

The ANC, MK, and ‘The Turn to Violence’ (1960–1962)

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Abstract

Why did the African National Congress (ANC) appear to embrace violence in 1961? Can one say it did so? Was the Communist Party responsible behind the scenes? What did the ‘turn to violence’ mean? With a plethora of new sources and reminiscences emerging, one can begin to craft a set of answers. Communists as Communists did not determine the timing of the ANC’s embrace of MK (*Umkhonto we-Sizwe*, ‘Spear of the Nation’). The ANC was a large member-based organisation which could not nimbly shift in any direction. During the state’s repressive and punitive measures in 1960–1962, however, a group of Communist African men from within the ANC hierarchy made use of the unsettled nature of political life to commit the ANC to a new path. They interacted intensively, together with non-African Communists, in the Treason Trial (1956–1961), and then in jail during the 1960 ‘State of Emergency’. Their aim was revolution. Preeminent among them was Nelson Mandela.

Key words: Struggle; ANC; SACP; MK; Congress; terrorism; non-violence; Mandela; Communist Party; China; apartheid; Sisulu; Slovo; Umkhonto

In history some moments are more important than others. In the history of the struggle against colonialism and apartheid in South Africa, the ‘turn to violence’, or toward ‘armed struggle’, was a very important moment. The ANC (the African National Congress) is and was the oldest continually existing nationalist political movement in Africa, and it had a long, respected history of non-violent, militant mobilisation against the injustices of the state. Illuminating the particular tipping point past which the ANC espoused violence cannot help but shine a broader light on the struggle against apartheid as a whole. To begin with a preliminary question: Why did the leadership of the law-abiding African National Congress alter nearly 50 years’ of its bedrock non-violent policy and initiate a program of (at least condoning) blowing things up?

Several factors weigh in favour of attempting a revised narrative of this juncture. Several young historians are beginning to publish work that will underline the difficulties and indeed catastrophic failures experienced in MK and ANC communities *outside* South Africa in the mid-1960s up through the 1980s. This article is about the initiation of the exile

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period inside South Africa just before then. Many sources about the early 1960s have also only recently come to light.¹ Published reminiscences now include those in the South African Development and Educational Trust (SADET) project's available material, and there are scarcely known interviews and reports and other material in archives at the Cullen Library and the Mandela Foundation in Johannesburg, the Mayibuye Center at the University of the Western Cape, and the Simons Papers at the University of Cape Town. There is even new source material for understanding Nelson Mandela's thinking in 1960–1962.²

Finally there is a sense, among some historians, that a standard narrative has congealed, and that it might best be shaken up. As many South Africans feel they know, in 1960 the ANC 'was banned', and the next year, the leadership of the illegal ANC, the so-called 'National Executive' or NEC or (the C is for Committee), embraced 'armed struggle'. Nelson Mandela led MK, or *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, the 'Spear of the Nation', which became the military arm of the Congress. The standard account marks the 16th of December, an Afrikaner settler-nationalist holiday, as the date MK launched its first attacks in several cities and suburbs, and thereby opened the next phase of the struggle.³

Below, we will see that this is a deeply flawed account. The 'turn to violence' began with a crisis and involved others in the struggle besides the ANC. In 1960 the National Party (NP) government shot and killed activists and declared a 'state of emergency' to provide

1. S. Couper, *Albert Luthuli, Bound by Faith* (Scottsville: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press, 2010); P. O'Malley, *Shades of Difference: Mac Maharaj and the Struggle for South Africa* (New York: Viking, 2007); D.J. Smith, *Young Mandela: The Revolutionary Years* (New York: Little Brown, 2010); L. (Rusty) Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting: Memoirs From a Life in South African Politics, 1938–1964* (New York: Viking, 1999), A. (Kathy) Kathrada, *Memoirs* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2004), and D. Goldberg, *The Mission: A Life For Freedom in South Africa* (Johannesburg: STE, 2010); R. Mhlaba, *Raymond Mhlaba's Personal Memoirs: Reminiscing from Rwanda and Uganda, as narrated to Thembeke Mufamadi* (Johannesburg: HSRC Press, 2001); and other taped interviews.
2. In 2007, Garth Benneyworth discovered parts of Mandela's diary in the court records of the so-called 'Litte Rivonia' trial (the State v. Wilton Mkwayi and others, 1963); see his 'Armed and Trained: Nelson Mandela's 1962 Military Mission as Commander in Chief of Umkhonto we Sizwe and Provenance for his Buried Makarov Pistol', *South African Historical Journal*, 63, 1 (March 2011), 78–101. The defence records of the Rivonia Trial (1963–1964) are now online courtesy of the Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand. The prosecution's case was passed from the estate of Percy Yutar (the prosecutor, who had taken it), to the Oppenheimer private library, to the SANA (South African National Archives). Mandela's travel notebook, calendar, and much of his 'diary' from his two 1962 tours of Africa were made available to me at the Nelson Mandela Foundation (hereafter, NMF) in Houghton, Johannesburg. There is Mandela's own autobiography, N. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (New York: Little, Brown, 1994), and the raw transcriptions of the interviews (at the NMF) it was based on, made with Richard Stengel of *Newsweek* magazine; but here I am also referring to the Ben Turok interviews cited below. In addition there is uncatalogued material from the exhibits in the Treason Trial (1956–1961) at SANA; and lastly, I conducted a few interviews myself.
3. The standard account is T. Karis and G. Gerhard, 'The Turn to Violence Since May 31, 1961', in Karis and Gerhard, eds., *Challenge and Violence, 1953–1964* (New York: Hoover Institution Press, 1977), Vol. 3 of T. Karis and G. Carter, eds., *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of South African Politics in South Africa, 1882–1964* (New York: Hoover Institution Press, 1971–2010), excellent in many ways, and by (among others) Y.G. Muthien, *State and Resistance in South Africa, 1939–1965* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1994), 161, and *The Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa, The Real Story, Expanded Third Edition* (assisted by historians including C. Bundy) (New York: Reader's Digest, 1994), 408–411.

scope for similarly open acts of sovereignty. The state then criminalised the ANC, which was about as old as it was, and other opposition groups. Amid a general increase in public acts of political violence, the state in effect behaved lawlessly, and yet relied on the persistent belief in the rule of law among even ANC and Communist Party (SACP) leaders, so as to catch them unawares at home and imprison them. For many South Africans, the government fully delegitimised itself in this process. At the very least, the subsequent transformation of the ANC at the leadership level must be reimagined within this other, encompassing transformation.

At the same time, the effort to forge an interracial, non-racial, military liberationist-interventionist structure capable of surviving the onslaught was audacious. The question went beyond what could be salvaged operationally out of the old ANC membership. The decision to use sabotage in cities, suburbs, and train-yards initiated the first phase of a planned, wider campaign which was to involve the taking of lives, and which had as its *telos* a general insurrection against the state.⁴ Nelson Mandela assumed the lead in the effort not because he above others wished move toward violence – there were men in the ANC who had argued in favour of violence for longer and with greater fervency – but because he grasped the need for directing, controlling, and monopolising violence. His models for doing so were Israel, Algeria, Cuba, and China, as well as France, 1789: anti-colonial and revolutionary situations.

The president of the ANC in this period was Chief Albert Lutuli. While the transition to the new modality unfolded, the Nobel committee awarded its Peace Prize to Lutuli as president of the non-violent ANC. The very evening of his return to South Africa, the first MK sabotage attacks began. Who was behind this move? The historian Scott Couper has recently argued that Lutuli neither knew about nor planned the launch of MK, and that his presidential authority had been trampled.⁵ Stephen Ellis has recently produced evidence to reinforce that argument and to show, moreover, that the Communist Party international hierarchy lay behind the decision to embrace armed struggle. A set of meetings between top South African Communists and Chinese and Soviet Communists in 1960 preceded (Ellis says, necessarily so) the decision of the South African Communist Party (SACP) Central Committee (CC) to get behind ‘armed struggle’. Then came the formation of MK.⁶

The argument that follows holds that neither international Communism nor President Lutuli determined the timing of the ANC’s seeming embrace of violent tactics. Nor did the Central Committee (CC) of the SACP with Moses Kotane (of the ANC National Executive) at the gavel pursue that aim. Whatever the president felt, the ANC required open leadership, branch meetings, and votes to change course, but the state’s repressive and punitive measures in the late 1950s and especially in 1960–1962 put a stop to that. The narrative below is about how a relatively small group of men and women of different backgrounds, with Mandela and a few ANC-tied Communist allies at its core, acted to reconfigure the struggle as a military one, in a race against time they soon lost.

First, some necessary background, focusing especially on the role of Communists in the struggle. The shift toward violence can be said to have begun with the post-War Youth

4. As the Rivonia court essentially charged.

5. Couper, *Albert Lutuli*.

6. Stephen Ellis, ‘The Genesis of the ANC’s Armed Struggle in South Africa 1948–1961’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37, 4 (2011), 657–676.

League, which radicalised the ANC in 1949, committing it to militant action; several activists then went to the Soviet Union and China on student visas, before the state criminalised the Communist Party of South Africa in 1950. The Party was reconstituted a year later, bolstered by World War II veterans, as the underground South African Communist Party or SACP, but could no longer work above ground with the ANC. According to Fred Carneson, when a rump group of Central Committee members met in an open 'brickfields' in 1951, they decided then and there to move toward violent action. But afterwards nothing was done.⁷

The state adopted unusual emergency powers in 1952, with its 'bannings' (often for six months) of many urban African leaders, and the erasure of their public speech. These fundamentally extralegal measures confined people to their districts and villages and eventually even their homes without due process. The various levels of policed enclosure, renewed, and then overtaken with five-year term orders, derailed many career paths for men who would have become leaders in the national ANC; at the same time, they opened quick avenues of advance for others, among them (for instance) Govan Mbeki, a key champion of MK.

In the Eastern Cape, whence Mbeki hailed, and only there, *all* public meetings attended by more than ten people of colour were already prohibited, and so the ANC was forced to operate as a cell-based organisation from 1952 or 1953.⁸ The Communists presented an attractive model of coherence without a public face. When the ANC reorganised in the Eastern Cape, under the M-Plan or 'Mandela Plan', organisers drew on the Communist Party's underground form, which entailed the abolition of branch meetings and their replacement with small units not allowed to interact laterally. When the Communists cooperated with the ANC at a middle level, they did so through the incipient labour movement, as well as in Indian, 'Coloured', and White (Congress of Democrats, or 'COD')-coded organisations. This Alliance was public face of the struggle in the 1950s until the M-Plan was introduced everywhere, starting in 1962. At that point, MK began its first recruitment also into cells (or 'groups'); unlike the M-Plan, MK drew not only on the ANC, but also on the other organisations in the Congress Alliance and on the Communist Party for its personnel, and with a clearly defined mission.⁹ In a sense, MK was a second attempt to reorganise, under great stress, encroaching on the first attempt.

7. Wits, Cullen Library, Sylvia Neame Papers (hereafter Neame Papers), A2729, Fred Carneson interview with Neame; Jack Hodgson interview with Neame; and University of the Western Cape, Mayibuye Center, Robben Island Memorial Museum Oral History Collection interviews, [hereafter simply] MCA 6, Fred Carneson interview with Wulfie Kodesh, 1993; and N. Roos, *Ordinary Springboks: White Servicemen and Social Justice in South Africa, 1939–1961* (London: Ashgate, 2005), ch. 9. Thanks to Neil Roos.
8. This point was made to me both by Ahmed Kathrada (interviewed 7 October 2011) and Denis Goldberg (interviewed 12 October 2011). Dan Tloome, George Mayeka, Oscar Mpeta, David Bopape, and very many other postwar leaders were politically wounded by bannings and loss of employment. The Eastern Cape enforced what had been a countrywide provision passed in 1927.
9. Bernard Magubane, Phil Bonner, Jabulane Sithole, Peter Delius, Janet Cherry, Pat Gibbs, and Thozana April (hereafter Magubane *et al.*), 'The Turn to Armed Struggle', *South African Development Educational Trust, Vol. 1* (Pretoria: SADET, 2008), especially pp. 80–82 provides an excellent summary with varying tones and positions. M-Plan: R. Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa, 1950–1976* (Cape Town: Jacana, 2008); Mhlaba, *Raymond Mhlaba's Personal Memoirs*; and Mhlaba interrogation in Yutar Papers, 385/8, Ray Mhlaba. Conditions in the Eastern Cape were especially 'tense' and liable to violence.

Particularly on the Rand, African Communists had long played a direct part in the affairs of the Communist Party, back to the days of the International Socialist League and T.W. Thibedi.¹⁰ Famous Africans of the Communist past include Joseph Jack, Johnny Gomas, and Edwin Mofutsanyana; in more recent days there was 'Uncle' J.B. Marks and tough-minded Moses Kotane, the General Secretary of the Party from the late 1930s on. But it was after the War that the Communist Party most centrally brought Africans' concerns into its purview.¹¹ Communists thereafter took a new interest in African nationalism. Still, in the SACP, it was not Moses Kotane or David Bobape or John Nkadimeng who rang in the big changes in the struggle in 1960–1962. It was not the older Communists of working class origins from the 1930s and 1940s. Instead, it was an incoming group of ANC men, Mandela, Nokwe, Sisulu, men with a broad range of urban connections to money and white Left intellectuals.

In 1953, Walter Sisulu visited the World Democratic Youth meeting, in Bucharest, as a guest of honour along with Duma Nokwe, Henry 'Squire' Makgothi, and several others. From Bucharest, this group went to Warsaw, and then to China for six weeks, quite a long time. Mandela had asked Sisulu to ask the Chinese if they would fund an armed guerrilla conflict: 'When you reach the People's Republic of China you must tell them, ask them, that we want to start an armed struggle and get arms'. Mandela linked this request to his own public espousal of violence in his famous speech in Sophiatown's Freedom Square, in June of 1953. Sisulu recalls that he spoke with the Chinese leadership about controlling overeager youth, who engaged in 'wrong slogans' and wanted armed actions. The Chinese advised extreme caution, saying the road would be 'difficult'.¹²

After China, Sisulu's delegation visited the Soviet Union for an even longer stretch of time, and then returned through the UK, in London, finally spending 'a few months in Israel'.¹³ According to Sisulu, back in South Africa, Joe Modise had to travel through the townships in 1954 to calm the young men down because nothing immediately was being planned.

The *Bafabegiya* and the Mandela faction

The origins of the coherence of the group of men who steered the ANC in 1960–1962 lies partly in the relationship between the Transvaal National Congress, the increasingly nonracial Left, and 'Africanist' activists in Johannesburg. Their history emerged through

10. University of Cape Town, Oppenheimer Manuscripts Collection, Upper Campus, Simons Papers (hereafter Simons Papers); family photographs. Cf. C. Rassool, 'From Collective Leadership to Presidentialism: I.B. Tabata, Authorship and the Biographic Threshold', *Afrika Zamani*, 13/14 (2005–6), 23–67.
11. Neil Roos argues that the CPSA freshly turned its attention to *white* labor after the War: Roos, *Springboks*, 75; in the ANC, there had long been Communists and nonCommunists, and people of many other views.
12. MCA 6, Albie Sachs, interview (359), 1,5, 13 December 1992; MCA 6, Walter Sisulu interviewed by Wolfie Kodesh, 6 February 1995, Side B.
13. Thanks to Chris Lee; E. Sisulu, *Walter & Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime* (London: New Africa Books, 2003), 167–171, deviates from the chronology and does not show their return through Israel, 179–181; and MCA, Walter Sisulu, 6 February 1995, 'Side B', on Israel. Also on the trip were Alfred Hutchinson, Minding Akane, Arthur Goldreich, and Harold and Ann-Marie Wolpe. I am quite interested to find a recollection of this trip.

the only partially understood mechanics of Mandela's retention of the Transvaal ANC presidency in 1952 and 1955.

In 1955, the ANC and its allies united behind the nonracial Freedom Charter, which spelled out the struggle's basic political demands. For the first half of the weekend meetings, before the Freedom Charter was adopted, however, according to Joe Matthews, a debate played out between Mandela's Transvaal ANC presidency and a group of persistent Africanist dissenters called the *Bafabegiya*, whose leader Mandela had defeated in 1952.¹⁴ The *Bafabegiya* group vented an 'Africanist' plaint that Communists had too much influence on the Transvaal ANC.¹⁵ The *Bafabegiya* were outmanoeuvred and outvoted, however, and the Mandela and Mandela-allied ascendancy was again confirmed. The assembled groups, acting as The Congress of the People, next adopted the Charter on 26 June, with (at least by that point) Mandela, Sisulu, and Ahmad Kathrada watching from a nearby rooftop because they were 'banned'.¹⁶

Key allies and members of the Mandela Transvaal group, if not most or even all of them, entered the Communist Party formally in this same period. John Nkadimeng recalls he began 'classes' (with Ruth First and Joe Slovo and Rusty Bernstein) along with other parolees after the Defiance Campaign incarcerations.¹⁷ Walter Sisulu became active in the SACP by the mid-1950s. In 1957, Kotane recruited Joe Matthews (son of the legendary Z.K. Matthews of the early ANC) into the SACP and the CC. Duma Nokwe, who was in the Communist Youth League in the 1940s, probably joined the Party around the same time. Ahmed Kathrada addressed Rand Indian-classified youth in the name of Communism in the 1950s; never a higher-up, he usually nonetheless found himself among the leadership. Albie Sachs joined the Party in 1955, and in 1956 he left the country for Youth Meetings in China and the Soviet Union.¹⁸ On 17 August 1957, for the Party-sponsored concert program at Gandhi Hall in Cape Town, Ben Turok and Joe Matthews played an instrumental duet together.¹⁹ A new network of post-war, educated, radicalised men could work together, and they sought each other out in the ANC and the incipient nonwhite trade unions.

The question before these South African Communists in general was whether the conditions were right in South Africa for a revolution. For many of them the answer was

14. According to both Mandela, *Long Walk*, and D.J. Smith, *Young Mandela*, and my conversations with Phil Bonner about interviews with struggle veterans, 18 November 2011.
15. 'The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling Their Stories', Joe Gaobakwe Matthews, <http://www.sadet.co.za/docs/RTD/stories/Stories%20-%20Joe%20Matthews.pdf>, accessed October 10th, 2010; this is also: Joe Gaobakwe Matthews, interviewed by Sifiso Ndlovu and Bernard Magubane, 18 July 2001, ed. Mbulelo V. Mzamane, chapter one of South African Educational Trust (SADET), *The Road to Democracy: South Africans telling their stories, Vol. 1, 1950–1970* (Pretoria: SADET, 2008). Matthews relates that a Mrs Molapo, a woman opponent of Mandela in the Transvaal ANC (not further identified in any SADET book), protested that she had nothing against Mandela personally, and exclaimed, 'he once left his hat in my house', perhaps implying something more between them. See also David Bobape, 'The Bafagiya', *Liberation*, No. 1 (1954), 17–19, image seen through DISA (Digital Innovation South Africa), <http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za>, accessed 4 February 2012.
16. MCA 6, Wulfie Kodesh interview with Walter Sisulu (1995).
17. MCA 6, Wulfie Kodesh interview with John Nkadimeng (1995).
18. C. Glaser, *Botsoisi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935–1976* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000); Neame Papers, A2729, Interview with Albie Sachs, London, 22 June 1990.
19. University of the Western Cape, Mayibuye Center, Mayibuye Centre Historical papers (MCH) 07, 114, Brian Bunting Papers (hereafter, Bunting Papers), 3.2.1.1–.6.7, programme.

obvious: no. Certainly Jack Simons and Moses Kotane said no. The level of popular participation even in the midst of the famous Defiance Campaign did not augur well for a mass uprising.²⁰ Did this mean the Party or the ANC would innovate and act further, anyway? Should the CP expend all its energies liaising with workers while the state picked nationalists off? What would become of its post-war Africanisation? These questions hung in the air as the five year terms of ‘bannings’ were renewed in 1959, against even more people. Certainly *something* had to be done.

The famous Treason Trial against the leadership of the ANC meandered throughout the end of the 1950s over a period of five years (1956–1961) coincident with this heightened display of state force. As several score of them sat together in the ‘cage’ in 1959 and 1960, as the trial dragged on, seemingly without end, they found time to talk to one another surreptitiously. The old Communist guard in the ANC, as represented by J.B. Marks and Moses Kotane, saw eye to eye with ANC President Chief Albert Lutuli, who (like Oliver Tambo, M.B. Yengwa, Alfred Nzo, and many others in the ANC) was not Communist; but among the younger interlocutors were most of the principals behind the later turn to violence, who were.²¹

In their conversations in and out of the justice system they found themselves allied to white Communists and veterans, often Jews whose parents had earlier been radicalised by persecution. They backed national liberation in and for South Africa (before a workers’ uprising) because it was a ‘special case’, that of colonialism in a single country, which meant that collaborating with the ANC was warranted. Nonetheless sometimes SACP people contemplated other paths. According to Sylvia Neame’s interviews, Albie Sachs’ SACP cell, including ‘Bubbles’ Thorn, Denis Goldberg, and Amy Rietstein, reporting to Brian Bunting, drove out to Natal during the violence there over cattle-culling and dipping tanks in 1959. Having seen schools and churches reduced to cinders, they drafted a letter to *The African Communist*, the journal, to the effect that such violence must be guided not by the ANC, but by the Party. The ANC was seen to be ‘inadequate to lead such an issue’.²²

Mandela sat in Communist and ANC meetings both, even while continuing as one of the interminable Treason Trial’s defendants. He was already the person the ANC went to for ‘implementation’ according to Wulfie Kodesh: the can-do, operational leader.²³ According to Ben Turok, in a remarkable set of interviews (given in 1973/4), the year 1959–1960 was a very active one for the SACP, and the Party found itself with

20. Certainly not meeting even the criteria of the recent wave of mass protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria, for example.
21. Mandela and Slovo, both lawyers, worked together well: Lionel (Rusty) Bernstein, as quoted in Magubane, *et al.*, ‘The Turn to Armed Struggle’, 65; Smith, *Young Mandela*, 198.
22. Neame Papers, Interview with Denis Goldberg, 28 September 87, 1 October 87, p. 22. Goldberg was a member of the Modern Youth (from Modern World) Society, on Loop St, Cape Town, which tried to liaise with and educate workers. Lionel Foreman, George Peake, Turok, Amy Rietstein, and Albie Sachs and perhaps Albie’s brother were in the same milieu. ‘Natal’ could not have been Cato Manor for Denis Goldberg, because Denis has told me he has never been there, and has no recollection of the event in the late 1950s. In the interview, he says: ‘I remember the interest in the unit concerning this’.
23. Wulfie (here spelt Wolfie) Kodesh, interviewed by John Carlin, no date (ca. 2000?), available on PBS: with no spaces: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/mandela/interviews/kodesh.html>, accessed 5 January 2012.

unprecedented authority. Turok recalled speaking with Nelson Mandela, who 'was on the District Committee [of the Communist Party] with us and as far as Congress was concerned', was quite useful as a sounding board.²⁴ Although 'officially' [we] were all 'non violent', 'in private we knew' which direction things were heading, Turok recalled of that time.²⁵

Meanwhile conflicts similar to those that involved the *Bafabegiya*, the 'Africanist' faction in the Transvaal, counterposed Mandela's faction freshly against Africanists in the Congress in 1958–1959. This conflict most likely involved the deployment of violent youths on both sides. The Pan Africanist Congress or PAC emerged as a result in April of 1959, with a strong presence in Langa, Cape Town, and on parts of the Rand. On 18 March 1960, the PAC ran an anti-pass protest, called to pre-empt another one ten days later, planned by the ANC. During the PAC-called protest, the state shot seven persons in Langa township, and extraordinarily, killed 69 people in Sharpeville, south of Johannesburg.

As Bernard Magubane suggests, the Sharpeville massacres against the PAC-motivated crowd were 'a decisive turning point in our history'.²⁶ Many faced the true nature of the state for the first time. The National Party government would shoot people to stop a peaceful action, and then lock in extraordinary powers for itself afterwards. Over the next weeks, PAC sympathisers set fire to government buildings, arguably the first acts of sabotage in the new era. Soon enough they would take up personal violence themselves, in return.²⁷

In his famous speech given in lieu of direct testimony at the Rivonia Trial (1963–1964), Mandela plainly said MK was formed to *take charge* of the violence that was already transpiring. Violent conflict broke out all around in 1960–1961, at Zeerust,²⁸ Sekhukhuniland,²⁹ Pondoland, and the cane fields of big sugar estates in Natal. But the biggest

24. Turok said he was involved in top SACP organising meetings three or four times a day 'in different capacities', Mayibuye Center, Brian Bunting papers, Box 131, 8.4.5, interview of Ben Turok by Bunting, October 1973 through May, 1974, for B.P. Bunting, *Moses Kotane, South African Revolutionary: A Political Biography* (Johannesburg: Inkululeko, 1975); hereafter Bunting/Turok. Turok offers a frank assessment of decisions and personalities. This material is not restricted in its quotation, unlike a separate, Wulfie Kodesh interview with Turok, also at the Mayibuye Center, which is. I took extensive notes on the material and thank the South African government for their openness to historical research.
25. Bunting/Turok, Tape 1, October 1973.
26. Bernard Magubane, 'Introduction', SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Vol. 1*, 1.
27. Tom Lodge, *Sharpeville, an Apartheid Massacre and its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 48, 162. Possibly 'Russians' or Lesotho-origin gangster-beaters, by 'Africanists', and gangsters or *tsotsis* from Sophiatown, by Mandela's Transvaal Provincial ANC people; Philip Bonner, personal communication, 18 November 2011. The latter violence is a reference to the Paarl violence in 1963.
28. Ellis, 'The Genesis'; Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (London: Longman, 1983), 283. See Siphamandla Zondi's excellent account of the violence in gaMatlala, in Zondi, 'Peasant Struggles in the 1950s: gaMatlala and Zeerust', SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Vol. 1*, chapter three, esp. 154–157. In gaMatlala, the chiefship remained close to an underground Congress, and national and local struggles were interleaved up to ca. 1963. Arianna Lissoni's PhD research is illuminating the fascinating conjuncture of Dinokana chiefly authority, circumcision regiments, and the Botswana pipeline for fighters (leading to Communist Party funding and training).
29. P. Delius, 'Sebatakomo and the Zoutpansberg Balemi Association: The ANC, the Communist Party and Rural Organization, 1939–55', *Journal of African History*, 34, 2 (1993), 293–313, shows the prior involvement of the ANC in Sekhukhuniland.

explosion of violence was Sharpeville, and Mandela and Slovo planned a coordinated response to those killings.³⁰ As part of it, Mandela and President Lutuli publically burnt their pass books, opening themselves to immediate arrest, and declared a mass stay-at-home. The government began arresting people, and entering African people's homes and beating them in Langa and in other townships, and on 30 March 1960, it declared a 'State of Emergency'.³¹ Philip Kgosana, a 23-year-old PAC leader, then led more than 30,000 people in an unprecedented mass assembly, spontaneous in nature, walking through the streets of Cape Town. Mandela, Duma Nokwe, and many other Transvaalers were picked up and put in jail again, temporarily inaccessible to their lawyers. At the same time the government (on 8 April) banned the ANC and the PAC entirely, declaring them illegal.

It was then, most likely in April or May of 1960, that an informal poll, favouring violence, was first taken among the jailed activists.³² On 19 April 1960, Duma Nokwe remarked to Helen Joseph during *the still in-session* Treason Trial (which dealt exclusively with non-violent activity constituted as treason) that the proceedings were 'out of date' – implying the inevitability of violence in the struggle and, perhaps, direct knowledge of that direction.³³

With the detention of nearly the whole of the SACP CC and the NEC of the ANC in April and May of 1960, however, the lone survivors on the 'outside' (who held positions of authority already) for at least five months coordinated both the ANC and the SACP together. Bennie Turok (CC), Moses Kotane (CC and NEC), and Mick Harmel (CC), having dispatched Yusuf Dadoo (CC) abroad (in large part because he was past his prime, according to Turok), acted as a triumvirate in directing the struggle: on the run, sleeping in different houses every few nights, keeping in contact with Ruth Matsoane and Bartholomew Hlapanane in Soweto and Johannesburg, for instance, and with Rowley Arenstein (despite his eccentricity) in Natal and Archie Sebeko in Cape Town.³⁴ Mandela was monitored by a policeman, but managed to arrange to spend whole weekends in his office in Johannesburg, and was somehow able to 'report' regularly to Helen Joseph the proceedings of the trial.³⁵

When the State of Emergency was partly lifted, in July of 1960, Harmel was with a second group of CC members, led by Yusuf Dadoo, who visited Moscow and China to discuss the situation. They returned with a head-nod for future violent activity.³⁶ Mandela

30. Magubane, 'Introduction', SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Vol. 1*, 1.

31. MCA 6, Wulfie Kodesh interview with Fred Carneson (1993).

32. Sisulu, as well as Wilton Mkwayi, and Henry Fazzie, all in separate interviews, appear to agree: Magubane *et al.*, 'The Turn to Armed Struggle', 71. Nkadameng would have been part of it.

33. Walter Sisulu, as interviewed by Phil Bonner in 1997, cited in Magubane *et al.*, 'The Turn to Armed Struggle', 71.

34. Yet they did quite effective underground organising work, according to Turok. Bunting Papers, Turok, Tape 3 (1974); and see Ben Turok's published views, 'South Africa: The Search for a Strategy', *Socialist Register*, 10 (1973), 341–376, via <http://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/search/titles?searchPage=9>, accessed 9 December, 2011.

35. Mandela, *Long Walk*, 216; Helen Joseph who appears to have been given a Communist code name, as she is thus listed in the Simons Papers (UCT) miscellany.

36. Yusuf Dadoo, Mick Harmel, and Joe Matthews were met directly by Mao. Ellis found a report that Mao told the South African delegation that perhaps warfare-wise 'Algeria' was a better model for them than China, which might have given them pause; Ellis, 'The Genesis'; and Magubane *et al.*, 'The Turn to Armed Struggle', 72–73.

and many others were allowed to sleep in their own beds regularly again by 1 September 1960. It was perhaps only then, in his friendship with the Slovos and Joseph and others, that Mandela began attending any Party meetings, around the same time the SACP announced its own existence (against Kotane's strong advice). Meanwhile the arrests began again, and some comrades scattered to Lesotho or Swaziland, such as Ruth First. A first wave of African emigrants (of 27 persons), including Wilton Mkwayi, and Patrick Mthembu, Ambrose Makiwane, and Moses Mabhida, flew to Lagos and Accra in September, and some of them went on later to China for military training.³⁷ Mick Harmel, the leading intellectual in the SACP along with First and Jack Simons, wrote and circulated a pamphlet called 'South Africa, What Next?', which basically argued for the inevitability of armed struggle.³⁸

Still, for a year more, the ANC took no action.

During that year the ANC, underground and abroad, repeatedly called for a national convention. This was the focus while the Treason Trial sputtered to an end. And all the way until the grand acquittal at the close of the Treason Trial, Mandela oversaw the transformation of the ANC by way of the M-Plan.³⁹ The fact that Turok felt the ANC's connections were open to him, and that the struggle operated efficiently when they were pressed by their persecutors, no doubt came to Mandela's attention. Still, outside the Eastern Cape, the M-Plan was effectively deployed only in a few isolated cases. At one point Joe Slovo, Bram Fischer and a couple of other white comrades tried to join the ANC, as if hoping to exert leadership and create consensus from within, but they were rebuffed.⁴⁰ The ANC remained the ANC. In addition, Albie Sachs' cell's letter to the *African Communist* received no response, reinforcing the sense that the SACP's white personnel had less power to set policy than they might have thought. When Sachs, Denis Goldberg, and other Communists finally began supplying Marxist Leninist lectures and practical field training to *young African military recruits*, it would only be under ANC auspices. The struggle awaited the end of the silence on the violence question from the ANC.

The Sophiatown group

So far we have remained within a fairly precise chronology. We must now voyage forward in time, briefly, to Zambia in 1982. There is a strange document in a legacy of papers in Cape Town (as Stephen Ellis discovered): a record of an exiled CC SACP interaction, in which John 'Pule' Motshabi spoke to Moses Mabhida and the rest of the CC, in an almost self-immolating manner. Mabhida in 1982 was both Commander of MK and an ANC officer

37. Save one early group of nurses, these men were the first to visit the east and China, and Mkwayi later went with Ray Mhlaba, Joe Gqabi and others to train militarily in China (in October 1961). That caused a small crisis with O.R. Tambo, who was based in London when the banning of the ANC was first bruited in government. OR knew nothing about the shift in progress: Wilton Mkwayi, chapter 24, SADET, *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling Their Stories*, 268–9, 289; Mhlaba, *Raymond Mhlaba's Personal Memoirs*; and Sifiso Ndlovu, personal communication, 26 October 2011.
38. Magubane *et al.*, 'The Turn to Armed Struggle', and Denis Goldberg, my interview, 12 October 2011.
39. Mandela, *Long Walk*, 221.
40. Isaac Makopo, chapter 19, SADET, *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling Their Stories*, 213 (interviewed by Sifiso Ndlovu, 24 November 2000).

with responsibilities over young recruits clamouring for action. Seated in what was likely a private Lusaka home or office, J.P. Motshabi contextualised his statements by referencing an (unanswered) criticism that the Party was not engaged with the working class. He then mentioned the recruitment into the Family (the Party) of ‘Nelson and Walter’, and others, in around 1960, calling them the ‘Sophiatown group’.

This is important evidence that Nelson Mandela joined the party in or before 1960. But it also reveals the shifting dynamics within the ANC and the SACP at the time. John ‘Pule’ Motshabi, haranguing the CC, denied the accusation that he (John), his brother Obad Motshabi, and David Bobape had tried to block the entrance of the ‘Sophiatown group’ when they joined ‘the Family’ back in 1959–1960. Nor, Motshabi declared, had he, Motshabi, engineered Robert Resha’s defeat for the presidency of the ANC as some charged! He denied he was suspicious of white intellectuals, and allowed only that he favoured a worker-based party generally.⁴¹ Motshabi felt slighted himself as a working man and a representative of workers when it came to consulting over policy; he implied Mandela had come in as a bit of an interloper, certainly without having to hawk copies of *New Age* on the street, and was an intellectual and therefore similar to many of the post-war white recruits. The 1982 CC meeting as a whole appears to have accepted the factual basis of Motshabi’s unwonted remarks.⁴²

In sum – moving back to 1960 – the Sophiatown group had antagonists; some African Communist members opposed them, some who were ANC (like Motshabi) and some who were not; and some of their allies, such as Rowley Arenstein, an influential working class Communist, thought the shift to violence was a terrible idea. Mandela and Sisulu may well have attended several SACP meetings, formally and informally, as Ben Turok recalls at least for Mandela, and it was by no means certain that the SACP would simply back an armed struggle with the ANC at the helm. Robert Hepple, briefly drafted into the CC in 1960, further supplies a text (in the form of an electronic file) about a meeting in December, 1960, which he says he copied from notes he took in 1964. He lists as attending, and therefore as CC members, Mandela, Sisulu, and Govan Mbeki, along with Turok, Mick Harmel, Fred Carneson, Ray Mhlaba, Dan Tloome, John Nkadimeng, and others. The meeting announced the new Communist Party support for the use of force.⁴³

Ben Turok (in a 1973 interview with Brian Bunting) recalled a subsequent meeting in preparation for a Party Congress in mid-1961, in which Rusty Bernstein presented the

41. Simons Papers, O8.1, Minutes of Group Meeting, 13/May/82, with GS (Gen. Sec.), JG, JPM, RS, MM in attendance, discovered by Stephen Ellis. Motshabi felt that intellectuals, and especially white ones, in the Party, needed to be overmatched by workers and unionisers (of African origin especially), like him. Moses Mabhidha rebuked him, calling him ‘a frightened man’, but did not contradict him. And see Simons Papers, P1, Motshabi, unpublished ms. autobiography, pointed out by Ellis, ‘The Genesis’ and by private communication during the month of November, 2011.
42. In fact Motshabi had not been a CC member in South Africa, and had worked for Mandela’s Transvaal ANC presidency. In 1960 he briefly fell afoul of the ANC in some way. Ahmed (Kathy) Kathrada does not recall Mandela being at any DC SACP Transvaal meeting and says he does not know if Mandela was a Party member. Pule Motshabi was suspended from the CC from 1982 onwards.
43. Hepple, ‘Notes’, privately supplied. According to John Nkadimeng’s memory, however, he was incarcerated from April 1960 all the way to March 1961, being among the last released, and so could not have attended; MCA-6, Kodesh interview with Nkadimeng (1995).

follow-up report on 'armed force' that Turok and others had participated in drafting. Turok says Mandela protested aloud that it would be difficult convince the ANC to abandon non-violence – 'to sell this to the ANC, particularly to Lutuli', were words he recalled.⁴⁴ Hence Mandela as a Communist was already considering his future role as the man who would have to do exactly that, according to Turok.

At the same meeting, according to Hepple, the question was raised as to the perpetuation of the ANC, and an argument had to be made in favour of its survival after its criminalisation, 'underground'. The motion to create another, separate, legal, front organisation, was after discussion, abandoned. Apparently Kotane spoke against the sacrifice of the ANC name, and probably also rallied the votes against the idea that the SACP should expand in place of the ANC. But Mandela's attendance was not missed, either.⁴⁵ The result of this ANC presence inside the CP was the perpetuation of the ANC in the vanguard of the struggle. Thus the Sophiatown group husbanded the ANC's hegemony.

An 'All-In African Conference' (24–25 March), originally planned to present a united front (SAUF) out of the ANC and PAC, in the end simply reinforced Mandela's stature as rising ANC leader. The Treason Trial verdict on 29 March then completely acquitted him along with the other accused. Mandela, briefly unbanned and free, now the future military commander of MK, immediately went into hiding, rightly fearing re-arrest. Yet others in the ANC moved within their accustomed orbits, demanding a national constitutional conference, uniting voices of protest. The ANC planned a three-day stay-at-home strike, the last day to fall on 1 June 1961, and the atmosphere in East London (with the 'abeTembes' opposing Chief Matanzima) was precarious, threatening imminent violence.⁴⁶ On 28 and 29 May, camouflaged ANC Youth Leaguers including Looksmart Ngudle attacked commuter buses with Molotov cocktails in Nyanga, Cape Town.⁴⁷ Yet still there was no official shift in ANC policy and no espousal by any leader of revolutionary violence. Printers and writers and unionisers, Communist and non-, all remained at work and 'above ground'.

For ANC President Lutuli, the stay-at-home represented the highest form of popular political action.⁴⁸ When there is less than full compliance in a general strike, however, the police can attack strike-enforcers such as Looksmart and the YL group above, and demand workers board buses – which they did with brutality that May. Mandela oversaw the strike and registered the second day as less than successful, and called the whole action off, perhaps prematurely. He then gave an interview to the *Rand Daily Mail*, in which he suggested that 'the people might be forced to use other methods of struggle'.⁴⁹

44. Bunting/Turok, tape 2.

45. Hepple, 'Notes'. Hepple was subject to what amounted to torture and was convinced he would be hanged; and Turok, Bunting Interviews (1973/4), Tape 1 and Tape 3.

46. This emerges from a close reading of the SANA, URU 1964 2266 (DEEL V) 4820, the State vs. Washington Pumulelo Bongco.

47. SANA, Yutar Papers, Police witness reports, 385/24, Vol. 3, Zollie Malindi.

48. Couper, *Albert Luthuli*, 111.

49. Karis and Gerhard, 'The Turn to Violence Since May 31, 1961'; Mandela, *Long Walk*, 270; Mandela supposedly criticised the Party for its internal racial hierarchy in this period, in a way suggesting that he knew the Party from the inside out. Smith, *Young Mandela*, 213, citing O'Malley, *Shades of Difference*; Ellis, 'TheGenesis'.

In some sense perhaps the ‘turn’ to violence had happened already, as the *International Bulletin* of the SACP from April, 1961, embraced the Pondoland uprising as revolutionary, and hinted at military actions to follow against the state.⁵⁰ On the other hand, the ANC only released a list of demands, *inter alia* for an end to the State of Emergency, for wage-hikes, and for a repeal of ‘Nazi laws’, that was ordinary and expected in its form.⁵¹ In fact, and this must be stressed, the NEC and the ANC’s president had not been convinced of the wisdom of a campaign of sabotage.

What was sabotage to do?

Before moving further into the relationship between *the ANC* and ‘armed struggle’,⁵² we must consider what armed struggle was to mean, which was really far from resolved in 1961. Indeed it is not apparent how sabotage was to challenge the state.⁵³ In a later interview, Rusty Bernstein recalled the sense at the time that the move toward sabotage was made off the back foot, as it were: that they had not thought the thing through.⁵⁴ By some partisans, sabotage was lauded as ‘striking a blow’ and ‘heroic’, but it was also explained as an act of desperation, understandable, perhaps, but greatly regretted; it was a harbinger of anger liable to burst out in uglier ways. Many comrades in their recollections distinguish sabotage from terrorism (which targeted human beings), but in its SACP CC adoption in December, 1960, the term apparently used was ‘armed propaganda’, not ‘armed struggle’.⁵⁵ Even as the rationale was to bring the state to change policies, most informed people doubted it would work. The SACP’s public stance in 1962 was opaque: ‘Why do people resort to violent acts like sabotage? They only do so when there is no other way of expressing their aspirations for freedom ... So Vorster’s Nazi law means more violence, more sabotage in South Africa’.⁵⁶ Here sabotage was a negative, like terrorism; and to stop it, apartheid had to be ended.

50. The SACP gave no hint of the new policy in its May Day message for 1961: Cullen Library, Simons Papers, ‘May Day, 1961’ flyer; Cullen Library, Sylvia Neame Papers, A2729, B13, *International Bulletin*, SACP, April 1961; also with a copy of H. Barrell, ‘The Historian and Conspirator: The ANC of South Africa and the Political-Military Relationship in Revolutionary Struggle’, St Antony’s College, Oxford University South African History and Politics Seminar, 20 May 1990.

51. Wits, Cullen Library, ANC, AD 2186 fa23, ‘Statement of the Emergency Committee of the ANC’, 1 April 1960; in contrast, by 1962 ‘courage, loyalty and devotion’ are asked of the people by the ANC, AD 2186 F-G Box 5 Fa44, ‘War Provocation’, 26 March 1962.

52. Karis and Gerhart, ‘The Turn to Violence’, and Document 66, in Karis and Gerhard, eds., *Challenge and Violence, 1953–1964*, 716.

53. E.g. Lodge, *Black Politics*, ch. 10, conclusion. Drab books like R. Borum, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (Tampa: University of South Florida, 2004), are no longer of any use; J. Goodwin, ‘A Theory of Categorical Terrorism’, *Social Forces*, 84, 4 (June 2000), 2027–2046.

54. Wits, Cullen Library, A3299E1 ANC, University of Cape Town Oral History Project, Hilda and Lionel (Rusty) Bernstein, interview with Terry Barnes, 28 February 2001: MK developed in a time in which ‘we are not any longer in command of the situation – they are’.

55. Bob Hepple, who attended the meeting; personal communication, October 2011.

56. Cullen Library, Simons Papers (copy), Reel 8, 6.14.1, Flyer, ‘Vorster’s Nazi Law Can Never Destroy Communism’. Similarly, the 16 December flyer ‘warned’ that MK was trying to prevent civil (i.e. race) war.

But as we will see, this is not the way sabotage was understood by the leaders of MK.

Traces of internal debates

In 1961 apparently several relevant ANC-NEC 'Working Group' (Rand) and Congress Alliance meetings were arranged. According to one interrogated witness, one of them was attended by Mandela, Sisulu, Nokwe, Govan Mbeki, Moses Kotane, Dan Tloome, George Mbele, Stephen Dhlamini, Dr. G.M. Naicker, and five or six others.⁵⁷ The overlap in personnel with the command of the Communist Party was strong, although not all Communists supported sabotage.⁵⁸ According to this Rivonia witness, Gopallal Hurbans, who catered two days of Alliance meetings, Mbeki gave a short speech introducing the idea of violence, but then Lutuli opposed the idea, pointedly speaking about 'fighting ... in a peaceful manner'. This was echoed by G.M. Naicker and then by Kotane, and the meetings concluded.⁵⁹ In Mandela's account, this meeting took place in June 1961, and he recalls his arguments in favour of armed struggle were dismissed peremptorily and 'cheaply' by Kotane.⁶⁰

We must note that Kotane as General Secretary of the SACP along with several others had been present at the CC *yet did not favour* the ANC's involvement in violence. Some time later, and here it is hard to be precise, Mandela spoke at length with Kotane, and prevailed upon him to allow him to bring the issue up once more before the NEC. This apparently transpired in a marathon discussion in Durban, Natal, either in July or possibly August of 1961. The crucial meeting ran late because they could not adjourn without coming to a decision, as a Joint Congress Alliance meeting, with a fresh group of people, had been scheduled for the following evening.

Kotane, a leader in the ANC's NEC and the CC of the Party, exerted great influence in the struggle, more than even Mandela or Sisulu. Chief Lutuli began the meetings (according to Mandela), along with his aide and top Natal ANC official M.B. Yengwa, as 'opposed [to] this very strongly'.⁶¹ The case made for continuing non-violence was carefully laid out. For one thing, armed acts would subject all of them immediately to arrest! In favour of violence, the case was made was that the ANC must not be left behind by other people, that it must remain at the vanguard of the struggle. When the formation of MK was belatedly but finally approved, because of this argument, we may take it that MK was distinctly to be connected with the ANC, but officially to be kept at arm's length. Crucially Kotane was somehow carried along with Mandela's argument in this vein. Next came the 'Joint' meeting with the Congress Alliance partners. Here Lutuli, according to Mandela,

57. Note addendum to Sources, this article. Yutar Papers, Police Interrogation Reports, 385/23, Vol. 2, Gopallal Hurbans, pp. 293–296. Hurbans recalled more meetings on these matters than Mandela.

58. Not only Arenstein, but Jack Simons disparaged the 1960 'turn', University of Cape Town, Simons Papers, BC 1081, A1.6 and O16.5, 'Draft Outline Guerilla Warfare' (by Martin Legassick), critiqued by Jack Simons.

59. Yutar Papers, Police Interrogation Reports, 385/23, Vol. 2, Gopallal Hurbans.

60. Stephen Ellis suggests that Kotane was insubordinate to Moscow and the Party at this point, because he did not immediately accede to Mandela's requests for armed struggle.

61. Mandela, *Conversations with Myself*, 76.

said, 'even though we the ANC has decided this, let us present it as undecided to everyone else',⁶² allowing him to offer his arguments again before a larger group of sympathetic participants. Kotane's implicit acceptance of the inevitability of Mandela's logic apparently emerged, however, and Mandela's arguments again prevailed.⁶³

Yet it was a thorough discussion. We know enough about Nelson Mandela from his prison years and after⁶⁴ to accept that much, and Mandela recalls the meetings both as lasting nearly all night. While Mandela could be ruthless as a lawyer, it does not follow that Lutuli was shabbily treated. Rather, Lutuli was brought to a point where he could not creditably argue against others any longer. Nor does this mean however that Lutuli's consent to MK embraced violence for the ANC as an organisation. What took a great deal of convincing was only after all that he and the Alliance (J.N. Singh, M.D. Naicker, the Cachalias, other doubters) *not publically condemn* a newly invented MK. Relinquishing their opposition was the extent of Lutuli's, and so 'the ANC's', and Kotane's, change of mind. Mandela recalled that Moses Kotane summarised the final verdict thus:

you can go on and start this organization, but . . . we as the ANC we are formed to prosecute a non-violent policy, this decision can only be changed by a national conference. We are going to *stick* to the old policy of the ANC.

This was Lutuli's position and the Indian Congress activists' in the Durban meetings, according to Mandela.⁶⁵ The non-violent ANC would tolerate the new violent organisation, at least until a 'national conference' changed the ANC itself. (This conference was about as likely to happen inside South Africa as the national convention the ANC demanded to draft a new South African state constitution.⁶⁶) While MK would operate, in Rusty Bernstein's recollection, as 'a separate, independent' body, it would keep the ANC's NEC 'informed'. The SACP's CC did *not* in fact keep the ANC's NEC informed about everything (secrecy was intrinsic to it), so this was an important proviso. While they were having these discussions in

62. In this meeting Kotane supposedly told Rowley Arenstein to be quiet in his particular opposition to violence because 'you are a white man', in Magubane *et al.*, 'The Turn to Armed Struggle'. In Mandela, *Conversations with Myself* (New York: FSG, 2010), 80, Lutuli is recollected to Stengel as having fully assented to the ANC's starting 'an army'. According to Ben Turok, Kotane in the mid-1960s was angry with the white Communists who backed the sabotage campaign, blaming them for the destruction of the internal South African ANC. Bunting/Turok, tape 1 (1973).
63. NMF, Stengel interviews with Mandela, 15 April 1993. Mandel, *Long Walk to Freedom*, errantly presents Lutuli's manoeuvre (that of refraining from telling Alliance of the NEC's fresh decision to establish MK) as if it occurred twice, once in a positive light, once in a negative light. This is an editorial error, an artifact of Stengel's assemblage of the interviews to form *Long Walk*; the story of Lutuli's ruse came up in two different interviews, 'Dec. 1992' and '9 Ap. 1993' (the second one is reproduced in Mandela, *Conversations with Myself*, 80). See Mandela, *Long Walk*, 237–238 (of the 1994 hardcover, equivalent to 272–273 of the 1995 paperback edition).
64. This is also Tom Lodge's larger point in *Mandela, A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
65. NMF, Stengel interview with Nelson Mandela, 5 April 1993, and 15 April 1993. Also in Mandela, *Conversations with Myself*, 78.
66. Wilton Mkwayi understood even sabotage as being about getting a national convention Cullen Library, State v. Wilton Mkwayi and others, 18 November 1964 to 15 December 1964 ('Little Rivonia Trial').

the winter of 1961, small SACP 'special units', including Ahmed Kathrada and Jack Hodgson, were already cutting phone lines.⁶⁷ This would now be MK activity.

The ANC go-ahead for MK was a huge victory for Mandela, achieved through politics and persuasion. Mandela had associated with Communists from the mid-1950s on, and he had managed to field the Communist Party's espousal of sabotage and make it the ANC's own. In the past with the ANC, in ordinary times, such a momentous shift would surely have involved all the branches voting for the new policy, and mostly likely voting in a new president. But these were not ordinary times.

MK, the SACP, and the Alliance

This is not the place to investigate the *implementation* of MK's program, nor how the transition to the M-Plan and the growth of MK groups unfolded on the level of neighbourhoods and branches. But the outline of the story in Natal, as divulged by Rivonia witnesses, suggests that the transition did not always go smoothly. The problem in Natal was not only within the ANC ranks, but with the trade unions and the Natal Indian Congress. Comparatively, such alliances on the Rand were easier, as the Fordsburg-based Transvaal Indian Congress (a much smaller political body) was quite ready for action and its Youth Congress's newsletter was called '*combat*'.⁶⁸ In practice, MK recruited from the ANC and the African trade unionists. However, some ANC branches did not just vote themselves out of existence, but clung on. In Durban, the ANC opted to commence violent actions themselves, or barring that, tried to insert themselves in the MK chain of command. As a result, MK appointed the Communist and ANC 'residents' association' president Curnick Ndlovu directly to the Regional Command of MK to coordinate the relationship.⁶⁹

At the top and bottom MK was multi-ethnic and class-varied. MK's 'High Command' was distinctly multi-racial and overwhelmingly Communist, directly influenced by whites such as Harmel, Slovo, Turok, and by military men such as Jack Hodgson and Harold Strachan, and by others like Bernstein and Fischer who had no MK command. At the same time, with MK much of the action of the struggle went into the hands of activists from non-ANC groups in the Congress Alliance; in this sense MK was constructed on the

67. Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 23; see Goldberg, *The Mission*, and Andrew Mlangeni, in Magubane, *et al.*, 'The Turn to Armed Struggle', 71; and au. interview with Ahmed Kathrada, 7 October 2011.

68. With Wulfie Kodesh; Ahmed Kathrada, Indres Naidoo, and Mac Maharaj came from Fordsburg. R. Sedat and R. Saleh, eds., *Men of Dynamite: Pen Portraits of MK Pioneers* (Johannesburg: Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, 2009), *passim*. The relevant newsletter *combat* I found in SANA, one of the unnumbered, un-indexed 'Treason Trial exhibits' (150 boxes).

69. Yutar papers, 385/308/1 'Essentials of the M Plan', and 385/4/4 'Organization Plan' which projected 550 Zones in South Africa by the end of June 1961; Yutar papers, 385/26, Vol. 4, 722: Bruno Mtolo; identified by Mtolo in his book, *The Road to the Left* (Natal: Drakensberg Press, 1966), 18; SANA, Yutar papers, 385/25, Vol. 3, E. S. (Selbourne) J. Maponya, 495. Stephen Dlamini, George Poonan (a close friend of Billy Nair), Curnick Ndlovu, and Solomon Mbanjwa were all apparently Communists. Yutar Papers, 385/26, Vol 4, Abel Mthembu, and Vol. 4, Bruno Mtolo (722 ff.) Greater Durban included Hammersmith, Chesterville, Cleremont, Kwa Mashu, Cato Manor and other areas.

ground by the Alliance, even if made by men in the ANC. Furthermore, Richard Stengel, Mandela's ghost writer, recorded the following on tape:

Mandela: So then now having got that decision at the ANC, we brought in Joe Slovo, Jack Hodgson and Jack Hodgson [Mandela is thinking out loud] and Rusty Bernstein, we brought them in and formed a committee, a High Command [along with Walter Sisulu] and I was Commander of Umkhonto and the chairman of the High Command.

A confusion follows in the transcript, as Stengel does not understand whites as MK leaders. Mandela says, 'Haven't I not mentioned the names there?' and Stengel says, 'No', so Mandela says, 'I forget now, you know? But then the two[,] the Communist Party and the ANC met from time to time, to give us, the High Command to listen to a report . . . and give us instructions'.⁷⁰ Mandela could have hardly been clearer.

Preparations for the first *actions* drew heavily on World War II veterans, Springbok Legionnaires, and involved a great deal of homemade ordnance. The official MK launch came on 16 December 1961, except for Durban, which went ahead a day early; there was some damage to electrical conduits, and while one man died in an accident, some fuses did not go off, and the flyers that were posted were mostly torn down before dawn. The flyers announced the emergence of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, Spear of the Nation; the Congress itself had been called *Umbutho we Sizwe* on letterhead for decades, 'Congress of the Nation', so the association was clear. The flyers also declared that non-violence was dead, and that the new strategy had replaced it.⁷¹ Lutuli and Kotane almost certainly differed with the particulars of the message on the flyers.⁷²

But violence was not just about tactics. The readings and lectures that Mandela scrupulously took handwritten notes on suggest that for Mandela, Nokwe, Sisulu, Slovo and their allies, sabotage was not just a nudge to the state, not just 'armed propaganda', but was a prelude to, or a part of, *guerrilla war*. Mandela's own words suggest this, and his actions in Algeria, Ethiopia, and at the Pan-African Freedom Movement of Eastern and Central Africa (PAFMECA) in 1962, before his final arrest, make this trajectory even more apparent. He also recollected as much 30 years later.

70. NMF, Stengel interview with Mandela, interviews on 4, 5, and 15 April, 1993.

71. SANA, Yutar Papers, 385/32/2/7, 'Umkhonto we Sizwe', 16/12/61, and see Karis and Gerhard, 'The Turn to Violence Since May 31, 1961.'

72. Ellis, 'The Genesis'; Couper, *Albert Luthuli*. The debate about Lutuli's position on MK's 'launch' is unresolved. One notes the ferocity of his Oslo acceptance speech (pointed out to me by Sifiso Ndlovu), but also that Rusty Bernstein's (requested) speech-writer's draft for the speech included a more direct mention of the 'paradox' given the shift in the struggle which Lutuli disregarded (Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 233). There was also a long tradition of generational divergence in the ANC, in which the leadership (here 'the chief' in fact) was greatly respected but beheld almost as a symbol. Arguably this was an even older, African, political-organizational trait, as I elaborate in P. Landau, *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa, 1400 to 1948* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chs. 1, 2. An alternative account appears in Magubane *et al.*, 'The Turn to Armed Struggle', in which Curnick Ndlovu (from an interview done in ca. 2000 or 2001) refers to his visiting Lutuli in the aftermath of the 16 December 1961 initiation of the sabotage campaign: 'only thing he [Lutuli] raised was that he was not aware that the leaflet [*sic*] was coming out that day', at his return from the Nobel ceremony; 90, n135; 92.

In the last part of this paper, I will re-establish Mandela's own intentions for the struggle in 1961–1962, and connect those intentions to his visit to the PAFMECA conference in February of 1962 and its aftermath. As we will see, Mandela organised the renunciation of the (non-African) Communist alliance, if not formally (yet) the Congress Alliance. This evidence is deployed in favour of my overall interpretation, that it was Mandela's 'Sophiatown group' who saw the shift to violent opposition as inevitable, who tried to take control of it, in the name of the ANC, and who therefore made MK possible.

Nelson Mandela's political notes

In 1961 and early 1962, as the leader of MK, Mandela read several books on revolution and peasant uprisings, among them works on the Malay conflict, the Irgun in Paletstine/Israel, the war in Algeria, the Chinese and the Cuban Revolutions, even the US and Vietnam (and Sun Tzu and Frederick the Great). He may have read much more, but on these books he took meticulous, thorough notes.⁷³

In his notes on Che Guevara, *Guerilla Warfare* (Rivonia Exhibit R 25), a book published the year he read it, Mandela stresses two key elements of the Cuban revolutionary's thinking. First, there is no need to wait for all the conditions for revolution to arrive before launching a guerrilla struggle. 'The insurrection can create' these conditions. The conservative peasantry, however, has to see clearly that it is no longer possible 'to fight for social goals within the framework of civil debate . . . peace is already considered broken'. The people will get behind reclaiming the land.⁷⁴ In his interviews with Stengel, Mandela recalled using these same ideas in conversation with Moses Kotane in 1961. Mandela had argued to Kotane that Kotane was

doing precisely what the Communist Party in Cuba did; they said the conditions for a revolution had not yet arrived. Following the old methods, you see, which were advocated by Stalin; while here] we have to decide from our own situation. The situation in this country is that it is time to consider a revolution, armed struggle.⁷⁵

Secondly Mandela in his notes stresses that sabotage 'is an arm of guerrilla warfare'. Subsequently in writing about Chinese agrarian guerrilla war, Mandela noted that specific conditions must come to the attention of 'anyone directing a war', and that grasping practical and historical circumstances was critically important (R 24, 'Strategic Problems of China's Revolutionary War'). It must be up to the educated central command as to how and where to wage war. Control was key.

73. I have compared his handwritten notes adduced by the Rivonia prosecutors to the typescripts they prepared, and they are accurate to the point of being identical. There was no handwritten version for one or two surviving 'exhibits' and one suspects they have been stolen and sold.
74. *Guerilla Warfare* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1961), also available at <http://mecanopolis.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/08/guwar.pdf> (approx. 127 pp.), last accessed 5 January 2012.
75. NMF, Stengel interviews with Mandela, 5 April, 1993. A concern with the land runs right through South African political mobilizations of the twentieth century; see my 'Johannesburg in Flames: The 1918 Almost-Was Shilling Strike, *Abantu-Batho*, and the African National Congress', in P. Limb, ed., *Abantu-Batho: A People's Newspaper in South Africa* (Wits Press, forthcoming).

Mandela put South African historical battles in the trans-historical framework of warfare outlined in his notes on the Chinese Communist revolution, writing ‘Battle of Blood River 1838’ and ‘Battle of Isandhlwana 1879’ in the margins. He read about the failed Malay uprising, a 4,000-man guerrilla army of whom many were World War II veterans.⁷⁶ In part because there was ‘not enough bush’ in South Africa to allow the kind of guerrilla war he would like optimally to wage, Mandela was particularly attracted to the Israelis’ struggle against the British, and to *The Revolt*, Menachem Begin’s book about the Irgun.⁷⁷ We might recall here that Sisulu and other Communists spent some months in Israel in 1953. We might also note a regional-level meeting (in Zulu and English) of the ANC, Natal, in which a long passage from *The Revolt* appears to have been read into the record:

And we shall be accompanied by the spirit of millions of our matyrs [*sic*], our ancestors tortured and burned for their faith, our murdered fathers and butchered mothers, our murdered brothers and strangled children. And in this battle we shall break the enemy and bring salvation to our people, tried in the furnace of persecution, thirsting only for freedom, for righteousness and for Justice ...⁷⁸

In fact Mandela was moved by the book and patterned MK’s aims on the Irgun’s. He summarised: ‘A new generation arose. It began to fight instead of pleading’. But Mandela was also most impressed by the Irgun’s discipline, and as with Cuba and China, his notes emphasise discussion but then centralisation:

The High Command controlled all the activities of the Irgun, both military and political. It considered general principles, strategy and tactics, information and training, relations with other bodies and negotiations with their representatives. It took decisions, and orders were given as in all military organizations; but there were never any decisions by an individual. There was always discussion.⁷⁹

After discussion, and once a decision was reached, there had to be absolute obedience. Mandela took the terms ‘Regional Command’ and ‘High Command’ into the MK from Irgun terminology.⁸⁰

Many of the leaders in the struggle read books, and sought out information about other anticolonial struggles. Mandela wrote dozens of pages of notes on Chinese guerrilla war, and wrote scores of pages of notes on a work called ‘How to be a good Communist’, as the Rivonia court was told. Famously ‘Operation Mayibuye’, a typed document which looked

76. L. Taruq, *Born of the People* (London: Greenwood, 1973 [1953]).

77. Echoed in Mandela, *Long Walk*, 275.

78. Simons Papers, microfilmed facsimiles, Cullen Library, Reel 6, 5.7.1.5. Inthetho ka Mongameli kwi Ngqungquthela Inkomfa Yombutho weSizwe Upondo Lwase Koloni, 1953. This derived from a radio speech given by Begin in 1948, reconciling the Irgun with the State of Israel at its birth in 1948; other parts of *The Revolt* are about how the regular Israeli army had wanted to kill or disgrace the Irgun as terrorists, as Mandela highlighted in his notes. (c.f. M. Begin, *The Revolt: The Story of the Irgun* (Tel Aviv: Steimatsky Agency [revised edition], 1977).

79. SANA, Yutar Papers, 385, R 18; ‘Irg Z. L. Nat M. Organization’, Para 13, and p. 4.

80. As Mandela said in his Rivonia valediction: Simons Papers, P1.1, Nelson Mandela 1957–89, Statement at Rivonia (1963).

a lot like a plan for Communist-sponsored invasions, was found with these papers in the July, 1963 police raid on the Liliesleaf Farm at Rivonia, the SACP-provided temporary headquarters for MK. A lesser known typed document was titled 'Organization Plan for the Preparation of Armed Revolution'. This was an SACP outline for 'the second phase' of struggle, with a plan to headquarter a Supreme Revolutionary Council in Johannesburg and based guerrilla armies in rural areas. The document stressed the achievement of a 'concrete understanding of the real situation' on the ground (quoting Kim Il Sung), social layer by social layer, in order succeed.⁸¹ A separate document called 'The Speaker's Notes – a Brief Course on the Training of Organisers' (also secured, like so much else, in the 1963 police raid), is particularly illuminating. It begins, 'You have been appointed to perform the important task of organising the units of Umkonto Wesizwe ... by the high command'. Why did MK start with sabotage? The trainer is advised:

Sabotage is an invaluable arm of people who fight a guerrilla war. In the initial stages it fulfils the strategic task of creating the conditions necessary for the formation of guerrilla units from among the people.

What follows this are directives and assertions very close to Mandela's own notes on Che Guevara and other guerrilla movements from the literature he perused. Sabotage must be rigorously directed from a central command, or, it must happen in wartime where local actions against the enemy lines are permitted.⁸² Sabotage is not a freelance method, but part of something larger. The scenario as some of the MK high command envisioned it involved police converging on increasingly frequent scenes of destruction and then coming under deadly sniper fire. This would draw further policemen in, and create areas of no policing, where others could train their focus. A different debate revolved around 'Operation Mayibuye' and the possibly grand scale of the operation on the ground. Denis Goldberg, on behalf of the high command, priced out the industrial production of several tens of thousands of grenade casings and antipersonnel mines under its rubric. While he never submitted such an order, there were further discussions afoot at Liliesleaf to disaggregate production and reach the same volume piecemeal.⁸³

Chinese and African sensibilities

Mandela both toured South Africa and visited other African states and sites of insurgency in 1961–1962. This trip was delegated to him by a 'Working Group' at the NEC level. In

81. Yutar Papers, 385/32/4/4.

82. Literature ordered through the ANC's overseas representatives. Yutar Papers, 385/33/33 (R 54), 'The Speaker's Notes'.

83. Goldberg discusses this in *The Mission*; and, SANA, Yutar Papers, 385/32/3/16, 'Organisation of Local Production', T 125 or T 39, 'Report to Logistics Committee of the [MK] High Command'. Mandela in his Rivonia Trial statement makes both true and untrue assertions in the interest of avoiding a mandatory death penalty. Hence 'I have never been a member of the Communist Party', and Mandela's courtroom argument for sabotage: it would put 'a heavy strain' on the economy 'compelling the voters' (white people) to 'reconsider their position': Simons Papers, P1.1, Nelson Mandela 1957–89, Statement at Rivonia (1963), paras. 59, 27 (and Yutar Papers, 385, courtroom interrogations). As for the actual prospect of guerrilla war: the 'for instance' was from Denis Goldberg, Interview, 12 October 2011; and Goldberg, *Mission*, 92 ff.

fact, in 1960, the ANC and PAC together (with a few ancillary groups), as the South African United Front, had established contact with Ghana. The SAUF had also convened in Addis on 19 June 1960. The following year, shorn of Dr Dadoo and Oliver Tambo, the PAC dispatched Peter Molotsi and Nana Mahomo to Africa again.⁸⁴ Now, after another year, Mandela and Oliver Tambo (soon joined by Robert Resha) would tour Africa in their trail, looking for material support, training, camps, and funds, for MK and the ANC, not the PAC. In the course of their travels they went through Nigeria, Ethiopia, Cairo, Morocco, and visited Algeria, spending time with the FLN (the National Liberation Front), where Mandela befriended Ben Bella, and then Cameroon, Mali, and Sierra Leone, Accra, Lagos, Monrovia, Senegal, Khartoum, and back to Addis for some weeks training in soldiery. As he wrote in his 'Notebook' in Algeria, back home, the 'Masses must be made to understand that political action, of the nature of strikes, boycotts and similar demonstrations, has become ineffective standing by themselves [*sic*]'.⁸⁵

Close to the start of his Africa trip, in early February 1962, in Addis, Mandela attended the 'PAFMECA' conference, which included delegates from all over Africa. PAFMECA brought together African heads of state in a liberatory context. Mandela delivered a planned address and narrativised the history of South Africa as a long history of struggle against oppression, and he announced the birth of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) by name, without mentioning that he was its operating commander.⁸⁶

Mandela looked for angles in this context. He noted that both the Egyptian and Ghanaian delegations were unpopular. Ghana's pan-Africanism had already alienated many states. Aloysius Barden, a white, mercenary ex-policeman, bizarrely appointed to run Ghana's Bureau of African Affairs by Kwame Nkrumah, withheld other movements' monies.⁸⁷ Mandela also perceived that 'Communists' were disparaged by many new African states, perhaps surprisingly in Zambia and Tanganyika especially, less surprisingly in Addis, where Soviet-backed Ethiopian Communists would soon overthrow Haile Selassie's regime. And not only Egypt, but 'Arabs' in general were distrusted, and indeed two years hence, so-labelled 'Arabs' would be murdered by the Afro-Shirazi party in a mass pogrom in Zanzibar. Africa was not united, as Duma Nokwe later pointedly noted.⁸⁸

The Chinese revolutionary model would be especially favoured by Eastern Cape comrades and by those trained militarily in China. The Chinese strategy for maintaining their popularity from the time of the 1955 Bandung Conference was promulgated in the notion of the 'Third World'. Discussed at the Pan-African Freedom Movement of Eastern

84. Mayibuye Center (MCH) 02, Box 1, ANC London, 1960–72, incl. Jan. 7, 1960 'Constitution', and Interview with Peter Molotsi, *SADET, The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling Their Stories, Vol. 1, 1950–1970* (SADET, 2008).

85. Benneyworth, 'Armed', and Nelson Mandela Foundation, Nelson Mandela Papers, (Rivonia) R 16, Notebook. Mandela wrote 'AFL', Algerian Liberation Front.

86. Briefly 'PAFMECSA' after South Africa was added, the members ultimately became part of the Liberation Committee of the Organization of African Unity, at the urging of Algeria's Ahmed Ben Bello: A. Biney, 'Ghana's Contribution to the Anti-Apartheid Struggle, 1958–94', ch. 2 in *SADET, The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 5, African Solidarity*, forthcoming, thanks to Sifiso Ndlovu; see also Magubane *et al.*, 'The Turn to Armed Struggle', 673.

87. Biney, 'Ghana's Contribution'.

88. In the document cited in n95, i.e. 'Maloone??'.

and Central Africa conference, the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization, or AAPSO, had voted against seating the COD, the white South African 'Liberal', i.e. mostly Communist organisation allied to the ANC. In late 1961, when the Sino-Soviet split became public, and Kotane, Harmel and the other Communists were in contact with both Moscow and with Peking, the Chinese introduced the resolution and secured a unanimous 'no' vote, in an attempt to separate their Communism (rooted in anti-colonialism) from the Communism of white Europeans and therefore the Soviets. The Chinese hoped thereby to deflect PAFMECA anti-Communism away from them.⁸⁹

At PAFMECA in 1962 several new African nations were leaning toward recognising the PAC alone, not the ANC, as the legitimate representative of the South African struggle. The issue crystallised for Mandela when he met with Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda in private, most likely on 6 February 1962.⁹⁰ Kaunda, who would soon liaise with the Chinese, with other Zambians, conveyed that he, Kaunda, was struggling to influence his country's representatives not to abandon the ANC, as they were bucking for the PAC.⁹¹ Mandela learned that the Freedom Charter had much impressed everyone, but when the delegations learned that it was a product of ANC collaboration with whites (Rusty Bernstein in fact had drafted it), they 'were repulsed', or had 'torn it' up.⁹² Here was the *Bafabegiya* and PAC issue all over again if in new guise. Now, however, Tambo was with Mandela, and in the company of men from emerging Tanzania, Zambia, and China, the basic demand was for South Africa to join the post-colonial club, which (in turn) required anti-colonialism, not proletarianism. At least for *armed* struggle, 'the four-pronged wheel' model, in which the COD and Indian Congress held nominally equal status with the ANC in the Congress Alliance, was obsolete.

Mandela then decided on the need for a new strategy. In the public record already is the idea that he conveyed to Alliance allies that the ANC's 'tactics' but not its 'policy' would have to change. The argument was already a serious one both with Yusuf Dadoo and with Monty (M.D.) Naicker.⁹³ But in the end this decision was taken, apparently Mandela again succeeding by his powers of persuasion and leadership. Recently a further document has come to light, a schematic record of a quorum or 'working group' of the ANC National Executive Committee deciding exactly this. There are four men in conversation, sometime

89. Other factors at work at PAFMECA we can only note in passing. China had already partially defaulted on a promise to fund a Chinese-African People Friendship Association scholarships for South Africans, and other projects. UWC, Mayibuye Center, MCH 02-1 London, 1960–72, South African United Front to China, 5 June, 1962. C.J. Lee, ed., *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010), Introduction; G.T. Burgess, 'Mao in Zanzibar,' in Lee, ed., *Making a World*, 205; and B.D. Larkin, *China and Africa, 1949–70: The Foreign Policy of the People's Republic of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 59. Kaunda also had dealings apparently with the Yugoslavs.

90. Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF), Nelson Mandela Papers, Diary, 1 February 1962, 6 February 1962.

91. See D. Gordon, *Invisible Agents*, forthcoming.

92. Yutar Papers, Police Witness reports, Vol. 3, 489–521. Ephraim Selbourne John Maponya, a secretary of Lutuli's in 1962 ('repulsed') and SANA TAB WLD CC1964 578 State vs. Wilton Mkwayi, R-13, Mandela's 'diary.' Mandela in *Long Walk* recalls then a long conversation with Simon Kapwepwe, whom he also swayed, 258.

93. Mandela, *Long Walk*, 264, 272.

in 1962, in London either before or after Mandela's aborted 'military training' (which ended in mid-July 1962). Excerpted:

'Xamela' (i.e. Qamela, Walter Sisulu): [']Tactics can be adjusted[,] We must bear in mind the sensitivity with other minority groups ...

'Madiba' (Nelson Mandela): [']What we lack is initiative. We should change our attitude and exert ourselves. Our friends must understand that it is the ANC that is to pilot the struggle. Something bigger should be arranged in Tanganyika.[']⁹⁴

'Bokwe' (Joe Matthews): [']We are prisoners of our own sins [.] We allowed ourselves to drift. I think cooperation has been carried too far. I think we should expand our offices ... like Zapu and Unip ... [and] make the necessary preparations in Bechuanaland... [']

'Gowanini' (Duma Nokwe): ... [']We must take the situation in Africa realistically. If the cause of the struggle in SA can only be put forward through the ANC then we must do so. I do not think it is any step backward. We must explain to our colle[a]gue[s] the step[s] that we feel are appropriate. The policy is decide, there is no question of deviation[']⁹⁵.

This articulation of the Africanist course-correction thus deprecated the Alliance. These words constitute the decision to redirect the armed struggle toward a more African-nationalist line, starting immediately, creating the MK of the next 30 years. The Chinese and African nations (Nigeria donated thousands) would fund this ANC, along with the Soviets, and African commanders could train scores and perhaps ultimately thousands of African MK conscripts on African soil. To that end, African leadership, ANC leadership, would come to the fore, and white (and Indian and Coloured) fighters would retreat into a supporting role. This was potentially an explosive idea, because, as we have seen, these allies had been elevated in the middle ranks within the structure of MK (which drew heavily on Communists and Congress-affiliated union men for 'volunteers'), but perhaps that is why the decision had to be made with finality: 'there is no question of deviation', as Nokwe put it.

Most importantly here, this NEC-working group in 1962 shows again that the core subjective agency behind MK was an emergent group of revolutionary ANC leaders. This 'Sophiatown group' and its close allies, if they deemed it necessary, would get rid of their Communist (mostly white) allies and act only in the name of the ANC: that is seen here. Any full account of MK must take the measure of (what was to be) a major, coming change.

A further clue to Mandela's probable forward-oriented thinking (from 1963), should one be needed, can be seen in a commentary he offered the young activist Sylvia Neame during the Rivonia trial, about a paper she was writing about the Communist Party. Bear in mind Mandela was both ANC (MK) and a Communist Party member at the moment he wrote:

94. This constituted the first step in building toward the creation of Morogoro.

95. It was seen by David Smith in Harry Oppenheimer's private library, when Smith was researching his book *Young Mandela*, but Smith does not discuss it and did not fully realize its significance. I found it independently and I've yet found no other notation of it. Yutar Papers, 385/33/13, R 14 (K.R. 17), headed 'Maloone?? 1. Policy of the U.A.R.' It is not clear if 'decided' should be read here, or 'to decide', but at the least, the implication is 'we decide, others follow our decision'. Thanks to Hugh Macmillan for information on Nokwe.

On several occasions in history, it has happened that the working cooperation between a non-marxist political organization and the C.P. ceases because policy differences emerged, as they have for example in India between the Congress and the C.P., and in several Middle Eastern Countries.⁹⁶

Perhaps just this was in the cards. The trajectory of the struggle as the government's brutality moved toward its final phases described an MK that would hew closely to the ANC. The leadership of the struggle remained Communist in orientation at that moment, because Mandela, Nokwe, Sisulu, Mbeki, Robert Resha, Dan Tloome, Ray Mhlaba, and many others in the leadership were Communists, interested in finding ways to move South Africa toward guerrilla war against the state. The sense above that 'they'd let things slip', that (as Mandela put it) 'our friends must understand' and take a back seat in the effort, made linking MK and the ANC even more important. In 1962, the last big ANC conference for many years took place in Lobatse, Botswana, cementing the shift; and by early 1963, MK agents were informing rank and file ANC members (who had not in some cases associated MK with the ANC and knew little about it), that MK was a 'child' of the ANC and that the struggle had simply entered a 'second phase', much as the December 16th, 1961 flyer announced.⁹⁷

At the end of June in 1962, Mandela and his allies briefly stood at the top of struggle's pyramid. Travelling out to see Lutuli in his Groutville home-arrest, to apprise him of this new policy (again!), Mandela paid a visit to the Durban Regional Command of the Natal corps of MK, where he spoke to a group of MK as their national commander in chief. Mandela said he was 'glad to see' they were all 'young men, not old men', a line elsewhere echoed by Sisulu and Mbeki; he reported that other African countries saluted them; he suggested that one fighter, Eric Mtshali, had offended his Tanzanian hosts by announcing he was a Communist, and that this was a 'dangerous' thing to do (this in continuation of his conversations above); he reported that the Algerian Ben Bella was sympathetic to Communists but not Haile Selassie, and not the Egyptians, who noticed in the pages of *New Age* that they had been criticised 'whenever they did anything against Communism'. Mandela reported that he had brought back £30,000 Sterling from his travels. They needed Party literature and works of history; they had to teach the rural people; they had to be ready to 'fight' the Bantu Authorities. Lastly, that sabotage would not 'end with Sabotage only. After that we will go into guerilla warfare'.⁹⁸

Mandela was captured by the police on the drive home the next day, Sunday, 4 August 1962.⁹⁹

96. Cullen Library, A 2729, Neame papers, 1968. Also, in Mandela's valediction at the Rivonia Trial, he says, 'I believe that it is open to debate whether the Communist party has any specific role to play at this particular stage of our political struggle'. (But if in support of the Freedom Charter, we 'welcome' the Party's 'assistance'.)

97. SANA, Yutar Papers, Police Interrogations, 385/25 (Vol. 2), E.S. (Selbourne) J. Maponya, 508-12.

98. Cullen Library, Rivonia, AD 1844 A15: Private Machine, 'Our Copy', Bruno Mtolo with Zulu interpreter.

99. NMF, Stengel interviews with Mandela, 16 April 1993. And in July 1963 came the massive raid on Liliesleaf farm, Rivonia, outside Johannesburg, a hide-out financed through Bram Fischer and offered to ANC and MK leaders, which led to the arrest of so many of them.

Conclusion: MK/ANC as phoenix

Who knows what might have been, but we can summarise what was: a coalescence of authority around *command structures* and secret cells, undertaken by a 1950s-era cache of ANC men in the SACP, under great pressure. These men along with white Communist allies began the first attempt to overthrow the South African government only after that government undertook to destroy them. The principle effect of 1960–1 repression, State of Emergency, and the ANC's 'turn', on the struggle as a whole, was the creation of further institutions favouring the 'abolition of election . . . and leadership by appointment',¹⁰⁰ in other words, a new kind of organisation, albeit also called the ANC.¹⁰¹ That transformation has not proved entirely easy to undo.

Amidst the state's brutal repression of dissent, and given the increased attention of the Communist Party to Africans' concerns after World War II, there arose the conditions in which an organised violent response to the violent state could emerge. Soviet and Chinese Communist did not give the go-ahead for violence until key African leaders (who were Communists) also backed it. When they did, change waited for them to persuade the other nationalist and unionist leaders in the struggle; the SACP General Secretary, a commanding figure in the ANC; and finally the rump NEC, and from there, the leaders of the Alliance, to give the okay. Facilitated willy-nilly by the state's neutralisation of so many colleagues, Mandela and a group of 1950s' Communist African nationalists, the Sophiatown group, did this. Emerging in the politics of resistance on the Rand in the 1950s, and cohering during the trials of the 1950s–1960s, they sought to refashion themselves as nationalist revolutionaries, and redeploy the name of the ANC in the process.

Might-have-beens are anti-historical, and the reasoning of the Sophiatown group was eminently defensible and arguably correct in 1961 and in 1962. They did not, however, succeed in the aims they cherished, before they went to jail or left the country for years or decades or were killed. The M-Plan failed to protect or sustain an underground ANC organisation. There was no guerrilla movement to stimulate a mass uprising against the state. The founders of MK defended the ANC's continued relevance, beginning inside the SACP in 1960–1961, a policy that developed along the same vector, from 1963 to 1965, such that the ANC and MK controlled and contained the SACP, and for many years strategically silenced it altogether in Zambia.¹⁰² What larger conclusion, then, can be drawn from the developments outlined here? Clearly that shifts such as 'the turn to violence' can easily be mythologised. The real story of that 'moment' is a messy and heavily contingent one. But nonetheless policymakers may ask: what form of mass politics last escapes the progressive brutalization, with 'state of emergency' powers, of a previously unjust but (largely) rule-following regime? The answer: an external, militarised

100. Yutar Papers, 385/25 (Vol. 2), Maponya, 508–513.

101. One thinks of Nietzsche's warning about becoming the monster. Yutar Papers, 385/28 (Vol. 5), Gabriel S. Nyembe, 898 ff., quotes Govan Mbeki's words excluding him from a (Working Group) NEC meeting in Transkei: 'Don't you know that the matters of the African National Congress are handled by only a few people now?'; in this my argument concurs with Couper, *Albert Luthuli*, 91; 102, and work he draws on. Rusty Bernstein in a letter to John Saul, printed in *Liberation Lite: The Roots of Recolonization in Southern Africa* (AWP: 2010), written in 2001, rues this shift in retrospect.

102. The subject of a future essay.

command-and-control operation, funded by foreign donors, immobile, and soon consumed by ancillary turmoil – yet still dedicated to basic virtues and human rights.

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Appendix A: *Note on sources*

The defence's records of the Rivonia Trial held at the Cullen Library, and the Prosecution Records, including exhibits, as held by the South African National Archives in Pretoria (as the Yutar Papers), are used in this article. These include state witnesses' depositions recorded by the South African Police. Especially for the larger project of which this article is part, these texts, the testimony that the state elicited from witnesses at the Rivonia trial, supplies important source material. But under the 'Sabotage Act' of 27 June, 1962, witnesses were held in prison in *90-day periods of isolation*, confined to a small room with minimal human contact, and this three month period could simply be re-imposed. This material therefore consists of coerced confessions or statements made under duress, making the transcripts difficult and problematic as sources: only their most sceptical use is warranted. (Normally, these reports were destroyed by the police, but Yutar preserved his bounded editions of the original police reports with these witnesses' depositions. Denis Goldberg also comments on the problem of torture in an addendum to his book, *The Mission*.) There are times when accounts emerge which Yutar's prosecutorial team did not desire, such that with care the Rivonia trial transcripts can help determine what evidence can and can't be trusted (Wits, Cullen Library, Defence papers of the Rivonia Trial, AD 1844 Box 3 A12–A16, A 12.1, Bennet Nvuya Mashiyana's testimony; Berrange Cross notes; SANA, Yutar Papers, 385/26 (Vol 4); Sikumbuzo Njikelana, 797–799). One must be a better judge of testimony than the Rivonia magistrate, Q. de Wet, who turned a blind eye to torture. But if this material is read carefully, it can provide evidence about the struggle in the years covered here.