

## **Non-racialism, non-collaboration and Communism in South Africa:**

### **The contribution of Yusuf Dadoo during his exile years (1960-1983)**

Paper presented at the Conference on

‘Yusuf Dadoo, 1909-2009:

Marxism, non-racialism and the shaping of the South African liberation struggle’

University of Johannesburg, 4-5 September 2009

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It has often been argued by our opponents that Communism was brought to our country by whites and foreigners, that it is an alien importation unacceptable to the indigenous majority. Our reply to this is that the concept of the brotherhood of man, of the sharing of the fruits of the earth, is common to all humanity, black and white, east and west, and has been formulated in one form or another throughout history (Yusuf Dadoo, 1981).<sup>1</sup>

This paper examines Yusuf Dadoo’s contribution to the thinking and practice of non-racialism during his years in exile. Non-racialism refers to the rejection of racial ideology – the belief that human beings belong to different races. Instead, it stresses the idea of one human race. Organizationally, it implies the recruitment of individual members without regards to colour, ethnic or racial criteria. Non-racialism has long been a subject of debate on the South African left as socialists struggled with the problems of how to organize political movements in a manner that did not reinforce state-imposed racial and ethnic divisions and promote non-racialism in conditions of extremes racial inequality.

The South African Communist Party (SACP) was formed in 1953 as a clandestine body that prioritized alliance politics over the development of an independent profile. In the 1950s its members sought to influence the African National Congress (ANC) and other

organizations aligned to the ANC through the Congress Alliance. These included the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the Coloured People's Congress and the white Congress of Democrats, as well as the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). Aside from SACTU, these organizations reflected the categories of African, Indian, Coloured and European that the South African state had deliberately constructed over decades. In this respect the Congress Alliance has been described as multi-racial rather than non-racial.

Although the SACP described its own tradition as one of non-racialism, building non-racialism in practice, even amongst the exile community, proved difficult and controversial.<sup>2</sup> Not only was it a question of overcoming the preconceptions and prejudices with which all South Africans were inculcated and of building trust through joint work. The very condition of exile inevitably produced a disjuncture between the perceptions and priorities of external leaders and developments in South Africa and the Southern African region. Moreover, the exile condition challenged the notion of African identity that was then common in South Africa and that, because of the political, economic and spatial organization of the country, gave that identity (and likewise Coloured, Indian and European identity) a real basis. Exile raised the question of who could call themselves African and what this meant.

Yusuf Dadoo was intimately involved in these debates. As a child he was exposed to an unusually diverse mix of peoples and ideas that set the stage for his later non-racial orientation. Born in South Africa into a middle-class Muslim Gujarati family, Dadoo attended a nearby Coloured school until state law compelled him to a distant Indian school. In 1917-18 he spent a year in India with his family. The next year, back in South Africa, he heard Clements Kadalie of the newly-launched Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union – a black trade union – address a meeting. In 1929 he left to study in London, where he became involved with the campaign against British rule in India and the anti-fascist movement and was introduced to Marxist ideas. He met numerous activists, including the Indian-born British Communist and one-time MP, Shapurji Saklatvala. Dadoo's father, concerned about his son's political activities, insisted he study medicine in Edinburgh. But he continued his political activities in Edinburgh, becoming involved with the local Independent Labour Party. Qualifying as a doctor, in 1936 he returned to South Africa where

his medical practice brought him face to face with acute poverty. He began organizing against anti-Indian laws and for the unity of oppressed black South Africans, joining the National Liberation League and the Transvaal Non-European United Front in 1938 and the Communist Party in 1939. He was influenced by Gandhi and in 1939 postponed a planned passive resistance campaign on his advice, but his political approach was also very much shaped by Pandit Nehru's ideas about unity. In 1946 he launched a passive resistance campaign against anti-Indian legislation, the next year he signed the Dadoo-Xuma-Naicker Pact that laid the ground for the Congress Alliance formed in 1955.<sup>3</sup> In exile Dadoo became a crucial advocate for non-racial membership in the ANC. His opposition to the South African state's attempts to co-opt Indian elites into separate representation articulated with the popular movement against collaboration with racial structures that developed in the 1970s and 1980s. In his last years, he used his status in the international Communist movement to highlight the case of South Africa.

### **Armed struggle and non-racialism**

Throughout most of the twentieth century the racially-based South African state practiced a combined strategy of repression, division and cooptation as a means of controlling the majority of the oppressed black population. Over the decades, people classified by the state as Africans, Coloureds and Indians were all subjected to various types of discriminatory and oppressive legislation that stripped them of political and economic rights, but also strengthened the sectional divisions amongst them and created distinct sectional identities. The launch of apartheid in 1948 signalled an intensification of this oppressive and exploitative system against which South Africans had developed a long tradition of non-violent protest. By then, the South African liberation movement had built up a diverse political tradition that was manifested in a range of political organizations holding different ideological viewpoints but all fighting for democratic rights.

The intensification of national oppression in South Africa was in marked contrast to the changes sweeping across the African continent. As the Cold War intensified and pressures on imperial powers still recovering from the Second World War mounted, the African political terrain underwent profound subterranean shifts, giving rise to working-class and

anti-colonial protests. For a new generation of Africans, travel overseas enabled them to envision themselves not as subjects of separate European colonies, but as Africans. Ghana, the first sub-Saharan African country to win independence, became a focal point for this new Pan-African political movement. Its leader Kwame Nkrumah invited the pan-Africanist and anti-Stalinist George Padmore to advise him on African affairs. In April 1958 Padmore organized a conference of the eight independent African states that paired Algeria and South Africa as two pivotal bastions of European supremacy in Africa. Nkrumah championed the notion of 'positive action' based on non-violent change, but Algeria's armed struggle rapidly challenged this non-violent paradigm.<sup>4</sup>

In December 1958 Ghana hosted an All-Africa People's Conference for delegates of nationalist parties across Africa, including South and Southern Africa.<sup>5</sup> Nkrumah's non-violent approach permeated the conference, which aspired to 'formulate and proclaim our African Personality based on the philosophy of Pan-African Socialism as the ideology of the African Non-Violent Revolution.' It hoped to develop 'concrete plans and work out the Gandhian tactics and strategy of the African Non-Violent Revolution'.<sup>6</sup> But Frantz Fanon, who was part of the Algerian delegation, argued passionately in defence of armed struggle. Africans had to form 'a national front, against inhumanity and poverty', he contended, using all available means, including 'force and violence' – a statement that met with cheers.<sup>7</sup> The conference resolution was a compromise, pledging 'full support...to all those who resort to peaceful means of non-violence and civil disobedience as well as to those who are compelled to retaliate against violence to attain national independence and freedom of the people.'<sup>8</sup>

These debates had a profound impact on South African political activists, for most of whom the 1960 Sharpeville massacre signalled the futility of non-violent protest and the need for new methods of struggle. The early 1960s saw a shift to armed struggle across much of the liberation movement. The SACP's decision to launch armed struggle caused some discord amongst its members, but most Communists supported the decision. An editorial in the *African Communist* that July signalled the Party's transition: 'the Nazification of the South African state' would make legal forms of resistance increasingly difficult. Inevitably, therefore, 'patriots and democrats will be compelled to an increasing extent to find new

methods of struggle which are “unconstitutional and illegal”.’<sup>9</sup>

In the meantime, the joint executive of the Congress Alliance authorized Nelson Mandela to set up an independent military organization that was autonomous from the ANC, which still followed a policy of non-violence. Later that year individuals from the ANC and SACP jointly launched *Umkhonto we Sizwe* [Spear of the Nation] (MK). Its manifesto described it as ‘a new, independent body, formed by Africans’ that ‘includes in its ranks South Africans of all races’.<sup>10</sup> Significantly, MK was organizationally autonomous of both bodies and was organized on a non-racial basis in which membership would be open to all regardless of colour or ethnicity. The common commitment to armed struggle raised the prospect that non-racialism could be achieved in practice within MK. But the approach had a pragmatic side as well. Mandela recruited white Communists who had acquired military skills in the Second World War and ‘had already executed acts of sabotage such as cutting government telephone and communication lines.’<sup>11</sup>

MK’s non-racial approach was reflected in its strategy and tactics. It considered four types of violence: sabotage, guerrilla warfare, terrorism and revolution. In the belief that whites would remain in South Africa after the achievement of democracy, it was not prepared to engage in terrorism against white civilians. Terrorism would undermine the attempt to build public sympathy, and thus be counterproductive, and it did not have the military resources for revolution. Thus, MK began with sabotage as the form of violence that would be least harmful to human life.<sup>12</sup>

Yusuf Dadoo certainly supported the transition to armed struggle, although he was not part of MK and was no longer in the country when it was launched. At the request of the SACP and the SAIC he had gone into exile in April 1960 and by May was in London; non-African Communists – those whom the South African state classified as European, Indian and Coloured – were generally unwelcome in other African states and often gravitated to London, while African Communists in exile could more easily base themselves in African countries.<sup>13</sup> While in South Africa the Transvaal-based Dadoo had built a political career based on a long commitment to passive resistance. Influenced by Gandhi’s notion of *satyagraha*, South African Indians had employed passive resistance techniques with great effect in their protests

against discriminatory laws.<sup>14</sup> While SAIC leaders such as G. M. Naicker and Nana Sita accepted and practiced Gandhian principles, Dadoo pragmatically saw passive resistance in tactical terms 'as a method of struggle'. Certainly by 1940 he accepted the concept of a 'just war', implicitly acknowledging the need for violence in particular circumstances. That year he described the second world war as 'an imperialist war, and therefore an unjust war. It is not a war to free the people, but to maintain and extend imperialist domination' – a position in line with the Communist International and generally accepted by Communist Parties around the world. 'This war could only be transformed into a just war for the preservation of Democracy and the defeat of Fascism', Dadoo went on to explain, 'when full and unfettered democratic rights are extended to the Non-European people of this county and when the oppressed peoples of India and the Colonial and semi-colonial countries are granted their freedom and independence'.<sup>15</sup> For these views Dadoo readily went to prison, but once the Soviet Union entered the war in June 1941, he changed his evaluation of the war.<sup>16</sup>

Dadoo's acceptance of violent struggle is signalled as well in his assessment of the 1952 Defiance Campaign. Despite the success of the 1946 Indian Passive Resistance Campaign, the Defiance Campaign, he noted 'was deliberately not called a passive resistance campaign....although it was non-violent. It expressed a more militant outlook, because most of the leaders had realised that in the situation of South Africa, where violence was the normal instrument of Government policy, there could arise a situation where no alternative would be left to the people...but to resort to violent methods.'<sup>17</sup>

Dadoo was, moreover, a proponent of the movement to unite South Africa's black population across the state-imposed racial and ethnic categories. He had early on taken a pragmatic approach to building unity amongst the oppressed. While expressing agreement with the Ten-Point Programme of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), he questioned whether unity could be built by mandating the acceptance of the programme as a precondition for actions. '[T]hose who have any experience of mass movements know that unity is built in the process of united action and not on any paper programme no matter how excellent it may be', he wrote. Instead, he argued, unity should be built by strengthening existing organizations and by calling their executives together. Thus, while supporting the

multi-racial association symbolized in the Congress Alliance, he was also committed to the non-racialism embodied in MK.<sup>18</sup>

### **Exile and identity**

Exile led to a profound rupture in Dadoo's life. In South Africa he had been a medical doctor with the prestige of an overseas medical degree, a well-known public figure who could pull crowds and whose particular constituency was the Indian community. In London he no longer practiced medicine, but instead worked full-time as an SACP functionary, while also representing the SAIC. Unlike the ANC, the SAIC was not banned in South Africa, although its room to manoeuvre was severely circumscribed due to political repression, and the Congress Alliance had agreed that the ANC should be the only national body to set up offices overseas.

In July 1960 Dadoo and fellow Communist Vella Pillay travelled to the Soviet Union to discuss contacts and support; in December Dadoo and Pillay went again, along with Michael Harmel and Joe Matthews. From then on Dadoo was a regular intermediary between the Congress movement and the USSR; this would prove a key role in light of the financial support provided by the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries. His work was frequently clandestine, although he soon became involved in international diplomacy on behalf of the anti-apartheid movement – travelling to India and Africa and lobbying the United Nations – and over time became a Communist icon, one whom Ronnie Kasrils described as an ‘old-style communist...for whom the Soviet Union was beyond reproach’. Yet Kasrils’ characterization of Dadoo was published in 1993, after the collapse of the Soviet Union had created shock waves on the South African and international left, leading to a profound rethinking of the socialist project. Dadoo, by contrast, lived at a time when the Soviet Union was a critical source of support for the liberation movement.<sup>19</sup>

Very soon after Dadoo's arrival in London he helped launch the South Africa United Front. This was an alliance of South African and Namibian national liberation organizations that aimed to promote a broad anti-apartheid agenda on the international stage, and on which Dadoo represented the SAIC.<sup>20</sup> But rivalry between the ANC and the Pan-Africanist

Congress (PAC) proved too intense. The United Front was dissolved on 15 March 1962. An article by a member of the pro-PAC Basutoland Congress Party described the ANC's leaders as the 'ideological stooges' of a 'frustrated clique of white "communist" racial supremacists'. Dadoo claimed that the PAC had maligned the ANC as 'the instrument of Communists, whites and Indian merchants and that it refused to allow 'the support of other well-known anti Apartheid forces in South Africa'. Both the attack and reply indicate an ambiguity in the usage of the categories 'white' and 'communist'. The episode signalled how politically charged the efforts to promote non-racial activity were to be.<sup>21</sup>

Several months later Mandela arrived in London after a trip across Africa to seek support for the armed struggle. It was an auspicious moment for those supporting armed struggle: Algeria became independent that June following its seven-year war of independence from France. During Mandela's trip he had been deeply affected by the African reaction to the ANC's close relationship with the SACP, which had a number of high-profile white leaders. The leaders of many African countries found it easier to sympathize with the PAC. When Mandela met with Dadoo and fellow Communist Vella Pillay, he informed them that from then on the ANC would be represented by Africans at international events; this was particularly important, he stressed, since the ANC's involvement in armed struggle meant it would need funds from other African countries. Dadoo and Pillay were not happy with this turn of events. Dadoo evidently felt that the ANC was 'preparing to depart from the non-racialism that was the core of the Freedom Charter' and kept asking 'What about policy?' But Mandela was adamant: the issue concerned image, not policy.<sup>22</sup> The exiled Dadoo was effectively being asked to step back into the Indian sectional identity that he had challenged while promoting unity across sectional lines in South Africa. The next year a statement by the SACP's central committee accused the PAC of 'whipping up anti-White chauvinism among African patriots'.<sup>23</sup>

### **Dilemmas of exile**

For most of the 1960s there was little overt political activity in South Africa. Alongside a massive wave of political repression, the South African state accelerated its efforts to strengthen apartheid by co-opting sections of the black middle class. This project entailed the

division of Africans into so-called tribal groups and their forced removal to arbitrary bantustans or homelands where they would be permanent residents, entering white South Africa solely as migrant or contract workers.

The state abandoned its perennial proposals to repatriate Indians, established the Asiatic Affairs Division, later reconstituted as the Department of Indian Affairs, and offered them advisory status in a South African Indian Council – the analogue of the Natives' Representative Council and Coloured Affairs Council that the state had earlier established as part of the agenda to erode the rights of Africans and Coloureds and which had been rejected by significant numbers of the targeted groups. Historically, the Communist Party had taken a tactical approach to the use of these structures; some of its members had initially participated in the Natives' Representative Council in order to use it as a platform for raising issues. By contrast, the boycott of such racial structures was a central plank in the NEUM's policy of non-collaboration, the promotion of which was seen as a means of political education.<sup>24</sup>

From the mid-1960s, when intense repression led to the collapse of the internal SACP and MK, the scattered exile leadership inevitably became more important. MK leadership effectively passed to the external ANC and thus became African only, unlike its original non-racial leadership. At a meeting in Prague in May 1965, the SACP's central committee agreed that the Party's leadership be transferred to the external mission. A secretariat or central executive committee was set up in London. Moses Kotane remained general secretary, assisted by Dadoo. The SACP saw its role at this stage as one of supplying propaganda inside the country as a means of educating and training prospective cadre. Dadoo, Slovo, Kasrils and Jack Hodgson recruited and trained couriers who were sent to South Africa. In this manner they managed to set up underground units to distribute propaganda internally.<sup>25</sup>

Yet the ANC's international profile as a specifically African organization that excluded those classified as Indians, Coloureds and Europeans caused tensions amongst London exiles. The ANC needed to mobilize and coordinate the exile community in London in support of the struggle. Sectional organizations may have made sense in the context of South Africa's extreme segregation, but they did not reflect exile conditions, and exiled non-Africans needed a political home. Non-Africans had made significant contributions to the

struggle, and some were serving long prison sentences. Those in exile did not feel that their contributions were fully recognized by the ANC and began calling for its membership to be open to all, irrespective of colour or ethnicity. The SACP itself was internally divided on the issue. Some communists argued that ANC membership should be open to non-Africans, but others opposed this: Pan-Africanism was very influential across the continent, and the visible role of white communists gave an impression of white dominance. Responding to these concerns, in the mid-1960s the ANC NEC created an ANC Collective led by communist Robert Resha (who opposed non-African membership in the ANC) and that included non-Africans; Dadoo and communist Reginald September were allowed to represent the ANC in international meetings.<sup>26</sup>

In September 1965 Tambo formed a very small committee of three communists, Dadoo, Slovo and Joe Matthews, in order to facilitate 'inter-congress cooperation at all levels'. However, the committee's composition evidently reinforced a perception that the debate on opening ANC membership to all South Africans was inspired by the SACP, even though several leading African Communists opposed the idea of opening the ANC to non-African membership. The committee favoured opening up ANC membership to all Congress Alliance members and proposed an interim council of war to coordinate alliance activities, an attempt, according to Ndebele and Nieftagodien, 'to revive the unity that had prevailed in the alliance'. However, its suggestions were largely ignored.<sup>27</sup>

The debate continued into 1966. A consultative conference of the Congress Alliance executives was held in Morogoro, Tanzania from 26-28 November to discuss these organizational problems. By this time Dadoo was so frustrated that he threatened to leave the alliance. 'The leadership, which is being given by the ANC, should be given by all', he argued.

We are making too much of a question that the Indian people are non-violent. In the sabotage movement, the Indian people have participated. It is not true that they did not want an armed struggle.....If it is a considered view of this meeting that the ANC can go it alone, let it be so. But is this a correct move? If it is not decided today to have a council of this type, we will be faced with the same problem in the not so distant future.<sup>28</sup>

He was supported by Flag Boshielo, Joe Matthews and Ray Alexander, amongst others, but the issue remained divisive and unresolved, and the conference rejected the proposal for a council of war. Although the ANC refused to accept non-African membership, it agreed to a three person steering committee of Tambo, Dadoo and Harmel to promote cooperation within the alliance.<sup>29</sup>

Outside South Africa, MK was facing difficulties infiltrating its troops trained in African and Eastern European countries back into South Africa. After their training most of the troops were marooned in army camps in Tanzania and extremely discontented with the prolonged inactivity.<sup>30</sup> To address this problem, in August-September 1967 MK launched the Wankie campaign in conjunction with the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army – the armed wing of the Zimbabwe African People's Union – with the dual aim of liberating Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and infiltrating MK personnel back into South Africa. This was followed by the Sipolilo campaign in March 1968. These were, significantly, MK/ANC ventures. Although the SACP's Kotane knew of the operations beforehand, the SACP central committee did not; Slovo, who had helped launch MK, learned of it in the press. The campaigns aroused the morale of people inside the country, but they were military failures and proved unable to infiltrate troops into South Africa.<sup>31</sup>

In 1968 Dadoo made an open appeal to Indians in South Africa – his first since his move into exile. The government was attempting to co-opt Indian elites into the South African Indian Council as a means of shoring up sectional identities. Dadoo called on Indians to boycott the council and thus to reject the Indian identity being imposed by the state. His words, which recalled the SACP's 1961 reference to the 'Nazification' of the South African state, could not have been more graphic: 'Remember the Judenraten (Jewish Councils) set up by the Nazis at the time of Hitler! The "representatives" of the Jewish community on these councils were used merely as instruments to facilitate the sending of hundreds of thousands of the Jewish people into concentration camps and the gas chambers.' Moreover, by noting the Indian comrades imprisoned for their roles in the armed struggle and calling on the Indian community to 'Heed the call of the ANC' and 'ally...with the freedom-fighters', the appeal allowed him to link non-racialism with armed struggle and express his commitment to the

ANC's leadership.<sup>32</sup>

By the late 1960s, the political terrain on which South African identities had been built was being eroded by the conditions of exile. Dadoo, the former public activist who had consistently challenged sectional identities, was still fighting over the right to claim his own identity. On the one hand he was urging Indians in South Africa to confront the state's enforced identities, on the other, he was fighting within the exile community for the tolerance of new and freely chosen identities. The South African state appeared as stable as ever, even though the map of Africa had been redrawn. The former British and French African colonies were now independent states. Southern Africa remained the last bastion of white supremacy and settler colonialism.

### **The 1969 Morogoro conference and non-racial organization**

The timing of Dadoo's appeal to the Indian community was significant in another respect. His public reminder of the role played by Indians in the armed struggle set the stage for his interventions at the ANC's consultative conference in Morogoro, Tanzania from 25 April – 1 May 1969. The conference was necessitated by the complaints from MK soldiers. Most of the delegates were from MK. They were also overwhelmingly African: out of some 70 to 80 delegates, five were Indian, three coloured and three white. Although the conference did not address the problem of infiltration, it was strongly critical of the ANC's exile leadership – for failing to address the needs of the soldiers at Wankie and Sipolilo, for the abuse of their positions and for their comfortable lifestyles. The executive resigned en bloc. The size of the executive was reduced from 23 to nine, the majority of whom were Communists.<sup>33</sup>

Dadoo, present as a delegate for the SACP, submitted a memorandum drafted by a group of SAIC exiles that argued that Indian exiles had been marginalized by the ANC. Whatever his role in drafting the memo, it furthered the debate on the role of non-Africans that he had been pushing, and about which individuals and groups had already made submissions. The conference decided that non-Africans could join the external ANC 'on the basis of individual equality', but could not be part of its national executive. However, it established a revolutionary council chaired by Tambo that answered to the ANC's national

executive and that included three non-African communists, Dadoo, Slovo and September; Dadoo became the vice-chair. The revolutionary council was to oversee all political and military work. Thus, MK was formally under the control of the ANC through its revolutionary council – a far cry from the ANC's non-violent stance ten years earlier and the first time, as Shubin notes, that non-Africans were included in ANC structures.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, Slovo had drafted most of the ANC's new *Strategies and Tactics* document, which reflected the SACP's thesis that apartheid was 'colonialism of a special type'. Asserting the primacy of armed struggle, it argued for a protracted rural-based guerrilla struggle, signalling its continued intention to develop an internal underground. It declared that national liberation was the first stage of the South African revolution, that its achievement depended on developing national and working-class consciousness and that liberation meant more than formal political democracy. Immediately after the Morogoro conference the ANC and SACP delegations held their first formal joint meeting. The aim, according to Slovo, was 'to discuss our common contribution to the struggle and our closer collaboration from then on'. They agreed to hold discussions and consultations, but not to have a public alliance – the Cold War effectively precluded that possibility.<sup>35</sup>

For the SACP the conference was a success: it had made significant inroads on the issue of non-racialism and it now had representatives on the revolutionary council that oversaw MK. Yet despite this success, when its augmented central committee met in 1970 to review the past decade, there was concern that although Communists were well placed in the ANC and MK, the Party itself was not functioning as a collective entity. The central committee still hoped to infiltrate MK cadre into South Africa to launch a 'people's war' combining armed struggle with mass mobilization and organization.<sup>36</sup> The committee's membership was expanded and Africanized and, no doubt reflecting the fact that it had been kept in the dark about the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns, it appealed to the Soviet Union, which agreed to a plan known as Operation J. Given the obstacles to penetration overland, the Soviets were to provide funding to train MK soldiers and to purchase a ship to land them on South Africa's eastern Transkei coast. Operation J failed, and the MK soldiers were arrested, to the consternation of the Soviets who reduced their annual financial support.<sup>37</sup>

Recognizing the virtual impossibility of infiltrating MK soldiers into South Africa, the SACP concentrated on sending small numbers of cadre back into the country, still determined to build an internal underground. In July 1971 it launched the clandestine organ *Inkululeko-Freedom*. The next year Dadoo replaced J. B. Marks as SACP chairperson. It may well be, as Mottiar suggests, that the establishment of the revolutionary council and his position as Party chairperson allowed Dadoo to play a more activist role. He was presumably more involved in the political underground than the military, although in the 1970s he began making regular trips to Tanzania and Zambia to visit the MK camps, where he shared the facilities and addressed the troops, evidently still a rousing speaker.<sup>38</sup> In September 1974 Chris Hani entered South Africa to set up an underground network. But work in South Africa proved too risky, and a few months later he moved to Lesotho. Until the mid-1970s, therefore, although the SACP was relatively successful at promoting a non-racial orientation in the exile ANC and had regained some say in the direction of MK, its dual plan to infiltrate troops and build an internal underground had effectively been stymied.

### **Black consciousness, non-racial workers' protests and Southern African upheavals**

Inside South Africa, meanwhile, the political terrain was rapidly shifting as new social movements emerged; state-imposed identities were challenged not only by exile activists like Dadoo, but by internal developments. The black consciousness movement developed in the late 1960s as stirrings amongst black university students culminated in a split in the National Union of South African Students and the formation of the South African Students' Organization in 1969. Black consciousness, which aimed to unite black South Africans across sectional lines, implied a rejection of government-legislated sectional divisions and of racial structures; hence, the popularization of non-collaboration during this decade, indicated by the massive resistance to the state's plans to grant independence to the illegitimate bantustans. Paradoxically, the Natal Indian Congress, dormant through the 1960s, was resuscitated in 1971. Black consciousness activists challenged the NIC to 'Think Black, not Indian', but some nonetheless decided to work inside it to contest sectional divisions.<sup>39</sup>

Dadoo was initially receptive to the idea of black consciousness. A report from the Party's secretariat to the central committee stressed that it 'warmly welcome[d] the assertion

of national identity, pride and confidence implicit in the overall concept of “Black Consciousness”. It is a fully justified and healthy response to the insulting arrogance of the white supremacists. The current spread of Black Consciousness is a contribution to the “psychological liberation” of the African people.’ The report saw black consciousness as part of the long history of struggle in which the ANC had played the leading role. But the report cautioned that ‘the term in itself does not express a coherent programme, still less an ideology.’ Essentially, the Party was concerned that the middle class intellectuals leading the black consciousness movement would not support the working class.<sup>40</sup>

In January 1973 a wave of strikes hit Durban, spreading across Natal and to the Witwatersrand. Significantly, Indian workers engaged in solidarity strikes with African workers on a scale not seen before. In January strikes of African and Indian textile workers closed factories in the Pinetown-New Germany industrial complex; in February, 16,000 African and Indian municipal workers at the Durban Corporation went on strike. Both black consciousness and white radicals engaged in solidarity support for these strikes, which showed real promise for a developing non-racial workers’ struggle. Black consciousness activists also campaigned against the South African Indian Council, of which Dadoo remained a vocal critic, describing it in 1974 as a ‘bogus body’. These early 1970s movements were invigorated by the independence of Mozambique and Angola in June and November 1975 respectively, after protracted guerrilla struggles in which the Soviet Union provided critical resources.<sup>41</sup>

The ANC-SACP exile leadership, however, seemed consumed by its own divisions. Tensions amongst the exile leadership over the role and influence of non-Africans remained a continuing issue. This culminated in the expulsion of eight members from the ANC in October 1975 and their efforts to form an ANC (African Nationalists) branch. The SACP responded with a long defensive tirade castigating the ‘gang of eight’ for its accusations of ‘conspiracy by the “Communists” and a “non-African clique”’. The ANC’s revolutionary council was overwhelmingly African, and included only one white, one Coloured and one Indian, it pointed out. While the ‘gang of eight’ could hardly brand African communists as anti-African, ‘the racist bogey...becomes a convenient weapon of attack against national

leaders like Dadoo and other non-African Communists.’ Ironically, racial tensions were dividing the exile leadership even as the internal movements were challenging state-imposed sectional identities and starting to display non-racial solidarity. But this undoubtedly reflected the dilemmas of exile, notably the psychological impact of their repeatedly frustrated efforts to penetrate South Africa, both militarily and politically. Fifteen years of exile, and they still could not get back inside; the Algerian war of independence had lasted seven.<sup>42</sup>

The next year, in June 1976, schoolchildren in Soweto launched a year-long protest – the Soweto uprising. This was supported by solidarity protests from Coloured schoolchildren in Cape Town. In short, a non-racial approach was developing out of these protest movements that were spreading like a wave across the country. The state’s crackdown following the uprising precipitated a massive increase in young activists fleeing the country, many of whom wanted to join the armed struggle.

By this time the SACP was openly critical of black consciousness for ignoring ‘the economic and class basis of South African racism’. While acknowledging its inspirational role, it now argued that ‘as an alternative to the ideology of our liberation front, it becomes a harmful demagogic cliché....and cannot appropriately express the vigorous revolutionary nationalism of our liberation movement.’<sup>43</sup> On 4 July 1979 the ANC issued a statement criticizing the efforts of the black consciousness movement to establish itself as a separate exile organization. While welcoming the young generation of exiles who left the country in the aftermath of the Soweto uprising, many of whom had been influenced by black consciousness, neither the ANC nor SACP wanted organizational pluralism outside the Congress movement.<sup>44</sup>

The SACP underground inside South Africa remained sparse and fragmented, and the mortality rate of MK soldiers infiltrating the country was extremely high. As a result, MK concentrated on hit and run actions from outside the borders. This was the period of MK’s ‘armed propaganda’, where the targets were carefully chosen to draw attention to the state and its personnel, but to avoid civilians. In key respects this reflected a growing political culture opposing collaboration with the state. There was a move to attack the property of blacks who worked within apartheid structures, such as councillors and police. Armed attacks

on police patrols, police stations, security force vehicles and property began to occur. There was some increase in the attacks on government buildings connected to the administration of apartheid. In the late 1970s MK was responsible for most of the armed actions inside South Africa, about one-third of which targeted economic installations, and one-fourth, the police. Armed propaganda, while limited in its political impact, nonetheless had a positive psychological impact on the internal struggle.<sup>45</sup>

Non-collaboration continued to be a central feature of the internal political struggle as the state intensified its efforts to divide and rule. In 1979 Dadoo and September were asked by the ANC's Political-Military Strategy Commission (created by the ANC's national executive and revolutionary council in late 1978-early 1979) to call meetings of cadres working in the Indian and Coloured communities in order to discuss the structures being imposed on those communities and the methods of organizing and mobilizing against them. In this domain, the SACP responded positively to internal developments, no doubt reflecting Dadoo's work.<sup>46</sup>

But the Party was sceptical about developments within the trade union movement. The year 1979 saw the launch of the Federation of South African Trade Unions, which was based on the concept of shop-floor democracy and eschewed formal political alliances. Communists figured prominently in the leadership of the exiled SACTU, and the SACP was antagonistic toward this legal, politically independent trade union movement. Parallel to this politically independent workers' movement, a Western Marxist intellectual current critical of the Soviet Union became very influential amongst South African radicals. In a series of articles in the *African Communist*, the SACP claimed leadership of the working-class movement, argued that unions should be subordinate to the Party and critiqued Western Marxism. In 1980 the SACP document *Forward to People's Power* argued that leadership of this escalating mass protest must be based on an effective underground. Yet MK was still unable to establish a viable underground inside the country.<sup>47</sup>

Reflecting this pressure, in the early 1980s MK was responsible for a significant increase in attacks on government and military targets. A bomb outside air force headquarters at Pretoria in May 1983 that killed 19 and injured more than 217 signalled a transition in the

orientation to soft targets: although individual ANC leaders regretted the loss of civilian life, the leadership as a whole justified the loss on the grounds that most of those hurt or killed were connected with the military.<sup>48</sup>

The 1980s saw the explosive development of a popular township-based uprising, much of which was based on the repudiation of African, Indian and Coloured collaborators in racial structures both at national and local-government levels. Tensions about Indian identity and political mobilization rose as the state increased its efforts to co-opt segments of the Indian population. In 1981 the state held elections for the South African Indian Council, whose members had heretofore been government-appointees. Indian activists in Natal and Transvaal launched a campaign to boycott the council elections. The boycott campaign was a resounding victory against collaboration with the regime's racial structures: only 8% of the Indian population voted. Dadoo's long opposition to racial structures helped lay the groundwork for this success.<sup>49</sup>

In Dadoo's last years his time was consumed with international diplomacy. Indeed, he became a Communist icon, a celebrated elder statesman of the Communist world. But this was no mere façade. He used his status to strengthen the international anti-apartheid movement and the campaign to isolate the apartheid regime – at a critical peak in Cold War antagonisms when US President Ronald Reagan was castigating the Soviet Union as an 'evil empire'.

Dadoo died in 1983, the year that saw a shift in targets as ANC-aligned groups – in a move opposed by some MK members – began attacking municipal counsellors and others deemed to be collaborating with the state. During the years 1983-85 the Congress movement finally moved from a guerrilla-led approach to one aimed at 'people's war'. But it became hard to distinguish between actions instigated by trained guerrillas and local youth who began their notorious necklacing to kill alleged informers. The practice of non-collaboration with racial structures became blurred into attacks on alleged collaborators. However, the exile leadership was forced to distance itself from the populist violence of the mid-1980s, which was ultimately contained.<sup>50</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Dadoo's exile experience mirrors the difficulties and frustrations faced by generations of exiles as they attempted to engage with developments in the land of their birth. Dadoo's work in exile seems to have had the most impact on the internal movement when it articulated with the movement against participation in racial structures, a movement that he had helped to shape during his years in South Africa. Non-collaboration with racial structures was a critical step towards the building of non-racialism inside South Africa, just as the questioning of African identity by Dadoo and other exiles fed into debates and about African and South African identity that continue today.

The issue of identity in political movements is intrinsically linked to the question of political strategy. Non-racialism articulated both with sabotage, which eschewed attacks on civilians, and with 'people's war', which sought to draw in the broadest range of support and to attack those who collaborated with the state – both irrespective of race or ethnicity. This can be compared to the use of terrorism in Algeria, which specifically targeted European settlers in the expectation that they would leave.

Dadoo's own identity was multi-faceted: Muslim, Indian and South African, communist and socialist, non-racialist and internationalist, public activist and clandestine agent. There is no contradiction here. His experience illustrates the fluidity of identity, which changes over a lifetime, which arises out of a process of imagination and which is always contestable. Distance inevitably brings a new perspective and with this the possibility of re-imagining what has come before in order to create the future.

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<sup>1</sup>Yusuf M. Dadoo, 'Introduction', Brian Bunting, ed., *South African Communists Speak*, London: Inkuleko, 1981, xv-xix, xv.

<sup>2</sup>Sheridan Johns, 'Invisible Resurrection: The Recreation of a Communist Party in South Africa in the 1950's', *African Studies Quarterly*, 9, 4, 2007: 6-22, 14, <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v9/v9i4a2.htm> accessed 27 August 2009; 'The Story of the Communist Party', underground leaflet distributed in South Africa in July, 1961, in Bunting, ed., *South African Communists Speak*, 268-71, 269.

<sup>3</sup>Parvathi Raman, 'Yusuf Dadoo: Transnational Politics, South African Belonging', paper presented to the workshop on South Africa in the 1940s, Southern African Research Centre, Kingston, Canada, 2003, <http://queensu.ca/sarc/Conferences/1940s/Raman.htm>, accessed 25 August 2009, 13-17; Interview to the United Nations Radio, 1979, in Yusuf Mohamed Dadoo, *South Africa's Freedom Struggle: Statements, Speeches and Articles including Correspondence with Mahatma Gandhi*, ed. by ES Reddy, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/library-resources/speeches/dadoo-y/1979-interview%20to%20the%20united%20nations%20radio.htm>, accessed 25 August 2009.

<sup>4</sup>*Conference of Independent African States – Declarations and Resolutions*, 22 April 1958, CSAS DU 8.14.4, resolutions 3 and 4, Borthwick Archives, University of York.

<sup>5</sup>Immanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement: A history of Pan-Africanism in America, Europe, and Africa*, New York: Africana, 1974, 419-20.

<sup>6</sup>*Provisional Agenda of the All African People's Conference*, CSAS DU 8.14.2.

<sup>7</sup>Heads of Today's Proceedings, Tuesday, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1958, CSAS DU 8.14.23; 'Awolowo's 5-year Freedom Plan', *Daily Graphic*, 10 December 1958, p. 1; 'Algeria is a most important topic – Mboya', *Daily Graphic*, 10 December 1958, p. 3; 'Imperialists won't rest until they quit Africa', *Ghana Times*, 10 December 1958 pp. 9, 12, all in CSAS DU 8.14.30; David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Life*, London: Granta, 2000, 348-50, 368-70.

<sup>8</sup>All-African People's Conference, *Conference Resolution on Imperialism and Colonialism*, 5-13 December 1958, p. 2, CSAS DU 8.14.6; Driver, *Duncan*, 157-8.

<sup>9</sup>Rowley Arenstein was expelled for his continued opposition. Brian Bunting, *Moses Kotane, South African Revolutionary: A Political Biography*, London: Inkululeko, 1975, 265-6; Ronnie Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous: My undercover struggle against apartheid*, Oxford: Heinemann, 1993, 38, 44-5; Donald Pincock, *Writing Left: The radical journalism of Ruth First*, Pretoria: Unisa, 2007, 213-14.

<sup>10</sup>Manifesto of Umkhonto we Sizwe issued on December 16, 1961, in Bunting, ed., *South African Communists Speak*, 274-6, 274.

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<sup>11</sup> Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, London: Little, Brown, 1994, 262-5, 269; Howard Barrell, *MK: the ANC's armed struggle*, London: Penguin, 1990, 4, 7, 10; Luli Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli mountains*, Claremont: David Philip, 2004, 284.

<sup>12</sup> Mandela, *Long Walk*, 262.

<sup>13</sup> Bunting, *Kotane*, 256; Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, 'The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970', in South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 1, Cape Town: Zebra, 2004, 411-78, 414-15.

<sup>14</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, Ahmedabad 14:Navajivan, 1972, 102-7, defined *satyagraha* as a soul force in which opponents were defeated through one's own suffering. Although tactically similar to passive resistance, *satyagraha* was premised on non-violence, while passive resistance, in Gandhi's view, was compatible with the use of force.

<sup>15</sup> *Statement by Dr. Y. Dadoo before the Court*, 6 September 1940, Transvaal: Non-European United Front, 1940, 8; Shauna Mottiar, 'Yusuf Dadoo: Bafa Begiya', MA, University of the Witwatersrand, 2000, 164-5.

<sup>16</sup> 'The Communist Party's Policy on the War Now!', a statement by the Political Bureau of the Communist Party, published in August 1940, and 'All Support for the Soviet Union', statement by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of South Africa, published in *The Guardian*, June 26, 1941, both in Bunting, ed., *South African Communists Speak*, 153-62, 162-5.

<sup>17</sup> The role of the Indian People in the South African Revolution, an interview in 1968', in Dadoo, *South Africa's Freedom Struggle*, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/library-resources/speeches/dadoo-y/1968-the%20role%20of%20the%20indian%20people%20in%20the%20sa%20revolution.htm>, accessed 24 August 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Y. M. Dadoo, 'The Non-European Unity', *Freedom*, 4, 1, February 1945, 7-10, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Mottiar, 'Yusuf Dadoo', 168-78; Vladimir Shubin, *ANC: A view from Moscow*, Bellville: Mayibuye, 1999, 37, 68; Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous*, 102.

<sup>20</sup> Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, London and New York: Longman, 1983, 297; Ndlovu, 'The ANC in Exile', 429.

<sup>21</sup> 'Why the United Front Failed: Disruptive Role of the PAC', by Dr Y. M. Dadoo, article published in *New Age*, March 29, 1962, in Bunting, ed., *South African Communists Speak*, 276-8, 277; Shubin, *ANC*, 49-50; Ndlovu, 'The ANC in Exile', 432-3.

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22. Mandela, *Long Walk*, 292; Anthony Sampson, *Mandela: The authorised biography*, London: HarperCollins, 1999, 168-9; Bernard Magubane, Philip Bonner, Jabulani Sithole, Peter Delius, Janet Cherry, Pat Gibbs and Thozama April, 'The Turn to Armed Struggle', in SADET, *Road to Democracy*, vol. 1, 53-145, 136; Nhlanhla Ndebele and Noor Niefertagodien, 'The Morogoro Conference: A moment of self-reflection', in SADET, *Road to Democracy*, vol. 1, 573-99, 577.

<sup>23</sup> 'The Revolutionary Way Out', statement by the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party, *African Communist*, April-June, 1963, in Bunting, ed., *South African Communists Speak*, 320-32, 320.

<sup>24</sup> Michael West, 'Indian Politics in South Africa: 1860 to the Present', *South Asia Bulletin*, 7, 1987, 97-111, 106-107; 'Boycott the SAIC!', Sechaba,

<http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/campaigns/mdm/boycottsaic.html>, accessed 28 August 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Gregory Houston, 'The Post-Rivonia ANC Underground', in SADET, *Road to Democracy*, vol. 1, 601-60, 632-3; Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous*, 100-103. According to Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, eds., *From Protest to Challenge: A documentary history of African politics in South Africa, 1882-1990*, vol. 5, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University, 1997, 52, over the next 10 years about 25 people were trained.

<sup>26</sup> Lodge, *Black Politics*, 301; Ndebele and Niefertagodien, 'Morogoro Conference', 579-80.

<sup>27</sup> Lodge, *Black Politics*, 301; Ndebele and Niefertagodien, 'Morogoro Conference', 581-2.

<sup>28</sup> Ndebele and Niefertagodien, 'Morogoro Conference', 583, n. 31, date Dadoo's statement as 24 August 1966.

<sup>29</sup> Ndebele and Niefertagodien, 'Morogoro Conference', 585-6.

<sup>30</sup> Ndebele and Niefertagodien, 'Morogoro Conference', 578-85; John Battersby, Notes of the Interview with Chris Hani and Steve Tshwete, Lusaka, Zambia, 3 June 1988, 7, Digital Innovation South Africa,

[http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/index.php?option=com\\_displaydc&recordID=int19880603.043.049](http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/index.php?option=com_displaydc&recordID=int19880603.043.049), accessed 19 June 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Barrell, *MK*, 20-24; Shubin, *ANC*, 78-80; Karis and Gerhart, eds., *From Protest to Challenge*, vol. 5, 38.

<sup>32</sup> 'Freedom fighters on the march: A message from Dr. Y. M. Dadoo to the Indian people', Appendix 1 in Dadoo, South Africa's Freedom Struggle, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/library-resources/speeches/dadoo->

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[y/appendix%201-freedom%20fighters%20on%20the%20march.htm](#), accessed 24 August 2009; Mottiar, 'Yusuf Dadoo', 179-81.

<sup>33</sup> Lodge, *Black Politics*, 300; Bunting, ed., *South African Communists Speak*, 409; Shubin, *ANC*, 89, says 60 delegates.

<sup>34</sup> Lodge, *Black Politics*, 301; Shubin, *ANC*, 92; Mottiar, 'Yusuf Dadoo', 183-5; Ndebele and Nieftagodien, 'Morogoro Conference', 597.

<sup>35</sup> Karis and Gerhart, eds., *From Protest to Challenge*, v. 5, 38; Shubin, *ANC*, 93, 114-17; Mottiar, 'Yusuf Dadoo', 187-8.

<sup>36</sup> Shubin, *ANC*, 118-20; Bunting, ed., *South African Communists Speak*, 381-3.

<sup>37</sup> Shubin, *ANC*, 101-7.

<sup>38</sup> Essop Pahad, Yusuf Dadoo: A Proud History of Struggle, *African Communist*, 78, 3rd Quarter 1979, <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/people/dadoo.html>, accessed 29 August 2009; Mottiar, 'Yusuf Dadoo', 185, 192; Shubin, *ANC*, 121-5; email from Vladimir Shubin, 24 August 2009.

<sup>39</sup> René DeVilliers, 'South African Politics: the Rising Tide of Colour', in Ellen Hellman and Henry Lever, eds., *Race Relations in South Africa 1929-1979*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980, 28-54, 49; Gloria Waite, 'The Role of Black Consciousness in the South African Liberation Struggle: An interview with Saths Cooper', *South Asia Bulletin*, 7, 1987, 112-22, 113-14; Tom Lodge and Bill Nasson, *All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s*, London: Hurst, 1991, 152-9.

<sup>40</sup> South Africa: Time of Challenge, *Report, on behalf of the Secretariat, to the plenary session of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party, October 1973*, in Dadoo, *South Africa's Freedom Struggle*, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/library-resources/speeches/dadoo-y/1973-south%20africa.htm>, accessed 29 August 2009. I am assuming that Dadoo was a principal author of the report.

<sup>41</sup> West, 'Indian Politics', 22-6; Mottiar, 'Yusuf Dadoo', 193; Sipho Buthelezi, 'Lessons of the 1973 Durban Mass Strikes', *Azania Worker*, 2, 3, May 1986, 22-26. Saths Cooper recalled that although the media played up African/Indian hostility during the strike, when he and other black consciousness activists investigated these reports they found no such conflict; see Waite, 'Role of Black Consciousness', 115-16.

<sup>42</sup> 'The Enemy Hidden Under the Same Colour', statement by the Central Committee of the SACP on the 'Gang of 8', *African Communist*, Second Quarter, 1976, in Bunting, ed., *South African Communists Speak*, 400-17, 400-2, 408; 'Expulsion of a Conspiratorial Clique'. Statement by the National Executive Committee of the ANC, Morogoro, December 11, 1975, and Statement by eight expelled members of the ANC, London,

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December 27, 1975, both in Karis and Gerhart, eds., *Protest to Challenge*, vol. 5, 402-3, 403-6; Lodge, *Black Politics*, 304.

<sup>43</sup> 'The Way Forward from Soweto', extract from political report adopted by the Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party, April 1977, in Bunting, ed., *South African Communists Speak*, 417-32, 424.

<sup>44</sup> Shubin, *ANC*, 194.

<sup>45</sup> Barrell, *MK*, 28-9, 35-37, 46-9; Shubin, *ANC*, 176; Battersby, Notes of the Interview with Chris Hani and Steve Tshwete, 7.

<sup>46</sup> Report of the Politico-Military Strategy Commission (the 'Green Book') to the ANC National Executive Committee, Parts One and Two with two annexures, August 1979, in Karis and Gerhart, eds., *Protest to Challenge*, vol. 5, 720-34, 720-21.

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Nash, 'The Moment of Western Marxism in South Africa', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 19, 1, 1999, 66-82; *Forward to People's Power – the challenge ahead*, statement issued after augmented SACP Central Committee meeting, *African Communist*, First Quarter, 1980, in Bunting, ed., *South African Communists Speak*, 437-67.

<sup>48</sup> Battersby, Notes of the Interview with Chris Hani and Steve Tshwete, 7.

<sup>49</sup> Lodge and Nasson, *All, Here, and Now*, 42.

<sup>50</sup> Battersby, Notes of the Interview with Chris Hani and Steve Tshwete, 7.