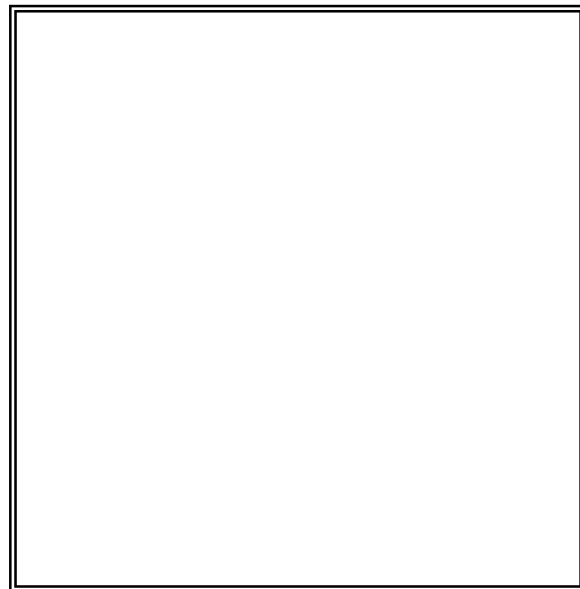
Later this tough Ben re-appeared, in Zambia, still as troublesome as ever. I was running the London office of SACTU and I invited him to come there and write his rich story. He did this and we published it – Ben Baartman: The Autobiography of a South African Textile Worker<sup>1</sup>.

Ben Baartman was the leader but the fighting spirit of all the Worcester seven

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<sup>1</sup> The autobiography of Ben Baartman is based on interviews transcribed and edited by Margaret Ling. Published by SACTU in 1988. Accessible at <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/tradeunions/benbaartman.html>

should be remembered with pride. Ben, Joseph Mpoza, Julius Busa, George Mpinda, Joe Ndamoyi, Joe Ngulube and the honourary ANC member Issa Dawood all made very big contributions to the struggle for freedom and democracy in our country.



## 2 JAMES and MARGARET BOOYSEN

### *Rylands ANC Branch*

James and Margaret Booyesen – it is difficult to write anything separately about their political lives as they seemed to have decided to always go everywhere together. I used to think that if it could be arranged, they would die on the same day and be buried in the same coffin. James was chairperson of the Rylands ANC Branch and Margaret was the secretary, and both were therefore *ex-officio* members of the ANC Regional Committee. They were keen and committed members.

Their branch was rather small, because Rylands, like Athlone, had a majority of residents who were designated ‘coloured’

so at that time were not eligible for membership of the ANC. Rylands was one of the areas allocated under the Group Areas Act for Coloureds, as part of the regime’s crude attempt to divide and rule the oppressed. Coloureds were a bit less harassed than we were, and the regime tried to sell the idea that they were the only black group that belonged in the Western Cape. All the rest of us were foreigners who required permission to be there. The only exceptions to this requirement were those relatively few Africans who had been born in the Western Cape. James and Margaret happened to be in this category and

this was why they were able to live in Rylands. (Of course, whites could live anywhere, regardless of what part of the country they were born in, or, indeed, even if they were foreigners – as long as they were racist and preferably rich.)

Rylands then was surrounded by open woodland which separated it from the townships of Langa and Nyanga East and West. It was a very strategic place for us and the comrades there played very valuable roles as the struggle intensified.

It became a halfway refuge for many of us when we were forced to move out of places like Kensington, Maitland and Cape Town itself to the Nyangas. We had to move ourselves, our families and all our possessions over considerable distances and our members in Rylands gave us somewhere to rest.

This half way position gave Rylands other functions for us too. Because it wasn't an African township, there was less surveillance so the ANC rented a house in an area called Welcome. One of our comrades, Aaron Gaika, opened up a herbalist shop there that we used as an underground office and a hiding place.

When I came back in 1990, I found that both of these good comrades had died.

Thinking of Margaret and James always makes me smile, because of an incident that happened one Sunday afternoon. Every one was relaxing before the week ahead when we received the news that Nelson Mandela had arrived in the Peninsula, and he wanted to meet with as many comrades as possible immediately.

We were suddenly confronted with the presence of this national leader who was

underground and whom the racist regime was desperately looking for. As far as they were concerned he was a dangerous man who should be killed first and questions asked later. We decided Rylands was the safest place to take him, but the chairperson and secretary were nowhere to be found. We managed to track down other comrades who quickly found a venue for a meeting in the church hall.

Mandela went to the front of the hall and started to address us. In the middle of the meeting Comrade Booysen, who had had a few drinks, arrived and asked loudly why we were holding a meeting in his area without him. Of course, ordinarily he would have had every right to ask that, but it was not the right thing to say when this big figure, our leader, was in our midst.

Everyone was speechless, it had all happened so suddenly, but before we had

recovered Nelson jumped down from the platform, grabbed Booysen by the scruff of his neck and threw the poor comrade out of the building. It looked so easy, as if James was made of paper and weighed nothing and Nelson returned to the platform at once as if nothing had happened and resumed speaking. The ANC volunteers who were guarding outside the building explained to James who was there and he quietened down and remained outside.

Before he left Nelson referred to the incident and said that Comrade Booysen should not be castigated, and should certainly remain Chair of the branch, which he did. Perhaps Madiba knew of the loyal work of Rylands Branch under the leadership of the Booysens, and felt he had been a little hasty in his rapid response!

# 3 JULIUS BUSA

## *Worcester ANC Branch*

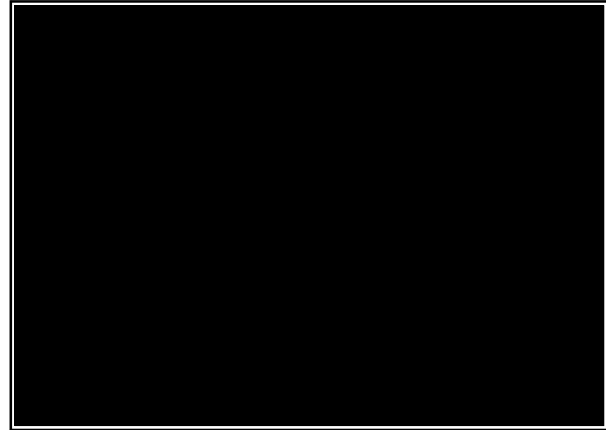
In Worcester, the ANC, the Trade Unions and the Vigilance (Residents) Association were all led by a group of men who came from Molteno in the Eastern Cape, supported by a remarkable Indian woman, Assa Dawood. One of these men was Julius Busa, and among the others were Ben Baartman, Joseph Mpoza, Joe Ndamoyi, George Mpinda and Joseph Ngulube.

Julius and his comrades were all officer bearers, shop stewards or committee members in all the key organizations. The men were all workers with strong roots in the textile or food and canning industries. When SACTU was formed they became an even

stronger force in the town, as the coloured workers joined the struggle.

In 1956 when many ANC leaders were arrested and charged with High Treason, Julius Busa and Joseph Mpoza from Worcester were amongst those detained. I met them at the military aerodrome where we were all collected to be transferred to Johannesburg and we went through experiences together that I describe elsewhere. Assa Dawood was also a Treason Trialist, which can be seen as an acknowledgement by the authorities of the great contribution that she was making to the struggle!

While we were in prison in Johannesburg the Apartheid regime was building up its oppressive structures, including a new prison in Worcester. There were several reasons why they picked this particular site. One was that this was convenient for the supply of cheap labour to the farms in the locality. Every morning farmers would come to the prison and pick up however many men they needed that day from the petty criminals that the prison was willing to hand over. The prisoners carried their prison food with them and were returned at 5pm. Of course this was generally a popular way to spend the day for prisoners, who got out of their cells and into the sun, with the opportunity to supplement their rations with fruit when the farmers were not looking.



But the prison was intended to served another purpose in this militant Worcester, that of intimidating local people. It was large and imposing, like a cathedral looming over the small town, and it brought a flood of uniformed government employees to staff it.

In general, more prisons were needed to cope with the increasing number of arrests

as repeated States of Emergency were declared in response to the intensification of the struggle.

Later, in one of these States of Emergency, Julius was the only leading comrade who managed to escape arrest in Worcester. In Cape Town it was myself, Fred Carneson and Sonia Bunting who temporarily evaded the net of the Special Branch. I used to meet Fred in the park behind the Red Cross Childrens Hospital at pre-arranged times, so heavily disguised that if we did not have signs by which to identify ourselves we would never have recognized each other.

We decided that a major ANC action would send a message to the regime that we were not intimidated by the arrest of so many leaders, and that Worcester, which was one of

our strongholds, would be a good place to carry this out. Sonia and Fred got some leaflets printed and I was delegated to go to Worcester with them. I managed to locate Julius, and have a discussion with him and he agreed with our proposal. I handed over the leaflets, he consulted with his comrades, and the next day Worcester went up in flames !

The principles of unity and collective leadership shown by the leaders of the movement in Worcester made the ANC Branch there the most militant and most successful in the Western Cape. There is still much for us to learn from them today. Their lessons and their achievements must not be forgotten and the people of Worcester and indeed the whole Western Cape should find a way to commemorate them.

## 4 AARON GAIKA

### *Kensington ANC Branch*

Aaron was another character in our Kensington Branch. He had been born in Cape Town of a royal Xhosa line, a prince who, like Nelson Mandela, rejected traditional hierarchies and committed himself to the democratic struggle. He became an important committee member of our branch.

Because he was born in Cape Town he was amongst those who had an exemption from carrying a pass and whose right to reside did not depend on having a job, as it did for most of us.

This made it possible for him to open a shop selling herbs, and he soon became a

prosperous businessman, attracting customers from all the racial groups in Cape Town. This amazed me, because I had always been told that whites were civilized people who did not believe in things like herbs, unlike backward blacks.

We took advantage of the opportunities provided by Gaika's herbalist shop. It operated as an ANC centre point for leaving messages and we had meetings there too, pretending we were customers. Aaron liked that, because a crowd around was a good advertisement. We also were able to reach to a captive audience of those waiting

to see him, getting over the ANC message to new people and some of them joined us. He had a useful telephone there too.

I was taught to drive by Gaika in his car and using his petrol. He was always willing to share whatever he had with his comrades.

Aaron went on to open other shops selling herbs in other centres around the Western Cape. That suited the ANC very well, and we were able to organize around these shops too and set up ANC branches in places we never thought possible.

Because he was exempt from carrying a passbook and he owned his house in Kensington, he was never touched by the mass eviction of Africans from there. We encouraged him to stay so that we could have meetings at his place, relatively unharassed by the police.

We used every loophole that was available to us to advance the struggle and comrades like Aaron were prepared to run big risks in doing this. If it had been discovered that his herbalist shops were nothing else but a front for the ANC they would have been closed down and he would have been imprisoned for many years.

One day after the racist regime had declared a State of Emergency, Gaika and Oscar Mpetha came to my house to warn me that the police were going around picking up people. I had already heard this and had gone on the run and Lindiwe told them that.

Instead of leaving at once, they made the mistake of asking her to go and buy them some liquor from the shebeen next door. I suppose they just wanted a break from the pressure we all lived under, but this lack of vigilance cost these great comrades dearly.

While they were drinking the police arrived looking for me. Instead they found Aaron and Oscar and were happy to arrest both of them instead. They were released after the end of

the State of Emergency, but I understand that Aaron later spent a long time in prison. I never saw him again after 1963.



**"Fifteen more,  
Sergeant. We've only  
got another 23 million  
to go."**

Tony Grogan, Cape Times

## 5 GILBERT HANI

### *Langa ANC Branch*

Gilbert was born in Tembuland in the Transkei. He migrated to Cape Town to make a living, leaving his wife and family at home. He became a small businessman, selling soft goods (shirts, vests, trousers etc ). This was a very difficult time, you could do nothing unless you were prepared to cooperate to some extent with the Apartheid system. Gilbert had to have a permit to do business and he had to balance this with being a member of the ANC.

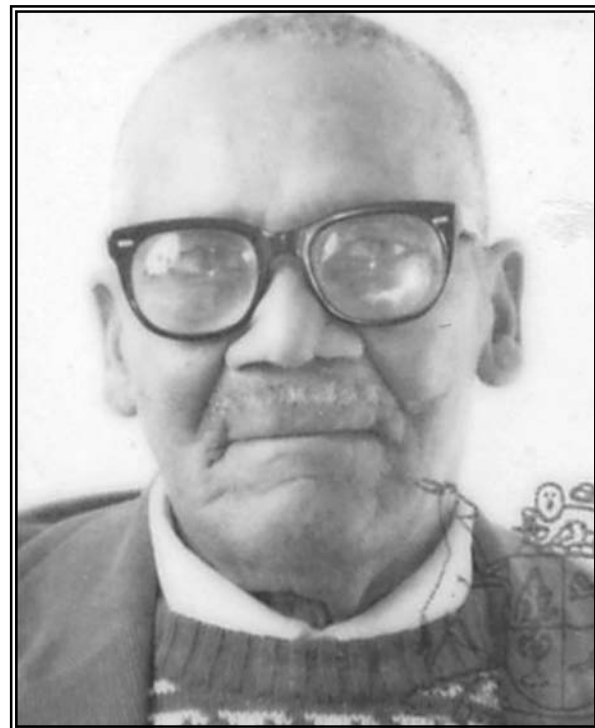
Langa held the only Pass Office for Cape Town and a lot of Langa residents worked there. There were two whites in

charge, a Mr Rogers and his deputy, but for the rest, the system was run by people who might be your neighbours and who probably were police informers, so ANC members in Langa were all walking a tightrope. Gilbert was very good at that, otherwise he would have soon lost his permit to sell his soft goods.

When his son Chris (then known as Martin) finished his degree at Fort Hare and came to Cape Town to further his studies in law, I had a meeting with Gilbert to discuss whether we should involve Chris at the top level in the ANC. Gilbert thought that it

would be good for him, especially as he was reading law. He thought that experience with the movement might sharpen him up, making him more like our great lawyer Sam Kahn. He thought we needed a black Sam Kahn. We co-opted Chris to the ANC Regional Committee straight away.

Gilbert was among the leaders in Langa Township who organized against the stooge Kaiser Matanzima, who was the tribal chief of the Tembu in the Transkei, being able to speak to meetings of migrant workers in the townships. The idea of these meetings was to force the workers to think of themselves as citizens of the Bantustan, with “urban Bantu councillors”, appointed by the chief, as the only people they needed to get in touch with if they had problems, rather than become involved with the people’s organizations like the ANC, the trade unions



and other community organizations. This scheme was aimed to boost the authority of the Bantustan system and emphasise that migrant workers were not citizens of South Africa. Matanzima never even reached the meeting hall when he tried to speak in Langa and had to have a police escort to escape, and the whole Bantu Councillors project came to nothing.

Gilbert's militancy did not go unnoticed and the regime started to harass him. On one occasion Gilbert and I were both arrested and charged with murdering a policeman. This was a lie of course. Yes, policemen were being murdered, but not by Gilbert or me, or any other ANC leaders.

When that charge fell through for lack of any supporting evidence, we got

information that Gilbert was to be deported to the Transkei, to Matanzima's regime. The ANC Region decided that Gilbert should rather go to Lesotho to create staging posts for comrades leaving South Africa to go for military training, and returning. He worked there with Elizabeth Mafekeng to help comrades proceed to Lusaka via Mozambique. Some of the comrades who are leading South Africa today went through Gilbert Hani's hands, including his son Chris.

When the people of Langa come to compiling the Roll of Honour of Langa people who devoted their lives to achieving our freedom, the name of Gilbert Hani deserves a proud place amongst them.

## 6 MILTON HANI

### *Kayamandi ANC Branch, Stellenbosch*

Milton Hani was Gilbert Hani's brother and Martin (Chris) Hani's uncle and was one of the outstanding ANC leaders in the Western Cape. He was Chairperson of the Kayamandi Branch of the ANC. Kayamandi is a township in Stellenbosch, the home of the Afrikaans university which produced many of the leaders of the Nationalist Party, the architects of Apartheid, including Prime Minister Dr Malan etc.

Only Milton Hani could be running an ANC branch at the front door of our enemy without being banned, deported or imprisoned. Milton was a small businessman,

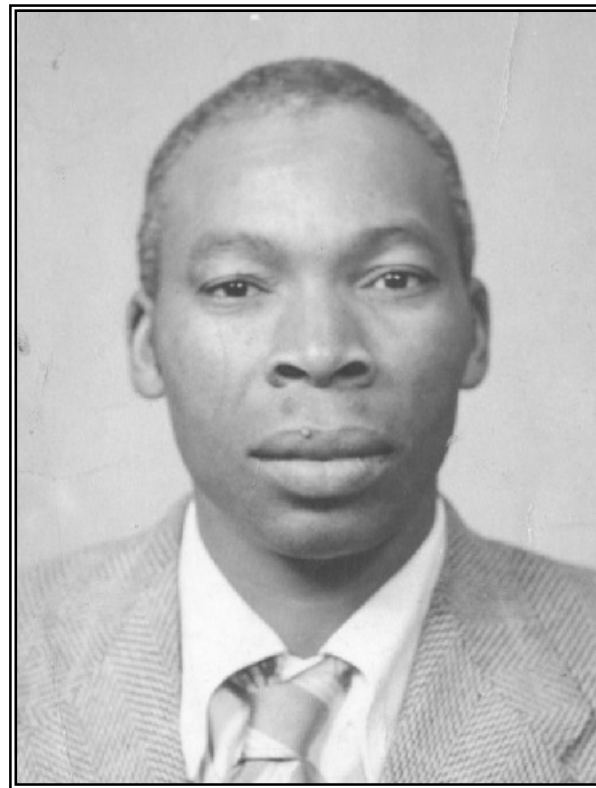
with a tiny shop in the front room of his rented council house. Luckily this was the only shop in that township and was located at the entrance to the township.

Everyone passed it going to or from work and called in to get something to eat during the day, or food to take home - bread, tea, sugar or whatever they needed for their evening meal. Whilst they were buying, a lot of discussion took place and of course the politics of our country were always at the forefront, so ANC policies were well known in Kayamandi.

When the woodworkers at a wood factory in Retreat, near Cape Town, went on

strike, Kayamandi township and Milton Hani became very important to the trade union movement. It was discovered that there was a twin factory, owned by the same company, in Stellenbosch so Hani opened up his shop for strikers from Retreat to have secret meetings with workers from the local wood factory. It was essential for these meetings to be secret, for we had no permits to be in Stellenbosch and in any case if the Special Branch had found us near the factory they would have us arrested.

The shop became a base for us to organize the Stellenbosch workers, which was very risky for Hani because if this was discovered the shop would have been closed down immediately and he would have lost his livelihood and probably been deported, if not imprisoned. Hani, like so many of our people, ran that risk, confident that in the end our



country would be free, even though then there was not even a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel.

Milton played an important part in ANC structures in the Western Cape. He spoke excellent Xhosa and was very articulate in his mother tongue. You could be sure that at Regional Conferences the Chair would often call on him to sum up the discussion on a resolution. After that nobody could think of anything to add and the Chair would just say 'thank you' and move on to the next item.

It should be remembered that this was a time when the oppression was growing by the day but the ANC was still sticking to its policy of non-violence in response. In our region, particularly in Cape Town which had traditionally been 'liberal', with many mixed communities, the imposition of Apartheid was deeply felt and frustration was growing

amongst those who believed that non-violence had served its purpose and that the time had come to add active defense of our people to the policy. The youth in particular were already talking openly at ANC meetings of policy change.

Milton, with his Xhosa eloquence was able to cool the tempers of many of us by pointing out to us that we had to remain united, and this meant being patient. We should pass resolutions expressing our views, and these would go to the Provincial Conference. If they were carried there, they would go on to the agenda at the National Conference and then if they were approved, the ANC's policy would change. Until that happened, we must support existing policies. Milton, with a talent for expression and persuasion which not many people have, helped ensure that the ANC in the Western

Cape did not forget that we were part of a united national ANC.

I believe that Milton Hani belonged to the cream of the leaders that our country produced during our struggle. I hope that

when we are ready to build monuments to local heroes, Comrade Milton Hani will be one of those honoured in Kayamandi, or maybe in Stellenbosch.

# 7 NKOSANA MARTIN (CHRIS) HANI

## *Langa ANC Branch*

Chris Hani played a major part in the recent history of our country, and others have written and have still to write his full story. He is mentioned here in this brief outline of the ANC in the Western Cape from 1953 to 1963, just to record his political origins and that he was one of the young people who worked in the ANC Youth League under Elijah Loza.

When Chris came back to the Western Cape after completing his junior degree at Fort Hare, he was the first person in our region with higher education. He had decided that he wanted to practice law and he joined

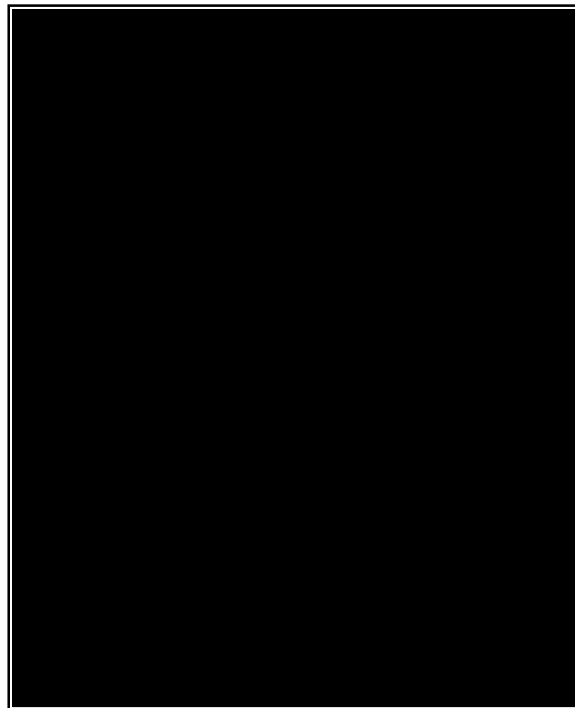
the law firm of Scheffer and Scheffer. He started to play a valuable role in the ANC Youth League and his father and I decided it would not do any harm to have him co-opted to the Regional Committee of the ANC. After all, Mandela and Tambo had done the same, combining studying law with political involvement. It would help to make him even sharper in defending us when ANC people were in trouble with the racist laws.

He agreed, and definitely the standard of work in our region improved as Chris got going and another young man who had been at Fort Hare, Sidney Skweyiya, joined him.

They began to organize and bring in others, students etc, to help with our work. We were badly in need of people who could produce well-written material to take our message to students and other educated people.

But we (and they) got carried away and Chris got involved in all sorts of other things too. We were not thinking properly and we put these valuable young people into danger and they were arrested with the rest of us. It turned out that the authorities were watching our activities, waiting to strike when it was convenient for them, and when they could do us the greatest damage, so that it would take us a long time for us to regroup and recover.

One night three of us were arrested, myself, Chris and James Tyeku (the owner of the car) in a car full of leaflets. Faldon Mzwonke who had helped produce the



Archie Sibeko (left) and Martin (Chris) Hani  
in Matero, Lusaka 1965

leaflets was arrested later and we were all charged with being members of a banned organization, the ANC<sup>2</sup>. Albie Sachs, now a Supreme Court judge, defended us and got us out on bail but the case was drawn out for a long time and we were all even more closely watched by the police, causing disruption to our work and seriously damaging the ANC. Eventually, the ANC leadership instructed us to go abroad for military training, rather than wait to be sentenced and then be detained indefinitely in prison.

Chris went on to become a senior MK leader and returned home in 1990 to play a significant part in the negotiations to end

Apartheid and create a democratic South Africa.

He was elected General Secretary of the South African Communist Party. Shortly afterwards he was murdered outside his house. Our country deeply mourned the loss of a man who had made such a great contribution to our freedom, and probably had an even greater contribution still to make.

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<sup>2</sup> See my autobiography, *Freedom in our Lifetime*, Indicator Press, 1996 for the full story. Also available at: [www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/congress/sactu/](http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/congress/sactu/)

## 8 BERNARD HUNA

### *Kraaifontein, later Nyanga East ANC Branch*

Bernard Huna was born in the late 1920s in Mhlanga village near Dordrecht in the Eastern Cape. He married Emily Mohanjana and they had 6 children.

Bernard was a straightforward man, rather short tempered by nature (like me) but he kept this under control. He was very disciplined and very dedicated to the movement.

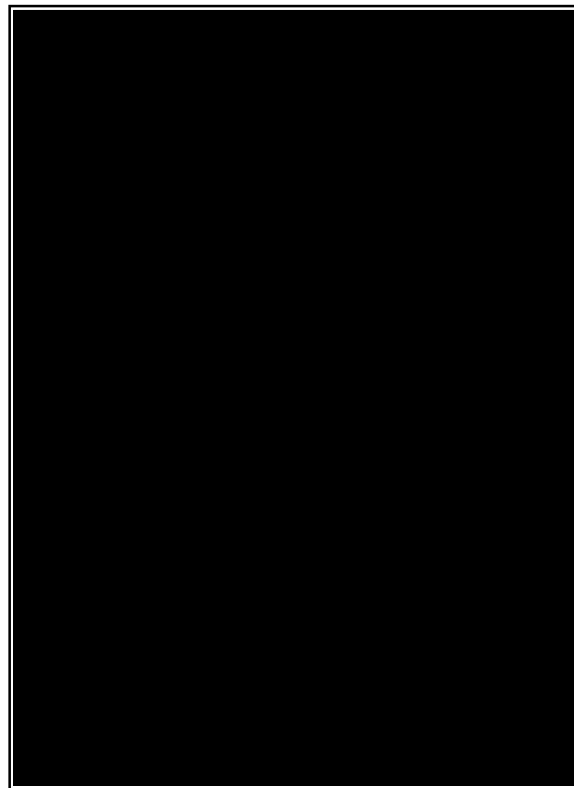
We knew each other from ANC Regional activities but we became closer when the Group Areas Act was enforced in the Western Cape. Kraaifontein was designated a 'Coloured' area, meaning that

only people classified as Coloured could own or rent a house there. Bernard and his family, like so many others, were thrown out of their house and dumped in Nyanga East, at the same time as we were being dumped in Nyanga West.

You might find it amazing that these forced removals, making Africans homeless, usually took place in winter, and this was no exception. In the winter the Western Cape is cold and wet. In the townships there was no drainage at all and it was really horrible, with deep mud and stagnant water and no chance of digging pit latrines.

The worst victims of these conditions were young children and old people. There was a sharp increase in the number of deaths, some due to the cold, given that the only shelter that was provided by the regime were tents. Our conclusion was that this was planned to demoralize Africans and discourage others from coming to the Western Cape. At worst we thought they were trying to reduce what they called the black danger by murdering us by every means at their disposal.

During the period that the removals were taking place there was other demolition work being done by the regime, aimed at the trade unions. A bill was passed prohibiting 'mixed' trade unions, and this forced us to organize separate African unions. The President General of the ANC, A.J. Luthuli, called upon all members of the ANC to join



the trade union that covered their industry, and if there was no such union, to form one immediately.

Bernard Huna was a leading member of the ANC in our region and a communist, and of course he responded to this call. He was working in a garage in Observatory and approached the recently set up local SACTU committee to ask us for help. It was not very difficult to get a union going, as by good luck there were other leading ANC members also working in the garage industry, like Zollie Malindi and Matthew Ntaba, and between them they were able to set up a provisional union committee until proper elections could take place. This was a fortunate development both for SACTU and for the ANC, for these comrades were able to make sure that SACTU and the trade unions were regularly discussed within the ANC structures, and this

could only be to the benefit of the movement as a whole.

Bernard Huna was soon co-opted onto the District Committee of the SA Communist Party, the highest organ of the CP in the Western Cape at that time, replacing Bernard Gosschalk who had volunteered to stand down to create the vacancy. This was also important in strengthening the joint working of components of the movement. Bernard Huna was able to get CP publications into the townships and his involvement helped to answer those who wanted to portray the Communist Party as an elitist organization, belonging to white people.

The last ANC Cape Provincial Congress before the ANC was banned was held at Paarl. Oscar Mpetha was elected President and Bernard and myself were elected to the Provincial Committee. This was

a huge stride forward for the Western Cape. It was the first time, as far as I know, that a Provincial Congress had been held in the Western Cape, rather than in the Eastern Cape, let alone that the President was based in the Western Cape, meaning that this was the headquarters during his presidency. Perhaps this was a recognition of the strength and unity of the movement that people like Bernard had helped to create in the Western Cape.

I was together with Bernard until 1963 when I was sent overseas for military training, and I never saw him again after that. Soon after I returned in 1990, I heard he had

died and I went to his funeral. The family had decided to make it a private occasion. It was not an ANC funeral and nobody was able to speak about the part he played on the road to the freedom and democracy we enjoy today.

If I had been able to make an address at the funeral, I would have said that he made a huge contribution to our struggle in the difficult years of the fifties and early sixties and that I had an enormous respect for him, a respect that all the activists of that time shared wholeheartedly. Bernard Huna was one of the heroes of the struggle and he should not be forgotten.

## 9 NELLIE JIBILIZA

### *Athlone ANC Branch*

Nellie Jibiliza was the only woman active in the Athlone Branch. Athlone was a predominantly coloured area and at that time only Africans could join the ANC, so the branch was quite small. However there were a number of good, active comrades there who exerted a bigger influence in the region than you might expect from a small branch. Nellie, together with Greenwood Ngotyana, Zollie Malindi and Eric Lusaseni represented their branch on the Regional Committee.

Though married, Nellie had no children, and so she was able to be delegated to represent the ANC Region at meetings and

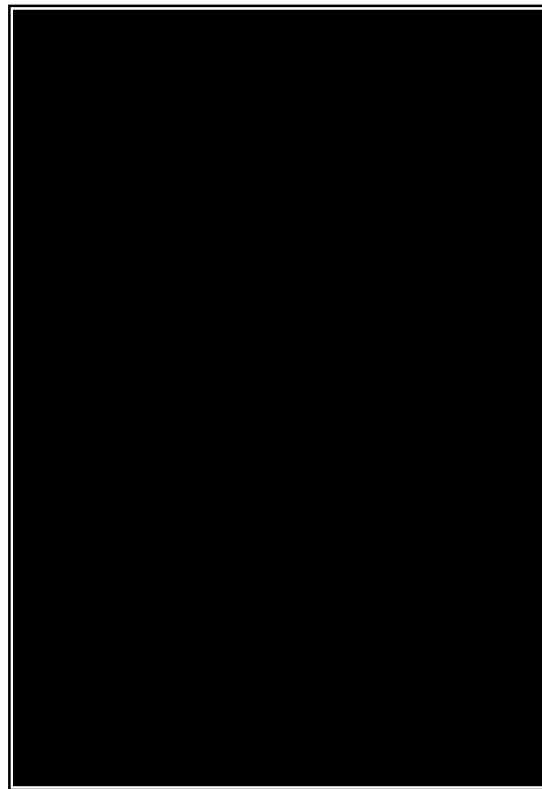
conferences away from the Western Cape, which many of our other capable women were not able to do.

She also became a national committee member of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW). This organisation, like the South African Congress of Trade Unions and the South African Communist Party, had adopted a non-racial constitution and so, like SACTU and the SACP, it was hated by the Apartheid regime.

One of the major campaigns of the Federation was against the regime's intention to extend the hated Pass Laws to women. The

authorities decided to do this because more and more black women were going to work in factories, mostly in the textile, clothing and food and canning industries. Since they did not have passes, they did not need permits to work and this gave them too much freedom. They started to form strong trade unions and the regime was not prepared to allow this.

Nellie, as a FEDSAW national committee member, automatically became a leader of the anti-pass campaign in the Western Cape, organising the collection of signatures and leading our delegation to Pretoria to join in the demand for the Prime Minister to receive the petition against passes for women which contained millions of signatures. A huge demonstration with thousands of women crowded into the gardens in front of the Union Building, with the police unable to stop them. (The gardens



were completely crushed and had to be built afresh afterwards.) The Prime Minister did not come out to accept the petition but the women had sent a powerful message.

Although of course the regime was able to get its way in the end, by making it illegal for employers to take on anyone who did not have a pass, this struggle deepened the understanding of women who were already involved in politics and drew many more into the wider movement against Apartheid.

Nellie Jibiliza's travels to take part in these subversive movements and their activities were monitored by the Special Branch, and whenever a state of emergency was declared she was one of those detained.

A few months after being released from detention, Nellie announced to the regional committee that in future she would

not be able to go to meetings in places like Johannesburg, because she was pregnant. There was a silence, and then a burst of clapping. Somebody remarked that we never thought that Nellie would ever get pregnant!

She gave birth to a boy. I did not see him as a child, but he must have been brought up to be political, like his mother. More than twenty years later I met a young man in Lusaka who introduced himself to me as Nellie's son. He was already an officer of MK.

I saw Nellie when I returned home to South Africa in 1990. She looked old, but she was still active in the movement, still a committee member of the FEDSAW. I soon got heavily involved in ANC politics in the region, and then was called to Johannesburg on Trade Union business. I then suffered a stroke and returned to my wife in England to

recover. When I returned in 1994 it seems that Nellie, like many other comrades whom I had briefly met in 1990, had passed away.

I now regret that I and others of the old stalwarts did not get together as soon as those from exile had returned home to discuss many things, including what you might call making our political wills, saying what we wanted to happen when we died. Who should speak at our funerals (and who should not!)

There seem to be so many comrades who were there when we arrived home but have since disappeared, and it seems that at

their funerals they may not have received the tributes they should have from those who knew their contributions and sacrifices in their younger days.

Why didn't we do this? My explanation is that we were all dumbstruck by the sudden collapse of what was supposed to be the mighty, invincible, racist regime. Their indoctrination had affected us all psychologically and at that point we did not quite realise we were free and could plan our future lives – and our deaths!

# 10 MZIWAKE KONDLEKA

## *Nyanga West ANC Branch*

Mziwake was a young man living with his parents next door to me in Nyanga West. I did not know his parents but I knew him and he was special to me and to other ANC leaders who lived in the neighbourhood, including Elijah Loza, Joseph Ndabezitha and Joseph Mtyekisane.

At the time when we were intensifying the implementation of the M-Plan (Mandela Plan), Mziwake was chosen by local ANC members to be the leader of our street, in charge of up to ten households. This was a big responsibility for a young comrade, as it involved talking to and getting to know everyone

in that street, even those who had no interest in politics (except when they found themselves in trouble and needed help!). He handled the position superbly and everyone liked him. Our place became safe, so well organised that criminals tended to avoid it.

When we opened our first military training camp in Mamre, Mziwake was there, giving a lead to other young men. This led to him being among those who were selected to go abroad for further military training. He became one of the most disciplined officers in MK, never in trouble in the camps, unlike some comrades, and here too, everyone liked him.

In the 1967 campaign Mziwake volunteered to be among the first to cross the Zambezi River. He was with the contingent who crossed near Livingstone and he fought in the battle of Wankie against the combined forces of the South African and Rhodesian Armies. (South Africa had decided to send its army to aid the illegal Smith regime to help them crush internal opposition and repel the ZAPU Liberation Army, at the same time blocking the ANC's route home.)

Mziwake died in Wankie, protecting an injured comrade, Eric Nduna who had

been wounded and could not walk. Eric urged him to move on, but he refused and they were both killed by the fire of the enemy, not prepared to surrender, but firing back to the last.

Mziwake Kondleka proved himself to be totally dedicated and extraordinarily brave, a comrade that the Western Cape and the whole country should be proud of. We should salute him and never forget his contribution to the democracy that we enjoy now. A man like this should be rewarded with the country's highest honours.

# 11 LUCAS KUKULELA

## *Langa ANC Branch*

Lucas Kukulela was born in the 1920s, in Herschel in the Eastern Cape. He was an ANC activist, and when SACTU was founded he became a founder member of the SACTU Regional Committee in the Western Cape. He was also a founder member of the Hospital Workers Union, along with Matthew Ntaba, who, like him, worked at Groot Schuur Hospital, and Christmas Tinto who worked at Karl Bremmer Hospital. The hospital workers members they recruited were valuable assets to the trade union movement, not least because many of them had some education and could speak English.

When one talks of ‘founder members’ of organizations, that fails to describe the sacrifices made by some of these comrades, like Lucas. He gave everything he had to these organizations including his precious time. He also spent his money, for example to buy paper to print membership forms and pamphlets and to pay his train fares to travel to recruit members in hospitals all around the Western Cape.

This was all done in his spare time and was in addition to taking every opportunity at work to organise his fellow hospital workers.

On top of all this, every day at five o'clock he came to SACTU's office to do administrative work, such as writing up minutes of meetings and checking what needed to be done by the leadership to follow up the decisions of the meeting. In fact, many of the smaller unions, that had no full time worker, depended entirely on him to get things done. He arrived at the office every working day to do this work and was so reliable that if ever he did not appear we got worried, thinking something must be wrong.

Discussions with Lucas continued even after meetings, as we travelled on the

train back to Langa, right up until we parted. He was what I call "a twenty four hour organizer".

Lucas was a thoughtful man and he used to say that every small success was a brick in the wall towards building a strong union. His slogan was "look after the small things and the big things will look after themselves". This philosophy worked in practice as we found when we were trying to organize in a factory. If we succeeded in winning one worker's grievance, we would find a lot of workers wanting to join the union. That was Kukulela.

# 12 ELIJAH LOZA

## *Nyanga West ANC Branch*

Elijah Loza was one of the two greatest heroes of the struggle in the Western Cape against the Apartheid regime. Together with Looksmart Ngudle he gave his life to protect his comrades. He was arrested and tortured but refused to give the enemy the information they wanted about ANC activists and he died, tortured to death, rather than talk. There can be no greater sacrifice than that.

Elijah was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1916 in a village called Ncera, near Alice in the Eastern Cape, not far from where I was born. He was my mentor, because as well as

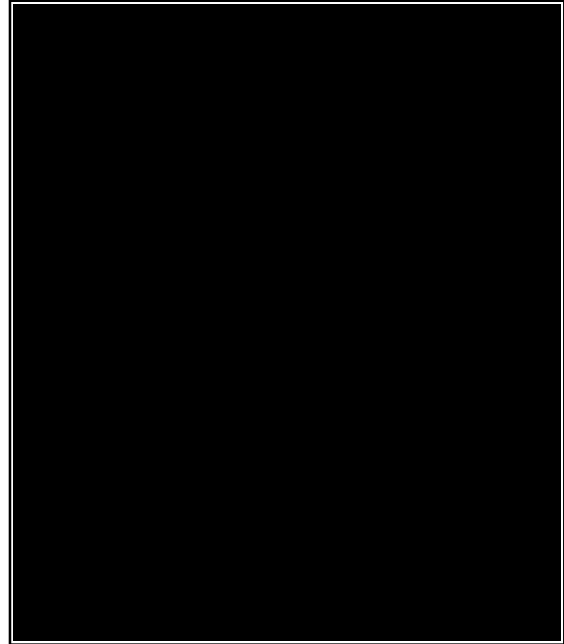
coming from nearby villages, we shared the same politics. I was always proud that my senior comrade, who came from our villages was the one giving us a lead in our struggle at such a difficult period.

He looked very young for his years. I could not believe it recently when his children told me when he was born. I always thought he was just 2 or 3 years older than me, not 12 years. He got on well with young people so he was consigned to take charge of the youth portfolio for the whole of Nyanga. This was where he showed what a good leader he was.

There are four particular instances which always come to my mind, in which this son of Ncera saved the ANC from being rubbed out in the Western Cape. The ANC in our area was always rather weak and a potential victim of any manoeuvres by the racist regime.

The first concerned the Pan African Congress (PAC). This was about the time that they were formed as an 'Africanist' breakaway from the ANC. We were convinced that the government had a hidden hand in this and that some of their leaders were traitors. A PAC group started to come to Langa to try to intimidate ANC people and others into joining them and Loza led the youth in forcibly defeating their attempts. As far as he was concerned, anyone who stood in the way of a united struggle had to be stopped.

The second event was when Kaiser Matanzima, the Bantustan stooge leader, tried to make a visit to Langa. He had barely



entered the township when the police had to rescue him and get him away. Loza's Youth were blocking the way to the hall he was supposed to go to, and he had no chance at all of reaching there.

The third time was when the racist regime tried, behind the backs of the people, to appoint what they called Urban Councillors in the townships, which were nothing else but government stooges. Because of the campaigns of Loza's Youth this was snuffed out when no-one was prepared to be appointed, and no council was formed in Nyanga West.

The fourth example of Loza's successes was when the Youth managed to chase out all the African policemen who lived in the township. They were spies

living in our midst, and we could not tolerate it.

These were just examples. There were many other campaigns in which Loza played a leading part – in fact he was a leader in every political campaign in the Western Cape during this period. In addition, after the creation of MK, he was involved in setting up our military training camp in Mamre.

He was an impressive character who inspired and trained young people like Chris (Martin) Hani and Zolile (Wilson) Nqose, who became so important in the struggle that lay ahead.

No wonder the Apartheid police hated him. They could not shake his commitment or break him so they decided to murder this great leader in a Cape Town police station.

# 13 ELIZABETH MAFEKENG

## *Paarl ANC Branch*

Elizabeth Mafekeng was born in Lesotho. Like many people in Southern Africa she was drawn to one of the big towns to make a living. In her case that town was Cape Town, where she arrived in 1927.

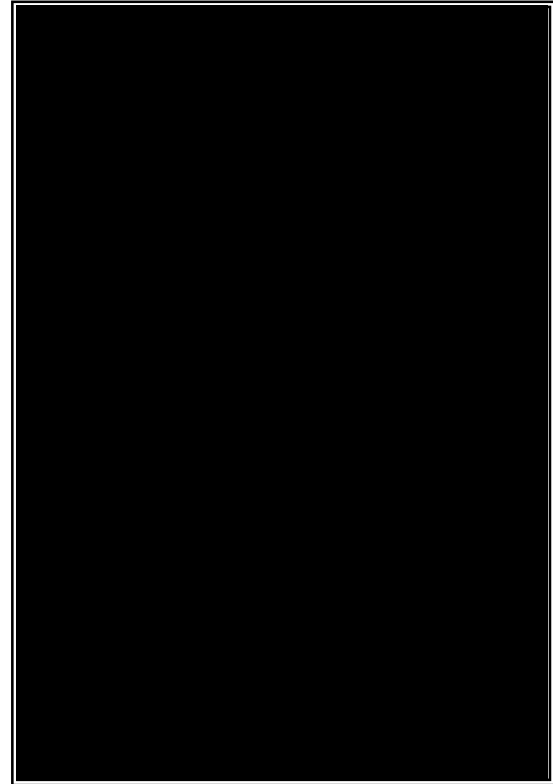
By 1939 she was working at H Jones and Co, a canning factory. There she had to work long hours in bad conditions for seven shillings and sixpence per week. As an African worker she was not covered by any industrial legislation so that, for example she had no protective clothing and no entitlement to sick pay or workman's compensation. These conditions turned her into an active trade unionist.

I first saw her at a meeting in the Stal Plein building, at the Food and Canning Workers Union office. She was an impressive, beautiful, young-looking woman, but amazingly she already had 11 children. (I could not believe that until I saw them. Some of them were working in the same factory as their mother.) She was a shop steward at H Jones's and a member of the National Committee of the African Food and Canning Workers, whose meeting it was.

At the same meeting there were both Ray Alexander, General Secretary of the Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU),

and Oscar Mpetha, General Secretary of the *African* FCWU. In such meetings they had to pretend that there were two separate meetings going on. For example, they would have one discussion and pass one resolution, but there would have to be two sets of minutes, with two different sets of movers and seconders of the motion. It was laborious and stupid but had to be done because in my country then “mixed” unions were not allowed. The FCWU would have been de-registered if it had been discovered that they were flouting the law.

Elizabeth quickly became President of the African FCWU but in practice where she worked at H.Jones she was respected and valued by members of both unions, that is, workers of all racial groups and was regarded as the leader of all 2000 of them.



The food workers were the backbone of the formation of SACTU and Elizabeth, as President of African FCWU, was one of its founders. She was also an ANC leader in Paarl and a National Committee member of both the ANC Women's League and FEDSAW.

Because of her positions she travelled widely. She represented South African food workers at international conferences, for example in Bulgaria, at the World Youth Festival in Warsaw and in China. She had no passport, of course, so she had to leave the country illegally. When you think of it, it must have been daunting for a black woman with little education to go on these long journeys, but Elizabeth did it!

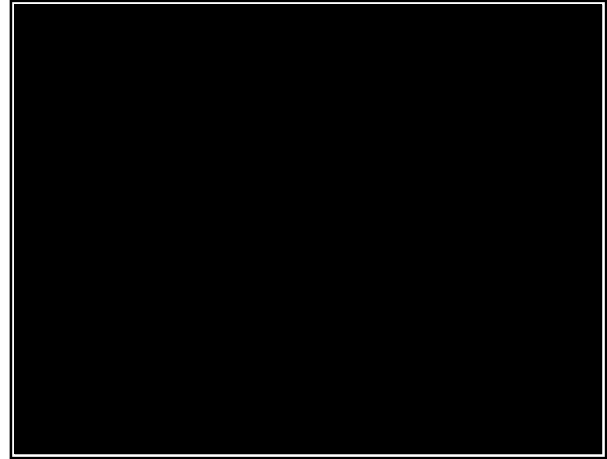
A woman like this was too big for Paarl! This town was surrounded by farms, and farm workers were joining the food

union. There were even strikes on some farms, supported by other food workers. Farmers were the real constituencies of the Boers and so the racist regime had to do something about this troublesome person.

When the news broke that Elizabeth was going to be banished to Vryburg, our leaders decided that they were not going to give the regime the pleasure of serving her with the banishment document. She should leave for Lesotho before they could do that and be driven there by comrades. This plan was delayed by an extraordinary development. When the people heard that she was to be banished, they flocked to her home in hundreds, swearing that she would be banished over their dead bodies. As the numbers grew and people refused to leave the house, the leadership recognised that dead bodies were becoming a real possibility and

decided to quietly take her away to Lesotho to avoid bloodshed. The mass of people only left the place when they were told she had already reached Maseru in Lesotho.

This short piece cannot do justice to the achievements of this outstanding woman – someone should write her full biography. She sacrificed everything, she gave birth to 11 children, she led her trade union, led the ANC Women’s League, defied the racist laws of the racist regime and dared to represent the oppressed workers of South Africa in international conferences. That we enjoy such international goodwill today is due in no small part to the solidarity that people like this wonderful woman, Elizabeth, were able to inspire.



Elizabeth Mafekeng with Nimrod Sijake  
(far right), Patrick Molea (with hat)  
and two other comrades.

# 14 SIMON MAKHETHA

## *Elsie's River ANC Branch*

Simon was born in Lesotho, a poor small rural country, surrounded by South Africa. Like most African men in Southern Africa, he was forced to leave home to look for work in the city and in his case this meant going to Cape Town.

He immediately got involved in the struggle for liberation. He and many like him never believed that Lesotho was anything else but part of South Africa, even though at that time it was still a colony of Britain. Because he was very capable he quickly became one of the top leaders in Cape Town, and was both

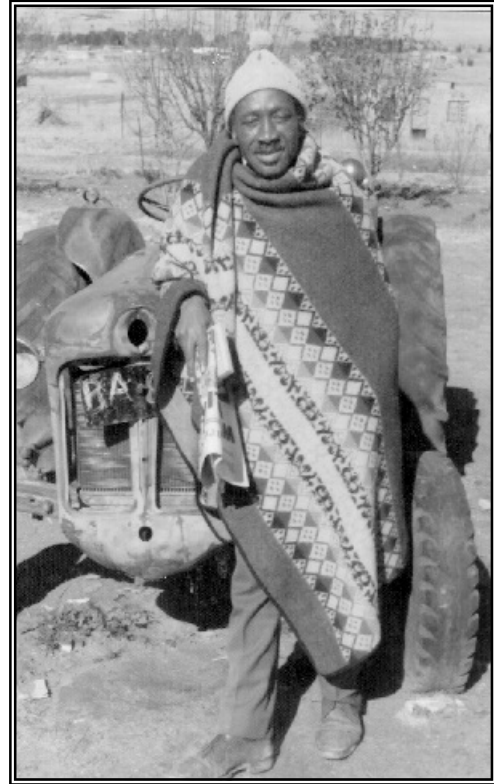
Regional Secretary of the ANC and a member of the Provincial Executive.

At that time he was a skilled worker in the printing trade, and so was getting a regular weekly wage, but he was not happy. He was not prepared to accept the position that he, like all African workers in this and every other industry, was working alongside other workers who had recognized unions and had some protection from labour laws and could even go on strike without breaking the law. Meanwhile he had no trade union, no protection and indeed no rights at all as a worker. There was great resentment over this

in African workers and Simon decided that he was going to do something about it.

He decided that he was going to resign from his relatively well-paid job to organize his industry. When we heard about this everyone thought that this was a mad decision. It was a brave undertaking, sacrificing his standard of living and it carried the risk, that the government might deport him. Without employment he could be sent back to Lesotho, as many others had been.

He resigned to become a union organizer and soon got involved in another industry too, organizing the Cape Town docks. These workers there had even less rights than others, as they were all employed as casual labour. After a time the dock workers came out on strike and as a result most of them were deported to the Transkei. Simon was deported too, in his case to Lesotho.



It turned out that Simon being in Lesotho was not such a bad thing for the movement, because he created a half way house in Maseru, a bridge for comrades going abroad for military training via Lesotho, and for those returning to South Africa. This was at the time when Chief Jonathan Leboa, who was friendly to the ANC, was Lesotho's Prime Minister.

The South African army later raided Maseru, targeting Simon's house as well as others. Luckily he was not there and they just

destroyed the contents. Others were not so lucky, and many South Africans and local people were killed. I stayed with Simon when I accompanied OR Tambo to the funerals of comrades murdered in the raid.

It seems the Apartheid regime remained determined to punish Simon for the important role he played in the liberation struggle, because he disappeared later, obviously kidnapped and murdered, as so many comrades in South Africa were in the last days of Apartheid.

# 15 CHARLES MAKHOHLISO

## *Kraaifontein ANC Branch*

Charles was born in the early 1920s in the Transkei, and became a migrant worker in the big cement factory near Stellenbosch. There was no provision for wives and families in that area, so he was, like most of his workmates, living alone. He became very active organizing the workers to join the trade union and he was one of the three people from the Kraaifontein branch who served on the Regional Committee. He was a big, strong man, very reliable and one of the most dedicated cadres that the ANC had in the Western Cape.

He was not someone who liked to speak at meetings, but he had a talent that was

invaluable to the ANC. He had a powerful baritone voice and made himself the lead singer whenever we came together for our numerous marches and meetings.

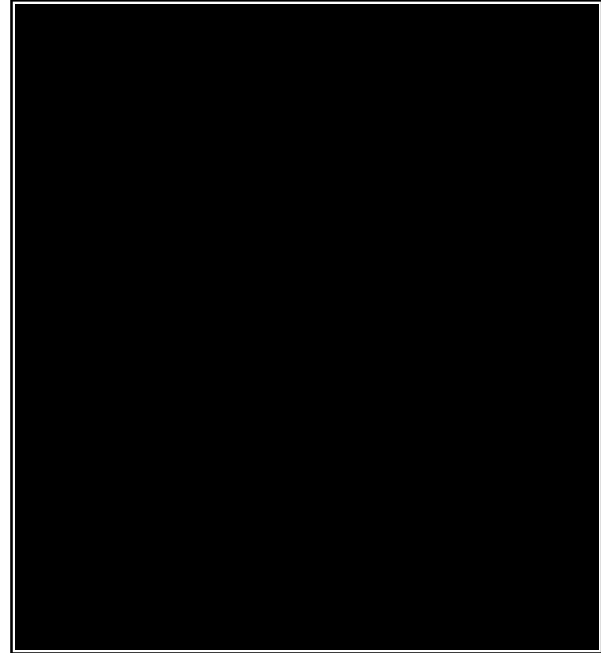
In South Africa the gift of singing is very important in building unity and soothing tempers when there are disagreements in a meeting, as there often are. Charles would always come in, in that situation, starting to sing some revolutionary songs, some of which he had written himself.

At any meeting, be it a public meeting or the regional committee, when the chairman opened proceedings the first item on the

agenda was the singing of the national anthem. Somehow Charles always managed to be there on time and everyone would look to him to lead the singing, which he did with pleasure. Wherever he was there would be singing and a crowd always gathered around him because singing is very popular with our people.

The ANC liked this. There was often no money to produce leaflets and the singing of Charles was used as a clarion call to let people know that a meeting was starting nearby. His size and his voice made Charles conspicuous to our people, but also of course to the police, who called him a noisy troublemaker.

Perhaps it was no surprise that such a well-known figure in the region was among the twenty people from the Western Cape who, in 1956, were arrested and charged with High Treason.



In the Treason Trial there were 156 of us from all over the country, confined in the Fort Prison in Johannesburg. There the national leadership also soon recognized Charles's talents and asked him to lead the singing of the national anthem with which we started every day. He also led on many other occasions when our spirit of unity, commitment and determination was reinforced by the singing of revolutionary and traditional songs, including every morning as we were transported in a big van from the prison to the Drill Hall for the judge's hearings. As we were driven across the town in what they called 'The Singing Box' crowds lined the streets to listen to this remarkable powerful singing coming from people on trial for their lives.

When we were discharged from the trial, all of us, including Charles and myself, were served with banning orders and confined to our respective magisterial districts so we were not able to attend meetings or take part in any other public activity, and I do not remember seeing him again. I was sent out of the country in 1963 and not able to return until 1990 and then I was told that Charles had died at home in the Transkei while I was away.

It was sad indeed that this talented son of Africa did not survive long enough to enjoy the fruits of the freedom that he dedicated his life to achieving. We owe it to him to make sure that his name is inscribed on our Roll of Honour so that he is never forgotten.

## 16 LETITIA MALINDI

### *Athlone ANC Branch, later Nyanga West ANC Branch*

Lettie was born near Stellenbosch on 26 March, 1922. When she grew up she moved to Cape Town, and in 1950 she joined the ANC. In 1952 she got married to Zollie Malindi and they had 4 children. When the children were all in school she was able to get more active in the ANC again and she was elected Treasurer of the Athlone Branch, a position she continued to occupy until the family, like all the other Africans in Athlone, were forced out by the Group Areas Act and had to move to Nyanga West.

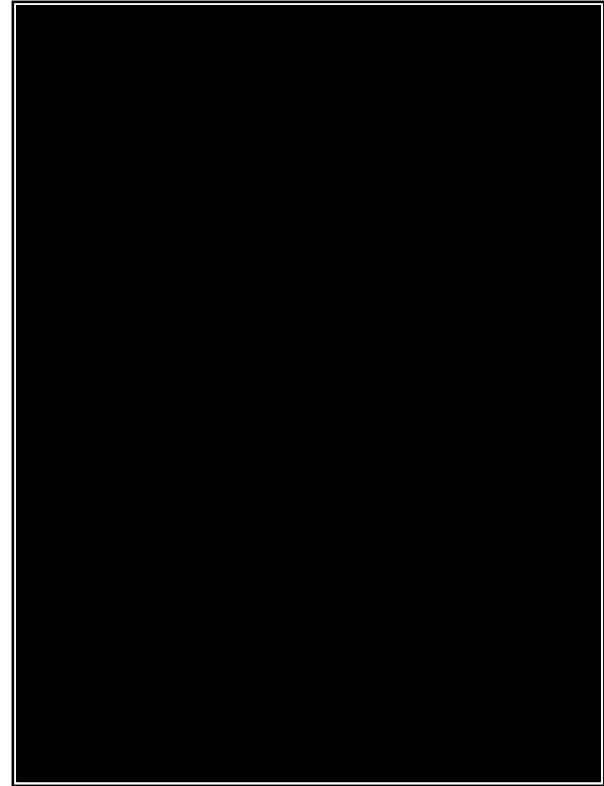
Before that she had already been asked by the ANC to go and act as an

interpreter for the Black Sash. (The Black Sash had been created by rich white women with a social conscience, who had the time to offer help to African people who were being victimized by the Apartheid system, for example being threatened with deportation or having grievances to do with work.) Many who came to the Black Sash offices were unable to speak English and as the white women generally did not speak any of the vernacular languages, an interpreter was essential. As the struggle against Apartheid intensified, so did the harassment and the demands on Black Sash increased. Letitia's

job there became full time and the interpreter became the administrator.

Of course, people visiting the Black Sash office often had broader questions to ask and needed to know about the politics of their oppression, and Letitia was able to discuss these things too – as ANC had intended.

Black Sash got involved in something else. They took the regime to court over the application of the Pass Laws. One clause said that most African men must “produce on demand” their passes. It was under this section that almost every man went to prison time and again, because they did not happen to have their pass on them when stopped. If they had taken off a jacket with the pass in the pocket whilst working in a garden, for example, they could be arrested if they went outside to cut the hedge and were thrown in the police van and locked up. The Court



agreed with the Black Sash submission that those who passed this legislation intended it to control influx to towns, so that men who had passes but did not have them on them, should be able to produce them at a police station later, and not be arrested on the spot.

It was not long before the Black Sash began to be seen as an emerging political trouble spot for the racist regime, and hate letters from National Party supporters began to appear in the newspapers, attacking Black Sash. Questions were raised in Parliament, with the Black Sash being compared to those others bent on spoiling 'good

Bantus', including the so-called Native Representatives, Sam Kahn, Brian Bunting and Lee-Warden, who had all been banned. The Black Sash should be banned too they said, but these ladies were the wives of powerful men on the South African scene, many of them millionaires, so the Black Sash survived.

It was the patient work of Letitia that persuaded Black Sash leaders to take up injustices like this. By this work, which did not result in her hitting the headlines or ever getting arrested, Letitia contributed equally to the struggle for justice and freedom as those better known agitators who went to prison for actions like publicly burning passes.