

I WILL GO SINGING

**Walter Sisulu Speaks of His Life
And Struggle For Freedom**

by

Walter Sisulu

with

George M. Houser and Herbert Shore

Dedication

To the Sisulu family, by birth, adoption and marriage, all of whom have made themselves an integral part of the Movement for freedom and justice in South Africa,

And

To the "ordinary people" of South Africa who were truly extraordinary in the struggle to bring an end to the tyranny of apartheid and in giving birth to a new democracy in South Africa.

Preface

"At 83," the letter said, "I have been persuaded that I should not depart this life without recording for history and the archives my reminiscences and experiences, not only of my personal life, but also of those events in the long struggle for this 'New South Africa' that we are now beginning to build."

Written on 17 August 1995 by Walter Sisulu, the letter invited us to assist him in putting his thoughts and memories on tape.

"These past few years it has become apparent that more and more people worldwide have become interested in the politics and history of this country. I have finally been convinced that I should leave a record behind after I have gone. I am delighted you have agreed to help guide my thoughts onto tape for archival purposes. I assure you of my full cooperation."

To speak of Walter Sisulu as one of the giants of South African history is not to indulge in a cliché, but is rather a simple and direct statement of fact. His life and the struggle for freedom in South Africa are intimately intertwined. Close comrade of Nelson Mandela throughout most of his life, fellow prisoner on Robben Island and other mainland prisons for some twenty-six years, Sisulu became Secretary General of the African National Congress in 1949 at a crucial turning point in South African history. The National Party, led by Daniel Malan, had just come to power the year before and with Malan as Prime Minister, set about codifying into law the concepts and practices of what became known as apartheid. At the same time, the Youth League, of which Sisulu had been a founding member, emerged as the dominant influence in the African National Congress, leading it to a new activism which ultimately made possible the transformation of the country.

From the early 1940s, when the Youth League was formed with Sisulu as its Treasurer, through the 1990s, he showed himself to be a master strategist, an effective mediator, a brilliant organiser and a mobiliser who inspired a devotion and commitment among ordinary people that reflected his own deep, passionate and unswerving dedication to the struggle which gave birth to present-day South Africa.

Throughout the nation he is referred to frequently and by many as the "kingpin" in that struggle, a driving force for unity who held together diverse elements that composed ANC. All pay tribute to him as indeed one of the fathers of his country. Tata Sisulu. Born out of wedlock to an African mother and a white father, Walter Sisulu was actually a "Coloured" in the terminology of apartheid. But he chose to be an African, lived his life as an African and participated in the struggle under the oppressive pass laws for Black Africans.

In 1997, in discussion with Joe Matthews, then a member of the Inkatha Freedom Party, and Deputy Minister for Safety and Security in the Government of National Unity, we were told that "Walter was the key person on the ground. He always seemed to know just

what strategies and tactics were needed to mobilise and organise masses of people into action. He was more than a visionary. He was a leading man of action who knew how to get things done."

But Walter Sisulu is a modest man, at times even a self-effacing man, and there was a growing concern, as he grew older, that there was no sign of a memoir or an autobiography from him. Many who had been involved in the struggle throughout the world increasingly urged him in some way to record the events in his life which are so intertwined with the remarkable changes in South Africa. Principal among these was Rica Hodgson, herself a prison graduate of the apartheid regime and Walter's personal assistant for many years. Rica was the driving force that brought this project into existence and it was her management and energy that created the conditions that made it possible.

And so, in August 1995, the letter came.

We two, George Houser and Herbert Shore, have been active participants in the liberation struggles in Africa for close to half a century. George Houser was founding director of the American Committee on Africa who first was in contact with Walter Sisulu in 1952 at the time of the Defiance Campaign, when Walter was Secretary General of the African National Congress. The ACOA was organised out of support for this campaign. Herbert Shore worked with the Council on African Affairs, under W.E.B. Dubois, Paul Robeson and Alphaeus Hunton, and then later with the American Committee on Africa. As a result of our work and writing, each of us was prohibited from re-entry into South Africa for several decades until the unbanning of the ANC and the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. We have collaborated closely on projects in the past, involving Mozambique and Angola as well as South Africa, and came to know the leadership of the liberation movements in exile in Dar es Salaam, Morogoro and Lusaka and have worked together on two booklets, *Mozambique: A Dream the Size of Freedom* and *No One Can Stop the Rain*, dealing with Angola (with Jennifer Davis and other members of the American Committee on Africa).

This project began as an effort to record an oral history from discussions with Walter. It was not designed to be either a biography or an "as-told-to" autobiography. Elinor Sisulu, Walter's daughter-in-law, has been working on a major biography and generously shared with us segments of her research and early drafts of sections of her book to assist us as background to our discussions. Our task was to guide Walter's "thoughts on tape for archival purposes."

We were honoured to be asked to undertake this project, knowing full well that there were many others who were highly qualified to do so. Nevertheless when we were asked, we took it on because of its vital importance to an understanding of South African history, our profound respect and admiration for Walter and the pressure of the fact that perhaps time was running out.

In September and early October, 1995, we spent approximately two weeks in Johannesburg in intensive discussions with Walter both at ANC headquarters and

at his home in Soweto. These were more than question and answer interviews. Our questions were designed not simply to elicit direct factual response, but primarily to stimulate Walter's memories, and the narrative was permitted to go wherever he took it. This was to be the basis for a narrative in Walter's voice, rather than a tightly-organised journalistic interview. It was to be the story of the struggle as Walter remembered it. The interpretations would be from his point of view. It was expected to be full of digressions and repetitions, and it was -- memories stimulating and crossing with other memories. The recording was for an archive at the Mayibuye Centre. It was intended to be public domain, available to students, scholars and writers in the future. The atmosphere of our sessions was relaxed and informal -- three of us, sitting around a table, talking with a tape recorder in our midst.

By the end of this period we had more than fourteen hours recorded on tape cassettes of Walter Sisulu recounting his memories from his beginnings in the Transkei up to our sitting with him in 1995. Copies were made of the tapes and placed in the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape, at the Africa Fund in the U.S., in the ANC archives at Fort Hare University, and the set of originals was given to Walter Sisulu himself. The project could have (and, as we originally conceived it, should have) ended there, providing a valuable resource for researchers who could take time to listen to the tapes. To make the recordings even more useful, Professor Andre Odendaal, then Director of the Mayibuye Centre, and an active partner in the project, had transcriptions made.

It became clear, as we studied the transcriptions carefully, that this record would be considerably enhanced if the text were organised both topically and chronologically. It was also clear that there were omissions in the narratives and some errors or ambiguities of names, places and dates that are inevitable in the recording of remembrances of events that had taken place years earlier.

Our next step was the process of organising the text, filling in the omissions wherever possible, clarifying names, dates and spellings, and checking on translations from Xhosa and Zulu. In Autumn, 1996, we worked together in New York to edit the text and organise its structure. Then we completed this phase of the project with a return trip to South Africa.

In January and February, 1997, we spent a few more weeks with Walter in Johannesburg and Cape Town. Fourteen more hours of tape recordings resulted from this visit.

The text is Walter's story in his own words. We have worked with him to organise the narrative, edit the material and provide some background commentary for context and clarification. But the substance and the words themselves are those of Walter Sisulu. Therefore this work is "by Walter Sisulu with George Houser and Herbert Shore."

The work is entitled "I Will Go Singing". Several elements in Walter's life and legacy led to this. First, when we asked him what was going through his mind when he was awaiting sentencing at the Rivonia trial and was expecting the death sentence he said, "I was thinking how I must go to the gallows. And I thought I must go to the gallows singing -- for the sake of the youth who follow

us, so they will know that we fulfilled our task in life. We must show that our death would not mark the end...but would be an inspiration to our people." And today uppermost in his mind is that when he leaves this earth he "will go singing," as an inspiration and a challenge to the younger leaders to continue the process begun long ago toward the realisation of freedom and democracy in South Africa. (*Cf.p.149 Chapter on the Rivonia Trial.*)

And why "singing" rather than speaking? Throughout our discussions, Walter told us again and again of his love for music and especially for singing -- in choruses and choirs, in church, in school, in prison, and any place the opportunity provided itself, -- he loved to sing in chorus with others. Just before we left Walter in 1997, at Elinor and Max Sisulu's home in CapeTown, he told us a story of the time of Sharpeville when, although he thought the precipitous action of the Pan Africanist Congress was an unfortunate mistake, he remembered being thrilled by a song of resistance that they broadcast clandestinely throughout the day. And so, many years later, at Elinor and Max's home, he sang the song for us from memory. As we felt the thrill of his singing and the meaning of the words, we knew that Walter would indeed "go singing" when the time finally comes for him to leave this earth, as a legacy to the young people who follow.

Throughout this project, our respect, admiration and love for Walter has grown. His integrity and dignity, the depth of his commitment and his generosity of spirit have been an inspiration. Throughout South Africa the people call him "Tata" with love in their hearts and we have come to understand why. He is a South African for the ages, a role model for the world.

So many have contributed to this project that over a period of more than three years it has indeed become a collective effort to honour Walter Sisulu. We have already spoken of Rica Hodgson, without whose dynamic energy, organising skills, constant guidance and commitment, none of this would have happened.

Rica's nephew, Brian Bernstein and his wife Andrea, devoted South Africans, living at present in Los Angeles, made it possible for Peter Ditz and the Israel-South Africa Foundation in Durban to make an initial financial contribution to getting the project started.

The bulk of technical and financial support for the Sisulu project over the three year period came from the Africa Fund in New York. We are grateful especially to the Fund's Director, Jennifer Davis, long a colleague in the struggle for freedom in Southern Africa, and the generous donors who contributed to this project. We are grateful to Professor Andre Odendaal, Director of the Mayibuye Centre when this project began, for his encouragement and support. Andre was succeeded by Barry Feinberg as Director of Mayibuye. The last phases of this work, and the process of making it available in printed form for wider use, could not have been accomplished without his essential participation and technical assistance.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Ahmed Kathrada and others of Walter's colleagues in the Movement and in prison, including members of the Defence Team at Rivonia who shared with us their views on events in his life, and to Elinor Sisulu, who generously shared her work with us.

We can only begin to express the depth of our gratitude to Sheila Sisulu, while still South African Consul General in New York (now Ambassador in Washington), who, in the midst of her major

duties and responsibilities, somehow patiently found the time to help us clarify the text and its many references, assist us with translations and other editing matters, and who was a constant source of encouragement. We are grateful too to Jean Houser who from the very outset devoted her time, and her editing, proofreading and computer skills to completing a clean copy final draft of the text on diskette.

No simple words of gratitude could do full justice to Thomas G. Karis, longtime colleague and friend, Professor Emeritus at the City University of New York, whose multi-volume work, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990*, started with the late Gwendolen Carter and continued through to the present with Gail Gerhart at the University of Witwatersrand, is an indispensable contribution to an understanding of the struggle for freedom and justice in South Africa. Tom's commentary and contribution to the clarity and accuracy of our text were invaluable.

And we offer our thanks for the outstanding work as Research Assistant to Laurel Ann Bogen, well-known Southern California poet, and an advanced student in the Professional Writing Program at the University of Southern California.

Many people have contributed to this work and enhanced its qualities. They bear no responsibility for its deficiencies. We alone are responsible for these. For us, this has been a labour of love and enlightenment. We have, of course, worked without compensation of any kind. Our lives have been enriched by the experience.

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A Special Word of Gratitude by Herbert Shore

It isn't often that one member of a collaborative team has the opportunity to thank another member of that team publicly. It is appropriate in this case that I voice special thanks to George Houser. We have collaborated on projects in the past, and, although we are both Gemini by birth, we are contrasted individuals in our skills and approach. George's strength lies in his organisational abilities, his skill at structuring and his meticulous attention to detail. George is a person of integrity, commitment and determination. We supplement each other well and the synergistic melding of our skills stood us well in the face of crises that have accompanied this project. When I experienced a stroke and was involved in medical treatment and rehabilitation, George took up the challenge and kept the work going so that we were ultimately able to resume

our collaboration and produce a final working draft together. This collaboration is a rare kind of brotherhood which I shall never forget.

And I must pay profound tribute to the love, devotion, commitment and determination of my wife, Yen Lu Wong. In the midst of her own work as Executive Director for a multi-campus program of the California State University System, her love and belief in the importance of this project led her to take on added responsibilities at home and as a care-giver in my illness and rehabilitation. Such love, belief and commitment are rare and I pay tribute to it.

An Additional Personal Word from George Houser

I feel I must add a word of my own. This collaboration, which Herb and I have had has been a unique experience for me. Not the collaboration, for Herb and I have worked together before, but the circumstances. Our collaboration has been strange in that for the most part our editing has been done as we have been 3000 miles apart, and our communication has been mostly done by phone and e-mail. Over the three years of the work, we have been together only three times -- twice with Walter Sisulu in South Africa and once in New York. Herb and I seem to be very compatible. There has been no contention in our relationship even though we have occasionally differed. In spite of some unavoidable set backs, our resolve to finish the work has strengthened each of us. It has been a very satisfying experience both with Herb and with Walter for which I will be everlastingly grateful.

It should be known that Herb got me into this project, for he is the one who had the original discussions with Rica Hodgson about the project and then contacted me. His expertise in writing has been a great asset. I must thank Herb for sharing this project with me and for our comradely relationship.

I EARLY LIFE

Walter, let's start right at the beginning.

My consciousness begins with my stay in Cofimvaba with my mother's sister, Agnes, and her grandmother (my great grandmother). I think I lived in Cofimvaba from 1913. Actually I was more or less a year old when I was taken there. I was born on May 18, 1912. And when I left there, I believe it was 1918. I remember this simply because of the vaccinations for influenza that took place, something which fascinated me, and the memory remained with me for many years. And I remember my mother's sister, my aunt, a very powerful person whom I admired. She looked after the livestock. She was in charge. She milked the cows. She was a powerful lady. When I was a baby, Agnes had no sons of her own. She considered me not only as company for her daughters, but a comfort to herself.

Why were you away from your mother from the time you were born?

Yes, that's a very important question. My mother was a domestic worker. I was born out of wedlock, and by tradition such a child belongs to the family. I am, accordingly the son of Moyikwa, my grandfather, the father to my mother. And that is how the family is.

What about your father?

I used to hear from my mother about my father. His name was Dickenson. It is not quite a clear and connected story. They would show me photos, which I no longer have, of my father's sisters. They were whites. Until later I had never seen my father. But later (I'll come to that when I come to Johannesburg) I met him. But I know that my mother's brother, Clifford, and another relative went to demand payment for the damage that had been done by impregnating my mother. Because they were whites, there was fear that there would be trouble if they went there. But they were well received. And because of that he was regarded as a gentleman. They did receive some payment.

He was a magistrate?

An Assistant Magistrate at the time when he met my mother.

As Assistant Magistrate, would he visit the village?

No, that's why I never saw him. No, my mother was working as a domestic servant in various hotels in Engcobo District in the Transkei.

And did this Assistant Magistrate, Mr. Dickenson, have another family of his own?

Yes, that is one thing I remember, that there were photos which included him, and his family.

Did they live near by?

No, far away, in England.

Now you, after you were born, lived with your mother for two years and then you were- ?

In fact, I think it was less than two years. It must have been just about a year or so. I was baptized in 1913, I think it was. When I left the care of my mother I went to her sister's and my great grandmother, to Cofimvaba which was like 30-35 miles from Qutubeni, district of Engcobo.

We have heard a little incident which we were told - that at about five years of age you were taken by your Aunt Agnes to a garden and there was a woman whose apron was filled with something and you were told this was your mother.

Yes.

So you were five years old when you first consciously met your mother?

That's true.

What was your feeling?

Well, I was excited. You see, I gradually became aware of the fact that Cofimvaba was a second home. I had always addressed my aunt as "Mam khulu", meaning "senior mother", not just "mama" who I thought must be somewhere else. This never bothered me because I was extremely happy with my Aunt Agnes. One afternoon I was summoned by my aunt into the garden where I saw a strange woman. I remember she was carrying something in her apron -- fruit and clothing -- that I discovered later was meant for me. And I heard that she had come from Qutubeni; that's where I was born. I link this with what she was carrying because in Xhosa the word *qutu* means to carry something. Here was a symbol of Qutubeni actually carrying something in her pinafore which gave me the impression of the link-up with the village, Qutubeni.

Although five years old at the time you did not actually go to live with your mother again in Qutubeni until later?

Yes. I was taken to Qutubeni, I think when I was six years old. You see, I remember the vaccination incident which was 1918.

The vaccination in Cofimvaba was because there was a terrible epidemic?

Epidemic of influenza.

How do you remember that experience? Were you vaccinated in a clinic?

I was taken to the small town of Cofimvaba. I lived in a homestead, not really very far from town, less than a mile. It was an exciting moment going there with old people and at some stage the bigger boys carried me on their shoulders. But I could walk on my own. Then we went for vaccination. And because of that, I have vividly in my mind that this was 1918, the influenza period. It was exciting to go out and walk with the people. Everybody seems to have taken it quite seriously. So we were fascinated by it.

Were you vaccinated by a doctor or a nurse?

No, a doctor.

Was the doctor white or black?

White - white.

Did you have any fear of the vaccination?

No, but I think I had a reaction to the vaccination itself, yes.

Right after this my uncles, that is my mother's brother, Clifford, and his brother-in-law, Molteno, came to fetch me. I said farewell to Cofimvaba with mixed feelings - sadness at leaving behind those whom I had grown to love, and joy at the prospect of joining my mother and a sister, Rosabella, four years younger than me. But my uncles came to fetch me with horses, those they were riding and another one which was supposed to be used by me. They had the impression that I was already riding horses, but I was not. I was too young. They had to carry me on their backs and the horses took them along. I remember this as one of the nastiest experiences of my childhood.

We arrived not at Qutubeni, but at Manzane which was the village of my uncle's brother-in-law, Molteno Ndzwane. He was a well-to-do man in the village. I stayed there for several weeks, met a number of boys, boxed, played, and fought with one another to strengthen each other.

An interesting thing about this story was meeting a warm person I called uncle who called me Maqabi. This is sort of a poetic name *Maqabi adliwa zibokwe zodwa nezwadlayo zikhala unome*. The whole phrase is translated as: "These leaves are not eaten. Only goats eat them, even though they die". I don't know the significance of that. That was to be my name as far as that village was concerned. Even today that's how they call me - Maqabi. For many people who went to school with me later (I went there to do standard 2 and 3 from Qutubeni) that name Maqabi stuck. That's the only Xhosa name I have because I was baptized Walter Max Ulyate Sisulu. No Xhosa name. The only Xhosa name is the nickname Maqabi which stands for "leaves", meaning a bit of a wild person.

Then we went to Eluhewini where my uncle and step-grandmother, Christina, stayed. But I never liked the place right from the beginning, and it's clear that my mother didn't like it too. And my mother then took me to Qutubeni. Originally my uncle wanted me to look after their cattle and so on. I don't think they agreed with my mother. They may have agreed to fetch me (from Cofimvaba), but once we were in Eluhewini my mother was not happy that I should remain there. She took me to Qutubeni which was the home of the whole family.

My real guardian should have been Clifford Sisulu, that is my uncle who came directly after my mother. By law he was my guardian. But in actual fact my upbringing was overseen by Dyanti Vanqa Hlakula, head of the Amayira family, our clan name. (*Another clan name used for Walter was Tyopho.*) Dyanti was head of the village, not only in the village but in the surroundings and the district of Engcobo. This was a beautiful area which was appealing to whites. Whoever came to South Africa, especially visits by English personalities, would end up at our place at Qutubeni. Now the point I am making is that I was the son in reality of Dyanti Hlakula and my whole upbringing was on that basis. Dyanti Hlakula was a cousin of my mother. But everyone regarded Dyanti as the head of the family. Dyanti Hlakula was already over 80 when I gained consciousness.

I am really always fascinated with the family relationship. It is difficult to explain. My grandfather, my mother's father, was Moyikwa, a highly respected man in the whole village. He was Dyanti's uncle, although he was 20 or 30 years younger. So you find a situation here where Dyanti Hlakula

is head of all our family, but he regards Moyikwa as senior, senior in the fact that he is uncle to him.

The Sisulus and the Hlakulas were the same family, then?

Yes, the Hlakulas and the Sisulus were all the children of the old man, Hlakula Sisulu, my great grandfather. Born in the latter years of the 18th century in the Glen Grey District, he was a relatively prosperous farmer. He had three sons: Hlakula, Mlungwana, and Abraham Moyikwa. The elder two sons followed the traditional practice and their sons took their father's first name. But Moyikwa adopted the Christian practice. Thus the Hlakulas, Mlungwanas and Sisulus are all direct descendants on their father's side of the old man Sisulu. Later the practice changed to European style, the Christian influence. The Hlakulas and the Sisulus are two branches of the same family. I still want to investigate if I can the baptismal certificate of Moyikwa and Dyanti and that will give me an idea of more or less when they became Christian and some idea of their development. Because I've been very busy I have not been able to do that. I have lost contact with the Mlungwana branch of the family. By virtue of being the eldest son of the old man, (Hlakula Sisulu) who himself was the eldest, Dyanti Hlakula became head of the Hlakula-Sisulu family.

Is the Christian element Anglican?

Yes, Anglican. I want to mention at this stage that very few people are brought up by people who are not their parents. I'm brought up by people who are not my parents, but wonderful people for whom I have high regard whenever I think of them. Even today I ask what contribution can I make to reimburse people such as this.

Dyanti Hlakula's eldest son was Job. He died in the first world war. And the wife of Job was Lizzie Gxowa. I called her mother. The family surrounding the home of Hlakula is regarded as the home of the whole village. Dyanti was the headman and he was the lay preacher. He was the man in touch therefore with the wider world. Today when you talk of the family, it is the Hlakula family. It's a big family. The Sisulu branch is much smaller. What I am trying to say here is that although the original Sisulu is really the father of the Hlakula family, what became Sisulu was only the children of Moyikwa, the youngest of the sons of Sisulu. Others became Hlakulas but they are all in actual fact the children of Sisulu.

HOME LIFE

What about your home and village?

This was a place that was so well cared for and I always think that perhaps it was intended by the rulers of the time to be a show piece because we had a beautiful place, a garden, an orchard with all types of fruit. And there you had a plantation. When we talk of home, I'm really talking about Dyanti's home.

Can you describe the inside of the house in which you lived in the village?

You know, I wish I could draw. What I call my home, Dyanti Hlakula and his wife Nozuko's home, was a centre where the homestead was situated. Now it was a centre which was also used for meetings because Dyanti Hlakula was the headman. So that he was not only the leader of our family, he was a leader of the village. Meetings were held in this homestead.

That's the main house. You have the kitchen and you have a house for the younger people who want to be happy by themselves, you know. Say in their 20's and so on. They've got that house. Now I live in the hut which was for young people.

In what kind of room did you sleep? What would the room be like?

Thatched roof and a central place of the family.

How many people slept in the same house?

Dyanti Hlakula, his wife and we, the children sleep in the same house.

Did you have a bed?

No.

You slept on the mat?

Slept on the mat.

On the floor?

Ya.

Was the floor the ground?

The floor is the ground. It is done with dried dung, you know, cow dung, nicely shaped and smooth. The fireplace is the centre.

In the centre, with the smoke hole in the roof?

Yes.

How early in the morning did you wake up usually on a typical day?

I think six to seven. When I was older then I would go to milk goats for milk for coffee.

So you had morning food before you went through the day?

Yes, there was breakfast, you see, which is eaten after prayers. There was a prayer meeting, prayers in the morning. After that you had food. There were prayers in the evening. By the way just here,

I don't want to give an impression that I was deeply religious. I was not. I question a great deal of the Bible. My interest, you see, was the world itself. The things which were said and the things which were done, that was my interest in reading the Bible. It was a question of the wonders that emerged that really affected me. I'm trying to make a distinction between a person who is influenced by religion. I was not influenced by that.

I remember Dyanti Hlakula punished me one day for the first time, which he had never done before, just because I asked who created God himself. Because they couldn't answer this, they didn't like the question. I was regarded as a naughty child and beaten for that type of thing. But my reading of the Bible was critical. I see contradictions right through and I was interested in these contradictions. I just want to make that point.

What kind of food did you eat for the morning after prayers?

We ate , you know, porridge. We had mainly porridge. But in most cases the leftovers of the night before. And generally if you're having, you know, bean soup and it's left over, it's our food in the morning.

Where did you eat? Were you all together?

Either we eat in the kitchen with the children or we come to the main house and have our breakfast there.

The kitchen was separate from the main house. What you have is a whole compound?

Whole compound. It includes, you see, the kitchen, a smaller place for cooking.

And how many meals a day did you eat usually?

Well, it's never easy to calculate. We go to school having had breakfast. And when we come back we do get meals. It doesn't necessarily mean you have no well-prepared food. Mealies generally is what we were eating.

What was your favourite food?

Oh, soup of beans. Even today that's my favourite.

How large was the village? I'm talking more population than territory.

I'm not going to be able to gauge precisely what, but it would have meant a few thousand people. Am I right even in saying so? But it was a big village covering a large area.

And you raised livestock?

Yes, livestock. Quite a great deal depended on farming and livestock. Yes.

How did you spend your time?

I looked after cattle, after, you know, livestock. Not only cattle, but goats, sheep and all that. That was my job. When I talk of going to the mountains, I don't mean just going there to dream. I go to the mountain to look after stock, livestock. And it gives me a chance of looking at the world. Dyanti's home was situated at the foot of a mountain beyond which there were forests. He possessed the largest amount of land in the area for cultivation and grazing purposes. His livestock was about 50 cattle, 50 goats, 80 sheep, and a few horses. It was the wealth of a man neither poor nor prosperous.

Did you have a number of companions with you when you were herding, other boys?

Yes, other boys. One of them is the brother-in-law of Nelson (Mandela), Samuel Mase, the brother of his first wife. Yes, he's alive. He's my age. It would have been interesting if he was here. The task of the younger boys was to milk the sheep and the goats, whereafter the milking of the cows was attended to by the senior boys. We younger boys, after milking the cows, were allowed to suck the teats, an event which I looked forward to. Then the livestock was let out from the kraals and pens for grazing around the mountain.

Now Qutubeni, we are told, is at the foot of what is called Red Mountain?

Red Mountain. Then across the river, not far away surrounding Qutubeni, there's the mountain Gilandoda, a part of the Matiwana Range, meaning "push the range". It is far bigger than Red Mountain.

How did it get its name "red"?

It's red in its nature. It's soil is red.

What is the Xhosa name for Red Mountain?

Intababomvu.

Were there paintings in a cave not far from Qutubeni?

Yes.

In which mountains were these caves?

They were on the foot of the Red Mountain.

And you went to the caves?

O yes, it was a daily affair to go to the mountain. Nice rocks there and also some fruit trees. The, what you call it, figs.

There was a tree in the cave?

Ya

Did older people ever take you to the cave and tell you a story of the rock paintings?

No, some boys, older boys told us the story of the Abathwa. The paintings and drawings were fascinating. We even as children looked at these drawings and were fascinated by them.

What do you remember about the drawings and stories of Abathwa?

Well, I'm merely linking the Abathwa, the people of the Western Cape, with various rocks and various mountains in the country which had drawings. And now as I grow in understanding the situation, I link that question of the drawings with the mountains. I had been wanting to find time to look at those drawings. And I know that they were not only at Qutubeni, but in various parts of South Africa.

Do you have an idea of what the dates would be that those paintings were made?

Well, the paintings were made quite long before our time. They were there. They were not new paintings which suddenly appeared.

The Abathwa people were no longer there?

No longer there. The Abathwa had great influence in Southern Africa. And the very language of the Xhosas, for instance, and Sotho speaking, southern Sotho is a mixture of what was Xhosa and the Abathwa. You get the clicks (*qha*), they come from that. That is the influence of Abathwa. So that Abathwa had filled in the whole of Southern Africa, right to the mountain, Table Mountain.

Are the paintings still there today?

Paintings are still there today.

Are they preserved in any way?

Not preserved. They should be. Yes, they must be preserved. They have a very fascinating history.

Now it was the custom in the winter time to turn the cattle loose in the fields. But before the cattle were let into the fields the boys came in and collected whatever harvest was left.

I wouldn't say before. I would say that at the time the reaping period comes, the boys will reap what they can simultaneously. It was something accepted, something which the boys were excited about.

And then the boys sold these or traded them at the village store?

No, not sold them. They traded for other things

What did you usually exchange your share of crops for?

They would get, for example, mealies for that. You go into a shopkeeper. He will give you what you want. For instance, one of the first things you want is a shirt, to buy a shirt. You go to school with a new shirt which you got as a result of what you got from the reaping. Also for the boys, there was a mouth organ. Every boy will want to have a mouth organ.

And you had one?

Yes, I learned to play it. I learned to jive with it. Every boy had to do that.

And also were whistles popular?

Whistles at the same time, yes. They use them as the boys are moving about at night. They signal to each other where they are to meet.

What about the church where you were baptised?

I was baptised at All Saints. Now at Qutubeni, the village where I was born, we had a church. Qutubeni had a mission, All Saints, next door. That's where I was baptised.

How old were you then?

I think I was baptised when I was less than a year. The minister of religion at that time was Canon Waters. He was the son of Waters of the Nongqause thing. You remember the story of the Nongqause where people were called upon to kill cattle and all of that. This priest was the son of that Canon Waters who was also a priest. The year of Nongqause was, I think, 1856.

Would you tell us the story of Canon Waters and Nongqause.

Yes. Canon Waters, I refer to him as a friend of Dyanti. They were almost the same age. He was the priest of that parish. All Saints. Dyanti was headman and a lay preacher. But they had so much in common that they developed a great friendship. He would come to make service in our village and would end up enjoying himself with Dyanti Hlakula. Now his father was the Canon Waters of the Nongqause event. This is the story of cattle killing. And so Canon - not this Canon Waters but his father, I think, had been in that story. But Canon Waters, therefore, became important because of this famous story in history, the cattle killing of that time.

The cattle killing to us now is a story really which was created by the missionaries with an imperialist and colonialist intent. There was a shortage of labour, according to my interpretation. It's not the interpretation of history books. The real aim of whoever invented the story was to meet the problem of a labour shortage. The story is that Nongqause, a young woman, suddenly appears, and brings a message that she has met the ancestors and they told her that the village must destroy their crops, cattle and everything. Then there will come a day when the sun will rise from the east and those people who have killed their cattle, and so on, will be rewarded. There will be plenty of cattle. They don't have to worry about it. That is the story.

That is the colonial interpretation?

Colonial. We would regard it as a story. The real aim is to destroy the wealth of the people which was cattle, and so create cheap labour. That really must have been the issue. The historians have not yet got into that. I remember Nelson challenging me, how can you prove? I say you don't have to prove. Look at the situation that this is the position. There'd be no other reason. Nobody suddenly says kill what you have and hope that tomorrow you will be better off. You don't have a thing like that. The sense of the story was that some missionaries who influenced this situation and in fact sent Nongqause to tell the story. That's how we look at it. I'd like one to examine the position a little closer.

Colonialists wanted to make it appear as if the killing was some superstition or belief in magic?

Superstition, and after all, the people are still backward. They believe in superstition. It makes sense only when you understand it as superstition. They believed in it.

Who actually did the killing?

The people killed their own cattle and then there was starvation. It meant breaking down of the economy completely.

(The Nongqause incident is told in all standard histories of South Africa. One source is Edward Roux, Time Longer Than Rope, chapter 5, entitled "Black Joan of Arc", pp 32-44., University of Wisconsin Press, 1966.)

SCHOOL

When did you start school?

If I calculate well, I'll say 1918. I was still at Cofimvaba. By 1919 I think I started schooling.

You were about seven?

I think I was seven, yes. But it might have been later.

At the Anglican Mission School?

At the Anglican Mission School.

Did you like school?

Those days I did. I did like school. I would go and look after the cattle. Tie them up and then come back, rushing to beat the time. The bell would ring once and I'm still coming down and am already late. You have to be punished for coming late, so I always had to rush.

How far was the school?

Not far. Not far. What would you say? 300 yards I think.

But you had to put the cattle safely in the kraal?

Safely on the plateau.

On the plateau before you could go in?

That's right. Before I go to school. We attended school until two in the afternoon. I was frequently late, after taking care of the livestock. For this I received caning on the palms of my hands by the teacher or the principal. When not caned, I was punished by being given garden duties, or kept in during recess. The caning took place in front of my fellow pupils, and I accepted it naturally, like the other boys.

What subjects were you interested in?

I was interested by the way in reading the Bible. That was my great interest because that I was able to capture. And I didn't like arithmetic. English I liked. These were main subjects, English, history and Bible.

And in the school were teachers lay people? Were they nuns?

No, no. They were ordinary. They were lay preachers but qualified to be teachers. And in those days a teacher had to pass Standard 6 and then take three years. Thereafter they qualify as teachers.

And your first teacher, your early teachers, they weren't necessarily white?

They were not white at all. In our village no whites were in the mission. When I went to All Saints which I did when I was in Standard 3 and 4 - then I came into contact with the sisters, that is now white teachers.

Anthony Sampson tells a little story in the Treason Cage about the fact that when you went to the Mission, there was a white teacher who was a sister who thought you were the best pupil she had and that you actually resented her praise of you.

Yes, that's true. I regarded the question of praise as something which she was doing because of my light colour. And so I resented that. I didn't think really it was genuine praise. And I thought it was racialism of some kind. That's true.

You were sensitive to that - already at that stage?

At that stage I was sensitive to it.

What was your attitude towards whites?

Both hostile and friendly. Generally as human beings no problems. I liked people like Canon Water and so on. I welcomed them. But when I realised they felt superior and that we respect them because of their colour, I began to resent them. But it didn't change me completely, my attitude. I tried to judge individuals as they were. And I think this was the position for many years even when I was now an adult. I was able to distinguish between the system and the individual. In other words, I could have warm friendships with individuals. But when I think of a system, I become very hostile.

You had a built-in political consciousness?

I think so. I think I had that. I don't know how it developed. I think it came from my study of the Bible, as I have indicated to you, and the world in which Christ lived. This world in which Moses was adored and hero-worshipped, Daniel in the lion's den, the world of Abednego, Shadrach and Meshach, their defiance, and then Christ's defiance. These are things which interested me. And as I say, even in years thereafter, I still maintain being able to distinguish between a system and individuals.

In your Bible studies, were there certain stories that you found more interesting?

Oh yes, very much. The books of Moses. These days I no longer remember the words of Genesis. "Let my people go." These are the stories I followed very, very closely.

So you were immersed in Old Testament as well as New Testament.

Yes indeed. Joseph and the story about Benjamin. These are some of the stories that fascinated me. Abraham, all these are stories I tried to follow and analyse.

How long were you in school?

When I went to All Saints I was in standard. 3. I'm not even sure if I'm right because, you see the fact that my mother was a domestic servant also meant that I had to be moving now from time to time and go nearer where my mother was working. I think I did my standard 2 or part of standard 3 at Manzane and not necessarily at All Saints. After Manzane I went to All Saints. That's where I ended up. I ended up after Std 4 at All Saints.

You mean you did not go to school beyond Std 4?

No, I did not, I did not. Sometimes I thought it was just the question of poverty, but it was not completely. It was a question also of influence. The boys in the village worked in the mines, and I wanted to do the same. And that's how I went to the mines. I think I was 15 when I went to the mines. That's how I calculated. I don't know whether it's reasonable. You see, I started school late, as I say, later than my sister, who was four years younger than me. I ended up in the same class as my sister.

She stayed in school longer?

She stayed in school longer. She in fact ended up as a teacher. But that was now my work, to support her as a teacher.

Did any of your teachers have any influence on you?

Well, my teachers always had a great influence on me. I had a high respect for my teachers. William Macozoma had a great influence on me in life generally. And my aunt whom I have been talking about now.

What was All Saints like, what did it look like inside especially?

There were two main buildings, four-cornered buildings, square. These were the two buildings and a rondavel which was used largely for a resting place for teachers and all that. The school remains where it is today. But it ended in Standard 4 in those days, did not go beyond Standard 4. I was forever late, punished for being late. I had to drive cattle and then after driving cattle I also have my own things to do, gathering figs and all that. And then when you come back late you receive punishment for that as I have already mentioned.

How many pupils were in your class altogether?

In my class there would have been something like 50 to 100.

All in one classroom?

One class would be 50. Perhaps there were another 100. There were 6 grades from Sub A to Standard 4. And there was a staff of four including the principal.

Were they divided boys and girls or were they mixed together?

No, mixed together.

Did you have desks?

We did have desks, yes. No, we're not sitting on the floor. You have chairs and desks during our time.

With a wooden floor?

No, the floor was still the same as in the house.

Cow dung?

That's right.

Can you tell us what the day in the classroom was like? How did you learn, talk, did you get into much discussion, ask questions?

Well, you see you start from Standard one with classes in a kind of pre-school, classes sub A and sub B. Then to Standard one. Here you have lessons -- reading, arithmetic, English, history, and so forth. Always an interesting time was recess, a time for drilling and exercise.

When you left school, you left -

Std 4. By that time I had been going to various schools. I told you my mother was working and sometimes she would want us to be near her. And I attended a number of schools, but the main school was All Saints Mission School.

Can you give an example of what another school was like that you attended?

Manzane was another school. That one ended in Std 6 and was quite a bit bigger than my original school, and up-to-date in various ways as compared with my school.

Who sponsored that school? Was it a government school?

Government school.

When you left at Std 4 you left from All Saints?

I left from All Saints. Then my next education was college

Okay. Did you go through Std 6?

No, no, no. Std 4. Then my next education was college - the college where I did my JC (*Junior Certificate*) at night schools. I did my Std 5 and 6 at night schools.

In Johannesburg?

In Johannesburg. And thereafter I did JC through Union College, the correspondence college. Now when I had no money to pay for school, I didn't collect my - well, they had registered letters to demand payment. I just ignored them. So that I was no longer encouraged to go to school because I had no money to pay for it.

So Std 4 was the end of the formal school education?

Formal, yes.

Std 5 and 6 were night school?

That's right.

And then beyond that you did some correspondence?

Correspondence College.

Did you have to pay either in the early schooling you had? Did you pay a fee to go to school.

You pay something.

But only afterwards like the night school and the correspondence study?

That's right, yes.

When you went to All Saints and any other government school did you have to pay for books at all or were the books -?

No, we paid for books.

WELLINGTON

Would you tell a little bit about Dr. Wellington Butelezi?

Yes. Now one of my relatives was also a teacher, and we learned, you see, that a black American had come. To us this black American was Wellington. He spoke in English. He was not in actual fact an American, but because of the story of black Americans, we thought of America as a black peoples' continent. And there was now the feeling that black Americans are coming. There was great excitement when the first-ever plane came in the area there. Excitement that the Americans had come, and although we knew very little about oppression, it was a welcome idea that the black people who have got power were coming. So one day our aunt who was connected with Wellington,(it was not Wellington himself but actually Twala, an assistant to Wellington). We were influenced, and I can't remember the actual details of who organized it, but we left our school and went to a special school influenced by Butelezi. We had to pay money there and it did not last long. But here there was the spirit and the influence of Marcus Garvey. Black people coming and liberating us. And therefore even our education was regarded as a white man's education. But this new education was as a black man's education.

So even in those early days you were aware of America and through Wellington of people like Marcus Garvey?

That's right.

Did you actually know the name of Marcus Garvey?

No, I didn't know. I knew that there were Americans who were powerful and who were in a position that they could liberate us. To take over.

And this had some influence?

It had an influence on us.

Did it have any influence on your decision to go to Johannesburg?

No, I don't think it did. Because this question of a separate school did not last long. But the question of the leadership of Wellington and Twala, that had a lasting effect - that there were these leaders, leading somewhere, not quite clear what liberation was, but they were leading. In other words, the question of domination seemed to have had an effect on me. I didn't want domination by anybody.

Did you have a sense of being dominated?

You see, I'll give you an example. My aunt, the wife of Dyanti Hlakula, would say to me, you are too cheeky to serve white people. I didn't like the fact that I've got to respect because a person is white. That I didn't like. There was that general feeling, vague as it was.

Did you have any sense about being in the whole country of South Africa?

No, no. Except this, that through reading in these books, our text books and even Xhosa books, it emerged, you see, when we're reading about the war between black and white, it became clear, that there was war. We were great admirers, at least I was, a great admirer, of the Sothos, of Shaka. That history had an influence on me.

And where did you begin to get that history from?

From reading books in school, ordinary books. We would see when reading books, that there were these wars, and that had an influence on us.

So even though the history may have been distorted or told in such a way that it wasn't the proper interpretation -

But the picture was clear, was clear that there had been this fight, black and white. Therefore we are on the side of the blacks. We admire their courage and what they do. And this was particularly the case of Moshesh, Shaka, and Maqoma and Makana. Those were our heroes right through until I left school.

STICK FIGHTING

Did you have any contact with white local government officials or anything like that at an early age?

No. By the way there's a story here. You see, boys get sticks from the forest. One day I, with two boys younger than me, wanted to get sticks. Sticks were very important for the boy in the village. You see, every boy owned his own sticks which were used for a variety of purposes -- for tending herds, for games and for defending himself against snakes and such minor dangers. The stick you're going to use, you feel it as you get it that, well, this is a good stick. I can use it. You want it, you are proud of it. But we were arrested on this occasion because you're not supposed to go to the forest and get these sticks. It is crown land. We were arrested and taken to Engcobo in town. We were now quite serious - the problem facing us of being in jail. There was no jail. We were just kept there in the police station. And we were released provided we came and paid a fine. Dyanti paid I think something like ten shillings each. That was really my first arrest.

How old were you then?

It's difficult to say. I've not been able to calculate my age very well. I think I would have been 10 or a little older.

First arrest. And when you were arrested in this case was it a black policeman or a white policeman?

Black, no, a black policeman. But we were conscious of the fact that he's the man of the law. He's not just a black man but he's a black, you know, carrying out the law. He was in power. I

had to account to the family how I misled the little children to go with me. But we got the money to be paid. And to be arrested was something very, very undesirable.

Because the sticks were instruments of violence?

Yes, yes. You see the sticks, when we talk real tradition, every boy in the village is brought up to learn how to use a stick. Every boy must know how to use a stick. You would select your stick with great care, for straightness and hardness and shape it down to your own requirements, oil and polish it. Sticks were part of yourself. A village boy without a stick was as strange a sight as a soldier without a gun. Stick fighting can be termed a natural sport. The greater his ability in stick-fighting, the greater his standing, popularity and prestige in the community. Stick fighting would provide entertainment at public functions such as weddings, and initiation ceremonies.

Stick fighting is a serious business. It probably started as part of military training against invading tribes. I learned from it. The training grounds for stick fighting were the Eqaqeni (*assembly point on the mountain*) and also in the fields. Each fighter has two sticks, the one in the left hand is meant for parrying opponent's blows and the hand was bandaged with blankets, old rugs, etc. The stick in the right hand is meant for attacking the opponent or to lay him out on the ground. Hence common targets were opponents head, hands, knees and ankles.

Boys are initiated into stick fighting immediately upon assuming herd-boy duties and the process lasts until initiation rites at the age between 16 and 20. A boy's junior or senior status depends upon his stick fighting ability. Stick fighting with boys from other villages took place when challenges were thrown out at them, on the slightest pretext, and at times, just for the fun of it. And whilst I was in the village there, I would know the strategy of encirclement because that's how we learned from others. The boy who was at the wing, either left or right wing, he's the key to the winning of the battle. The encirclement is done systematically. If you feel that you can't hold it, you call on other boys, "let's turn back". So you retreat. You retreat, but again the boy who is leading in the wing could still say turn back and you all turn back. And that is how you would defeat others. Because you suddenly turn back and forcefully go in and they are unable to resist you. So every boy has got to learn sticks, to know how to use sticks. And otherwise life is impossible. You're just being dominated unless you learn that.

Were there many such confrontations?

Yes. Oh yes, it's a daily affair. It's a daily affair. On the weekend, for instance, when dipping, days of the dipping dam and you're going to dip cattle. And all the boys of our age go and assist in taking the cattle to the dipping tank. That's an occasion when a fight is going to take place with boys coming from one village to another.

So you learned strategy?

Very important, and to win the battle is a pride of anybody, any boy. And to fear to take that lead is something which is not acceptable. In order to feel confident in life you must be there. You must be able to face your enemy, your enemy in that contest. Now that's the strategy which we now later find. We talk about Mao strategy, same strategy, the encirclement. The boys train

along those lines. That's what I discovered later on. But that very strategy we used as boys is a strategy now used in a great revolution, revolutionaries like Mao and others.

Did any of the boys ever get hurt seriously?

Yes. Oh it's a very serious thing. Seriously injured, but largely you get your head injuries and you fall and all that. But you see later on there was also a tendency of using spears. I don't think in our village during that time there was any death, but people were injured.

How were the wounds nursed? I'm a boy and I get injured in one of these games - who looks after me?

You are looked after by the boys because you don't want to expose yourself with the family, that you've been injured. So you must accept whatever little treatment the boys give you. You don't want to be known as one to be like this, and you do want to appear to be a hero.

About the stick - what was the size of it?

Well, what will be the size of it - three feet I think, three to four feet.

How thick?

Two inches I think.

When you had the best kind of stick it would be maybe two inches thick. It was heavy?

No, not so heavy. Perhaps it will be less than two inches, one inch or even less than an inch. It must be easy to deliver. Easy to defend yourself with it. It must not block your way. Now you know you feel it. If you are a boy brought up in a village, you're brought up a small boy, learning how to fight. And then you are going to fight the battles. When you're 15, 16, 17, 18 and up to 20. Only circumcision removes him as a boy from this position.

Before you're qualified to be a man, an interesting thing is that it is accepted you make all the mischief. For instance you take pork (the pork is cooked next to the kraal). The boys just come and take it. It is not taken badly that the boys came and took that meat which is cooked by the elderly people. No, it is accepted as a tradition of the boys. Now it's understandable that they should be mischievous and do all those things. But when the time comes for initiation to manhood, now you must behave like responsible people, never go back and do what had been done as boys. Stick fighting is a training that is part of the culture.

Stick fighting is an art in the coordinated use of two hands?

Yes. You see, one is for delivery, one for protection. . You have to protect your head, your face and even legs. The art is that you should be able even to defend your legs, defend your head with this. And be able to deliver on the other hand. You keep your opponent far from you.

Were you good at it?

Yes, I think I was good.

And what about your head, any protection?

No, the stick, that's the protection.

If somebody was left-handed?

It will be the same. Your defence will be on the left.

Were you one of those who would organise the boys in the fight?

Part of it. It's an accepted thing that at a particular age we all participate in stick fighting. It's actually playing. But there's no mercy, they play rough. You get hit on the head and blood will come up and so on. And it's all taken - that's the game. No young boy would grow up without being part of that. Some find themselves timid, but it's not accepted even by your family. You can't come running because you fear other boys. You must show your manhood, that you are able to stand up to your opponents.

II LEAVING HOME - JOHANNESBURG AND EAST LONDON

At what point did you decide to go to Johannesburg? What finally caused the decision to leave home?

When I look at it now, we were fighting as boys at school. A senior teacher noticed that there were boys fighting and sent a message, "Get the names of all the boys who were fighting there." I decided I wasn't going to go back to school with that punishment from the teacher. This was the occasion when I willingly joined the other boys. It was also a question of poverty. I needed to support myself, but I think in the circumstances in which I lived I could manage. I could have gone to school. I was influenced more really by the atmosphere.

The South African economy was dependant on migrant labour drawn from rural areas. Annually groups of young boys and elderly men went on contract to work on the mines of the Witwatersrand and Reef. Those returning home boasted about the glitter and bright lights of distant cities, and displayed their possessions such as Westernized clothing and watches, etc. I was in awe and admiration of these stories and it aroused a desire to own these prized possessions myself. I wanted to have cash and earn money. We were two actually who were going to Johannesburg, going to work. The other boy was two years older than me and I took advantage of that.

To go to work in the mines?

In the mines, come back with suits and trousers. I was influenced by the fact that my mother had left Qutubeni for East London in search of work, and from there to Cape Town, and then to Johannesburg where she earned a living by doing washing on a weekly basis for several families. Also Dyanti had died.

How did you travel?

Train. The train went as far as Cala Road, a railroad junction some miles distant from Engcobo.

At this time was there any restriction on your travel?

Nothing, no, no. Except the restriction of where do you get money to travel. You have got to go to Teba in Engcobo, about 5 kilometers away. You know at Teba is a recruiting office for boys going to the mines.

So you sign up - when you went you signed up with WNLA? (Witwatersrand Native Labour Assn.)

Yes, that's right.

Were passes involved?

Passes were always involved in one way or another. The pass laws were not an affair of apartheid. At the beginning of the century, they were there. But my problem was that I was

under age, only 15 , and you must be 18. I took a chance and applied once, and was turned down. I then decided to produce documentary evidence acceptable to the recruiting officer. At 18 you are supposed to pay tax. But I didn't pay tax because I was too young. But I had a relative, one of the Hlakulas, who had been to the mines. The first time I went, therefore, I was not Walter Sisulu, but Mino Masamini Hlakula. I had to use his tax receipt to show that I had been to the mines before so that I should not be turned down as too young. If I showed I had been there before, there was no danger of being turned down. That's how I went to the mines first, using someone else's tax receipt as identification.

If you signed up with WNLA, did it help you financially?

Yes, financially to go in the sense that I was under contract and guaranteed a job.

In spite of the passes you had permission in effect.

Yes. Another boy from my village and I went together on the appointed day to Engcobo where we were issued rations of bread and sugar for the journey, as were each of about 50 others bound for the mines. We were loaded on a truck and left for Cala Road where we were to embark on a Reef-bound train. This was the first train I had ever seen. I had heard stories from those who had gone to the mines before about fantastic things capable of carrying hundreds of people at a time with capacity for traveling endlessly. The first train whistle momentarily stunned and unnerved me, but the excitement of a dream come true and the presence of my companions eased my mind.

The train, meant only for transporting recruits from rural areas to the mines, was known as Ubombela. On its somewhat 700 mile journey, it would stop at an endless number of stations and sidings to load on human cargo destined for the mines. The journey lasted for nearly two days. I stowed my meagre luggage on an upper bunk which served both as seating as well as sleeping accomodation. The cost of the rations would be eventually deducted from the pay packets of the workers.

I found out that I was bound for the Rose Deep Mine situated between Germiston and Primrose. With my companion I walked the distance from the station to the mine compound to start a new life as a migrant worker. I was taken to the dormitories where the workers were housed. I ended up with 30-40 young men and elderly people coming from Qutubeni and Engcobo. The dormitory had planks along the side walls which served for beds. I chose an upper bunk.

The following morning I was taken to the compound manager's office where I met the chief clerk, a man by the name of Katangana. It was decided that I was too young. I can't go underground. I found a cousin of my mother, a catechist of the Anglican Church within the mine, and he influenced the mine clerk who was a neighbour of his. With the help of the mine manager, they were able to get me a job in the dairy that delivered milk to the mine, and I was taken to the dairy on the outskirts of Germiston. I was released from the contract and arrangements would be made to reimburse the company for the cost of rations, train fare, etc.

I went to live at the dairy. Something like 9 months I was there. There my job was to wash dishes, wash, you know, cans, bottles and then accompany the driver of the cart to deliver milk.

Nicely, well-dressed, you are in a white coat to deliver this milk. In the absence of bottle-filling machines in those days, work was tedious. The first deliveries had to be completed by 6:00 a.m., which meant I had to get up about 2:00 a.m. and deliver milk by horse and cart. The second delivery was at 4:00 p.m.. In between I could rest and prepare for the afternoon delivery. Pay was one pound per month with board and lodging. Work was seven days a week.

I would feel very lonely and very nostalgic for meeting my friends. I got to the mine too early, 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock and I could not meet them. I could just see them. That satisfied me, however, not to be away altogether. The fact that I'm in the neighborhood, I know that my colleagues are in that mine, that compound. And that is how I spent I think something like 9 months.

This was a dairy connected with the WNLA?

No, no, no.

This was quite separate?

This was independent. We are not in the control of WNLA any more. You are a subject only to the laws of the dairy.

After the 9 months at the dairy did you go back home?

Yes, it was something more than that. I can't remember the reason we quarreled with the dairy owner, a man named Muller, and with his wife. Then somehow I was assaulted using a weapon, a whip. And I resented this. I went to the police station on the advice of other boys. Then I was assaulted even there by police.

When you filed the complaint?

Yes, when they said I'm a deserter. "Go back, they want you, you're a deserter". And that's how I finally left the dairy. I said, well, this is too much. I must go. And I left then, went to the mines where my other friends were. And then the following day I had to look for a job in the mines. I got a job to work in the compound in the mine area as a mason, stone crusher. That's what I did after that.

Is the mine still there?

Yes, we'll see it one day. (*We did go with Walter to the mine.*) It's Rose Deep Mine. The compound itself is still there. It's no longer operating, but it's Rose Deep Mine. Now during the recent election I had just been there. I went to canvas there to talk about elections and voting.

You went directly to this job from the dairy or did you go back?

No, I went directly from the dairy.

MALE INITIATION

At any time, Walter, did you undergo a male initiation ceremony?

Yes. I returned home in 1929. Although I found life in the mines interesting to some extent, I was never fascinated to be away from home. So, after eight months in the mine, I decided to return home to Qutubeni after the expiration of my contract. A main reason was that I was now ready for the circumcision ceremony. Friends and relatives had gathered, my sister, Rosabella, among them, for a big welcome. I handed my money to my cousin, Joubert and his wife, who were running affairs now. I was naturally accepted as a senior boy.

At the beginning of 1930 I, together with four village boys, made preparations for the circumcision ceremony. It is something which is just necessary for boys. For three months I was in initiation school. It's a school because, you see, the interesting thing which people should observe is that when you've passed the stage of initiation, you become a different man. Your whole outlook must be different. You become responsible and stick fights and things like this are no longer entertained. You are now a man. Your behaviour must be exemplary. You must be able to handle the affairs of home. That's the usefulness of the initiation, that you change in outlook, completely.

Could you tell us what happened at the ceremony?

The boys are generally grouped and are chosen, according to the seniority of the family or the importance of that family. We were five in our group. We have to live on a mountain in a hut.

Which mountains did you go to - are we talking about the village where there was Red Mountain.

No, not that far from the village. It's part of the hill, the hill that rises to the mountain. You go and build your own hut, a temporary structure of thatched roof and grass walls about a half mile from the village boundaries as you go to the house. They are supportive as you go to the house. There's going to be a celebration when you come back. Now you come back again, you see, it's the height of discipline when you are a boy who goes for circumcision. The very manner in which you are treated, the pains you endure. You can't be crying. You're supposed to endure that situation, that pain. Your foreskin is cut with an assegai, sharp. Now, you're not expected to cry. You're expected to stand as a man and show how enduring you can be. That's what happens. It's the height of training. You're trained, you see, from boyhood you get into this position preparing for transitional period when you're now getting to manhood. That's what happens.

How old were you?

I was 17.

And what did they teach you during this period of initiation? Were you talked to and taught certain things?

No, it's really - not really teaching, you are merely trained, you see. You've got to say and repeat

what the man says and repeat it in a proper way. Just beaten for nothing sometimes - that's part of the training. The period is one of self-development, self-cultivation. The initiates were required to smear their bodies with white ocre, wear only blankets, sleep on the floor. All the boys did was to sleep and eat. No work was required. We had to exercise care not to be seen by married women.

How many days are you there in the initiation?

About 3 months - generally it's accepted, 3 months.

And at the end of the 3 months, does the circumcision take place?

No, at the beginning. At the end of three months you're going home now, you're a man. You go to a river to wash. You are washing your past. You're a new man. Your behaviour at home changes completely. You are a responsible person. You might even take over, as time goes on, what you call the homestead of the family.

What goes on day to day for 3 months?

Oh, just staying there as boys. One of the things you do, you go and ask for a sheep from someone's house and it's expected that they, you see, will be sympathetic. They give you a sheep and you're going to eat that day. And people at home bring food. You are fed actually. That period you are properly fed.

And what is done so that you can begin to learn, not begin, but that you learn the discipline?

Oh, I see. Well, on the day you are now going to be discharged, men in particular from various status come up. You are going to be warned. You're going to be spoken to, very strongly, that you have to pass over that period of ceremony. You are now part of the responsible men of the village. You take responsibility for your family in a very serious way. Those are the talks that will be given. You are offered things. You know, your relatives give perhaps a cow, a sheep, a goat. Things like this. You are now awarded those things. In my case both Joubert (as head) and Joel made the main speeches reminding me that my boyhood life had ended and now I was expected to make a contribution to the public life of the village.

And from that point you can marry?

After that you can marry. It's not expected that earlier than that you can marry. But after you have been circumcised and you are now out, you now are ready, after a year or two, to get married.

And you can then sit in village council?

Village council. The moment you are circumcised you can sit in the village council.

Is this an event that you looked forward to?

Yes. It's an event which you must pass. You must pass, otherwise you are despised. In fact you can't live among the people who are circumcised if you are not circumcised. You don't belong there.

So even though you had been to Johannesburg, worked and came back and all that, you yourself felt you were not yet a man.

I'm not yet fulfilled in the status of a man. I had to go through circumcision. Perhaps that's another point, that whereas this would have been done by my parents, they would supervise this. They would do everything possible. In my case Joubert, son of Job or his mother, together looked after me as if I was a real son in that situation. I never felt less parentless. I felt I was well attended to, well looked after and enjoyed the position.

At the conclusion of this initiation do you have a feeling of pride?

Yes.

Accomplishment?

Oh yes certainly, certainly. I mean you have passed a stage. You feel it as you walk, you feel it as you talk. I've passed a stage. That stage is a stage that has been passed. You are now a responsible citizen in every sense of the word.

And even people who have accepted Christianity and were part of the church would go through -?

Oh ya. Christianaity has not been able to wipe it out. They had to accommodate themselves to it. I was a Christian, born in a Christian family and yet I had to go through that and feel proud about it.

JOHANNESBURG AGAIN -- IN THE MINES

At what point in your life in this going to Johannesburg and coming back home did the initiation ceremony take place?

It was after my first period in the mine. The point is that after I worked in the compound, as a stone crusher, I then went home. And I went home for initiation. Thereafter it's also tradition you go to the mines. I again went to the mines after that, this time underground. It was mid-1930. This time there was no age problem. I entered into a contract in my own name. I actually resisted going underground, but to no avail.

So you went back - that was a second time - to Johannesburg?

Ya, that's right.

Was it the same mine?

Yes, Rose Deep Mine.

Can you talk a little bit about what it was like to live in a hostel, an all male hostel?

Now first of all, living in the hostel there you have a division of men and boys. On my first occasion I was a boy. The second time I'm now a man because I've just had circumcision and you live then with men. The boys' work is to serve the men and do things and help with what the elderly want.

Can you describe what it was like to go down in a mine shaft?

Well, it became something normal to us. The first day you are shaken, you see, to go down the lift. The lift taking you right down. You soon get used to it. But at first you are shaken by that. But it becomes less important. What becomes important is the work you do underground, shoveling with a spade, using a spade for a shovel. It doesn't go in, so you've got to push it in. Then you load the wheelbarrow and from there you load the cars running on a railway line. You do that type of thing. Those who are boring holes, are highly paid. I mean highly paid compared with others and because it is considered a very difficult job.

You build holes for explosives?

You build holes for explosives. Something considered very important underground.

However, after one of the explosions, was the air filled with dust? Was it unhealthy as far as breathing was concerned?

No, it didn't affect us as far as breathing is concerned. It must have had an effect when dust got into that atmosphere every day, but it's not an effect which I can now tell you and say it was like this.

Underground it was terrible. You work hard. You have to dig stones by shovel and that is difficult. and the whole day you're doing that. You are not doing that, you see, at leisure. You are being driven. "Come, come, come malayisha". And you're irritated by this. Because of my size, smallness, they regarded me as a pikaneen - young one, apart from malayisha. They thought it was too much for me. I was holding, you see, the machine mine for boring the hole in the roof, and in the wall., but not doing the boring. They're going to put in dynamite. And that is largely the type of work I did. This is an important job for a chap who's making holes. They get even better money. But I was merely a pikaneen to help him. If I don't do that then I go to the "layishing", that is loading. Sometimes I was the personal teaboy for the white foreman. I was dressed in wet sacks throughout the day. It was strenuous work which left me exhausted at the end of the day. That's how I was working.

My pay was about three pounds a month. Younger workers handed over most of their pay to

older miners who played the role of guardian, retaining only about ten shillings for personal expenses. These guardians were highly respected and never abused their position. They were often illiterate and I would write letters for them forming a strong bond.

Now what drove me away? When the roof fell and people were killed. That morning I organised some chaps not to go down. "Let's go to the manager". We wanted to be employed outside. We felt we couldn't go down when people are being killed like that. That's how I left. I had already served my four months, so I could leave the mines. And I was not satisfied with the conditions. The food was a source of constant complaint. Bedding had to be supplied by the migrant workers themselves and dormitories were overcrowded, windows were small and ventilation was poor. Toilet facilities were not the flush system, but bucket system.

I should mention one other thing. Just before I left the mine there was agitation for a strike. I attended the meeting and I was impressed by the speakers there, very dynamic speakers, red-blanketed (*rural, unsophisticated*) men making a forceful demand for changing conditions in the mine. In particular it was a question of the food. They demanded that if there was not some change by Monday (and we met on Saturday), we shall march from the mine to WNLA headquarters. This was my first confrontation with the authorities in this way. The manager of the mine realised that this was a powerful threat. And in fact a change was brought about in the kitchen. I thought I should mention that.

We heard a story that when you were a miner at one point you did a little gambling. Someone was doing a game with bottle tops.

Yes.

And you lost?

Yes.

What can you say to that?

It was after my arrival when I was still new. I met these chaps, you see, who were gambling. They had the art of persuading you. I was persuaded by them. It was a Sunday. I saw a man with three bottle tops juggling around with a pea. All you were required to do was to point out under what bottle top the pea was. If you pointed out the right one, you would win the bet. If not, you lost. The juggler/trickster enticed me to play at first without placing a bet. Then I was encouraged to place a bet. I had ten shillings in my pocket and I placed five shillings and lost. Then I placed another five to recoup my loss. In desperation, I decided to place my Zobo watch (costing fifteen shillings) convinced that I could win back what I lost. Lost again. All I could do then was stake my hat -- which went the way the watch had. I argued, but to no avail. I returned to the mine dejected and was given hell and told I would never be allowed to go out alone again with money. That was my experience in gambling. I was quite new.

The only time?

Well, that one. That was the last one, when I saw that I had lost everything, was the last.

EAST LONDON

So where did you go when you left the mine? You were leaving because it was unsafe?

Yes. And I was going home. I then went home. This is now mid-1931. I was at home for several months. My main activities were to attend social functions such as weddings, church meetings. But on one occasion I attended a large meeting at Engcobo where the Magistrate and Bunga members (of the Transkeian legislative assembly) were giving a report to those assembled. The Magistrate said there was to be a stock limitation, especially goats which were destroying trees, and depleting the soil. One red-blanketed man arose and stated that the Magistrate as a white man considered himself superior, that what the Magistrate had just said was a declaration of war on the people. He asked why the black people were asked to cull their stock while each white farmer had thousands of livestock on his farm, that the remedy was to remove the white farmer. Many of the people attending the meeting were shocked and the Magistrate was very angry. The man refused to leave the meeting.

This was my first meeting in the Transkei and one of the only times I had witnessed a black man standing up to a white and I was highly impressed. This incident, Wellington's influence and work in the mines went a long way in influencing my political outlook.

Toward the end of 1931, I went to East London. Now my mother had been working in East London again as a domestic servant. My uncle, that is my mother's brother, youngest brother, Theophilus, also worked there. So I was influenced now also to go there. They were no longer there but I knew the history of East London. I then went there to work.

When did you first begin to learn about Clements Kadalie?

I learned about Clements Kadalie in East London. He fascinated me because I came across big names here. I was taken to the home of the Dr. Walter Rubusana, a founding member of the ANC. In fact, even before the African National Congress was founded, he led a movement that protested against the Union of South Africa, that is against the Act to establish the Union of South Africa. He was a big man in the area. Because he was now not only a wise leader, he was a national leader, a very important national leader. He was a chairman of the so-called Native Advisory Board which called for African representation in Parliament.

I also met at East London, Clements Kadalie. Very interesting because I looked for work for a long time there. Those were years of unemployment, in 1931. When you knock and look for work, they say, go to Kadalie to look for work. This Kadalie was not known to us. He became very important in our eyes. Who is Kadalie? We got to know. He was a man who was a leader of the trade union, Industrial and Commercial Workers Union. I attended his meetings. He was a very powerful speaker and a very impressive personality. Every Sunday I went to his meetings. Kadalie spoke about the depression, the life of the African people, injustices, raids and arrests.

Then there was Richard Godlo. He may not have been the president of the South Africa

Congress of Advisory Boards at the time, but he later became that. He was eloquent, dignified, systematic in his speech-making, superior to Kadalie in oratory. Godlo attacked the permit system, housing shortage, unemployment.

My wide contacts at East London widened my horizon. And I came across the evil of pass laws. Now in a place like East London, the main thing was the Lodger's Permit which was one of the pass laws. If you haven't got a permit to stay in a particular property you are in trouble. Raids were then taking place. And on particular days we knew the raid was coming. If you were not in possession of a Lodger's Permit you would have to run to the forest.

I was not employed for about three months and was not able to pay rent. I was staying with relatives. Since I was short of money, I sold my clothes for three or four pounds. Then I was employed by a man by the name of Barnes who ran a garage. But I was not employed in the garage. I was employed as a domestic servant. And I worked here with a white woman who was herself a domestic servant. We got on very well, discussed our employers and their weaknesses and their tendencies. I earned one pound ten a month including food, clothing and board. I was very happy there for about a year.

I think that's all I want to say about East London at this stage because early in 1932 I left East London, went home and prepared myself to come to Johannesburg. I came to Johannesburg in 1933 with the experience I had gained in East London.

BACK TO JOHANNESBURG

I should have mentioned that my mother had left not only East London but she went to Cape Town. She then came to Johannesburg. That was, in fact, before the period I'm describing now.

She was already there? So she was in Johannesburg before you went?

No, she was there before my first trip in 1930 when I was in the mines.

She came from Cape Town to live there?

Yes. Now in the mines it was not easy. My mother is in the location. It did not taste very well. You felt a bit ashamed that she should be in the location. It's not a respectable thing to be in the location. That was the attitude at the time. Nonetheless she was my mother. I had to visit her. Visit her in the George Goch location. That is, now before I went home, the period of 1930. She got a man to be my stepfather. I'll come to that later.

So then when you went from East London back to Johannesburg, your mother was already there?

Yes.

What did you do in Johannesburg now?

I was employed without much waste of time there. I was employed at Premier Biscuits. I worked there for about 3, 4 years. It was 1933, '34, '35. And I think the end of '35 I left.

What were you doing?

I was working in the biscuit department, packing biscuits made by white girls, about 300 of them. I would take empty tins to the girls and load the packed tins in the lift. I also helped in the baking department.

For 18 shillings per week?

18 and a half shillings per week. We went on strike because we were demanding at least 21 shillings for our wages, plus ration.

You were there about three years?

Yes.

Then it must have been fairly satisfactory?

Comparatively with everything else, it was satisfactory. My mother and my stepfather lived also in Doornfontein. So I was living with them in Doornfontein, working at the Premier Biscuits. It was easy. I go to work. It takes me only 5 minutes. And at this time I also attempted to go to night school. They were running night schools at what was known as BMSC - Bantu Men's Social Centre. Now this was a centre for the elite actually. Now I started there, going at night to school. I was studying Std V, but I didn't complete because I didn't stay long enough.

What were you studying?

English and arithmetic - those were the main subjects. And one of the first phrases I learned and was proud to keep for many years was "prevention is better than cure". And I led a strike at Premier Biscuits. I had also learned a little bit from a man who had been working with us who was no longer there. Eliot Mgadi was his name. He was connected with the trade union movement, but I had very little knowledge of the trade union movement. I had no idea really what a strike is except that I knew that to strike means you don't go to work until your demands are met. That I knew very well. I had put the idea to the community of workers there to say, "let's go and strike. Let's make these demands". Now unfortunately Mgadi was no longer there to take us to the trade union movement, so we did things on our own.

And on some advice - I laugh today - I said to the workers, "you must come with your suits, you must not come with your overalls. Bring your best suit, just as you go to church. We must meet at a particular corner, Siemert and Market Street, at 10 o'clock. By 10 o'clock you know that the employers will be panicking. Nobody to bake, nobody to drive lorries. Everything comes to a stand still."

So indeed my colleagues obeyed. They all went to Siemert and Market Street about one block away from the building. Now I am going to lead the group on a procession to the premises of the bakery. We went as planned. Now the manager was a very serious-minded man. And almost cruel. Doesn't talk to a black man. He doesn't know anyone by name, just say "boy, come here". He completely ignored me. As we entered the gates he was already there to welcome us. As we came around, we lined up.

How many of you were there?

I think we were more than 100, ya. We could have been 200 for that matter. Now the chap is feared by the workers. So once he takes a line - "hey boy, you want to work?" "Yes, sir". "Go that way". He got almost all of them in that way until only four of us were left. There was an immediate caucus to say - I was now being persuaded by my colleagues with "We must get back". I say, "no, my pride doesn't allow me to go back. Go back without them conceding to our demands? How can I explain that to the people? I can't go there". There was also a discussion among my colleagues here who were sympathetic. They felt that they should look after me, collecting a certain amount of money to help me. A powerful argument took place as some said, "but he has been given the same offer as ourselves. We come back. He doesn't want to come back himself". I was left out in the cold. And that was the end of that employment. It was the beginning of 1936.

What were the demands you were making?

21 shillings a week. We were getting 18 and a half plus a loaf of bread ration. These were the demands. After I left, these demands were considered. That meant that I must now look for a job.

By the way I should mention that my mother was also good in washing and ironing and all that. It was part of my duty to deliver the washing that is ironed to Yeoville and Bertrams and various places. That was part of my job, especially during that time when I was not working.

My stepfather was a very nice person, concerned with drinks, but he was not a drunkard. But he drank and wanted liquor made at home. And he was not impressed with home responsibilities. We never got along too well. One reason had to do with my sister, Rosabella, her education. He did not believe in this. He wanted all the money. He and my mother separated.

What about Rosabella?

I remember her when she came to Cofimvaba as a baby of about one and a half years. The first time I met her she came with her mother, with my mother. The next time I met her was as a child at school. She went to school before me because the teacher was a relative of ours and the children from our family could easily be allowed in. And I think they began school at quite an early age.

My sister went to college at All Saints. And we had to pay for her fees. To become a teacher you had to go for three years. It was my responsibility to pay these fees. My mother was not working

except ironing. So whilst I was working , I was able to help with the fees. After that it became difficult even with my mother's washing job. But we did it finally. She completed the course.

Whilst I was looking for work, I came across an institution that wanted temporary workers. Advertising. It was at the *Bantu World* paper. At the *Bantu World* I met powerful leaders like Selope Thema. He was then the editor of *the Bantu World* and Secretary General of the African National Congress, with R.R. Dhlomo as assistant editor.

I was in touch with these people. And I was impressed by men like Selope Thema. Very imposing, never cringes before a white man. And he spoke as if he was a boss himself. This impressed me a great deal. I had high regard for him, the manner in which he walked, the manner in which he discussed with whomever he met. You see there were various stalls there in the office in which we were supposed to prepare the advertising. I think we were something like 12 boys, 12 chaps working as advertising agents.

By this time I was living in Orlando. Perhaps I should explain that. In 1934 there was a move to remove the blacks in town. We moved our family from Doornfontein to Orlando and got a house which we occupied. You get your house, you see, by arrangement with the City Council, and so we found a house. It had four walls and a roof. We slept on a grass floor until a cement floor was done. There was no electricity, no amenities, no facilities. It was a bucket system to remove night soil and a communal tap for fresh water. Only mission schools, no government school. I ceased attending night school. It was twelve miles from town. That's where our home was going to be.

Is it still there?

Yes, yes. I just went there with somebody who was here. and showed him the house. My work continued at the *Bantu World*. One day I was given leaflets to distribute, publicising *Bantu World* and some consumer products. As I got on the train, I saw a young girl crying. She was questioned by the ticket examiner. I approached them to see what was going on and I say, "Why do you take her ticket away?" He was angry. "It's none of your business" and he did not hesitate to deliver a blow. We started fighting. I grabbed his collar and hung on until his shirt tore. The attitude of the people at this stage was "what is the matter with this man, what is he fighting the white man for?" You see, they saw me in the wrong. I'm not the right man. When the train got to New Canada Station and they called the police.

I was then arrested. The following night was a weekend. I slept at the Orlando Police Station. I was taken to Johannesburg Central prison simply called Number 4. For the first time I experienced jail life. I was taken to the isolation section where people are put for serious crimes. The prisoners there were praying and crying because they were sent to the isolation sector. Some of them were charged with murder and all that. I was deliberately put there to be intimidated by all these cries. The atmosphere was frightening because some people there were thinking of a death sentence. I was there for the whole weekend.

Then only on Monday we were taken to court. Fortunately my mother knew I would be

appearing. And she came. I was found guilty and was warned by the Magistrate that I had interfered with the execution of duties. I was fined 3 pounds, I think. According to my mother, she came in contact with my father at this stage. Not my stepfather, my real father who was then a prosecutor in the Supreme Court. And earlier in Transkei he had been Assistant Magistrate. This time he was now in Supreme Court. Somehow I never found it easy to dig into my mother's affairs. I just listened while she talks about my father, and I realised she respected him. And I felt, well, this is the relationship. So anyway, the point I was making, I came to real life in jail during this weekend. But my mother was able to pay the fine and I got out.

Through the help of your father?

According to her, she met my father and I assume he got the money for her. I will touch on this question of my father later when I deal with my position in the Estate Agent's business.

As you have seen, I came in touch with active politics in East London, attended the meetings of Clements Kadalie and others. And I was haunted also by the pass laws in East London. Pass laws were even worse in Johannesburg. We were haunted by pass laws. Nothing has ever affected me like the pass laws. It was the most humiliating type of legislation. And to see the queues of people arrested, your heart leaps. I just haven't got an adequate description of the humiliation people suffer, and the inconveniences brought about by the pass laws. And you felt indignant about it every time you thought of it.

Whilst I was in Doornfontein, I was arrested a number of times under the pass laws. Because of my colour, I was not as easily arrested as some Africans because the police thought, well, I'm a Coloured. But because of my associations they were always able to arrest me and the explanation would be mine. And I couldn't, I could not even attempt to say I'm a Coloured. I didn't even like that type of thing. I'm all right as I am. I'm a black man, I'm an African, I'm subject to all the laws that affect my people. And so that was my life in Doornfontein. In one incident after I was dismissed from Premier Biscuits, I was arrested for a pass book violation whilst I was looking for work. I was taken to the Hillbrow police station and paid a fine of ten shillings as an admission of guilt. I saw the assault on prisoners in the station. It made me absolutely angry to see prisoners even assaulted by gun butts.

But you did carry a pass?

Yes, I used to carry a pass. There was the question of a Coloured man carrying a pass. I never took advantage of that because I never wanted to see my colour determine my race. I was an African in every sense of the word.. No less, no more. And therefore I could not imagine myself saying, "No, I'm Coloured and I'm not carrying a pass." I carried a pass like any other African. My inspiration was my mother and the people and I wasn't going to run away from that. Instead I wanted to emphasise my origin and precisely because I am light in complexion, I became perhaps even more nationalistic in my outlook. Once you carry a pass, you are in a way accepting it. You are resenting it, but you are accepting because otherwise you can't do your work. The point, you see, I don't want to run away from, is that I'm part of the system until I have defeated it.

III BEGINNING OF ORGANISATIONAL TIES

In 1934, with my mother and step-father, I moved from Doornfontein to Orlando. I found the same conditions there as in Doornfontein, even more intense-- raids, police raids under the pass laws, and liquor laws. So everywhere you were haunted by the police. And I was now active in the Orlando Civic Association which dealt with the grievances of the residents -- the permit system, raids for liquor and passes, etc. In 1936 this affiliated with the Transvaal Civic Association. And here was the beginning of my politics. And I came into contact with the Mdingi brothers, three of them, and the senior of them was Herbert. His brothers were Frank and David. They were known as being the grandsons of Hintsá, the Paramount Chief of the Xhosas. They may not have been directly the Hintsá's grandsons, although that is how they were known. Well spoken, powerful personalities, wherever they were. They had striking personalities, good mixers, sportsmen. Herbert especially took a very active part in public affairs. They took a great interest in me. I supported Herbert when he contested for a position on the Civic Association Advisory Board in 1938.

Whilst there I also became the secretary of the Orlando Brotherly Society, a cultural and mutual aid organisation. The moving spirit behind the Society was, again, Herbert Mdingi. The Brotherly Society kept us together as a group, those who were members. We had annual conferences. It debated both the political and economic situation in the country. It was, however, basically a local organisation. There were about 50 members. We helped each other. You paid stokvel, you know, where people pay money in installments to help each other out. I was involved in this for about two years.

The three Mdingi brothers were educated and had a wonderful influence in the township. But I parted my relationship with the Mdingis. First of all we had agreed that we do not approve of the war, World War II. We are not going to support anything that is a part of the war. And that was now my attitude. Hostility to war. The war is for the whites.

This was approximately what year?

'39. I should have mentioned by the way already that before the actual war there was a conflict between Ethiopia and Italy. And I think this aroused great indignation amongst many of our people. Ethiopia had become a very influential centre for uniting the black people. It is mentioned in the Bible, but we were beginning to know a bit of current history when there was actual conflict between Ethiopia and Italy. Our sympathies were undiluted support for Ethiopia. This included Mdingi. I'm coming to the point where I say we parted ways. Somewhere Herbert Mdingi joined the civil defence called the Civil Guards. This may not have been directly supporting the war, but he was in uniform and therefore part of the support of the war even if theoretically this was not the position. This disappointed me a great deal, because here was a man I had admired who had been my leader in every way. He's letting me down by joining because to me it became part of the war. I couldn't quite see the difference.

I should also mention that at that stage Kaiser Matanzima had just completed his studies at Fort Hare, and because I was associated with Mdingi (Mdingi was an uncle of Matanzima, and the mother of Kaiser Matanzima is an aunt of Mdingi), I was the first person to bring Matanzima

right into the township. I went to fetch him in Germiston . I brought him into the Orlando township on the instructions and request of Herbert Mdingi. .

At that stage, I was proud of Matanzima because here was an educated chief who would now play a very important part in the affairs of the people. That was my first contact with Matanzima. I was also now influenced by history and therefore resentful of what had happened to the Paramount Chief of the Xhosa, Hintsa. It was painful to learn that he was murdered by the English soldiers under the pretext that he was running away. He had been captured. That had such a terrible effect on me that a man of such a great stature would be killed simply like that. Nothing happened to the soldiers. I took a great interest in history, to look at history of how our people were treated, what had happened.

The association with Mdingi opened up new avenues for you?

Perhaps that is also what finally led to my relationship with Nelson. In 1938 I became an agent of the Union Bank of South Africa. I became interested in land agency. I had no money but I felt I would get commissions and I opened up an office. In town I found a white man by the name of Lipshitz who was an agent and an administrator, a very dignified man. I became his agent at first by looking for people who wanted to sell properties or buy properties. And by agreement I opened my own office. Part of the office was his and part of it was mine. His was in the front and mine in the back. I called my agency the Non-European United Estate Agency.

And that is how I started in the estate agency business. And I've already indicated that by this time I was busy in politics. I became active in the Civic Association, and vigilance committees. Through the influence of Herbert Mdingi, the Civic Association opened an office in Germiston and at a conference there I met Gaur Radebe. Radebe was a Communist and a very stubborn fighter too. We then, together with Mdingi, formed the Transvaal Civic Association. Now this would be '35 to '38. So my politics started with the Civic Association. I took great interest. I went to meetings at night. It was about this time that the war broke out. This widened our interest and particularly at this stage, Japan comes to prominence. I did not regard Japan as an enemy. Japanese were looked upon as men of colour and therefore deserving support despite the fact that they were fighting China. This was before the Chinese revolution. But Japan was more prominent in our minds. By this time I was attending meetings in the Council hall of Orlando and also questioning, you see. Some were preaching support of the war, and I spoke against this.

Was the Brotherly Society a political group?

Not exactly. It was cultural as well as political, but its political perspective was largely directed towards the economic development of the black man. So it wasn't openly political. But you had to shape up your mind that you are for this. You wanted to develop and the stumbling block was the white man, so in that way you came into conflict.

What about the Civic Association?

No, you see the Civic Association was really political. But a Civic Association, as today, was largely concerned with the question of the township administration. But because

passes were the main thing, the main law that persecuted people, the Civic Association became political. They demanded the abolishing of passes. They attacked the beer raids and attacked all that type of thing. In that way Civic was political.

And as you were an estate agent, then you dealt primarily with those properties that would still be available to black people?

To the black people, like Sophiatown, Alexandra township, Selbourne, Evaton. Those were the areas I was to deal with.

You were an estate agent when Mandela first met you?

Yes, yes. I was an estate agent. He was brought to my office. I was in touch with our black people especially as they came to the pass office. My office was not far from the Native Affairs office. The first person I met among those who took a great interest in me was Archie Jumba, a cousin of Albertina whom I was to contact later. They used to bring people to my office, especially people from the royal family. One day Mandela came together with Justice Mtirara, his nephew. At this stage the Paramount Chief was the guardian of Nelson. And now Justice was the son of the Paramount Chief. So they were working as brothers. They came together, running away from home, and they landed in my office. I was at once struck by the personality of Nelson. I had, by the way, at this time already joined the African National Congress and was able to attend the conferences of the ANC. And so when he came I found a person who just answered my hope, my aspiration. This is a young man who must be developed, who has a great part to play in the movement. His personality was very striking, very warm. If he had not come the next day, I would have gone looking for him.

Let's go back to the previous period leading up to the estate business.

When I left Premier Biscuits, I had difficulty in getting a job. I worked for numerous factories for two or three weeks. and I don't think I did more than a month on one particular job. Until finally I was employed by Herbert Evans, a paint company. I worked for Herbert Evans for a number of years, I think. I don't know how many, but I think one or two years. We used to sometimes mix the paint to supervise paint and paint- mixing and this job was also in Doornfontein. And now the various places I'm referring to were in another place quite far, in Booysens, for example, quite a distance from where I was before.

Herbert Evans was a factory. I worked in the factory. There was another establishment for manufacturing and wholesale. When I left Herbert Evans, I can't remember now the reasons, but at no stage did I leave jobs by agreement. There was always some clash. In this case, I think, I had disagreements because I objected to the bullying of the white man.

I went to be employed by L. Suzman and Company. There my uncle Clifford was also working. I worked for some time, two or three years. Again I lost that job because of disagreement. I was asked to load boxes and so on. I said no, that's not my job. My job is to deal with the clerical work. I lost that job in that way, but I'd been working there for some two or three years. Wages were better than small jobs I had in other factories. But all of them were something like one

pound ten. I can't remember now precisely.

That is how I worked from one factory to another. I then got employment with a bank, Union Bank of South Africa. My work there was largely estate agency work except when, now and again, I helped one of the black tellers. I relieved them now and again. From the bank and doing some sort of agency work, I was able to get into the agency as I've already described. I became an agent to Mr. Lipshitz. We shared offices and finally decided to break and I had my office and he had his own office.

Was this a friendly parting?

No. He took a receipt book and collected 100 pounds from a client of mine who came to look for me. He then issued a receipt without my knowledge. Until this man came to collect his money, I didn't know about it. That's how the clash came about. He didn't give me the money. In fact we went to court on the matter. The judgment was in my favour.

I got my own licence for an estate agency. That helped me because I was able to attend to my political work. I was now very active even before becoming a member of the ANC. This combined with my work with the Civic Association. I've already referred to establishing a wider estate agency which was to cover Transvaal. I was never able to make a real living wage, but I was supplementing myself by selling goods here and there. Until I got married. We shared the responsibilities of a room. But my wife largely carried that.

At any time did you ever meet and come face to face with your father?

Yes, I did. In the course of problems of the estate agency. My father had become Attorney General for the Transvaal. But he retired and he was now a chairman of the Equity Building Society. He wasn't full-time there. I went to the manager to say I would like to meet him and Mr. Dickenson. They gave me a hearing. My father didn't know what I was going to do. But I wasn't going to discuss my relationship with him. I was merely giving him a chance also to see whether he would recollect that he had a son.

Did he?

I don't know, I don't think so. He did not indicate it. But he was very decent, very correct. But the main thing which I wanted to bring, a finance question, they would not tackle that. But they behaved very well in refusing and said that we can't do that, sorry. That's how we ended. That's the last time I saw him, I think.

But at no time did he recognize you as his son?

In a way I think largely it was also my fault. I was aware of the respect in which he was held by my family. But as I developed, I thought, well, it was his duty to look after, and therefore he didn't have my full, you know, support. We have never, therefore, followed up the matter. I never thought I should go further than that. I thought if we, by accident, happened to discover each other in this situation --. When I grew up, when I was at All Saints, the man who taught my

mother used to refer to him as A.V. Dickenson. They used to call him Victor. I still want to investigate the family name.

He has children?

I don't know, but I think he would. But there was also, as I say, a question of pride in going to my father and introducing myself.

But he also had a career record. He was in Supreme Court?

Ya.

Assistant Magistrate?

Ya.

He was a lawyer?

He must have been a lawyer by profession, yes, to be an Assistant Magistrate and then a Crown Prosecutor and later Attorney General. I used to go to court, listen to his cases, a number of them. And listen as he dealt with these questions, the arguments and so on when he was in the Supreme Court here. He was able and did a good job. I had the impression he was fair and not malicious.

When did he die?

I don't know.

How did you come to join the ANC?

Because I was active in politics, I was in contact with trade unionists. Among them was Alfred Mbele and he enrolled me. I myself was impressed and found that this is the organisation I needed. And that is how I joined the African National Congress in 1940.

In the course of my work I took a great interest in journalism. Not to become a journalist but to become an agent of the press, of the *Bantu World*. You see, for all the associated papers I became an agent, and writing small articles for them, not for a fee, just writing for the World Press - *Bantu World Press*. I made no profit. Instead I think I got myself into debt because I was selling a lot of papers and getting boys to sell, and to share, you know, the commission. In the end it dug into my pockets because some of the boys misappropriated funds, or papers arrived late, and I had to make up for the damage. Nevertheless, working for the *Bantu World*, I met a number of friends this way.

The articles you wrote for Bantu World were history, past history?

Yes. But also current happenings. For instance I wrote an article condemning the beer raids and analysing how essential for people to drink natural beer. This was an article in support of one of

the clergy who had written on the subject. I also wrote about individuals. There was a section of the *Bantu World* about people coming from other parts of the country. I never thought about getting paid for these articles.

How did you actually join the ANC? Did you go into the office and sign a card?

No, I didn't go to the office. I signed a card with the man who was enrolling me. He gave me a card, my own card. I gave him the money to register with the ANC.

What did it cost in those days?

Two and six. For a number of years it remained two and six. (*2 shillings, 6 pence*)

That was in what year?

1940. I was now to have systematic politics. Once I was in the ANC I was able to attend, to have branch meetings and to have regular conferences. In fact it's from 1941 that I attended all conferences except 1946, just because in 1946 at the time of the conference I was not at home. I was in Transkei.

Where were these meetings, in Orlando?

No, Orlando meetings were only branch meetings. But the conferences were held in Bloemfontein except the provincial conference which I've also attended.

What was it that attracted you? Also at the time ANC admitted only black people to membership and not people who were -

Yes, it was only blacks, Africans as it were. (*The ANC Constitution of 1943 was nonracial regarding membership. But in practice only Africans were members.*)

So this was the first well-organised militant black organisation?

That's right. A systematic organisation. I had my eyes opened, and I felt that, in fact I was in the presence of history, as it were. And I became very active. In fact shortly after I joined I became Treasurer of the Orlando Branch of the ANC. At that time branches were generally small. Membership fluctuated from 100 to 200 for many years, but the influence of the Orlando Branch was out of proportion to its membership. The main political activity consisted in taking up local grievances -- pass and liquor raids, permits, influx control. As far as it concerned local affairs, the branch did not go beyond the superintendent, a man by the name of Olivier, who was appointed by the City Council. He was generally arrogant and paternalistic. A new superintendent appointed in 1942 was a very fine chap, better than his predecessors. He treated people on a man-to-man basis.

IV ALBERTINA AND MARRIAGE

When did you meet Albertina?

I met Albertina in 1941. She was at the non-European General Hospital. My sister, who had now left teaching, was also training in that hospital. Nelson's former wife, my cousin Evelyn, was also training in the same hospital, as was A.P. Mda's wife, Rose. They were all friends. I was actually introduced to Albertina Ntsiki (her full maiden name was Albertina Nontsikelelo Thetiwe) by her cousin who was an acquaintance of mine. And well, I was impressed at once. I thought this is the person I wanted. Just the appearance and I courted her, and she fell in love with me. And it went on for some time, and finally I proposed marriage.

She said to me "before we marry you must know about me. You should know that I have three children." At first I took this quite seriously. Having been brought up the way I was, I was feeling very disgusted with this type of thing. "You've got children? How many children?" She said three. Then, smiling, she explained. I was holding her hand as we were walking and I naturally dropped her hand, you know, just felt this instinctively, dropped her. And then she told me what she meant. She meant that she had a responsibility for her brothers and sisters. Both her parents were dead. The brother was already being taught. The little money she was getting, I think it was a pound a month, she was using to educate her brother, the brother who came directly after her. She had been contemplating not getting married until she had taken care of her brother and sisters. I was simply impressed by her explanation.

When I proposed love to her, I naturally said, "Well, I'll help you". And I took responsibility. In actual fact before we got married the brother came to stay with me and my mother. And she was also being helped by the Roman Catholic Church. Then we got married.

That was '44?

1944. By the way I should have mentioned that in '42 she had to undergo an operation for appendicitis. And I had to make arrangements because she had no relatives here really. I arranged with my cousin, Samuel Mase, who is Nelson's brother-in-law, and she stayed in his home. She stayed there until she recuperated. And thereafter it was a question of marriage. At the wedding Nelson was my best man and his wife was the bridesmaid.

You told us before that you had two weddings. For one you went to the -

Transkei because Albertina's home was Transkei and I had to go and meet her people. She, like me, was brought up by her uncle, and the uncle was also the headman of the village.

Did you go alone to meet them or someone went with --

No, I first went just to inspect the place, to inspect the situation and I went alone, without saying what I'd come for. But they knew. They suspected what I came for. Then after that I took the responsible people, my relatives, with me. They spoke of the purpose - marriage of the girl.

They wanted the marriage of the girl to our son. That's what happened with me.

And was Albertina with you?

When I went to ask for marriage, she was at home in the Transkei at her uncle's place. Incidentally, Albertina and I have an identical upbringing. She was brought up by her uncle, as I was, in the rural area. A difference was that she was more persistent than I was in struggling for an education. Her uncle, Campbell, did not want to educate her, but she insisted.

What was the conversation like between you and her relatives?

Well, let me tell you. We met her uncle, Campbell Mnyile. He was in charge. That's the man who was headman of the village. And he was educated. I told him my plans and said I wasn't proposing to have the wedding there. "I've come so that we could get married with your permission in Johannesburg." The bans had been published.

And then we argued. He said no. No child of mine is going to Johannesburg and leave the responsibility to a boy I don't know. That can't happen. So we argued, you see, very sharply about this because I had already made preparations. And that's when he said to me, "Have you ever got married?" I said never. He said, "Then you can't tell me about marriage. You must listen to me. I know marriage. I can talk authoritatively".

When you came to the family, did you come with gifts for them?

Usually you do come with gifts. I don't think we came with gifts, I'm not sure.

No bride price?

No, that I did. I paid bride price. A hundred pounds, which was equal to ten head of cattle.

Were you married in a church?

No. There we got married in the Magistrate's court on the fifteenth of July in Cofimvaba. The headman for Cofimvaba, whose name was Ngoali, told me that when the magistrate arrived, I must salute him. I refused to do so and stated that I was prepared to greet him and treat him with respect, but not to salute him. Ngoali was disappointed. When the magistrate arrived, he saw the situation and understood it. He remarked that I was taking a very young woman who, as a nurse, would be badly needed in the Transkei and that it was a pity that Albertina was going away. After the ceremony we went to Albertina's uncle's home in Tsomo, some miles away. I paid lobola there. You walk together there to be seen by the people. They must come and welcome you and accept your marriage with singing and applause.

Where was your marriage registered?

We had to register with the magistrate at Cofimvaba. After that we held our celebration at her home in Tsomo. That's how it was.

Was there a feast?

Yes, actually it's a feast. People are invited. They come from the whole village.

And then you returned to Johannesburg and had another marriage?

Then I returned to Johannesburg and had another marriage. Because the bans were now published, I must go to church and register there. About a week later we came back and got married in the Roman Catholic Church.

About the ceremony in the church, do you remember what Albertina looked like, what she wore?

Yes, I remember because we still have the photo of the marriage in the house. So it remains and I'm clear about what she wore. She put on a white gown and I wore a black suit with a bow tie. I had made arrangements for a reception which was the practice of the people. A reception in the evening was customary. It became sort of a tradition. It was at the Bantu Men's Social Centre. This was a traditional place for social affairs. They played tennis there. They play games and even have lunch there. During the day before the reception the people are eating and then at night they go to the reception.

There was music and dancing? Can you describe what went on?

Now, you see, it was also accepted that when you get married, you are the first, you and your bride have to lead in the dancing.

Was your mother there?

She was at home, not there. This is for younger people. She was at the wedding, but not at the reception. The reception is for younger people concerned with dancing and all that.

Would you say that the speeches at the reception were political speeches?

Oh yes, they were political speeches. These were politicians. They were not going to say something else - political speeches. Anton Lembede made a speech. He was the main speaker together with Dr. Xuma, President General of ANC. They're both main speakers. And Lembede's remarks were in part directed to Albertina. "You must know you are now married to a married man. He's married to a nation". That helped me because here I've got a bride who's going to find me busy and so on. And doesn't know what's happened to me. This helped a great deal. But Albertina later said to me, "Please don't take advantage of Lembede's speech". But we got on very well. Dr. Xuma also made a speech. And then we went to the township. That is how our marriage took place.

Now the Roman Catholic Church generally does not allow marriage unless you're going to agree that the children will remain with the church. I was not used to that type of thing. Nevertheless

we agreed and we'll see what the situation is as things develop. We'll allow that situation. But immediately after marriage we said, well, she's Anglican now, I'm an Anglican. We can't go back to being Roman Catholic. It's going to divide us. Albertina accepted this. If Albertina had insisted, I would have agreed, but I was afraid of the indoctrination of the Catholic Church.

Before you met, was Albertina very much involved in politics?

No. She was not involved in politics at all. After we met, she gradually became quite interested by attending meetings.

Did you move into the same house you're in now?

It is, but I got into that house in 1941 if I'm not mistaken.

In Orlando?

In Orlando West. Ya. I moved from Orlando East where I was in 1934. All my children are born in that house. I've got 5 children. I think Max is now over 50. Many people ask why don't I move to town? I feel that there is sentimental value attached to that house. Meetings of the Youth League were regularly held in that house. It is historic in that way. I should have mentioned, by the way, that Albertina attended the inaugural meeting when they established the provisional executive of the Youth League. She was also present.

But she found out very soon that you were already married to the nation?

She found out very soon that I was married to the nation.

She must have known that though soon after she met you.

Indeed so.

Because what did you talk about?

There was nothing else to talk about but that.

Politics?

Politics. Well, I should mention also that I was interested in music. I was a singer in various - not a singer in the true sense of the word as one who knows music. But I like music, choral music. And I was also a singer in the church. I was a member at one time of the choir in the Anglican church. And so occasionally Albertina and I would go to a social centre for the music there. Also I became chairman of the Orlando Musical Association. By the beginning of the '40s I was taken by politics more. I was already active in the Civic Association.

Our singing group not only sang in Orlando. We sang, for instance on South Africa Broadcasting (SABC). We sang for various other townships. This was a chorus of twenty or

more with both men and women. I was a tenor. We were quite good. I am very much impressed by music. It is part of my whole being. I am not well informed about theory, but I am a very keen listener even today. It doesn't matter whether it's classical, or church music. I am fascinated by music. (*Walter's love of singing and of music was one reason for the title of this memoir.*)

V YOUTH LEAGUE

How did the Youth League get started?

I attended the ANC Conference in 1942 as a delegate from the Orlando Branch and the man who moved the motion which led to the formation of the Youth League was my co-delegate, Leslie Gama. At that time there was a student strike at Fort Hare. Gama's point was that the unrest was manifestation of the mood and militancy of the youth. Hence it was necessary to galvanise and direct the youth along proper political channels. The resolution passed toward the end of the conference saying that the time had come (I'm not using the exact words here) for the national body, as it were, to take note what was happening in the country, especially in regard to youth. Actions were taking place in various parts of the country, in various colleges, that indicated clearly that the time had come for a response and guidance from the senior body.

Dr. Xuma had been elected President General of the ANC at the 1940 conference. He had told me then that there was a gulf between the younger and older generation. I had this in mind when the resolution was passed in 1942. It was at this conference that I met Moses Kotane for the first time and he made a great impact on me. I was impressed by his calmness and logic. It was also at this conference that I spoke for the first time, touching on the intended removal of Sophiatown and the inevitable financial loss and burden that would result from this.

Next then at the 1943 conference, Willie Nkomo, a medical student who also attended the conference, Lionel Majombozi and myself met in Bloemfontein and agreed that in the light of the resolution of the previous year, that we must take initiative to form the ANC Youth League. I was the key person to go around. And my office became the headquarters where the operations took place.

The real estate office?

Yes. We then formed a provisional committee of the Youth League. Willie Nkomo and Lionel Majombozi had definite political ideas. They were in fact actually in the youth movement of the Party. And I was not. But I had a central position. I didn't want a sectarian approach. I wanted a broader, unifying approach. And that was my function. We discussed how to bring others. Both Majombozi and Nkomo were students. They had contacted Oliver Tambo. They are the people who brought in others to the Youth League. And I think our first provisional secretary was Congress Mbatha and that Nkomo himself was chair, a provisional chairman. My function was to organise, to bring this thing together. Then finally, in mid-year 1943 we launched the movement - the ANC Youth League.

Anton Lembede was elected President and I was the Treasurer. Oliver Tambo was the Secretary. I had a close relationship with A.P.(Peter)Mda, more than anybody else because he was also in the ANC. Also we welcomed Lembede. He was a scholarly man, and at the time a budding lawyer who was soon to become a partner to Dr. Seme. Dr. Seme was the founder of the ANC and in fact even before the ANC was actually formed, he made a call for an organisation which would put an end to racial ethnicity. He said that we must end the question of Msotho, Zulu, Xhosa. That

must come to an end. We must think as one.

Now, incidentally, I should have mentioned that in going to Bloemfontein in 1942, I was together with Seme, with my colleague Gama. At that time ANC was taking shape. Dr. Xuma had proved to have a greater perspective for the ANC. He really brought an end to factions or even to regionalism, to federalist structures. He really should take credit for modernising the ANC. He was the man responsible for that. And in that meeting to which I referred in 1942, Seme paid tribute to Dr. Xuma's ability to organise, and particularly to bring in intellectuals into the fold of the liberation movement.

I should say that the 1943 ANC conference was one of the most important and busiest conferences in our history. The new Constitution was adopted which made ANC unitary instead of what had been actually a federal structure. The emergence of the Democratic Party was discussed. Its aim had been to become a party within the ANC. That right had been prevented by the new Constitution. The House of Chiefs was abolished and the ANC made into a membership organisation. It elevated the branch structure to become the basic unit of the organisation. There was great enthusiasm in placing the ANC in its true position - that of the mouthpiece of the African people.

You mentioned Lembede and Mda. What was their importance?

Let me say about Lembede. Even when the ANC Youth League was formed I kept very close contact with Lembede. Here was a promising man who was now a law partner to Dr. Seme. He was a dynamic speaker. He rigidly adhered to nationalism. I didn't mind that very much but I myself did not believe in extreme nationalism. I was to hold the left, like Nkomo, and the right, together. That's why Nkomo would not take a position in the Youth League, because he thought it was below his politics to think in terms of exclusive nationalism.

Let us refer to the Manifesto, to grasp precisely what the Youth League was and what it was preparing for. One thing, it fulfilled the position of creating an organisation which had confidence in the African himself. It fulfilled that position. Lembede was a philosopher and a scholar. He believed not only in dealing with the African in South Africa, but had the continental approach of the ANC and discussed it philosophically and rigidly stuck to that.

You have, therefore, a situation in which there was, on the one hand, the Communists who were militant, and on the other, the Youth League. These two were not quite in agreement, but were able to accommodate to each other. Those most hostile to the Youth League were the conservative element within the ANC. At least the Party tolerated the Youth League and even what they considered its reactionary tendencies. But they accepted the fact that here was a movement of young people, militant, whose objective was the same. The Programme of Action was largely the work of the Youth League, but in partnership to some extent with the communists. When I say with the communists I don't mean the Communist Party as such. I'm talking really about the left members of the ANC who were influenced by the policies of the Communist Party.

I want at this stage to deal with the outstanding contribution of a man like Moses Kotane. He was fortunately not a sectarian man. His approach was militancy which is balanced, properly

balanced. He was not a type of man who beat his breast and shouted slogans. That he was not. He would more analyse the situation and look at every issue on the basis of merit. Because of this, many of us admired Moses Kotane. Even men like Lembede and especially Peter Mda - Mda who had a religious background, as a Roman Catholic. Even Lembede was a Roman Catholic. I don't think religious background played a very important part. I'm just mentioning this to look at the background which influenced their policies, had something to do with this. I say therefore that even men like Mda and Lembede admired a man like Moses Kotane. Particularly Mda.

Mda was perhaps more advanced theoretically than all of us. He had entered politics at a very early age. By 1936 he was already politically active, and so he had an understanding of politics. He was more advanced, as it were, than Lembede in understanding politics, not only in South Africa, but generally. By the way, he did look down a bit on Lembede because of his limited understanding.

What happened to Lembede?

Now Mda had a great influence on Nelson because he was clear in his politics. But Lembede was an impressive speaker and a man who was not only national but continental in outlook. So that you had this background. I had a routine of going to Lembede's office when I came from home to go to my office. I would pass by there to exchange views. One day I did this and Lembede had collapsed. I found him struggling and twisting about on the office sofa. He was in great pain and I immediately called Dr. Molema whose office was only a block away. Dr. Molema examined him quickly and he was taken to Coronation Hospital. He died the next day. This was in July 1947. Lembede was only 33. His death dashed the hopes of many. He was a very promising young man. Even today the Pan Africanist Congress claims Lembede as a leader.

My own view is this that Lembede, although, a strong nationalist with tolerance for the Communist Party, would ultimately have ended, becoming a member of the ANC. I can't imagine that he would have accepted the analysis later espoused by the PAC. Those oriented toward PAC ideas were limited and could not in the end influence Lembede. How would it influence a man like Mda who was even more advanced than Lembede. The PAC, in my mind, created tremendous difficulties for Mda. Because Mda, as he himself put it, if you live ANC and form an opposition organisation, you are dead. So he didn't believe that there was any future for any organisation that would challenge the ANC. That was Mda's approach.

The younger nationalists who were in the Youth League became more ultra national, inspired by Mda, especially after the death of Lembede. They therefore regarded Mda as their leader. And it was difficult for him to say, "I'm not your leader". Mda found himself in a difficult situation, faced with a contradiction. He knew the power of the ANC now and in the future. But on the other hand he admired the younger men who looked upon him as their leader. And finally he ended up in a contradictory situation - not active, but being a supporter of the PAC.

Now going back to when Mandela came into your real estate office, can you discuss how you met him and also how you met Oliver Tambo?

I met Nelson, as I said, when he came into my office. He was brought by people who were involved in my office. My office was a gathering place for those who were working at the Native Affairs office. They would come into the office, especially those who had status in the countryside, like chiefs. They were in touch with me and they brought Nelson to my office. It was Nelson, accompanied by Justice, the son of the regent Paramount Chief of the Thembus, the guardian of Nelson. A lot of Xhosa-speaking people stayed in George Goch location, as did Nelson for a short while. So when he came to me I saw that here was a young man coming from Fort Hare who had a bright future and who would help to develop our organisation. And as we exchanged views and he told me he was interested in law, that completed the picture.

Now I was in touch with the lawyers, various lawyers as an estate agent. And I had a particular firm in mind where Gaur Radebe was working, where there was a sprinkling of brighter, left ideas. I think this was because Gaur Radebe was a Communist even when he was there. I think he was in the Young Communist League.

Now when Nelson came, I immediately thought he should be introduced to this firm. It was a respectable firm, Witkin, Sidelsky and Eidelman. That was a firm to which a black man was attached as an articled clerk. At the time the firm was not in a position to act on the question of articling Nelson. They could not reject nor accept the idea at that stage, but they were prepared to work with him to give him something to do. Radebe was then living in Alexandra. He then advised Nelson that "You probably can't be taken into the firm whilst I'm there. The best thing is for me to leave". I'm not sure what happened but I know that Gaur Radebe took over his business as an estate agent in Alexandra Township because they were also running a real estate agency as part of their broad business.

Finally Nelson was articled by Witkin, Sidelsky and Eidelman. This brought Nelson into close contact with Ismail Meer, a very bright young Indian man, and J. N. Singh, also a bright young Indian man. All of them were articled. They became good friends. Ismail was in love with Ruth First who finally got married to Joe Slovo. There may have been quiet competition of Ismail and Joe for Ruth, but not overt. They worked together politically. So there was that combination. Now and again Nelson did stay with me. I'm not sure whether it was after Alexandra or somewhere at that stage. He did stay with us.

Now Oliver, my connection with Oliver came through the Youth League. He was introduced to me because I was an official of the Youth League and he was a teacher at St. Peter's School. We developed an interest in each other. Now Oliver was also religious. We were both Anglicans but he was more of a staunch Anglican than I, more like my mother and they developed a friendship. Now and again Oliver came to our home, not to stay, but on weekends. The Anglican Church was just a stone's throw from my house and there was therefore this common touch between my mother and Oliver. My mother loved Oliver very much. And Nelson was like a son of the family and so there was that relationship that developed. The main thing that brought us together really was to discuss and exchange views on politics and world affairs. I don't know what else I can say about that.

I believe the Youth League was formally established in 1944, but that it really developed during 1943. It started off as a Youth League in 1943, but the conference that gave birth, the launching

of the Youth League was in 1944.

There was then a nucleus of you. It would be interesting to know who were the leaders. You had Lembede and Mda. You had Sisulu and Oliver Tambo. You had Nelson Mandela and William Nkomo.

At the beginning it was William Nkomo, Lionel Majombozi and myself. That's the beginning. They were the men who also had good ideas. Except their ideas were left Marxist inclined and therefore they could not tolerate extreme nationalism. Nkomo did not even stand for a leadership position, nor did Majombozi, and yet they could have well taken positions because they were able men, especially Nkomo. He was an orator, and more experienced than most of the Youth Leaguers..

So you had the ideas but what was put down on paper?

That is what I was talking about. To understand the development it is necessary to look not so much at the Programme of Action, but at the Manifesto. Look at the Manifesto and then you will get an idea of development of the Youth League. Not only would you be looking at Mda and Mandela's ideas but you would be looking at a man like Jordan Ngubane who was a journalist and quite experienced too. He had an important part to play.

{Note: The Manifesto was formally adopted by the Youth League National Exec. Com. in 1948. It was, in effect, the basic policy statement of the YL and had been worked on for a long time. It called for "rallying and uniting African youth into one National Front on the basis of African nationalism", "giving force, direction, and vigour to the struggle for African National Freedom, by assisting, supporting and reinforcing the National Movement - ANC;" "studying the political, economical and social problems of Africa and the world"; "striving and working for the educational, moral and cultural advancement of African youth." The Manifesto then goes into more specifics dealing with nationalism, economic, educational and cultural policy, etc.}

{The Programme of Action was an implementation of the Manifesto and was formally adopted at the ANC 1949 Conference when the YL gained dominance. It called for "the creation of a national fund to finance the struggle for national liberation"; for "the appointment of a Council of Action whose function would be to carry into effect, vigorously and with utmost determination the Programme of Action ... to work for the abolition of all differential institutions the boycotting of which we accept and to undertake a campaign to educate our people ... and to employ the following weapons: immediate and active boycott, strike, civil disobedience, non-cooperation and such other means as may bring about the accomplishment and realisation of our aspirations." (The documents for the Manifesto and the Programme of Action may be found in From Protest To Challenge, edited by Thomas Karis and Gwendolen Carter, vol. 2, pp. 323-331 and pp. 337-339. Published by the Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, Stanford, California, 1973.)

It was called the African National Congress Youth League ?

That's right. You see, right from the beginning

They were separate organisations in effect, and yet you used the name of the ANC?

Yes. Xuma characterised the Youth League, you see, as a ginger group. However, the Youth League came into being with an idea, a clear idea that they must promote the ANC. They were the men who were aware of the mistakes of the ADP - African Democratic Party of Paul Mosaka. The ADP of Mosaka boasted of its militancy. Its militancy went too far. They sort of became an opposition to the ANC. Their idea was to crush Xuma, but in actual fact their purpose was to undermine ANC. When, therefore, the Youth League was formed, this fact was present in our minds, that we are the people who defended ANC against the Democratic Party. And so the manifestos and policies were wedded and were part and parcel of the ANC. The ADP was founded in 1943, but ended in 1948.

I should say that after the YL was organised, four of us went to see Dr. Xuma -- Nkomo, Ngubane, Mda, and myself. Xuma was disturbed by the steps that had been taken and thought they had usurped the position of the National Executive. He thought that when the resolution had passed in 1942, the initiative for next steps would devolve upon him. Xuma seemed completely hostile and it was clear that he spoke for the National Executive.

Two points toned down hostility. First, that one could not be a member of the YL before first being a member of the ANC, and second that all members of the YL over the age of 17 were compelled to pay subscription fees that covered membership of the ANC and that they were to act in all matters in keeping with the policy and activities of the ANC. The idea of the YL was ultimately accepted. The inaugural conference was held at the BMSC with the blessing of the mother body. Lembede was elected President, Victor Mbobobo as Vice President, O.R. Tambo, Secretary, and myself as Treasurer.

Did the Youth League undertake any programmes for action independently of the ANC?

Yes, yes. The whole Programme of Action was the work of the Youth League, not the ANC. It derived from the Manifesto and all that. The Youth League came into being, being aware of their opposition to the Democratic Party which they condemned. They were aware that the ANC could never be a mass organisation capable of leading the African people as long as it carried the old idea of the older leadership. So the Youth League thought the correct thing to do was to really be governed by a new policy, rather than the methods which were used in the past when the question of leadership was a question of status. Doctors and lawyers - these were the people who became leaders. The leadership of the YL, who were intellectuals, were opposed to this, especially to actions such as deputations and petitions. They were opposed to this, and the policy, therefore, was worked out by the Youth League deliberately to change.

It was a new situation which was being created, a new outlook altogether. One thing they were determined to do was to give new leadership. The little quarrels they had with the left were based on the suspicion that the left wanted to dominate. But they were not prepared to be dominated by anybody. There were foreign ideologies so that the Youth League did not want to debate this. They were men of power, of determination. Lembede, as you know, had ability, Mda was an

intellectual of standing, Nelson was the same. He became a friend of Mda in the development of the Youth League. Oliver the same thing. Oliver was a man very closely connected with Dr. AB Xuma. Yet he belonged to the new school of the Youth League.

The aim of the Youth League was to change the ANC so that it could become a mass organisation?

That's right, change the ANC to be a mass organisation. Change the ANC to reject any subordination, that it should stand on its own and become a real mass national organisation.

There was a discussion within the Youth League Executive Committee about what our relationship should be to the Communist Party. I remember in Nelson's house we discussed this question and we divided. The motion was put that we must not work with the Communist Party. The majority approved, but I disapproved. I took the line that we must cooperate. "These are the people working together, let's cooperate with them". Mandela, Mda, and Lembede actually expressed disgust at my selling out. And that's an indication of how hot the discussion was on this. Already Nkomo had raised the question of what do we do about the differences on Marxism and nationalism. As I said, Nkomo did not participate in the election for leadership. He never said so but I know this man I was working with. He thought it was beneath his intellectual understanding to lead an organisation that was opposed to Marxism. So there was this discussion.

You see, the YL was determined to oppose meetings by the Party. Ruth First did address a meeting at the Bantu Men's Social Centre just before she left for an international conference, I think the founding conference of the World Federation of Democratic Youth in London in 1935, and even reported when she returned. Nelson was a friend of a circle that included Ruth First, Ismail Meer, J.N. Singh and Joe Slovo, all that group. But Nelson showed remarkable consistency in his interest in nationalism. Although he had a wide circle of friends, he had an independent line. He was in fact resentful of anything dictated by other people. But it was agreed in 1947 to support the campaign to go to a meeting of the World Federation of Democratic Youth held in Prague. That did not end the hostility. It was there. But we reasoned that it was necessary as long as the delegation is sent independently and is sent by us. We, the Youth Leaguers, went out the next week to collect money to send Victor Mbobo.

EVENTS THAT INFLUENCED

Several things were happening in the '40's. The major thing, of course, was the planning in the Youth League for carrying out the Programme of Action and the Manifesto? But what events influenced you?

I can mention a number of important things, not in any particular order. First, I think I should mention that the war years had aroused the people. This is shown by the 1942 bus boycott in Alexandra. This boycott had the support of a united front including the Trotskyists, the Communists, and the nationalists. At this time the YL had not yet become a force, but this campaign was an important landmark in revitalising the movement. It was going to play an important part even in later years.

This campaign had to do with fare increase, did it not?

Yes. The people were protesting a penny increase for that matter. This campaign was very important because of the support it received from the people. But later Dr. Xuma himself took the position that if the President General of the ANC would head the campaign, it would have increased support. So in 1943 a petition was directed to the Prime Minister and taken to Parliament by certain members, including Moses Kotane and Selope Thema.

Smuts was the Prime Minister at that time?

Yes, it was Smuts. The campaign was popular especially because the pass laws were haunting the people. That campaign continued then, you see, from time to time to raise the indignation of the people. There were marches and other protests.

Another campaign I should mention is the squatters movement. Decades of neglect by government regarding housing and rapid industrialization during World War II, led to rapid urbanization creating a housing crisis. It was estimated in the mid-1940s that the immediate requirements were about 150,000 houses for urban Africans alone. Squatter camps mushroomed. In 1944 I attended an open air mass meeting. James Mpanza called me aside and informed me that he was planning to move into a vacant lot near Orlando West with a procession of followers. I was then chairman of the Orlando Branch of the ANC. Indeed Mpanza called upon the people to defy and put their houses across the railway line. It was difficult to oppose a campaign like that, but the Communist Party opposed it. The Youth League supported Mpanza much more than the senior body. The ANC gave something like 25 pounds. But the Youth Leaguers actually participated. They joined the squatters, some of them slept there. Later Nelson in particular was to be very closely associated with the squatters movement.

What about your association with the movement?

I supported it. One incident occurred in 1946. I was on my way home one day when I learned from the papers that violence had broken out near the Orlando Community Hall where shelters had been erected and which the City Council had ordered be demolished. A fight between the Municipal police and the squatters had led to two deaths and several wounded. I dashed over to the trouble spot to get first hand information. The place was surrounded by police with armored cars and tanks on hand. Hundreds of police under a Brigadier were ready to attack. I, together with others including Lembede and Paul Mosaka, decided to see the Brigadier with a view to persuade him not to attack because the squatters were prepared to defend themselves and that would lead to a bloodbath. Then we went to speak to the squatters and persuaded them to hold off until morning. The wounded were removed and a bloodbath was averted.

Was the issue resolved?

Temporarily. Towards the end of 1946 a meeting of the residents was called in the Community Hall convened by Mpanza. A resolution was drafted by Mandela and seconded by me that the City Council secure from the government the tents which had been used during the war to accomodate soldiers and this be done by January, 1947. About 12,000 people gathered the day the

decision was to be made. After declaring that it would not have its hand forced by lawlessness, the Council made a vacant lot available four miles away from Orlando, at Jabavu, where the squatters were permitted to put up temporary shelters.

By early 1947 it was estimated that the number of squatters ran into 60,000 with squatter camps under the control of "camp guards". The Johannesburg City Council instituted a system of "controlled" squatting. An area of about 1500 acres was set aside adjacent to Jabavu for an eventual population of about 100,000.

I think Mpanza deserves to be mentioned as one of the heroes. Here is a man who led the country those days when things were not as bad. It's true his approach was less political. But he created the sea of Soweto. You talk about Soweto today and you must talk about Mpanza. He called upon the people to take over and divide the land and squat. It was a major campaign and although we supported it, we did not realize its significance.

What about the '46 miners' strike?

The mine strike was planned by J.B. Marks. He was a powerful speaker, a very attractive personality and he had good support of the rank and file. I think he was a most-loved Communist. He was president of the African Mine Workers Union. The union was supported by the ANC and I think Gaur Radebe was one of the founders much earlier, in 1941. The union did not become active at that time, but later during the war years J.B. Marks combed the country to organise the mine workers to demand a pound a day for work. It did not occur to many people that this was preparation for a strike.

Finally the strike was called on the 12th of August, 1946 with 70,000 involved. I read in the papers that the police were driving, forcing the miners to return to work. About eleven were killed and during the panic that ensued many were injured through being trampled down. There was a debate as to whether this strike deserved the support of the ANC. Now Xuma opposed it. The Communists knew that if you touch the mines, you have touched the core of the country. They should have known the repercussions. Lembede and some of us were not quite agreeable to tackling such a central issue, yet we felt the time had come for us to support this issue. We couldn't be indifferent. And I think the majority in the Youth League were for support.

The ANC was not in support of the mine strike precisely because they thought there was a sinister motive. Why did the Communists call such an important strike and not let the people know, let the President General know? So there was that problem, that controversy. Those of us who were in support of the strike attempted to call for a general strike, but the trade union movement was not strong enough for this, but the effort was made.

There was a feeling in some quarters that for the strike to be successful, it would be necessary to sabotage the railway line between Soweto and the New Canada station. I was approached on the matter and was asked if I was prepared to undertake the task. The matter was fully discussed with me. I knew the consequences and accepted. I didn't give sufficient thought to the consequences of it. The people who approached me did not themselves have a following, but I agreed to do the sabotage. Hymie Basner promised that he was going to give me the sabotage material. I did go

to the appointed place and waited for him. He never arrived.

The general strike was a failure. As an aftermath of the miners strike, the CPSA offices in Johannesburg and Cape Town were raided and 50 whites, Indians and Africans were indicted for conspiracy under the Riotous Assemblies Act. The charge was withdrawn for lack of evidence, but most pleaded guilty to violating War Measure 145, which made it a criminal offence for Africans to strike and they were given short sentences or fined. I think the Central Executive Committee was also charged with sedition. The Prosecutor was Yutar who later became Prosecutor in the Rivonia trial.

The Indian passive resistance campaign came the same year, didn't it?

Yes. I had read about Gandhi's campaigns in South Africa and India, so that when the passive resistance campaign came in 1946, I was aware of the history of the Indian Congress in South Africa. I had also read about the Indian struggle for independence from Britain. I did not hold any particular view of passive resistance as a method of struggle except to regard it as a challenge against the powers that be. This in itself was inspiring. I was in full admiration for the campaign when it started, and I feel now that if I paid greater attention to it, I would have appreciated its significance to the movement better. I would have better equipped myself for what was in store for the ANC a half dozen years later in the Defiance Campaign.

I was able to witness the hustle and bustle of the campaign because the Indian Congress office was just opposite mine in Johannesburg. I visited the office and was impressed by the presence of Indian women who were involved in the campaign. I was also impressed by the fact that some of the students had suspended their studies and threw themselves into the campaign.

(The campaign was a joint operation of the Natal Indian Congress headed by Dr. Naicker, and the Transvaal Congress headed by Dr. Dadoo to protest the Ghetto Bill passed in 1946. The members of the organizations courted arrest with over 2000 going to jail. The Natal Congress grew from a few hundred to about 35,000. Additional information about this campaign may be found in Karis and Carter, From Protest To Challenge, vol. 2, p. 114.)

What about the "Doctors Pact" of 1947?

(This was known as the "Joint Declaration of Cooperation", signed by Dr. A.B. Xuma, Dr. G.M. Naicker, and Dr. Y.M. Dadoo, the latter two representing the Indian Congresses of Natal and the Transvaal. The Declaration recognised "the urgency of cooperation between non-European peoples and other democratic forces for the attainment of human rights and full citizenship for all sections of the South African people". The Declaration called for support in the struggle for full franchise, equal economic and industrial rights, removal of land restrictions, the extension of free and compulsory education for non-Europeans, freedom of movement and abolition of pass laws, and the removal of oppressive and discriminatory legislation. This Declaration was signed on March 9, 1947.)

After the signing of the Pact, a mass meeting was held at Market Square.

I was not present for the signing, but Lembede was. Immediately after the meeting, he gave me

an account. Lembede was very excited and showed great enthusiasm because he said, "we as Youth Leaguers truly agree and accept to work with other non-Europeans on the basis of equality and independence of the ANC on matters of common interest". He was making this point because the Youth League emphasised two aspects -- nationalism and independence of the ANC and was very suspicious of other groups who might be thought to be dominating. Generally there was excitement about the Pact. There had been a joint delegation of the ANC and SAIC to the UN in 1946. There had been a passive resistance campaign which focussed attention of the world on South Africa and at the same time had been focused on wider issues affecting the African people. Hence there was much talk of a hopeful direction of the nationalist movement.

What about developments on the international scene? Did they have any effect on the Youth League and the ANC?

Yes, they did. Such events as the founding of the United Nations. As I mentioned, Dr. Xuma attended the first session as part of a joint delegation. Incidentally, when he met Smuts in San Francisco he was asked why he was there. Xuma replied that he had had to travel thousands of miles to see his Prime Minister.

The signing of the Atlantic Charter promising self-determination to the people of colonial countries after the war had an effect. I made the point that the ANC was basing its programmes and actions not merely on the national, but also on the international sphere, and that the ANC was not merely the mouthpiece of the African people in South Africa, but also had a say in world affairs.

In addition the Fifth Pan-African Congress was held in 1945 in Manchester, England, formulating an anti-imperialist ideology. DuBois was its international President, but Peter Abrahams from South Africa was Publicity Secretary. African affairs occupied a central place.

I should also mention international conferences at which South Africa was represented. One was the World Federation of Democratic Youth. We sent a delegation including Ruth First. I attended a meeting, already mentioned, which Ruth addressed at the BMSC after her return. I saw this young, intelligent girl addressing an audience with confidence and eloquence. I could not, at that time, grasp everything she was saying, but I was tremendously impressed. Also there were South African delegates to the Dakar conference on trade unionism in 1947. J.B. Marks was one of those who attended. These international contacts had an impact on us.

What about the election of 1948 when Smuts of the United Party was defeated and Malan came into office as the Prime Minister?

I think the people never expected it was going to happen. I'm talking about the rank and file. Nobody thought that the Nationalist Party would win. I remember I was going to work, watching the polls indicating what the situation was. We were surprised to see that change taking place. But the Youth League now had become an organisation. They accepted the victory of the National Party. It was a challenge they must face. That's what it meant, but we had quite a number of people who were shaken by it within the left movement itself. Some ran away from the country and that was highly criticised. That was the effect of the National Party. It was known

that the National Party was already conscious of the Youth League and the movement would suffer a great deal as a result of Malan coming to power. His campaign was against the black man, and against the Communist Party. You are in fact talking about suppression of the black movement.

The YOUTH LEAGUE BRINGS CHANGE

Now your objective was to change the direction of the ANC and to exercise some influence in the direction that the ANC would take, is that not correct?

That is perfectly correct.

How did you go about this? What kind of planning sessions did you have? Who was involved?

First of all, would be the Executive itself. I don't know if I mentioned three of the members of the Executive were women. And although to be sure now the Executive was composed of something like 12 -15. There were those who were assigned tasks like Mda, Lembede, Jordan Ngubane, Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo. Yes, these were the people who were very active dealing with things, theoretical questions such as the manifesto.

And you yourself, of course.

Yes, myself in the general discussions, and right from the beginning, Dr. Xuma. Although he welcomed the idea of the Youth League, he was rather disappointed by the tone and the approach, and he said that his idea would be that he become the head of the Youth League. "You produce manifestos. You produce a constitution. You are therefore a ginger group within the movement." This was his approach to us. So there were several discussions that were crucial in the end, that brought about the change in leadership. When in 1949 we were preparing for the ANC conference, discussion had already been taking place about the Programme of Action. The statement had been completed except that it had not been adopted yet by the conference.

We went to see Dr. Xuma. I think it was Nelson, myself, Oliver Tambo, and, I believe Mda and Nkomo were in this delegation. We sat there until after 12:00 midnight arguing, showing him that a new situation had arisen. We no longer believed that we must have just a programme. We must have a policy which we will subscribe to. He argued that we were now dictating terms. He said, "I could never accept blackmail. I consider your approach simple blackmailing. I am not going to subscribe to such a Programme of Action".

We were keen to have Dr. Xuma but we had no alternative but to part ways with him. We said, "Well if you can't accept the Programme of Action, then we are not in a position to support your presidency". That's how we parted with Dr. Xuma. We, as I say, were kept until after 12:00. And he did not even have the courtesy of helping us get home or having a place to spend the night. He just got us out of the gate. We had to look for a place. Buses were no longer running and, if I remember, I think we slept at Gama's place. Gama is the man I mentioned who moved the motion for the formation of the Youth League at the conference. He was my co-delegate.

You met at Dr. Xuma's home in Sophiatown?

Yes we met at Dr. Xuma's home in Sophiatown.

The ANC conference was in Bloemfontein in December?

Yes, that's right.

Would this meeting with Dr. Xuma have taken place in November?

Would have been either October or November, somewhere there.

A little while before the conference of the ANC.

That's right.

What kind of meetings did you have planning your session with Dr. Xuma? There must have been some extensive discussions in the Executive of the Youth League?

There had been continuous discussions of the Manifesto. Well, he argued, you see, that this manifesto really suggested that we were a different type of organisation. We were not the type of organisation which he visualised. Not only was it Dr. Xuma, but the old guard. All of them were very unhappy about the development of the Youth League. We, on the other hand, thought we were loyal. We were opposed to the Mosaka Democratic Party which simply became an opposition. We wanted to develop the ANC and to be a mass peoples organisation. So there was that argument. The argument was not only with Xuma but with leading members of the ANC of the time, (Allison Champion and Selope Thema), people who were the spokesmen of the ANC. That was the situation. And that was reflected even at the conference when the election took place finally.

What kind of a role did ZK Matthews have at this point? Was he active in the ANC?

Yes, he was the president of the Cape. And in actual fact when we were now planning the elections, we approached Professor Matthews to see if he would agree to be the President General of the ANC if we were not supporting Xuma. He would not accept the position. Well, I can't say that it was because of Xuma, but the Programme of Action was something completely new. Something which naturally had to strike fear in the minds of people who were now going to be the leaders of the organisation.

Suddenly at the conference Lancelot Gama, brother to my former co-delegate, proposed my name, seconded by Allen Nxhumalo. I was then elected Secretary General and Dr. Moroka President.

Moroka was not very active politically in the ANC. He was known more to be a leader in the All African Convention. But when we were now in difficulties, the later President of Lesotho, Ntsu Mokhehle, had an idea and went to look for Moroka. Moroka was at the conference but by that

time it was night, and we got Moroka to accept the nomination as the President General of the ANC. There was no problem about Molema who became the Treasurer General. And Xuma was out. But Xuma was very popular because in the election for members of the Executive, he had the highest votes to be a member.

In regard to the search for candidates for leadership positions, do you have any thoughts about why Professor Matthews rejected the offer?

I am not sure what he would say, but I know that the situation was hot. Nobody would easily accept what had been a comfortable position. Xuma would have accepted because he had been a President for some time. He had earned the respect of many people, although he would have found it difficult. In other words, the point I want to make is that I don't think that Xuma wanted to evade the problem. He really wanted to take the position as the President. But in the case of Professor Matthews, I have no doubt that he realised that this was a new situation. The Programme of Action indicated that we no longer wanted to rely on deputations. We were no longer ready to rely on the prestige and popularity of individuals. It was the policy that was going to guide the movement and they knew what it meant.

Did Dr. Moroka have hesitations before he accepted the opportunity?

He had no hesitation. It's simply because he was not really a deep thinker. No, he just accepted it. He did not go into it as the later years showed. He didn't really realise what he was in for. Now a bright chap like Professor Matthews knew what he was going to be in for. And I think to some extent L.K.Ntlabati, whom I had approached to stand as a Secretary General, also knew. So therefore others within the old guard realised that this was a new situation. They would have to adjust themselves.

When was the Programme of Action written? In the beginning you had the Manifesto of the Youth League?

That's right. In 1947 we began to discuss the Programme of Action. And in actual fact by 1949 it was complete, and was to be presented at the conference. And then came the decision to let the Programme of Action be discussed throughout the country. Let people come to the conference and adopt it knowing very well that this is the Programme of Action which will guide them over the years.

So the Programme of Action was all ready for the conference?

Oh yes, it was ready, and it was important who supported the Programme of Action at the conference. It was important to the election. I don't think I've got any more to add except that the conference reflected what the will of the people at that conference was.

Was the Programme of Action adopted?

It was the main thing. The whole conference centered around the Programme of Action. Sometimes Moses Kotane said that the names of the Communists were at the bottom because the

idea was to eliminate them. I don't think he was right when he says that. It was not deliberate. There was the fact that the leading members of the Party were at the bottom of the list. This was because new names were coming up.

You indicated that the proposal for you to stand for Secretary General did not come up in the discussions of the Youth League before. It came up spontaneously?

Spontaneously at the conference.

How did you feel about that?

By the way, I also knew that to accept that position meant a completely new situation for me. I knew that there was no money to finance the movement. But I was obliged. Once I had accepted, once I was elected, I knew that it's the end of my business or anything else. I had to be full time, whether I was paid or not, but I had to be full time. I couldn't draft a Programme of Action and call upon the people to support it without leading it. So that I already knew. I had confidence in my wife, that I would have her support fully as indeed it showed. She supported me fully.

Did you have a chance to discuss it with her?

Not before the conference because I didn't know. I didn't know what the position was going to be, but I had discussed the whole situation with her, including developments involving arrest. I made it very clear to her that I was not a free man. I was now in the position whereby I could be arrested at any time. And in fact when she talked about furniture, I said no, there's no question of buying furniture now. You see, because we couldn't afford it. We must accept the new situation, and she really accepted that fully.

So when you were nominated and elected you had no hesitation about her support.

I had no hesitation about her support even though I had not discussed this aspect. But she was fully behind me.

Was there any other candidate competing with you?

Yes, when I look back now I think it was Tloome who was also in the Party. Dan Tloome was another candidate. I'm not sure if there was another. But we beat all the candidates there.

So you were elected overwhelmingly?

No, I was not. I think that the Communist Party candidate was very strong, very close.

You don't remember how many votes you won by?

I would like to know. I should have investigated that really, rather than speculating about it because I think it's a very legitimate question.

Is there a record of that some place in existence today?

The problem is that all documents were taken by the police. So that has been the problem. But I'm very much interested to know what the position was. Yes, I'm vitally interested in that question because it keeps coming up.

Do you feel that the results were close?

It was narrow in the sense that Tloome had - now the Transvaal, for instance, had always been accepted here. There was no question of anti-communism. They were supporting militancy. And therefore a man like Tloome supported by the Party, and who had been a secretary of the trade union. He would have had good support, but I'm still interested by how much. (*Mary Benson writes that Sisulu won by one vote. South Africa, The Struggle For A Birthright, page 129. Funk and Wagnalls, revised edition, 1969.*)

Did you vote for yourself?

No, I did not vote for myself. Generally that would be my attitude, not to vote to win.

VI THE DEFIANCE CAMPAIGN

After you were elected Secretary General and Dr. Moroka the new President, and you faced the challenge of the National Party coming to power, and after the Programme of Action had been adopted by the ANC, what was next?

The next question was the implementation of the Programme of Action. This programme departed from what had been happening before. It stipulated things which had to be done. It committed leaders to action, to do something. I told you when I was elected I knew that this was a new chapter altogether. I had to find a way of promoting this Programme of Action. It depended much on what I would be able to do. I suggested the Defiance Campaign.

The idea was a campaign for expanding the ANC?

Yes, to be a mass movement. There was a major difference between the passive resistance of 1946 and the Defiance Campaign. We departed from the question of passive resistance in order to inspire our followers with a defiant attitude. It was the only way out of brutal apartheid. It was necessary for people to be ready for a struggle on a higher level. You have to link up the Defiance Campaign as part and parcel of the strategy for mobilization of the masses under the leadership of the ANC.

Whose idea was the Defiance Campaign?

According to Nelson I was the mover of the motion in the Executive of the ANC that the time had come for us to take action. So I initiated it in that sense. When I made the suggestion in the Executive, Dr. Moroka said, "You want us to die in jail?" They were a bit taken aback but it was adopted because the Youth League had the majority. We had to plan for the defiance.

How many were on the Executive Committee?

Twenty-three.

Did they include Mandela, Tambo and William Nkomo?

Mandela was not at the 1949 ANC Conference. He was not elected, but I had been working with him and suggested that he be coopted. He was coopted. Now it was the right thing to have him because he was a hard worker. Once he had accepted, you see, his attitude to working with others had not yet been smoothed. It was still rough, a rough relationship despite his relationship with individual leading people. I think his attitude of nationalism and then his pride were factors. And of course as far as that is concerned, the campaign strategy was shared by the Youth League as a whole. But we differed in methods. He was in the office, in charge of the office when I was touring in the country on the campaign. We planned it.

It is important to bear in mind that in the development of the Defiance Campaign, we had not only the Youth League and the ANC but the South African Indian Congress which influenced to a

large extent our militancy. We were inspired by the passive resistance of 1946, and therefore the militancy increased in the Youth League.

You worked closely with Yusuf Cachalia, Secretary General of the SAIC?

Yes, I did.

Were there other factors that led up to the defiance? You had a lot to do in preparation?

Yes, the Defiance Campaign was a process. There were events within the movement that had an effect. The decision of the National Executive, held in mid-January 1950 in Johannesburg, to publicize the Programme of Action was important. I informed Cachalia that the ANC was ready to cooperate on any issue and this was important. I was also acting as chairman of the newly-established National Action Council, deputizing for Dr. Moroka, the President. But then, in Feb. 1950, the Transvaal ANC Executive made known that plans were afoot to hold a Free Speech Convention sparked by the banning of Sam Kahn, a member of Parliament, JB Marks, and Yusuf Dadoo. This stimulated hostility to holding a convention especially in Youth League circles where the feeling was that the Communists were undermining the Programme of Action.

On the eve of this convention I had discussions with Nelson, among others. He argued that I was encouraging the undermining of the Programme of Action and that my presence at the convention would most likely make matters worse. At a meeting of the Youth League I was criticised and told I had no right even to send a message to the convention. As a result of opposition and criticism, I decided not to attend although I was not convinced about it. But I felt I owed loyalty to my colleagues and left town.

The convention was a tremendous success. A grand welcome was arranged for Moroka who travelled in a carriage to the convention. This was his first meeting as President. The convention made the decision to stage a one day strike on the 1st of May, as a protest against prohibiting speaking at meetings, particularly for Sam Kahn, and also J.B. Marks and Dr. Dadoo. The decision to strike aggravated the situation further with allegations of undermining the Programme of Action. The National Executive of the ANC dissociated itself with the decision for a one day strike, but did not veto the action. Moroka's having attended had given support which resulted in some members openly attacking. The CPSA and the Transvaal Indian Congress came in for special attack.

What about the Youth League?

The Youth League actively opposed the Free Speech Convention because they believed the CP was undermining the leadership of the ANC. They believed the CP always wanted to take over the leadership of any movement.

You were in an awkward position, then. You were Secretary-General of the ANC and had been a leader of the Youth League?

I was in that difficult position, but you will remember that I said when elected Secretary General

that I knew the tremendous tasks I faced. I was building a movement that was not so strong and I was disinclined to accept differences that would undermine this. My whole approach was to make a success of the movement of which I was a leader. So that to me it did not appeal that I must oppose on grounds of ideology. Although Nelson and I discussed things, we did not see eye to eye on this issue. He was actively opposed and strongly supported other ideas. So I was in a difficult position.

What happened on the 1st of May?

Mandela and I went to the ANC office and heard that there had been shooting in the locations. We went to Orlando in the evening and helped to take some people to the hospital. Police had shot wildly at demonstrators. Three were killed in Orlando, nine in Alexandra and one or two in Sophiatown. Altogether some eighteen or nineteen were killed. I felt that it was wrong to have opposed the strike. This was my feeling on the day of the strike.

What were the repercussions?

But even before we come to the details of that we should bring in the question of the banning of the Communist Party, because that's one of the apartheid measures. The Youth League had taken the position that they would not allow the situation to go unchallenged. And the ANC took the line that this action by the government was aimed at the national liberation movement, and not only at the Communist Party. We all fought tooth and nail against the banning of the Communist Party, whatever differences existed. In the Programme of Action we had mentioned specifically that there will be boycotts. The Programme of Action was committing the leadership. There was no middle course. Leadership had to do something about it. Either you had to run away and do nothing at all, or, if you are in the movement, you had to support action.

Because of the urgency of the situation, invitations were extended by telegram to the South African Indian Congress, the CPSA, the Youth League, to join in an emergency session of national organizations on the 14th of May, 1950. The major decision at this gathering was to call for a national day of protest and mourning and a national stoppage of work. The date set was 26th of June 1950 which was a date before the bill banning the Communist Party became law. On the 21st of May, the National Executive Committee of the ANC convened at Thaba'Nchu, (*Dr. Moroka's place in the Orange Free State*) at which it was agreed to drop all differences of the past and fight as a united people. A speech by Moses Kotane left a terrific impression on me. The speech and appeal by Moses must be considered as a turning point. It helped to cement unity between leftists and nationalists. I was appointed to represent the ANC at a meeting of the heads of organizations to be convened in Durban to work out details. Following this I travelled to various centres to organise for the 26th of June.

Were You successful?

Well, yes. I proceeded to Port Elizabeth and at the first meeting I addressed there, the press estimated 15,000 people attended, the largest meeting held in Port Elizabeth up to that time. And then I went to East London by plane, my first ever plane ride. I found the people there cold and indifferent as a result of fear. They had heard about what happened in Johannesburg on 1st of

May by police action. As a result the meeting about the strike in East London was not really a success. The meeting concluded that they heard what I had to say and supported the idea of the strike, but at the present stage the time was too short.

I should say that Mandela, despite his previous opposition, once the decision was made, worked all-out to implement the agreement. He did a tremendous amount of work. All hostility which had developed over the May Day strike disappeared.

When I returned to Johannesburg, I found preparations in full swing. The national leadership assembled at strike headquarters at 11 Nugget St., Doornfontein, to assess incoming information. This meeting, on the 25th and 26th of June, was important because, for the first time, we met in a social atmosphere of friendliness and solidarity. The Communist Party had already disbanded unilaterally before the legislation had passed. This informal gathering generated a feeling of solidarity and optimism. The feeling was predominant that this marked the unfolding of a militant campaign against oppression. And so the banning of the Communist Party led to the calling of a one day strike on June 26th. This was a protest not only against the banning of the Communist Party but also a protest against the Group Areas Act and the killing of the people on May Day. These events had led from one situation into another. The plan was outstanding.

What happened on the 26th of June?

June 26th was not really a great success in the Transvaal because of what happened in the May Day strike. But it was a great success in Port Elizabeth. The event made Port Elizabeth a centre for future militancy and became an important base for ANC activity in the Cape. Militancy dates from this time. In Durban also it was a great success. It created a lot of problems because the City Council decided to sack Indians and replace them with Africans. The best was done to handle this situation and attempts were made to pay the rent of those who had lost jobs. This attempt was largely due to lack of experience because it was impossible to maintain people that way for a long time.

What happened next?

Well, there were some internal problems. Dr. Xuma had been very shaken by Moroka's selection as President at the 1949 ANC conference. He then became rather reckless and said that now the affairs of the ANC would become known to the police, thereby suggesting that Moroka was working with the Special Branch. He mentioned this to me. When I asked what the basis for his allegations was, as I interpreted it, his reply evidenced bitterness and jealousy. Xuma also wrote a letter to the NEC along the same lines. This letter was read in the NEC and was condemned by all. The most outspoken person on the issue was Oliver Tambo who always got along well with Xuma. Tambo more or less said, "This dirty letter must be removed from the records of the ANC."

To make matters worse the government introduced a bill to remove Coloureds from the common roll of voters. (*The Separate Representation of Voters bill, introduced in Feb., 1951*). The feeling amongst the top leadership of various organisations was that something had to be done. Dadoo went to Cape Town to stay there for some time and, working with Sam Kahn and others, tried to form and establish the Franchise Action Council, confined to the Cape. I was to open a

conference in March/April 1951 that ultimately established what was named the Coloured Franchise Action Council.

What led up to the beginning of defiance?

The next important meeting of the National Executive was on 17th of June, 1951 to discuss the next steps to be taken in implementing the Programme of Action. The recommendation was that the task was to prepare for action based on the pass laws. They had civil disobedience in mind. A joint conference was held in July of the NEC's of ANC, SAIC and the Franchise Action Council. The decision was a declaration of war on passes which were declared to be enemy number one. Laws which were to be included in the agitation were the Suppression of Communism Act, the Rehabilitation Scheme, Bantu Authorities Act. A National Planning Council was appointed consisting of Moroka (in absentia), myself, Yusuf Cachalia, Dr. Dadoo and J.B. Marks.

The Planning Council met at Thaba'Nchu with Moroka and agreed to touring the whole country to determine the view of the leadership in various localities and to assess their reaction to the plan. We toured, with the exception of Moroka, beginning in Durban. We met with the Natal ANC and the Indian Congress separately. Both were not quite happy with the plans. Chief Luthuli explained the basis of the hostility of the Zulus towards the Indians and hence the inadvisability of a joint campaign. I accepted the reasons and views put forward by Chief as to how the Zulu people felt, but stated that the matter must be viewed from the standpoint that both groups were victims of white oppression and that when the joint struggle was launched then the bonds of friendship would be forged more forcibly. The plans were thus accepted by the ANC and the Natal Indian Congress in principle.

We then proceeded to the Transkei. We met with members of the Bunga (*the traditional Transkei legislature*). J.B. Marks was the most popular person. He caused a great deal of excitement among the Pondos, himself being a Pondo. They were happy that JB "had come home". We created a tremendous impression on Bunga members. They were impressed by the plans and promised full support. But while we were busy discussing matters, the Special Branch arrived. They started with Dadoo and Yusuf Cachalia and asked them for their permits to enter the Transkei. Cachalia was asked what his nationality was, to which he replied that he was South African of Indian origin. Then they met the Bunga caucus and the members were thoroughly intimidated with the arrival of the Special Branch. The enthusiasm was no longer there.

On our way to Idutywa, about thirty miles from Umtata, we were accosted by the police and taken to the police station. I was asked for necessary documents. I told them that as one who was born and bred in the Transkei, I was even more entitled to be in the Transkei than the police. Later summonses were served on the three of us, but we were not detained.

In Port Elizabeth there was no positive reaction, nor particular objection. The plan was welcomed in Cape Town. In Kimberley we met with leadership but there was not strong reaction. It was during this trip that JB nicknamed Cachalia "Jungleman" because of his troublesomeness with the law. The whole trip took about two weeks. Plans were drawn up and submitted to the respective executives.

Were plans submitted to the ANC 1951 conference?

The main item for discussion at the conference was the proposed Defiance Campaign. Among the people who turned up at the conference to discuss the plans was Manilal Gandhi. He asked permission to address the conference on the issues. The Indian observers who were present opposed this, but I thought it proper that he be allowed to do so. Gandhi's approach was that satyagraha was an important political weapon that had been started by his father, and that it was essential for people to know about certain principles, such as nonviolence, discipline, etc. He thought that Africans were not ready for that. His advice was that the Defiance Campaign should not be launched. He made a lengthy speech along those lines and annoyed everybody.

Other delegates who spoke made reference to Gandhi's speech and said that he was not the only one who could implement those ideas. Some other Indians from Pietermaritzburg were also opposed to the Campaign, but later in the Indian Congress there was generally great enthusiasm about the plan. Some Cape delegates, including Z.K. Matthews, made remarks to the effect that they had certain reservations, but assured the conference that despite that, when the plan was adopted and implemented, the role of the Cape would not be found wanting. My impression was that this was a well-attended conference by enthusiastic delegates who were very impressed by the plans. The presence of Indian fraternal delegates also dramatised things.

Was the plan for the Campaign brought to the attention of the government?

In the plan, provision was made to write to Dr. Malan, the Prime Minister. Immediately after the ANC conference, the SAIC conference held in Johannesburg adopted the plan.

I wrote a letter to Malan which was also signed by Moroka. In fact, Mandela assisted in drafting the letter and also took it to Moroka at Thaba'Nchu for his approval and signature. Moroka seemed to have taken a great liking to Nelson. Moroka's great fear was that things were secretly done by Communists, but Mandela assured him that it was all ANC's work and effort.

(Note: The letter to Prime Minister, DF Malan, was dated Jan. 21, 1952. It informed the PM that at its recent conference the ANC had called for the repeal of certain apartheid legislation such as the Group Areas Act, the Suppression of Communism Act, the Bantu Authorities Act, etc., by the 29th of February, 1952. If this was not done, the ANC would hold protest meetings and demonstrations on the 6th of April "as a prelude to the implementation of the plan for the defiance of unjust laws.")

The letter received wide publicity and this gave the Defiance Campaign greater impetus. In his reply, the PM warned that the full weight of the state machinery would be brought to bear on the Campaign.

When did you decide on the 26th of June for the beginning of defiance?

In the course of our preparation, it was decided, following the police killings on the 1st of May and the protest demonstrations of 26th of June 1950. Also it coincided with the enactment of the Suppression of Communism Act.

Wasn't 1952 celebrated by Afrikaners as the 300th anniversary of their ancestors coming to South Africa? And April 6th as Van Riebeeck Day?

Yes, and in our letter to Malan we stated that we could not participate in the "Van Riebeeck Celebrations" unless the offending laws we referred to were repealed. Instead the 6th of April would be a preparation for our defiance. At the beginning of the year we set up our National Action Council and also established National Volunteer Boards for both the ANC and SAIC. Nelson was appointed National Volunteer-in-Chief of the ANC throughout the country and Maulvi Cachalia of the Indian Congress was Deputy Volunteer-in-Chief.

What happened on the 6th of April?

ANC headquarters sent out various people to address mass meetings. Of particular importance was the Port Elizabeth meeting because it was the largest. The crowd was estimated to be in the region of 35,000, although I thought this was exaggerated. This meeting was addressed by J.B. Marks and Ida Mntwana, both of whom were very popular. Johannesburg also staged a large mass meeting. Preparations for defiance concluded with a joint Executive meeting of the ANC and SAIC in Port Elizabeth, the largest such meeting ever held. The purpose was to discuss the final launching of the Campaign.

When did the first arrests take place?

Even before the 26th. The first people banned were Moses Kotane, Yusuf Dadoo, Ismail Bhoola, David Mopapi and others. They addressed a mass meeting, I think, in PE. I was there also. An interesting thing happened driving back to Johannesburg. The car broke down in the Orange Free State. Yusuf Cachalia decided to go to some boarding house to make arrangements to stay there overnight. He adopted a very imposing attitude and made arrangements with a white who was a member of the Torch Commando. Two of our group slept in the car. Ida Mntwana, Cachalia and I stayed at the boarding house -- no difficulties. Yusuf had gone alone to the boarding house to make arrangements and said that he was bringing his friends along. The Englishman had assumed that Yusuf was white, but he was very surprised when he saw me and Ida. The manner in which Yusuf introduced us seemed to have intimidated the man. The car had a complete breakdown and we were unable to have it fixed. We took a taxi to Johannesburg. Even the taxi driver regarded Yusuf as white and took me and Ida to be Coloured. Hence he spoke disparagingly about the "kaffirs". We wanted to reach Johannesburg and so we decided not to embarrass him except to keep the conversation within reasonable bounds of language.

What about the actual beginning of the action on 26th of June? What did you do?

On that particular day we had planned that the Transvaal and the Eastern Cape would go into action. And they did. Raymond Mhlaba led in the Eastern Cape. I was to guide the general movement. But the situation developed in such a way that I found myself leading the campaign in the East Rand, an action which was criticised by a number of the leaders, that I should have gone into action on that day. I acknowledge it. It was a mistake. I felt I couldn't avoid the situation.

The decision was that I should not be in the first batches. The first group was supposed to be led by Nana Sita and Rev. Tantsi who was vice-president in the Transvaal. Tantsi was very dedicated and dignified but he got ill. Later he told me that he had not been ill but was not in a position to go through with the act of defiance. This supposed illness created a problem. I took his place. I defied the pass law. I did not produce a pass when the police called on me to do so.

Where was this?

In Boksburg.

How many were arrested on that day?

I think about twenty.

What did you do?

I went into the location without a pass. I refused to produce it. I was taken to jail. I was supposed only to accompany the group but not with the intention of defying. The police were present in full force. When I was asked for my pass, I said I would not produce it and was shoved into the Sita group. My arrest was accidental, not planned.

How could it be accidental?

Accidental in the sense that it was not planned. On the other hand, I could not be in the campaign that opposed passes and when the police demanded my pass, clearly show it. So I decided to defy the police. I was heavily criticised later to the effect that I was supposed to be at the centre of direction and should not have done what I had done. I was supposed to have been in an evening group under the leadership of Flag Boshielo. There were about 100 in this group, including Mandela and Cachalia, to supervise things. Both got arrested. We were found guilty and sentenced to seven days. It should be noted that, as part of the Sunday services in prison at that time, "Nkosi Sikelel i-Afrika" was being sung. But after our detention, the prison authorities stopped this. Yet immediately upon our arrival in prison, the anthem was sung by a group of about 50 with deep feeling and this aroused the feelings of the entire prison population.

The Sita batch were taken to the police station and the next day to the Boksburg prison. As we entered, the volunteers were brutally assaulted. This was the morning of the 27th, a Saturday. On Sunday the commanding officer, called the superintendent at the time, arrived and the volunteers were lined up in the courtyard. I approached the commanding officer and stated that the volunteers had come peacefully and I placed before him the fact that the volunteers had been assaulted and that four of the volunteers were in isolation cells. I was grabbed by a couple of policemen and taken to the punishment cells. One of the warders assigned to look after me complimented me for my courage. His name was Mavuto and I became friendly with him. All were placed in koeloe kut (*isolation*) but I was separated from them.

I joined my colleagues working in the garden. We had to work with the common law

prisoners. These prisoners were incited by the warders to insult the volunteers. I defused the situation. The volunteers adopted their own rate of work and refused to be driven like oxen. I and Sita were singled out to drive the wheelbarrows the whole day, but Sita was excused on medical grounds when it was explained he was an ill person. I was told to go ahead but refused to do so after 11:00 A.M. I said that I considered I had done my share and was not going to continue. The warders were angry and I would have been handled but for the fact that the remaining volunteers protested and threatened that violence would erupt. I was taken to the superintendent where the warder made his report. I then explained my case. Although the superintendent was aggressive and told me to go ahead with the work, he assured me that I would not be driven. From that day onwards, the warders adopted a more conciliatory attitude. We were allowed rest breaks and smoke breaks. I had stopped smoking but had restarted in prison.

When my colleagues and I were released, we were welcomed back at a reception in the Trades Hall. Sita and Seperepere spoke to inspire the people. Seperepere made a very short dramatic speech of a few sentences and sat down abruptly. He received the longest ovation. From that day onwards he was called Naguib after the Egyptian leader at that time. He became the Volunteer-in-Chief for the Transvaal.

What were some of the highlights of the Campaign? It started on June 26 and went at least six months, to the end of the year?

The name "Defiance" was deliberately used to make a difference between passive resistance and defiance. The aim here was to incite the people to action so that they should be militant and no longer fear jail. They must go willingly to jail. That was the aim, to arouse the whole nation.

Over the six months there were thousands arrested?

Eight and a half thousand, I think. These were volunteers ready to go into action in an organised way - occupy benches in a station, occupy areas reserved for whites. That's how it was. It was organised defiance.

Would you say most action was in the Eastern Cape and the Johannesburg areas?

Yes. The Eastern Cape was even leading.

Who was taking the leadership there?

There were several people who were leading - Gladstone Tshume, Raymond Mhlaba and Dr. James Njongwe, and later Joe Matthews.

What about your own activities?

From the beginning and throughout the Campaign my office was flooded with journalists from overseas. I came to know quite a few of them. Some of them subsequently wrote books. One of them was Lord Buxton. Also Christopher Mayhew, a cabinet minister in the British Labour government. In exchanging views with them I began to shape my approach on how to handle the

press and other such interviews. I also was in the fortunate position of working with Mandela because he was in the office every day. I had this same opportunity with Oliver Tambo, JB Marks and Moses Kotane.

Were you arrested more than once?

Yes. The second was with the arrest of the leadership - twenty leaders, including Dr. Moroka. He was arrested in his home in the Orange Free State. I was detained at Marshall Square police station in Johannesburg but separated from the others. We were charged under the Suppression of Communism Act. I was accused number one.

When the case came to trial in the Supreme Court, Moroka had a separate defence. This was viewed with hostility. Mandela was asked to persuade him to do otherwise, but failed. Dr. Moroka had never imagined that as a Moroka and also as a leading medical man in the area of Thaba'Nchu who had attended to many of the Afrikaners (and who had also sent Afrikaners with scholarships to various places) that he could ever be arrested. So when he was arrested, he suspected that there was something wrong with the Communists. Now he started seeing Communists - he suspected something was done without his knowledge, and he decided to employ a different lawyer. He was the only one who was out of line with the rest of us. His trial went on in that way. He had his own lawyer. And as a matter of fact, when he appeared to give evidence, he was asked who the Communists were and he started with me, to point to me. His lawyer said that that was immaterial. He must leave it. So his plan was to point to nearly everybody as a member of the party. Now that discredited Moroka, and it also indicated how naive he was about the whole situation. It was a superficial bravery, because all the years he had given the impression of bravery, but when it came to the real push, he was unable to stand it. If I'm not mistaken he even said in court that there is no such thing as equality. That annoyed people. That made people lose confidence in Moroka completely.

What effect did this have in the ANC?

Indignation against his behaviour and you will see he was not re-elected. I should mention that Moroka was in an unfortunate position geographically. He was isolated in the Orange Free State. It should also be mentioned that during the trial there were noisy demonstrations outside the court. The Chief Magistrate asked Moroka to address the crowd to remain calm. He did so.

There were similar trials in Kimberley and Port Elizabeth. As in our case, all were found guilty and given nine month sentences, suspended for three years. I attended these trials. I had an interesting experience in travelling back to Johannesburg. The plane stopped in Bloemfontein, and we ate dinner at the airport. This was the first time I had gone to a white restaurant. No resentment was shown toward me and my companions.

There were no trials in Durban. These were the first major trials which took place within the period of the Defiance Campaign. The arrest of the leaders inspired the masses of the people, but it also had the effect of driving fear into some. The wide publicity given to these trials heightened the political consciousness. Publicity was largely due to the fact that a lot of correspondence was received from various parts of the world, among them from Martin Luther King Jr. These letters

were read in court by the defence.

What significance did you give to the arrest of Patrick Duncan and Manilal Gandhi in December, 1952? (*Duncan was the son of a former Governor-General of the Union of South Africa. The arrest of Duncan and Gandhi took place on Dec. 8, 1952. Some seven whites and about thirty Africans and Indians were arrested with them.*)

Duncan discussed the matter with me. He wanted to be part of the ANC. The ANC did not accept whites at that time. We had that difficulty. There was also the question of Duncan not wanting to be led by Communists. Also Manilal Gandhi had pursued the inadvisability of the Defiance Campaign with me. He often made visits to my office. His main worry was that the ANC was working with Communists. I replied that his father, Mahatma Gandhi, had also worked with Communists. Manilal said that the difference was that his father had not been led by Communists. When I asked what evidence there was that the ANC was led by Communists, he replied that he knew that the ANC was led by Dadoo. I could not persuade him otherwise, but showed great patience. He also maintained that passive resistance was the philosophy of the Mahatma and that we had not been using it on the same basis.

Therefore the participation of Gandhi and Duncan in December, 1952 was welcomed. I think they were influenced by the effectiveness of the movement through the Campaign.

Did they defy in Natal?

No, in Germiston.

(*Duncan was sentenced to 100 days in jail and Gandhi to 50. They chose to serve their sentences rather than pay fines.*)

There were riots that year in October and the government tried to connect them to the Campaign?

They were not connected. I was in East London myself on that day. When the people asked permission to have a meeting, the police came and gave them five minutes to disperse. I don't know if five minutes expired, but the police fired. That's what happened. That's when it started. The people reacted. Seven people were killed, including four whites among whom were a white nun and a doctor, in the riots that followed. I met with the local leadership and issued a public statement reaffirming the principle of nonviolence and criticised the provocative action by the police. I called on the people to remain calm.

That did not interfere with the carrying on of the Campaign, did it?

No, it did not.

What about the ending of the Campaign?

Various things happened. About September, 1952, the United Party approached the ANC with a

view to ending the Campaign. They pointed out that elections were due to be held in 1953, and if it was agreed that the Campaign should be called off and if it was then made public that the UP had persuaded the ANC to do so, the UP stood a very good chance of winning. They said that if the UP won the election they would be willing to cancel five apartheid laws, but not the sixth (the pass laws). They explained that they were confronted with powerful mining interests, although they would continue to negotiate the issue.

I was approached basically in my capacity as Secretary General. Mandela and Marks were also approached. I reported to the National Action Council and the National Working Committee. They wanted to know what the UP was prepared to do if they did not win the election. The UP had difficulty on this. Finally the NAC and NWC made up their minds that no deal could be arranged. The whole thing was rejected.

The government took stringent action, did it not?

Yes. Laws were passed which we called "martial law" designed to end defiance. You could be sentenced to whipping plus a certain period in jail. In addition your property could be confiscated. The measures were very hard and they created a problem. You couldn't say to people, "Defy this. It doesn't matter what happens". No man was easily prepared to be whipped and to have property confiscated. And that, I think, had the effect of ending the Campaign.

The laws passed were the Criminal Laws Amendment Act and the Public Safety Act?

Those are the laws I am talking about which we called martial law.

How do you assess the effectiveness of the Defiance Campaign? What was the result?

It was one of the greatest events of the movement. It had the effect of making the people confident and fearless, prepared to defy the laws, to be prepared to go to jail and meet any situation. That was the importance of it. It was the beginning of a new situation which led even to a person facing the death penalty with confidence. The Campaign brought about a situation in which people were not arrested just by chance, but by plan. This meant organisation. Nelson Mandela, as I mentioned, was appointed Volunteer-In-Chief, and Maulvi Cachalia as deputy. The movement called for volunteers. In the Eastern Cape, it was called "Amadela Kufa", "defiers of death". You can see from this that a revolutionary situation was emerging.

Was the task of Mandela and Cachalia to organise around the country?

No, more concerned with discipline, not so much organising. Their function was discipline, to train the people to act in a particular way.

Was there much cooperation in Natal?

Yes. At first there was reluctance, even with Chief Luthuli. We had some thorough discussions with him because in Natal there was some feeling that the Indians were exploiters and did not seek harmonious relations. But a new spirit was created once opposition was minimized. In fact,

Chief Luthuli, who belonged to the group who were suspicious of Indian motives, became the champion of non-racial action.

Did the Gandhi-Duncan action strengthen the Congress alliance?

Oh yes. It did two things. It helped create a mass movement. Secondly, it strengthened the Congress alliance because it made clear that the Campaign was operating both with the ANC and the SAIC.

Did the Defiance Campaign increase the membership of the ANC?

It very much increased the membership of the ANC. We went to about 100,000 from 5000.

Did you call the Campaign off at a particular time, or what happened to end it?

The effect of the laws made the spirit of defiance lower because of the new difficulty the people faced in submitting to whipping. And without publicly calling it off, it more or less diminished. Also we put our energy into a new effort - the Congress of the People. It became the next most important campaign.

In the 1950's the official salute of the ANC was the "thumbs-up" gesture. What happened to it?

This was mainly before the Defiance Campaign. It changed to the clenched fist because the "thumbs-up" was known as the ANC greeting and led to banning. The raised fist was started by some groups in Port Elizabeth. It was not officially the salute of the ANC and therefore could not readily lead to arrest.

What about the M Plan? Did it originate with the Defiance Campaign?

Yes, that's right. It actually was intended to go into effect when banning orders began to take place. That was the main objective. During the Defiance Campaign we realised that the government was going to act and was going to ban the organisation. We then sat down and decided that Nelson should be entrusted with the task of drafting a plan, which he did. This was called the M Plan, the Mandela Plan.

Did Mandela plan it alone?

Well no, but he drafted it, and it was discussed and adopted, but the drafting was done by him.

How would you describe the Plan?

It was a system of organisation whereby ten houses on each road made a working unit. The whole area was divided into these ten house units. They each are given a name. Each unit would meet and then join in bigger units at the regional level. It worked with different degrees of success, at different times. No area except the Eastern Cape ever really succeeded in implementing the Plan.

During the '80's it was used to build and help the UDF (United Democratic Front).

What about the ANC annual conference in 1952?

Preparations for the Conference were very extensive after the exciting period of the Defiance Campaign. There was country-wide enthusiasm and the Conference assumed greater significance than previous ones. For the first time in many years the Conference was held in Johannesburg. The reason was that many leaders were banned who were in Johannesburg and consultations with them were necessary.

What about your situation?

The police were looking for me apparently with the idea of banning. By this time Mandela had already been banned for six months under the Riotous Assemblies Act. The Working Committee felt that I should go underground to avoid being banned before the conference. They felt that the Secretary General should be present as he was conversant with many aspects of the Campaign throughout the country. Thus I went underground. The National Executive Committee met with me at my underground headquarters at Kliptown. They discussed the possibility of the ANC being banned. In preparation for this a resolution was drafted giving the NEC extraordinary powers.

The Conference was held in the Trades Hall. The plan was that I should enter at an appointed time properly disguised. I was disguised, among other things, with a Muslim Coufia (*religious hat*). Although the place was cordoned off, I was taken past the police without them recognising me, and as soon as I arrived at the stage, the chairman announced my presence and called on me for my report. I stayed for the discussion of the report and then left as I had come without being detected. The police were not present in the hall and could only wait outside, not being allowed in the meeting.

What about the ANC election?

By this time Moroka was no longer looked upon in a favourable light. People were already thinking of another possible President General. In Natal, Chief Luthuli had become very popular and at the Conference he created a tremendous impression. His defiance of the government had increased his popularity. (*In 1935 Luthuli had been elected as Chief of Groutville, officially the Umvoti Mission Reserve in Natal. He served in this capacity for seventeen years. In 1952, because of his active support of the Defiance Campaign, the Department of Native Affairs, to which he was responsible as Chief, forced him to make a choice between his support of the campaign or his chieftaincy. He refused to disavow his ANC commitment, and the government then deposed him as Chief. More detail on this episode can be found in Luthuli's book, Let My People Go, the chapter on "Defiance and Deposition, pp. 115-124. London: Collins, 1962.*) When the election took place, Chief was elected President General. Both Njongwe from Eastern Cape and Moroka had stood but were defeated.

There were also efforts made to remove me as Secretary General. Natal was a very important area and MB Yengwa was a natural choice. Also, because the Cape had played an

important role in the Defiance Campaign, some there wanted to project the Cape's position. There were also cliques from the Transvaal that cooperated with these moves. In the election Yengwa and Robert Matjie (from Cape) were candidates for Secretary General but were defeated.

The National Executive Committee officially called off the Campaign in January, 1953, using the new powers it had been granted. There was no opposition when the Campaign was called off. It had been a great success. Nothing had raised the political consciousness of the masses so high until that time. Efficiency had increased within the movement as well as determination. The Campaign also drew the attention of the world to the question of racial oppression and Europeans began to question the future of the country. Indirectly it led to the birth of the Congress of Democrats, the Liberal Party and later the Progressive Party.

At about this time both Mandela and I were banned for six months and Njongwe in the Eastern Cape. We were not called upon to resign from organisations, but were barred from addressing gatherings.

VII TRIP ABROAD

In July 1953 you took an extensive trip to Europe and Asia, including the Soviet Union and China. What led up to this trip?

I received an invitation from the World Federation of Democratic Youth to attend the first World Youth Festival in Romania. I discussed this with members of the Working Committee, not in a formal meeting because the matter had to remain a secret. I discussed it with JB Marks, Moses Kotane and Nelson who was chairman of the Working Committee. Moses did not have confidence in the trip. He was concerned about the fact that the Secretary General was going to a Socialist country and would be exposing himself thereby. He was also concerned about the question of a passport, but he did not oppose the trip.

Nelson attended a meeting of the National Executive Committee in Natal. I did not attend because I was preparing for my trip and I didn't want to jeopardise it in any way. He discussed the plan for my trip. Chief Luthuli had no objections at that time, but later he denied having information about it. It was decided that Dan Tloome would act as SG in my absence.

How did you get out of the country and who made the arrangements?

Kathy (Ahmed Kathrada) was the main person who worked on affairs of youth, planned the trip and made arrangements for departure. Some connections were made with travel agencies, but they failed to secure travel documents and tickets. So Kathy made arrangements through his own contacts. We had to get affidavits from lawyers, signed by lawyers, to serve as travel documents. But we had to bribe our way to get on the plane to Israel.

Why Israel?

Because they had a plane and there was confidence that they would not betray us. El Al was government supported.

What kind of a bribe?

I think money was given to the person before we arrived at the airport. Kathy made all these arrangements. We got on the El Al plane at Jan Smuts airport by bribing the officials. Detectives were not there at the time. Arrangements were made with people who knew operations at the airport.

Who was with you?

The main person was Duma Nokwe, the Secretary General of the Youth League. But there were more in the delegation. Some of them used other secret ways of leaving South Africa and some went by sea directly to the WFDY festival in Bucharest. The delegation included Alfred

Hutchinson, Henry Makgothi, Harold Wolpe and his wife, Arthur Goldreich and his wife, and others. When we got to Bucharest they were there, a large group came from South Africa.

Duma and I left by plane which was scheduled to depart at 3:00 a.m., but actually it was two hours late. We nearly panicked momentarily because we had no passports, only the affidavits that we were South African citizens, and we thought officials might arrive. The only condition the airline made was that we must have return tickets in case we were not allowed to land. It was a nonstop flight to Tel Aviv, but because we left late, we were correspondingly two hours late in arriving and missed what should have been our connecting flight to London.

At Tel Aviv passports were demanded and there was also a language problem. All that Duma and I could say was "South Africa - Malan - fascist". It was midnight and we were pushed from pillar to post. Immigration officials did not know what to do. Ultimately interpreters were brought in and we explained the position that the South Africa regime was fascist and therefore we could not apply for passports. Then we were introduced properly to the officials, I as Secretary General of the ANC and Duma as Secretary General of the Youth League. We were kept until the early hours of the morning and then taken to the Ambassador Hotel in Tel Aviv with expenses fully paid for. We stayed for two weeks.

What did you do during that time?

We had landed in Israel just after Malan's trip there. South Africa was in the news also because at the time "Cry The Beloved Country" was being performed. As soon as it became known that we two South African leaders were in the country, we were taken to a performance and also met the cast of the play. Performances had already been on for two and a half months. We were also introduced to the audience, mentioning our positions and that we were on our way to the Festival. We made short speeches to the effect that we appreciated the hospitality of the Israeli people. There was tremendous excitement among the actors themselves and stage hands when we were introduced. Further, Duma introduced himself as the cousin of Lionel Ngakane (who had earlier taken a leading part in the play there) and one actress simply went head-over-heels and urged us to make arrangements for her to meet Lionel.

The inevitable round of invitations followed. At one of the first parties, the hosts asked us to sing. We did so and sang "Mayibuye" set to the tune of "My Darling Clementine". The Israelis were disappointed that some Western melody was being sung and urged us to sing what was truly indigenous, which we did.

We went to Jerusalem and for men who had a Christian background this was a tremendous experience. We crossed the Jordan river and went to the place where Christ is supposed to have had the Last Supper. We were taken around and were shown things of historical and Biblical interest. We were taken to the King David Hotel where the struggle of the Israelis against the British took place and which had been bombed by the Irgun.

Wherever we went, privately or publically, we severely criticised the Israelis for having invited Malan to Israel. We said that while we appreciated the hospitality shown to us, it was nevertheless a disappointment that they should have invited a man who had openly expressed

sympathy with the Nazis. The majority with whom we spoke agreed with us and criticised the government for the invitation, but some defended the action of the government headed by Ben Gurion.

Did you have a chance to visit a Kibbutz?

Yes, we were invited by someone on the left in the Labour Party to visit a kibbutz. It was interesting. Some of the children stayed with their parents, although in other Kibbutzim they stayed in separate dormitories and were allowed to visit their parents on weekends. Also, someone who might be a professor in a university, for instance, was expected to do manual labour, e.g., street cleaning, so much so that they had taken the whole idea quite literally. We only visited one kibbutz where we were shown around and stayed overnight. It was interesting that at the kibbutz school there were books on Marxism-Leninism and Stalin's works lining the walls. The kibbutz was self-sufficient, produced its own clothing, etc. They no longer relied on money. There were not travel facilities and they were never paid. Whenever they wanted to go to town, they simply hitched a lift. The community we visited had about 3000 people.

Did you get a sense of the struggle in Israel?

The Israelis were very enthusiastic about their struggle and wherever we went the story of their struggle was related. There was also a war effort there and wherever we went we saw soldiers in profusion as a state of hostility existed between the Arabs and the Israelis. Just to give an example, because of my lighter complexion, I was mistaken sometimes as an Arab. On one occasion when I took a little boy's hand, he simply pulled his hand away.

Did you know anyone in Israel before you got there?

Well, I knew Naomi Shapiro who later married Jack Barnett. She had been a correspondent for the paper, New Age, and I knew her in South Africa. I could not find her on my way to the Festival, but I was in Israel for a fortnight on my return trip and stayed with them. Barnett took me to Nazareth and I saw the well where Mary was supposed to have been informed she would be the mother of Jesus. The well was still in use. The importance of Nazareth to me lay not in its well, but in the fact that it was thickly populated by Arabs.

I learned that the Communist Party was very active in Israel at that time. It ran six newspapers in different languages. It had seven members in the Knesset, four of whom were Arabs. Whilst the remaining population was very enthusiastic about the new state of Israel, the CP was not. Whereas the general population showed us the new developments in Israel and tourist attractions, the CP took us to the slums where the majority of Arabs lived. The CP was very critical about discriminatory practices against the Arabs. For example, all Israelis were obliged to carry ID cards, but on the papers of the Arabs there was a distinctive mark which showed that they were Arab and they were therefore the object of greater scrutiny and interrogation.

What impressed you most about Israel?

Well, there was organisation. I think they were very thorough. When you see the activities of

the people in the kibbutz you know how thoroughly well organised they were. Israel was in fact just beginning and yet they were organised in every sphere. We learned a great deal from them. I had a certain admiration for the Israelis and their enthusiasm, but I did not sympathise with them. I felt that the real party which should have been in power was the CP for it would have been in a position to bring about harmonious relationships between Jews and Arabs. I did not have any admiration for those who left the Soviet Union to settle in Israel, nor did I approve of the idea of the Israeli government calling on all Jews throughout the world, including socialist countries, to settle in Israel. This was probably the first cause of friction between USSR and Israel.

What about the rest of your trip? You were in London, the Soviet Union, and China. What were some of your impressions?

On the way to the Festival we first landed in Athens from Tel Aviv. Here there was nothing of importance except of being in an ancient and historically well-known city. I had a similar feeling in Rome. Because Duma and I had no passports, the immigration officials escorted us (by police actually) to another airport for another plane. We flew from there to Paris and then to London.

London was the first major destination according to our tickets. Here we were cross-examined and thoroughly searched. Although we did not have the proper documents, we could not be prevented from entering Britain as we were subjects of the Commonwealth. Whilst we were being interviewed two people approached. One of them was Dave Kitson who greeted us in Zulu. I did not know Kitson and suspected him of being a policeman. We completely ignored him until he made explanations that he had been sent by the SA Festival Committee. We then stayed with Kitson in private accommodations. Kitson then took us around and in addition to South Africans, we met Desmond Buckle, a Ghanaian who had been in England since the age of 13. He was a journalist for the Daily Worker. He became my closest companion in England.

Incidentally, tipping the waiters in England was obligatory. I was critical about the practice. I felt that instead of the employer paying wages in full, guests and customers had to pay the wages in part - this is what it amounts to.

Dave Kitson took me to the British CP offices. Here I met Palme Dutte, chairman of the international section of the British CP and I. Cox, chairman of the African Affairs Department. One of the first things I discussed with Dutte was the Pan-African Congress. Cox and Dutte discouraged the idea and I had a long argument with them and attacked the leadership of the Party for not taking full advantage of issues of this nature. I pointed out that Britain was the centre of the colonial world and it was surprising that the Party did not concentrate on colonial affairs. I pointed out that the struggle had to be broadened and that Pan-Africanism was a popular movement and that the British CP must go wrong if it fails to pay attention to this aspect.

What about the Festival?

The SA delegation to the Festival via London was about 25. A special plane was chartered. Duma was the head of the delegation. On the plane I met Senator William Morrow from Australia. He was at one time president of the World Peace Council of Australia and had been expelled from the Labour Party for his activities. We developed a firm friendship. We flew to

Czechoslovakia and went by train from there to Romania. When we entered Romania there were many people and a big welcome at the first station.

One of the persons in our delegation was Lindi Nkagane (after whom my daughter, Lindi, was named). At this first station stop, many people were excited to see her, touching her and her hair. One of the Romanians asked her, "Are you a kaffir?" Lindi explained the term and why it was not used. The person concerned was ashamed and apologised profusely. On the station platform we found the traditional circle with singing and dancing, the throwing of handkerchiefs, pulling and pushing, and even kissing.

When we reached Bucharest there was a difference made between general groups and honoured guests. I was given a car, a chauffeur and an interpreter. The interpreter was a young and beautiful woman, a doctor, by the name of Naomi. Later I was joined by Morrow and shared the same car and interpreter.

In the hotel I was visited by various people - some of our own delegation with complaints about such things as the place they were staying or quarrels among themselves. Delegates from other parts of Africa visited me also with complaints. They were very hostile to whites who they said were contemptuous. They complained that they could not have access to Lindi, that whites were monopolising her. I explained that Duma was the head of the delegation. They expressed their frustration by saying that Duma was just a white man's boy. So I had to attend to many of these problems. Others who came to me were journalists from various parts of the world. Some African delegates came to discuss the matter of the ANC's move for a Pan African Congress. It was agreed that this matter would be discussed more thoroughly when we reached Poland.

I visited state farms and factories and was shown various development projects, women engineers working hard. I went to the countryside and met peasants. Every night we were in meetings and usually seated with important persons such as cabinet ministers at the same meeting or show. The music especially thrilled me, all types of music. The evidence of folk culture was tremendous. All this was part of the festival. I met the "Red Dean", Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury. He was given a special place which had formerly been the residence of some royalty, or something like that. I was very impressed with him. The food was excellent, usually five courses and they kept piling it on. Altogether I was in Romania for six weeks.

You next went to Poland?

The whole group, except one or two, went to Poland. We were invited to attend the conference of the International Union of Students. This was the first international conference I had attended. I was impressed by the simultaneous translation system. It was an exciting moment when Lindi was called to the rostrum to speak on behalf of the South African delegation and she put the SA situation clearly and beautifully.

Was the Pan African Congress discussed?

The proposed Congress meeting, comprised of various delegates, took place in Warsaw. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the need for such a Congress and a follow-up on the letters I

had written to African states. The question was to go about setting up the machinery for calling the conference. At a meeting with delegates from Egypt and the Gold Coast (Ghana) it was agreed that they should consult with their governments and organisations to arrange a congress.

I had the opportunity to address workers at a factory and I complimented them on their achievements, especially the rebuilding of Warsaw which had been razed to the ground. Also I outlined the SA situation. I stayed in Warsaw for two weeks. I was fascinated by seeing Poland, especially Warsaw, the way it was built up. Whilst there, I and Duma and Senator Morrow were invited to visit the Soviet Union and China.

We traveled by train to Moscow. It took two days. Duma once disappeared on the train and was ultimately found, quite drunk, in the company of two Russian generals with whom he became quite popular. I was annoyed when I found him thus. The generals offered me drinks, but I refused. They thought I was interfering with Duma. Duma is a very nice person and very polite. When he's drinking he's even more so. We made friendship with the generals, but they regarded me as a reactionary because I wouldn't drink.

In Moscow we were booked in a hotel facing Red Square. We were given two interpreters. We stayed in Moscow only a few days, but before leaving we addressed the Konsomol. Duma delivered the address which was prepared in English. The interpreters were disappointed. The address was supposed to have been given in Xhosa and interpreted into Russian according to the text already prepared. They thought that speaking in English was a reflection of acceptance of white domination. This was the view of the interpreters.

Next you went to China. How long were you there?

We spent six weeks in China. We went by the Trans Siberian railway and it took twelve days from Moscow to Peking. Once there a full program was drawn up for each day and we toured fifteen of the thirty provinces. I particularly enjoyed my visit to China. I found the Chinese very warm. Perhaps there was also the fact that the country was semi-colonial, just emerged from that situation. So there was that interconnection. I thought the efficiency I experienced was outstanding. I don't think I found it to the same extent anywhere else. If they organised a trip and said 4:00 o'clock, it was not five past 4:00 but 4:00 exactly.

Unfortunately I never liked Chinese food. Again I may have been regarded as reactionary. When we were asked what food do you want, I would say I want English food. This would be embarrassing to Nokwe because he was a very shy chap. He was embarrassed that I was so bold as to say I want English food. And that's how it was, and is even now when I visit China. I still am not able to enjoy their food. Yet in Johannesburg people speak very highly of Chinese food. I think I must accept that I'm very conservative on the question of food. I don't easily find it enjoyable. So this was very bad for my host.

As we travelled around I was introduced to people as Secretary General of the ANC, i.e. the National Movement. Translated into Chinese this was Kuomintang and this was embarrassing because this was the name of Chiang Kai Shek's movement and he was attacked wherever we went.

I was particularly fascinated by the celebration of the national day, 1st of October. There were celebrations and parades and I attended a banquet. I was introduced to Chou en Lai who was magnetic and made endless toasts. He showed tremendous stamina and remained sober throughout.

Before leaving South Africa, Nelson and I had discussed the ultimate things of the Movement. Though we believed in the policy of nonviolence, we knew in our heart of hearts it wasn't going to be a satisfactory answer. Nelson suggested to me, "Man, we must talk to the Chinese about revolution". And I did. The Chinese were very modest. They always wanted to learn from you even though they were so advanced. They said, "Well, listen chaps, revolution is a very serious affair. Don't play with it. Don't take a chance unless you are really ready for it". I did discuss with CP members the possible need for assistance in the future, that although the situation at the time (1953) was not ready, it would develop toward armed struggle. But the manner in which the Chinese put the issue satisfied me that it was something very serious. It's something you can't play with. You must not be misled by slogans. You must analyse the situation before you make a decision about what to do. That's one of the things I learned. And I was quite happy with the discussion, quite satisfied with their approach.

Were you impressed by Mao and the Chinese Communist Party?

Very impressed. Well, I take my time when I make a decision. I think I'm not easily excited. I examine things. I never liked a mechanical approach, never liked it. I never like to make a decision because people are excited about it. But I liked the Chinese because I thought there was an element of steadiness, and particularly with Mao and Chou en Lai. So the leadership impressed me when I met them at a reception. I met various leaders among the Chinese. We saw the home of Mao and how the surroundings were. How the relationship was with Liu Shao Chi and the fact that his wife was regarded as an important part and had influence. She was accepted by the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party in spite of the fact that there was a clash between two ideas.

Do you have any comments on the Soviet Union?

Well, I judged the Soviet Union mostly from where we went, Azerbaijan. On our way from China we flew to Moscow for three days and then to Azerbaijan where I stayed for three weeks. We were booked in a hotel facing the Black Sea. In the cold weather I contracted flu. But I found the people very warm contrasted with Moscow. On the whole I was less impressed by organisation in the Soviet Union than I was in China. China dominated my mind more than the Soviet. I did spend a few more days in Moscow and was impressed by amazing development and tremendous construction. Most impressive was the Metro underground, the Moscow State Library with its millions of books. We went to the Bolshoi Theatre on the evening of 7th November and saw Swan Lake. I did not go to the Mausoleum.

On the way home, I returned to London where I addressed a meeting at Holborn Hall. My theme was that the English people had an obligation to the people of SA because of the past relationship and the way in which SA had been turned over to the whites. I said that the youth especially had

an obligation to give the National Liberation Movement its moral and material support and this was the only way in which the black spot could be erased from the history of the English people. I also addressed a group of MPs arranged by Fenner Brockway, leader of the Movement For Colonial Freedom. And I met many people in the anti-colonial movement. Seretse Khama and his English wife, Ruth, were very impressive. I had talks with those in close contact with Nkrumah about ideas for regional Pan African organisations. I also had discussions with Mbiyu Koinange, Kenyatta's brother-in-law and one of the outstanding leaders of the Kenya African Union, and with Joe Murumbi, secretary of the KAU.

I met Peter Abrahams in London who was the ANC representative in the Pan African Conference of March 1945. I was invited to dinner by Colin Legum, one of the senior reporters of the *London Observer*. I had previously been interviewed by phone by the *Observer* and asked about my impressions of my trip. I had said I was very impressed by the Chinese. The paper had published the interview with a twist, viz., that I was not impressed by the European Communist movement. This annoyed me and I made an appointment with the assistant editor, protested the distortion and demanded that the paper correct the misrepresentation. This was done. Colin Legum had just returned from a trip to SA and had taken a great interest in the reaction of the African people to my visit to socialist countries. I think his main purpose in talking with me was to assess me. He informed me that there was great hostility to me and that I might not be able to retain my position in the ANC. I felt that he wanted me not to support the communists and to leave off praise of communism in China. I had in mind that this was a period when the cold war was at its peak, just after the Berlin Wall issue.

Did you have an interesting experience in getting back into South Africa? Did you fly back the same way you left?

Yes. I returned via Israel where I stayed for two weeks with Naomi and Barnett, and then from there to Nairobi, and thence to Jan Smuts airport. It was the 14th December, 1953. I was held up at the Immigration Office until 11:00 p.m., searched and questioned. I had arrived at about 4:00 p.m.

Did the SA authorities know who you were?

Yes, they knew who I was and they were digging into how I went and all that type of thing.

They realised that you had left illegally?

Yes, they realised that I had left illegally and obviously they knew where I had been.

Did any charges come out of this? Why didn't they arrest you immediately on your return, knowing that you had made an illegal trip?

I wonder why. I'm not sure that it was illegal to leave the country. I think the law was amended during that period. This was 1953. I don't know because I can't remember why they didn't arrest me. They threatened to arrest me, they wanted particulars about me. They gave me three days to prove I was a South African citizen because they considered me a prohibited immigrant. If I

could not do so, they threatened they would send me back to Israel. All I did was to give them particulars about myself, just personal details. (*It only became illegal to leave the country without a passport after 1955.*)

Did they interrogate you about the trip and the nature of the trip?

They did not interrogate me as such. They did question me and kept me there till late at night, you see, trying to find out about the trip and all that. But they were cautious too. They didn't want to use brutal methods.

You were searched primarily for what you might be bringing back into the country?

Yes indeed - documents and so on and secret messages. After all this, it was late at night and there was no transportation. No one was there to meet me because they did not expect me at that time. The police took me to the Park Station and I caught the last train to Orlando. I went directly to the Orlando Police Station and the police took me home.

During all this Duma was not with me. We had left each other in London.

What was the impact of the trip on you?

The trip was one of the most significant events in my personal life. It influenced me to become a Communist. I was the guest of honour in the socialist countries. The impact of the Festival itself had tremendous significance. I met different people from all over the world, representatives of the youth movements from Africa, Asia, and Third World countries. The absence of the colour bar and meetings and talking with heads of state and top officials of government made me feel like a human being in terms of equality. The socialist world made a powerful impact on me. Even before the trip I had moved completely to the left. When I became SG I had broadened my approach and outlook. An important turning point was the 25/26 June, 1950 when the ANC and CPSA were together in campaigns and protests. Also there was the influence of Dadoo, Moses and JB. All of this influenced my outlook. After my return from the trip I started attending official classes and then joined the CP.

Did you return from your trip in time to attend the annual Conference of the ANC?

In fact I slept for only a few hours at home and left for the Conference in Queenstown early the following morning. The daily paper had that very day carried a report that I was in London. So the people were very surprised to see me. I had wanted to give a report of the trip to the NEC, which was meeting at the same time, but they did not accept this because they had not delegated me to go to socialist countries. I was told that I should give my report to the Conference itself. I pointed out that Chief was aware of the trip and had discussed it with Mandela before I left, but Chief said he did not remember this. Nelson was not at the Conference. Duma was also present at the Conference having returned two weeks before I did.

The group hostile to the left wanted to know how I came to go to the Festival, whether the NEC had sanctioned the trip, and what funds had been used. At this time the Indian government had

stated that it was raising 2 million pounds for the Defiance Campaign. Allegations were made that Mandela had used part of these funds to finance the trip. I asked Duma to present the report to the Conference, which he did. He dealt with the invitations, describing the World Federation of Democratic Youth itself, the Festival, and gave the whole picture. He also dealt with how money was raised and that the trip was financed by WFDY by tickets and pennies collected from various countries. After having dealt with the Festival, he touched upon the countries which we visited - The International Union of Students Congress, invitations to USSR and China and the impressions of life in the socialist countries in general. There had been rife speculation in the country while I was away whether I would manage to arrange arms for the struggle in South Africa. There were two great groupings, one hostile and one critical.

The report satisfied nobody. Those who were sympathetic felt that I did not manage to do enough. Many of the youth were looking forward to what we could learn from China. When I talked they expected me to talk about revolution. But I talked about the question of solidarity which did not impress the youth at all. They did not want me to talk about solidarity. They wanted me to talk about whether I had arms. I was asked whether I was ready to fight. So, to some extent I was not welcome without speaking of very hot news. In the end a motion of "no confidence" was tabled at the Conference by the anti-left group - that the House had no confidence, had not given authority, misuse of funds, etc. The motion was defeated, in fact many people at the Conference hailed the trip.

VIII THE ROAD TO THE TREASON ARRESTS

(The years 1955-56 were critical ones leading up to the treason arrests in Dec. 1956. Walter had returned from his trip abroad at the end of '53, was banned in '54 and could not continue to serve as Secretary General of the ANC except in an underground fashion. Organisational efforts went into planning for the Congress of the People and working on the Freedom Charter. At the same time the government was implementing its Western Areas Removal scheme while opposition was being organised to this. And simultaneously renewed efforts to challenge the pass system were being inaugurated led by the women. In 1952 the Bantu (Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents) Act was enacted by the government which extended the pass system, euphemistically now called "reference books", to African youth over sixteen and to African women. It became clear to the ANC and the Congress Alliance on Sept. 27, 1955 what the intention of the government was when some 1000 police raided about 500 homes and offices seizing documents and material that might implicate anyone in sedition or treason. These were events leading to the treason arrests and the subsequent notorious Treason Trial.)

CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE FREEDOM CHARTER

How much preparation was there for the Congress of the People?

The Congress of the People was one of the most highly organised campaigns that the Movement had ever undertaken. Prof. Matthews took the first move in the Cape ANC Conference (*August 15, 1953*) where he introduced the idea of the Congress of the People.

(In his Presidential address at that time Prof. Matthews had said: "I wonder if the time has not come for the ANC to consider the question of convening a national convention, a Congress of the People, representing all the people of this country irrespective of race or colour to draw up a Freedom Charter for the democratic South Africa of the future."
Karis and Carter, From Protest To Challenge, vol 3, p.105.)

The Conference in the Cape accepted his proposal and from there it was passed to the National. We now had to examine it as a matter of policy. We all accepted that it was a wise move. There had been talks in jail, you see, of something similar to this. But now it came as a clear idea. *(The ANC adopted the plan at its December 1953 Conference.)*

The aim was to reach every corner of the land. In preparing for the Congress, the whole country was divided into small manageable regions for organisational purposes. The Transvaal, for instance, was zoned into 15 areas. Dwelling complexes were covered and people were asked to elect their delegates. Likewise the factories and the mines, etc. All this left a powerful impact on the people as a whole. The government was frightened at the magnitude of the campaign.

It was tied in with the Freedom Charter?

Yes. Each area was asked to send in its demands to headquarters. It was then the duty of the secretariat to scrutinise each report and extract the main points of the demands for the document to be written. I and Joe Slovo, Rusty Bernstein and Yusuf Cachalia constituted the secretariat dealing with this aspect of the work. A set of three lectures were drawn up by us. They were the

basis for the organisers in various areas to present the matter to the people. They were urged to speak of the country we live in and the changes needed. On the basis of the demands submitted the secretariat selected ten main topics for the Charter and at the Congress held 25/26 June, 1955, each section was introduced by a speaker.

Which came first, the Congress or the Charter?

The Congress of the People was set up to carry on the campaign. The Freedom Charter came from it. The Freedom Charter was the product of that campaign. It was presented in its details at the Congress. Each section was moved and adopted.

Who actually wrote it?

It is very important as to how it was prepared. The idea of the campaign was to arouse the people into thinking how they should be governed. Contrary to the notion that some leaders were responsible for promoting the ideas, the resolutions in the Charter emerged from the demands presented by people throughout the country, as I indicated before. It is these demands which were finally brought to the Congress of the People as the Freedom Charter. Various people and groups from all sections of the country wrote the resolutions. In the course of all the discussion there was a feeling, particularly in Natal, that the left of the movement was trying to hi-jack the idea. Chief Luthuli himself expressed reservations about certain aspects. It was finally adopted at a special conference of the ANC.

(The Congress of the People itself was held on a privately-owned field of a friendly Indian merchant in Kliptown, about fifteen miles from Johannesburg. No hall would have been available for such a large gathering. The official statistics indicate that there were 2858 delegates (2196 Africans, 320 Indians, 230 Coloureds, and 112 whites). A vast amount of local work was involved in preparation for the Congress. "A platform was constructed and heavy planks were used for seats. A camp kitchen was set up, and a low fence was built with only one entrance, where credentials for delegates could be checked. On Sunday afternoon (the 26th) police stormed the place carrying search warrants to look for treasonable material. They announced that papers would be examined and names and addresses taken. The people rose and raised their right fists with upstretched thumbs in the Congress salute. This went on for a full ten minutes and the chairman quieted the crowd and the police went about their business. It took four hours. The main business was the reading, discussion and adoption of the Freedom Charter." (Based on several eye witness reports and paraphrased in No One Can Stop The Rain, by G.M. Houser. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989, p.118.) The crowd adopted each section of the Charter by a show of hands and with shouts of "Afrika". The police interrupted this process toward the end of the reading.)

What about the controversy that developed within the ANC on the question of sponsorship by the Congress Alliance ?

Yes, there emerged a particular group which opposed the Freedom Charter. First of all, they opposed the very Alliance, believing that we were dominated by the Congress of Democrats. *(The Congress of the People was a joint effort of the Congress Alliance composed of the ANC, the South African Indian Congress, the Congress of Democrats, and the South African Coloured Peoples*

Organisation). Secondly, they opposed some ideas in the document. Well, you have things like, "South Africa belongs to all the people who live in it, black or white." This type of thing was challenged, you see, by a certain section. By this time, A.P. Mda was no longer active, but the leadership of the opposition was taken by people like Robert Sobukwe. They were people who challenged that this was selling out. One of the clauses which they challenged is that "the land will be shared among those who work on it". And to them this meant that there would be no change. They said that to let the people who live and work on the land to continue there, that is the white farmers, is a sell-out. These are the issues which were brought up, but this controversy did not prevent the adoption of the Freedom Charter. It was almost unanimously adopted. I don't remember a single person who stood up to say "I'm opposed". This opposition was consolidated and organised after the document was adopted at the Congress of the People in 1955. As I said, it was necessary to call a special conference of the ANC to formally adopt it.

Weren't you under ban and not able to attend the actual conference in Kliptown?

I did not attend the conference itself. I went there under cover, incognito. That's how I went there with Nelson, Kathrada, and I think Yusuf Cachalia were there. We were watching the movements and developments from the top of a building, but we could not be there officially.

What had you been banned for and when were you banned at that time?

Oh there were so many organisations, I think it's 17 or maybe 27 that I was told to resign from. (*Walter was banned by the Minister of Justice ordering him to resign from the ANC and give up his position as Secretary General within 30 days and to stay away from gatherings for two years*). And when the Congress of the People came into being, a ban was simultaneously imposed on me. I was banned from membership in that organisation also.

So you were banned from working as Secretary General of the ANC?

Banned from being Secretary General, called upon to resign.

What was the date approximately that you were banned?

About July, 1954.

And did you continue to go to the office?

I not only continued to go to the office, but continued to do the work as was necessary but underground. Duma Nokwe became Secretary General. I was even better situated than Duma Nokwe because he lived in Orlando. He was an advocate, not an attorney, who was required to be in the office every day. He could have some free time and we could exchange views and discuss the situation. And so the situation was bettered when Nokwe became Secretary General, and Oliver Tambo was the Deputy President.

What about your pay during all this period? How did you survive?

Well, I survived. Albertina, you know, I ought to pay greater tribute than I do because I just don't know how I managed then, and how I have managed in the years thereafter without her. Let me mention the fact that there was some decision earlier to pay me five pounds a month. Xuma ridiculed the idea. Some people felt a bit concerned that I'm supposed to be earning only five pounds, and they said why don't we give him ten pounds at least. Now Xuma laughed at this. "I think we can't afford it. You are not paying the five pounds and you say it must be increased to ten pounds." Xuma was still in the Executive then. For a long time I depended on Albertina. Some years later money was sometimes collected to help, but this was the situation.

So in effect you were supported by Albertina.

Albertina was the main person for the home.

Had she participated in the Defiance Campaign?

No, not in the Defiance Campaign. She was by this time a member of the Executive. She did participate in the defiance of pass laws in '58, not in the early 1952 Defiance Campaign. .

What was the follow-up on the Congress of the People?

The next step was to popularise the Freedom Charter. For a time the administrative work was done by the secretariat of the Congress of the People. Different organisations of the Congress Alliance adopted the Freedom Charter at their respective national conferences. The Congress of Democrats adopted it first. The plan was to have one million signatures so that people would feel party to the FC. Later this idea was dropped after a start had been made. The reason for the abandonment was the hesitancy of people to sign. Blacks were always suspicious of signing any document. But the idea was to have a copy of the Freedom Charter in their homes.

THE SPLIT WITH THE AFRICANISTS

What about the special ANC Conference?

There were many problems especially, as I mentioned, in Natal with certain clauses of the Freedom Charter, especially the land clause. Also the question of nationalisation of firms, etc., were interpreted as socialistic. This is why the ANC decided at its 1955 Conference to discuss the matter at a special conference held in April, 1956. This conference was a very stormy affair. The Africanist group (who later formed the Pan Africanist Congress) objected to the preamble and clauses such as "SA belongs to all those who live on it", and "The land shall belong to all those who work it". The Natal representatives were prevailed upon to drop their reservations, and they did this because they realised that their objections would mean playing into the hands of the Africanists.

But this controversy had been building up ever since discussion began on the Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter, had it not?

Yes, in fact it had been building up even during the Defiance Campaign when there were secret

sessions of some of the Africanists. From the time of the Defiance Campaign this had been building up.

This was mainly because the Defiance Campaign was open to all groups?

To all groups, to all groups.

Do you think that the Congress of Democrats or the South African Indian Congress had unusual influence in the ANC, or did the ANC pretty well maintain its leadership?

No, the ANC maintained its leadership. The question of Africans having an inferiority complex where relations between white and black were concerned was not the case. Even before the PAC was formed, men like Nelson were inclined to have a strong nationalistic approach. This was also the subject of much discussion in the Youth League.

So would you say then at this point the entrance of the ANC into a Congress Alliance was an expression actually of greater confidence the ANC had in itself and a greater sense of identity?

I would say so as I've been indicating. There had been a sensitivity with the leadership of the youth in particular wanting to assert themselves. By this time we had reached a position where we were confident. We had asserted ourselves. We were leaders in our own name and right. There was no question of being dominated by anyone.

Did the Africanists walk out of the special conference?

No. At the special conference for the adoption of the Freedom Charter, the Africanists wanted to come as delegates and their chief man, Potlako Leballo and others, were not allowed. Their credentials were not in order and they were not accepted as legitimate delegates. That is what led them to walk out of the ANC. There were strong arguments and hostility at the special conference, and then the opposition came together and decided to issue a statement on their breaking away. The split came at this 1956 special conference. The whole aim was to oppose the adoption of the FC. The break took place at that time. Their statement in effect said that now we (the Africanists) are on our own. The time had come to walk out. They said the ANC was no longer a nationalist movement. It was now multi-racial. They were opposed to the Alliance that brought various groups together. The PAC was then formally organised at their first conference in 1959.

Could you assess Sobukwe, what kind of a person was he?

Yes. He was a man of integrity. There was really no opportunism about him. I think that when he opted for nationalism, he was genuine, influenced, of course, by people whom he respected such as Mda. But he was a man of integrity and I regretted that a man like him was misled. Let me say I think the relationship between Sobukwe and myself was a very good one. I think he had high regard for me as a person. He, of course, admired Peter Mda. I think he also respected Nelson the same way. He was friendly to Joe Matthews. Joe advised him that if he had any problems he should come to see me. Joe tried to arrange a meeting between us, but it didn't happen. I think that

Sobukwe was not confident and therefore the best thing was to avoid me. He had the idea that the Africanists were so strong that he would rather not see me. I would have liked to meet with him. I, in fact, tried to reach him, but we never met for this discussion. But I respect him in spite of that. I think he was genuine.

It appeared at first that those who would form the PAC were in difficulties. I don't even think Sobukwe was there at the beginning, but he gave the inaugural address at the PAC Convention, Apr. 4-6, 1959. There were those who had doubts and there was some dilly-dallying until finally they decided to go on their own.

Most of Sobukwe's colleagues were of no consequence in the movement. Sobukwe on his own reached a level of top leadership although he was never elected to the Executive of ANC. When he became the leader of the Youth League, he got some status and as an individual he had influence in the movement. He's the only one. A.P. Mda never completely identified himself with the PAC. Therefore I am not including him. All others were junior leaders with no consequence.

What can you say about Leballo?

No, I think absolutely that he was far from being a man of integrity. I don't want to use extravagant words, but he certainly was not a man of such stature as Sobukwe.

Were there others of those who took some leadership in the PAC that you felt were people of integrity whom you could respect?

Well, there will be variations of assessment on the individuals. I did not work with the youth, with the PAC men. At least we worked with Sobukwe. Well, Mda on a different level. I still have respect for Mda for his intellectual standing and his contribution too. I criticise him for having lagged behind, but I can even understand that. That when a situation had been reached whether he should be ANC or PAC, he had difficulties and therefore he had to retreat from the movement. I know the question of being unwell is made much use of, but I think this was the difficulty which he had. If we regard Mda then as PAC, I respected his intelligence and understanding. Leballo, I dismiss him completely.

In jail I met with John Pokela who became a Deputy President. I liked him as a person, and I think I also rate him as an honest man, that he really believed in PAC. Who else was with me in jail? Makwetu. I had much respect for Makwetu when we were in jail. He was a steady man. He was all right for unity in jail, but I'm more disappointed sometimes with his utterances now. I also respect him for the work he had done for the PAC. I think he deserves credit in working for the PAC and the manner in which he did it.

Who else is there? Those are the top chaps. I should not fail to talk about Zephania Mothopeng who made a difference in the PAC attitude of collaboration with the ANC in the prison years. I have high regard for him. I don't agree with all his approaches but he's a man of integrity. I respect him as one of the top PAC men who deserves some serious attention. I hope I'm not influenced by the personal relationship with him. The families are still close even today. By the way, his wife is in the hospital. If I have time today I'll be going to see her. Yes, he's a very nice chap and

dedicated to PAC. I don't agree with his assessment of the situation. That's all I want to say, but I wanted to mention him at least.

WOMEN'S ANTI-PASS CAMPAIGN

Were other campaigns going on at this time?

The next important campaign was the women's anti-pass campaign. It's very important for people to know what part women played in the whole struggle. They have been tremendous. They have been inspiring and they have been courageous.

Perhaps the beginning goes back to 1913-1918, at the time of Charlotte Manye Maxeke. It was then that under the leadership of what was called the Native Women's Organisation, an anti-pass campaign was conducted. They took action even before the ANC did. The women had played a very important part without our taking particular note of it. Women organised the first militant movement. In between 1913-18 in Winburg in the Orange Free State women defied and went to jail with their children on their backs.

The Native Women's organisation was discontinued but in 1944, I think, Mrs. Xuma formed the Women's League at the same time as the founding of the Youth League. In 1954 the South African Women's Federation was founded and Lilian Ngoyi soon became National President and was also President of the ANC Women's League. In 1954 the women again defied in Winburg because they were told they would have to carry passes. Wonderful demonstrations. Thousands of women went to jail. In various centres of the Transvaal thousands defied the pass laws. The same thing happened in Natal. Actually in Natal the campaign was described in Parliament as an uprising. There was a call for putting down such a dangerous campaign. That's how hot the women's campaign was.

Were the women turning in their passes in the campaign?

Yes. In Winburg they were burning them. In other centres they were refusing to take them because they had not yet accepted them. They were supposed to take passes, but they refused to take them. In Winburg, where they had taken them, they burned them.

But the most important thing that happened with women's organisation was the women's march to Pretoria. This was the culmination. That was in August, 1956. 20,000 women marched to Pretoria. This was led by Lilian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph and Albertina was a part of it. Strijdom was then Prime Minister. He tried to escape from the trouble the women brought, but the demonstration was tremendous. Not even the ANC had organised such a movement.

This was the occasion where the slogan "Strijdom, you have struck a rock" originated?

Oh ya, that's right. "You have touched the women, you have struck a rock. You will die."

Ultimately, then what happened to the requirement for women to carry passes?

Well, the whole question of passes will now be linked up with the anti-pass campaign of 1960 and Sharpeville.

This anti-pass campaign led to further internationalisation of the South African problem?

Yes, but there were other factors that internationalised the struggle. Remember that there was an intensification of the anti-colonial struggle world-wide at this time. The Bandung Conference took place in 1955. Moses Kotane and Maulvi Cachalia, the brother of Yusuf, were chosen as South African delegates. I thought that Moses was the right person for Bandung because of his diplomacy and experience. I was also aware of Maulvi's Islamic ties with the East and his standing in India. But there was the small problem that Yusuf had really wanted to go. He and his brother had never had a close relationship. The Indian Congress was not satisfied with the choice, but accepted it. But this conference was important for us.

WESTERN AREAS REMOVAL SCHEME

Was the Sophiatown removal (along with Martindale and Newclare forming the western areas of Johannesburg) a major issue?

It was a major issue. It was one of the tremendous campaigns launched in Johannesburg. The threat of removal of Africans aroused the indignation of the people who lived in these areas and also of property owners. The people lived in these areas in comparative freedom in the absence of the usual hindrances of the permit system and other municipal regulations. Even though the conditions, such as space and facilities were greatly limited, and there was exploitation by landowners, they were not subject to double raids from the SA police and the municipal police which is usually the case in African locations. This explains why there was a great degree of unity between the tenants and the landlords on the question of the removals. In preparation for the actual removals, the permit system was made applicable to Sophiatown. (*The last area in which Africans had freehold rights.*)

There were protests against the removal?

Well, a protest meeting was held at City Hall in 1955 against the permit system for the western areas. But the protests began long before this. In June, 1953, just before I left on my trip abroad, there was a large rally held at the Odin Cinema, with about 1200 people gathered in protest. This was almost two years before the actual removal which took place in February 1955. Nelson and I were on our way to the rally and we were talking with Father Huddleston. The ban against both of us had just expired. The police saw us and came to arrest us, but Huddleston intervened. "You can't arrest them, my dears", he said. "Arrest me." I'm not sure how we convinced them that the ban had expired just that day. On this occasion Yusuf Cachalia was arrested after he had started speaking at the podium. Robert Resha and Kathy were also arrested on this occasion. (*Protest meetings were held every Sunday and Wednesday evenings in the months leading up to the removal date -- Feb. 9, 1955.*)

The night before the removals started Chief Luthuli was scheduled to speak to a rally. Thousands had turned up at the square, not only from Sophiatown, but from all over the Reef. But he was banned at the airport. I substituted for him. But Chief was as good as being part of the rally because he was accommodated in a nearby house right next to the square. There were journalists from all over the place and Chief had a private interview. One journalist asked Chief how he could reconcile himself with Communists - he being a religious man. Chief replied that the communists did not interfere with his religion, and he added that he did not know what his reaction would be the day Communists interfered with his religion. He thus silenced them.

Just before this rally, Dr. Xuma had addressed another rally. His statement included a traditional war cry: "Zemk'Inkomo Magwalandini", a "call to arms". (*Mandela in his Long Walk To Freedom on p.143 translates this as "the enemy has captured the cattle, you cowards".*) The agitation against removal was so strong, so powerful that the authorities were worried about it. It became a major campaign throughout the country.

You indicated you were of the opinion that the agitation was correct but the slogans went too far?

One big mistake we made was that the agitation was really not in keeping with reality. We used slogans, for instance, "Hands off Newclare", or "You will remove us over our dead bodies". The impression was therefore created in the minds of the people of an opposition strong enough to face the army of the country. So when this confrontation finally came about, there was a big difficulty, a problem. There were those in the leadership who felt that we must face the challenge physically and the youth were even more convinced. Well, I was in a leading position as Secretary General of the movement, although banned, and I knew we were not in a position to meet the situation fully. I could not agree with some of my very radical colleagues. We were convinced that we were not in a position to take on the army and the police. We had to find a way of carrying on the agitation in a different way.

The youth were very angry and disgusted with the leadership. They wanted action. But we could not face the situation. The night before the removal began, about 500 gathered for a meeting, I think, at St. Mary's. Joe Modise showed himself to be very courageous. He stood up to argue with his colleagues that the action they wanted could not be carried out. The leadership was confused in the situation. Some were thinking that we should allow the militant element to take action. Others of us felt, no, this is not the occasion. We must find a way of channeling the anger of

the people. The slogan "over my dead body" was dangerous because it meant that we would fight. But we were not ready to meet force by force.

This finally meant that the government removed the people of Sophiatown largely by intimidation, getting the people to go.

Was actual force used?

Yes, the whole area was lined by police right up to Meadowlands as people were being taken various places in Meadowlands. We consoled ourselves by saying that at least we compelled the authorities to build houses to go to, but we didn't want to accept the removal voluntarily. That's how it was and our resistance was one of the main charges of the Treason Trial..

Was the removal the creation of Soweto?

No, I don't think so. The creation of Soweto began with the squatters movement. The squatters movement emerged from Orlando West and Orlando East. That covers the whole area. This Mpanza led, as we have already said. That was in fact the beginning of Soweto. But the removal scheme was the destruction of Sophiatown as a freehold area.

IX FROM TREASON TO MASSACRE

(The era of the Treason Trial lasted for more than four years -- from December 1956 to March 1961. The trial went through many phases beginning with the original arrest of most of the top leadership of the liberation movement, and then proceeded through the period of the preparatory examination in the Drill Hall in Johannesburg presided over by F.C. Wessel, the Magistrate. Then came the dropping of the charges against 61 of the accused in December, 1957 including Chief Luthuli, Oliver Tambo and ZK Matthews. The actual trial in a special three man high court in Pretoria of those remaining on the charge of high treason began in August, 1958. Justice FL Rumpff was the president of this court which also included Mr. Justice Kennedy and Mr. Justice Ludorf who later recused himself and was replaced by Mr. Justice Bekker. The venue was the Old Synagogue transformed into a court for the occasion. Charges were then dropped against all but 30. The proceedings against this final group began in January 1959. Oswald Pirow was brought in as chief prosecutor. The acquittal of this group was announced March 29, 1961. Walter was, of course, in this final group as was Mandela.

During this span of years many things were happening in which Walter was involved, for he was out on bail although he was banned from his position as SG of the ANC. Our discussion with Walter covered some of the events of the TT, but also some of the other important happenings in the country and particularly the event that changed the nature of the struggle -- the Sharpeville Massacre.)

THE ARREST

Would you say something particularly about your own arrest?

Whilst preparations were being made for the National Conference to be held at Queenstown, country-wide arrests took place on 5 December, 1956. Most of the 156 arrested were taken into custody on that night. I was arrested more than a week later on 13 December together with Rusty Bernstein, Joe Slovo, Kathy, and Jack Hodgson and others. When I heard about the raids and arrests on the 5th, I left home. Later I heard that the police had not been looking for me because my place was not raided on the 5th, although they did call at my home, which was not unusual. I was already under ban. It appears that the Special Branch was not sure about me and then a few days later felt that the charges in the indictment would apply to me. During this interval, I recall I was approached by a man by the name of Mankazana and asked why I had not been arrested. I replied that I thought the reason was that I had been banned all the time. He then challenged me "Have you now abandoned your principles because you are banned?" He thought it was not possible for a leader to remain unarrested while others were taken into custody. During these days before my arrest, I visited the Fort to see those who were already there. I saw Oliver Tambo and was greatly impressed and inspired by his demeanour.

When the police came on 13 December to your home and knocked on the door, they came in and what did they say to you?

Well, they came quite early in the morning, probably about 7:00 or 8:00. They came properly prepared to say "you're under arrest, take your things and come". That was the characteristic style -- to say take your things and go. They did not explain things.

It has been reported that when they knocked on the door, you were in your bedroom and you said through the door "I've been expecting you, are you here?"

That might be correct, you see. That might be correct because I was arrested after the other people had been arrested.

It has also been said that when the police came, you asked your wife to prepare some coffee or something for them. Is that correct?

My wife still gets annoyed even today. What right do I have to ask for coffee for them when a person comes to arrest me. No, I did that. You see the Special Branch had a different tactic from what happened later. They could talk to

you. So you could treat them as human beings. When a person comes in the morning, you give them coffee. And I think this is what happened. Usually I had quarreled with the police when they came, but that day I did say we must prepare coffee for them.

Where did they take you then?

I was taken to Number 4, that is the Fort, Johannesburg Central jail. That's where I was taken. We were, I think, nine in our group including those I mentioned.

All the others were already there?

Yes, those who were already arrested from various parts of the country. Now the Treason Trial passed over many people and we don't quite understand it, because some of the leading people like Dr. Dadoo were not arrested, were not part of the TT. We tried to find out why. How could they avoid the arrest of the leading people -- especially J.B. Marks and Dadoo? But as we looked at it later, it was clear that there was a particular date that affected some people who were banned. Those who were banned after that date were not affected. In my case, and that of Rusty, Kathy, and Joe, arrested a week later, they made a mistake and we should have been part of the first group.

When did you all see each other then?

We met immediately. Generally we were all together. In fact, it was tremendous. As you will imagine the people arrested were outstanding -- lawyers, doctors, professors, preachers, workers and what have you, all put together. Each of the accused had made a speech somewhere which brought him into the tangle of the Treason Trial.

We were divided into two large groups. Young chaps were upstairs with Rev. Gawe. I was with Chief Luthuli, Rev. Calata, ZK Matthews, Monty Naicker. The important thing here is that the leadership of the liberation movement had been brought together from nearly every important region, leaders of various standing, exchanging views and creating a spirit of solidarity. We slept separately in two large cells, one upstairs and one downstairs, all over the floor. We each had a mat. We would get together in the yard and at meals. This, of course, gave a chance of exchanging views. We had political lectures. It was very convenient for political studies and also for group exercises. The development of a firm bond of friendship between Chief and Indian leaders, especially Ismail Meer and Monty Naicker, really started here. From that time on their friendship was firmly cemented. Natal still harboured reservations about the Freedom Charter, but the feeling of hostility disappeared under the conditions.

You spoke of committees that operated while in prison with yourself, Mandela, Luthuli, and Matthews involved?

There were various committees. The committee I was on discussed general strategy about what should be done in the movement. In fact one of the fascinating developments while we were in jail was the functioning of the committee dealing with daily political issues. We had Nelson, Chief and myself as well as others on it. It was a very active committee dealing with all issues such as the boycotts which were taking place at that time. It met every lunch time, the leadership would meet and review the position.

You talk about music, singing. It was a daily affair. It had tremendous effect, inspiring the people. A man who finally was hanged while the Rivonia trial was going on, Vuysile Mini, had a tremendous voice. He could move the people. It was a daily affair, when he starts up, everybody is up.

What kind of songs were you singing?

The freedom songs. I now can't remember all of them. "Verwoerd move away". Things like that. And "Sikelele Izwe Lethu", "we cry for our land which was taken by the -" they use the term "kalatyana", which means "unprincipled agents, or crooks".

As you will realise, the arrest of the 156 leaders really cleared the deck. It meant that various provinces, in fact all the provinces, were leaderless. The central leadership was removed. It became necessary to set up new machinery.

This is where the "Stand By Our Leaders" committees came in. The people who were administering were people who belonged to these committees. Later on it created complications because when the question of elections came, the leaders of these committees did not want to dissolve. They suggested returning the leadership en bloc. Well, we thought this was undemocratic. The ANC election, especially in the Transvaal, created problems, divisions in the movement. So there was that problem, not on the national level but in Transvaal. The Transvaal was the key. The committee had to be dissolved. In fact I think the Africanists were responsible. Some of the Africanists were looking forward to holding key positions.

In discussing these problems did you have any interference from the authorities?

No. Once they brought us together they were unable to control us there. We were prisoners awaiting trial. We didn't get bail until the 19th.

Was there mixing with other prisoners?

There was no official mixing, but of course there was contact. The arrest of the leaders had created a tremendous impression throughout the country. "We Stand By Our Leaders" committees sprang up all over the country. The same spirit prevailed outside as prevailed among those arrested and even among the common law prisoners and the black warders. Even two white warders greatly changed their attitude, being very good. Both had once been seen assaulting common law prisoners. They were spoken to and felt ashamed. Some of the white warders also started explaining their own grievances to me and others about their conditions of work, duties they were expected to perform, the welfare of their families, etc. Chief and ZK were held in very high esteem by them. The reading of newspapers was a moment eagerly looked forward to. Joe Matthews usually read the news. Lectures were also given and various topics were chosen for discussion. During the day there was mixing between the two groups, upstairs and downstairs.

When you got out on bail were you all under ban?

Yes, we were all banned and not in a position to function normally. By the way, one of the strong critics of our accepting bail was Ntsu Mokhehle, the president at that time of the Basutoland Congress Party. He said that it was incorrect. He thought that we weakened the movement by accepting bail. Most of us disagreed with him on this. We needed people to operate, to be there. In case there was a chance for bail, so much the better for us. These were the beginnings of the divisions which finally led to the Freedom Charter split.

How did you continue to function even though you were banned?

Well, after the preparatory examination started in the Drill Hall in Johannesburg, take, for example, the period of lunch time when there was a break in the proceedings, we would have a meeting. The police would not find out anything or interfere. We're meeting, 150 there. And the leadership will meet, they eat together, they talk together. It was difficult for the police to interfere. This was one method of operating. And then at night we would have meetings. My household was watched but we could go through other entrances and go somewhere. And I could go to Nelson and meet one or two others there and have discussions. That's how we were operating. Meet in various homes, arrange a particular meeting with a particular group.

Did you go to the office at all?

Yes, I did go to the office. In the office one had to be very careful because the police are going to follow you. But you're careful to the extent that you don't really have a meeting. You talk to individuals.

What kind of planning could take place in those sessions?

Well, take for instance the bus boycott. It was hot at the time, and it was not only in the Transvaal now. It was embracing the entire country. And therefore the leadership had to give guidance how the boycott of buses was going to take place. In fact men like Tom Nkobi and Alfred Nzo were products of that period. They became active administrators of the ANC -- Nkobi became national organiser and Nzo became Administrative Secretary. These were the key men in the Alexandra bus boycott. They were not among the accused in the TT. Although the

committee which sponsored the boycott was broader, direction was given by ANC. I mention particularly Nzo and Nkobi because they played such prominent parts and they gave regular reports and they came to the Drill Hall where the trial was being held to give their reports. At this time Nzo was Sanitary Inspector with the Alexandra Health Committee and he was asked to resign, to choose between his work and his politics. He then tendered his resignation.

The bus boycott was a big affair and meant daily discussions. The boycott had spread to Pretoria, Durban and Port Elizabeth. This was one of the major campaigns handled by the ANC and became a major success. But to understand it, one should start with the Evaton bus boycott of 1955. This was also in the hands of the ANC. Almost the whole of the Executive was in charge of that boycott. They dominated the Transport Council which included the boycott in Evaton and also in Vereeniging. That boycott was very violent because the police and bus owners had organised the Russians (the Basotho group of gangsters) led by Ralekeke with a criminal record. The boycotters met violence with violence. Leading personalities in the boycott were Molefe and Vus Make, chairman and secretary of the Council. Whilst the Treason Trial was on, some of the leaders were charged with murder connected with the boycott. Molefe and Make, and some others were thus appearing in two trials at the same time as they were also treason trialists. Ralekeke was used by the Crown in the Treason Trial to try to prove that the ANC was a violent organisation.

The bus boycott was significant in many respects. It came at a time when the Treason Trial had made a great impact. Also anti-government forces, black and white, tended to draw together on issues such as this one. The government Minister had declared that the government would not cave in to such intimidation, but in the end he was compelled to cave in to the demands of the people to help the bus company with additional subsidies. The impact on the people was really great. In the liberation struggle seldom is there complete success, but here the success was complete. The bus company accepted the recommendations about conditions of employment and this victory paved the way for the success of the Alexandra boycott.

During this period did you have a premonition and discussions about the possible banning of the ANC?

Yes, we certainly did. We actually set up plans, which were abandoned because nothing was happening then as far as banning is concerned. But we made preparations.

Did you make plans for your own going underground?

That came later. I continued to play a central role as a person who had been put in the position of SG. People continued to regard me as SG. My work had to continue in one form or another.

The policy at this time was still nonviolence?

Still nonviolence, yes. We were still continuing with the policy of nonviolence. I'm not sure if we actually pronounced nonviolence. But our policy was understood and accepted to be that. Any discussion of a change of policy came later.

Can you say something about your experience in the Treason Trial itself? What was it like at the beginning?

The first thing I must say is about the solidarity that was created. A mutual understanding developed among the prisoners as I have already indicated. The first day of the preliminary examination in the Drill Hall in Johannesburg we were inside a cage actually. The place was not a court, but a big hall transformed into a court. The anger against being in a cage in the courtroom was not confined to the prisoners. It was felt even more by the lawyers because they thought it lowered their standard as men of justice. And they protested, as we protested. I think it didn't take long and they had to remove it. But we were indignant against being put in a cage. At the beginning, Norman Rosenberg was the chief defence counsel, and later Israel Maisels. And the preliminary examination was before a magistrate, F.C. Wessel. The defense team was brought together by the indignation of the lawyers in the way we were handled.

What was the rationale for the cage?

I think it was to show how dangerous we were more than anything else.

In December, 1957, a year after the arrests, Wessel gave his decision in the preparatory examination and charges were dropped against 61 of the accused?

That's correct. That left 92 on trial after the first dismissals. Then the case was moved to the Special High Court in Pretoria. F.L. Rumpff was the leading judge and he was correct in his approach. He didn't want wrong things. He was a supporter of the National Party but he wanted the Afrikaner to be right. Rumpff had a close relationship with Oswald Pirow and must have recommended him as chief prosecutor later. Pirow actually went to Germany to meet Hitler. He was a friend of Hitler as a person. He went to Germany when he was in fact Minister of Justice in the government. My perception is that he had a close relationship with Hitler.

How did you feel when two groups of the accused had charges dismissed and you were still part of a group that was being tried?

Yes, there were two groups which were dismissed, one of which included Oliver Tambo and Chief Luthuli. I personally interpreted this as quite a genuine, honest discharge. I didn't think there was anything in it because others were still to be charged. If we were convicted, another group of 30, and then another after that, would have been brought in to face the same consequences. So the first dismissal did not seem strange to me. I thought the people were not guilty, and that some were less guilty than others.

You felt that if a conviction occurred in your group, it would simply lead to a further round-up and charges ?

I knew that was the plan. If we were in the most, what you might call, guilty group in the eyes of the prosecution, and if they convicted us, they were going to take the next lot and convict them. And I think the plan was 30-30. So it didn't really worry me. But it also indicated to me, and I think to others, the weakness of the case.

The government changed tactics with our last group of 30. They brought in as chief prosecutor Oswald Pirow who was known as a Nazi sympathiser, and when he was appointed you have a new situation. Because he was seen as a brutal Nazi. He was a notorious advocate who had befriended Hitler. He was an open sympathiser with fascism. He thought a number of blunders had been made by the prosecution. I think it was his idea that we must be tried in smaller groups. Because he was an experienced advocate, he realised that the chances of success for the government were limited if the case was conducted as it had been. He felt that his method would lead to conviction. Incidentally, though, he was more polite than you would have expected. In fact, I think he called Africans "African" (not Native) when others had difficulty using the term "African".

A DISCUSSION OF USING THE WORD "NATIVE"

Can we follow up on that to ask about the use of the word "native"? At one time the term was used generally by whites?

Yes, but the Youth League would never entertain the word "native", never. They regarded that as backward politics of liberals. When the African National Congress was formed it was called the Native National Congress. Only during that period was it accepted. During our time it was really unacceptable. It was regarded as an insult. Using the term "native" emphasised the separateness of the African.

But the government continued to use the term for some time?

Oh yes, even in my trial they still used "native". You see, they still used "native" because that was the position. One division of the government was "Native Affairs". At the Crown Mines there was a sign at the road saying "Drive slowly. Natives crossing ahead." That was the thing. You know, this may be my view only, even a man like Pirow, fascist, prosecutor in the Treason Trial, was more advanced than some of the government people. In the Rivonia trial I had several clashes because I hated the contempt with which we were treated and especially with Yutar who would ridicule you when he talked about natives and would say, "You mean natives when you talk about Africans." So right up to Rivonia, the term was still in use by the government.

Then the term Bantu was used instead of native?

Yes, when the nationalists began toying with the idea of Bantustans and all that, they used Bantu-- Bantu education, Bantu this, and Bantu that. They realised the resentment against the use of "native" and wanted something progressive, and in their minds something progressive was Bantu.

About the time you were born, the term was used in the Native Land Act?

1913. That Act divided the country, 87% for whites and 13% for Africans.

Did that affect you where you lived? This was 1913 and you were born the year before. You were a small child in the Transkei. Did you come up against this Act in any way, something that you recognised as oppressive?

Oh certainly, a key area in oppression, the matter of taking land away. You will remember we spoke about women, that women led the defiance of carrying passes in 1913-1918. The Land Act continued to be regarded as an oppressive measure. Even today when we are free, that's what they're discussing, how to reallocate land. And they got to consider the fact of the 1913 Land Act.

And this became a basis for the so-called Native Reserves?

Precisely. Various areas, trust lands, became, according to the Herzog Act, in fact Native Reserves., later Bantustans.

What about the Native Representative Council?

The Native Representative Council was organised as a result of what became known as the Hertzog Bills. It dates back to 1925. But the Bills became the key question in 1936, and that's when B.M. Hertzog was Prime Minister himself. He introduced the Native Representative Council idea. At first the reaction was to boycott the Council, but that was never a definite decision. The Council idea was rejected completely at first. This was the time when the All African Convention was organised with ANC support, to oppose ending the common voters roll in the Cape. The aim of the Hertzog Bills was to take away the franchise given non-Europeans in the Cape. Later the All African Convention became known as the Unity Movement. The Unity Movement was Trotskyist oriented. Perhaps I should be very careful to say this, but it was no doubt so.

The dominant element was the Cape African Teachers Association. The real leader was Isaac Tabata. Other intellectuals were such as Benny Kies and Nathaniel Honono. These were the leading members of what you call the All African Convention. The Convention was designed to take over organisational leadership. It was to unify the people by bringing organisations together, including the ANC. At first it appeared to be a formidable organisation. But later on there was a feeling within the ANC in particular that this organisation would dominate and replace the leadership of the ANC. They therefore opposed this. There was always, then, that conflict -- pro ANC, pro Unity Movement. Today you still have elements of the Unity Movement. This organisational conflict was a result of the Herzog Bills.

The Hertzog Bills also gave birth to the Native Representative Council. The issue was whether people should participate in this. The ANC took a positive line. They must try and use the Council. This body came into being presumably to give Africans a voice in public affairs in place of the vote now denied them. Of this 22-member body, chaired by the white Minister of Native Affairs, only 12 Africans were chosen in a separate election. It was a body without real power. That body went on for years and even during the days of the Youth League, it was still very prominent. The question was, is it correct to make use of this institution?

What did you think?

Well, my line was to make use of it. Don't just reject it, rally the people to take advantage of it. That was my line. This debate (on cooperation with government-sponsored institutions) came up in Robben Island when there was a division between us. Govan Mbeki, who had been a leading member of the Cape Voters organisation, and Raymond Mhlaba, wanted to reject outright participating in this institution.

Events have proved that it was correct to make use of it. It rallied the people who had no other way to take action.

You need to mobilise all. Holomisa had been active in the Transkei Bantustan and yet had been playing a very progressive role. Mangope also, but in a reactionary way. You had to mobilise the people of South Africa to accept the new situation.

When did the Native Representative Council cease to exist?

I think 1951 for all practical purposes. You see, in 1949, when we took over the leadership of ANC, we supported the boycott of the Council. The senior, the elderly people in the ANC, the old guard, wanted to carry on. So there was this controversy. The Party too took it up as an issue, the question of boycott or participation, and I think the Party took a very leading part in urging participation, not boycott.

What did you think of Tabata?

He was a very bright chap, well informed politically. In other words he had read theoretical works of Marx. But I think he was concerned primarily with theory. It never occurred to him that theory alone could not move. He did not recognise that the correctness of his theory must be tested in the actual field of political activity. That is why the Unity Movement never succeeded. It could bring a lot of phraseologies, very militant, very dynamic, but in actual practice they were very weak politically. They were weak then and they are weak even now. History has shown that they are out of the running.

Did you have much contact with Tabata and the Unity Movement?

No, occasionally we had discussions. A person who had more discussion with Tabata was Govan Mbeki. He himself was a member of the Bunga, the Transkeian Bunga. He was in touch with the leadership of the Unity Movement. I think Nelson was impressed by Tabata. He had actually visited Cape Town, had a lot of discussions with Tabata who ridiculed the idea of the ANC. He would say to Madiba, "Why are you a member of the ANC?" And Madiba's answer was to the effect that even my grandfather was a member of the ANC. So they ridiculed the ANC saying that we are just like cattle, and in fact that's their description -- voting cattle. I personally don't have respect for their theory, for a theory that has nothing to do with practise is useless.

BACK TO THE TRIAL

Let us now return to the trial. The trial attracted international attention?

The whole event was not only national but international. We would invite people from elsewhere to come. The Defence and Aid Fund played a very important part. Rica Hodgson, my assistant, comes from Defence and Aid. Its particular function was to raise funds. Defence and Aid did great work because people were no longer employed and were dependent on the little which they got from the Fund. It was a wonderful thing, maintained by loyal people. The solidarity which I mentioned in connection with the lawyers, even the most conservative, came out in support of the Treason Trial. I mentioned that Rosenberg, a leading lawyer, became the head of the defence team. And after him, because it was for a limited time, Israel Maisels now became head of the defence. We were in touch with international forces. People came as individuals and were taken around and given a picture so that it had international repercussions and improved our own standing in that way.

I should now mention the boredom. We were bored going to court, sitting in court there, tired of sitting. It was during this period that 23 people were hanged for fighting the police in Bergville. Judge Kennedy had sentenced the people who were found guilty for killing police, and we protested against this judge. In Pretoria, when Kennedy was appointed as a judge, we asked him to recuse himself. He was a nationalist, a member of the National Party. Kennedy was not acceptable to us because he was a hanging judge. In Bergville, the conflict had been between the police and the residents. They were tired of raids by the police. The police then came and tried to arrest some of the people and two police were killed. 23 were convicted and most of them hanged. In Pretoria we decided to protest and decided not to stand when the judge came in. (*According to others, this protest took place in the Drill Hall in Johannesburg, rather than Pretoria.*) Fred Carneson of Cape Town led this protest. He was white. The judge threatened to arrest those defying. It was a dramatic affair and made all the treason trialists associate themselves closely with Carneson.

Do you recall one exchange in the testimony of Prof. Andrew Murray of the University of Cape Town, a supposed expert on Communism, who unwittingly said some sentences from his own writings were "Communistic"?

Yes, Vernon Berrange was cross examining Murray and read a passage from one of his books and asked him if it was Communistic. Murray said it was "straight from the shoulder Communism".

Was Murray embarrassed when informed the quote was his?

He was not embarrassed. The whole point was that the government was claiming that the ANC talk of nonviolence was a bluff. What these people were doing, they charged, was preparing for a revolution. We had reached that stage, they believed, when they arrested all those who were preparing for a revolution.

There also is the interesting case of Wilton Mkwayi.

He was one of the accused, a trade unionist from Port Elizabeth, who came to Pretoria when the trial was resumed after a recess and not allowed by the police to enter through the gate. He said he was one of the accused but was ordered to leave. This reflects the attitude of the police. Here was someone who was one of the accused and they chased him away. He escaped the country.

During the period of the TT, as banned SG of the ANC, did you keep contacts outside SA? We're now talking about the end of 1958 when the first All African Peoples Conference was held in Accra. Were you in touch with Nkrumah at all?

Yes, oh yes, certainly. And let me tell you, as SG, I wrote a letter in 1952 or '53 proposing that the time had come for a conference, a Pan African conference to be held in Africa. I wrote to all the African national organisations and I got hold as well of some governments. I received letters from various governments -- Egypt, Libya, and various national organisations. In fact there was great enthusiasm. That enthusiasm was overwhelming when I went to Europe in 1953 and also in the conference of the World Federation of Democratic Youth as we discussed earlier. When I left the country with Duma Nokwe who was then the SG of the Youth League, I was very much welcomed by the people who came from Africa in Poland. And they happened to know that I had been writing letters and they discussed this issue with me. In fact we met and discussed the issue when the Polish congress was held. Then we had sub-conferences to discuss how to bring about the Pan African conference. Plans were laid down then. Nkrumah was in a better position to do something about it.

Finally the obstacle was created by the British government because they were in control of things in much of Africa at that time. We thought the best thing then would be to have regional conferences. Nkrumah held one in West Africa and I was supposed to have one with Kaunda in Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia). We never succeeded because the British frustrated us even with that.

(When the first All African Peoples Conference was finally held in Accra in December 1958 there was an interesting South African delegation composed of some who were already outside SA at that time. Among them were Alfred Hutchinson, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Jordan Ngubane, an American, Mary Louise Hooper who had worked with Chief Luthuli and was deported from SA, Michael Scott representing Chief Hosea Kutako of then Southwest Africa, and Patrick Duncan.)

This Conference finally led to the formation of the Organisation of African Unity. I was in touch with Kwame Nkrumah during this period, but not with George Padmore. Somehow, I don't why, I don't remember whether I had direct contact with Padmore. I know he was Africa advisor to Nkrumah. Jomo Kenyatta was already in detention. But I was in touch with the leadership of Kenya through Mbiyu Koinange, a brother-in-law to Kenyatta, and with Joe Murumbi, later Kenya Foreign Minister.

Did you have a feeling at any point that the result after four years of the trial might come out differently than it did, that you would be found guilty and might even get the death penalty?

Some of the prisoners, treason trialists, did feel that way. I never did. We knew that the greater part of the ordeal

was really propaganda, that we were not likely to be convicted for treason. But the highlight of the evidence was a speech by Robert Resha. He made a speech at the Transvaal Provincial Indian Congress headquarters, at Market and West streets, and not aware that the speech had been surreptitiously taped by the Special Branch. Now Resha, speaking about the importance of discipline, had used an example saying a volunteer is a person who must be thoroughly disciplined. If he is called upon to "murder, murder, murder, he must murder". You must be disciplined, he was saying, and this excited the authorities, and they believed on the basis of that, the ANC was committed to treason. The government knew that the ANC used the provincial office of the Indian Congress for meetings sometimes. But the TT was based on the Freedom Charter to indicate how a new government should be perceived. That was the basis of the Treason Trial.

The petition of the government, repeating the words of Resha, frightened many because it sounded as if it was real treason. "You must murder". The emphasis of the prosecution was on murder, murder, murder. That's why it frightened the people. Some feared that Resha's speech had created a situation whereby there was a possibility now of people being sentenced to death or life imprisonment. It became a more serious affair than people had thought. But it was not just Resha. The prosecution read speeches of angry men and women expressing themselves indignantly about things which were happening to them. And that is why the Resha speech highlighted what people were actually feeling.

What I am trying to say is that you hear people talking about violence in perhaps isolated issues. Therefore when Resha's "murder" speech was brought up, you put these things together and they sound as if there was really a case of treason. That's the point I am making. We knew that Resha was only giving an example of disciplined action, not advocating murder. The Resha speech was recorded by the police and they were therefore dramatising it. The authorities said "look at the way they talk when they don't know we are there."

Well, the final acquittal was a terrible defeat for the government, was it not?

Yes, indeed.

The timing is interesting, though. The final acquittal took place in 1961. Sharpeville had already taken place. The ANC and PAC had been banned at this point. The struggle had even reached a new phase. How come the government lost the case? It was so important. It received international publicity and the trial lasted for four years.

The approach of the government was an approach of people who were panicking. It was not what you would call a logical approach. They wanted to force things because they were in power. They imagined things. They imagined the situation whereby they could move with ease. They underestimated the strength of the movement. By strength I don't mean the numbers as such, but the influence of the people of the TT, nationally and internationally. They underestimated that. And they were frightened by the possible consequences of all this. And this therefore is the reason why the situation developed as it did. The case for treason was more imagined than real. They wanted to intimidate the liberation movement by convicting people for treason. It's not that there was in fact treason as such. There was an imagined treason and that is why an acquittal occurred.

F.L. Rumpff was the head of the judges. Rumpff was a man who was a nationalist supporter but he was in his heart of hearts a lawyer. You may ask why a lawyer could be used to take up a case of this nature. I think if there was a man who was prepared to learn, it was Rumpff. As he was sitting there daily for months, he was not mechanical. He was a thinker. As he was sitting there he was learning and came to the conclusion at the end of the case that the whole nonsense about communism and revolution was not there. Especially communism, because he found nothing communistic in the evidence to which he was listening. And it was therefore remarkable that a man who was trusted, a man brought up in the nationalist atmosphere could have taken a line like that. I don't know. It's my personal view that he, in his heart of hearts, was a lawyer and had the integrity of a lawyer brought up in our system. He was not vindictive. Although we regarded him at the beginning as brutal, he proved that he was more logical, more reasonable, more prepared to examine things objectively.

Did that lead you to think that there was something different about the judiciary from other parts of the regime?

Yes, although there is no judiciary in the British sense, but there is the influence of the British. What bolsters is the many individuals who became lawyers and judges. But there is the aspect you cannot ignore, that there is a certain amount of justice in the judiciary.

At the time Pirow was brought into the case, did you feel that there was a genuine possibility that a conviction would take place or did you feel at the time that this was an act of desperation?

Personally I thought it was an act of desperation. I thought that it was too late even for Pirow to do anything about it, so I had less fears about the ultimate outcome. But that is not the view of everybody. Other people felt a serious situation had developed.

This could have meant, could it not, that the government itself was anticipating that there would be acquittal if they didn't do something dramatic?

Yes, they knew that there was unpopularity internationally and at home, that their charge of treason was treated with great contempt, and that only a man of standing, such as Pirow, could perhaps produce results. That's how the government felt. Nearly everybody knew the appointment of Pirow was a serious affair and could possibly result in convictions. Many people were thinking like that.

One international reaction to the acquittal was that South Africa must not be so bad after all, trying to get a case of treason against the leaders in the liberation struggle and they're all acquitted. That country can't be so bad, there must be some democracy there.

Yes, all the conservative element, particularly English, would have felt precisely that way. But I think other people were also not bluffed completely by that. The country still remained fascist of some kind. The relationship of South Africa to fascism was well known too.

What about your relations with Albertina and your family during this period?

Well our relationship was very warm. Right from the beginning before we even got married, we exchanged views. It was my task to educate her about the developments, and I was doing so for a very courageous woman, very courageous. And one of the things we did, you see, which is usually very difficult with many families, is the interest she took in my mother. Usually a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law don't find it easy to get on well. My mother and my wife got on very well. And my wife gained so much confidence in me that as I explained what my life was, that the situation is like this, what oppression means, she accepted that quite wholeheartedly. May I say that when finally the time came for arrest and prison, I was amazed at the manner in which she stood up. She has been tremendous. She's got more courage than I have.

By this time your family included children. How were the children assisted to deal with and cope with all that was going on?

Well, it was not even necessary to teach them. You see, the police would surround my house with cars and motorbikes right through the night. So every white man who came in was regarded as a policeman. That already made my children, as they grew up, to be hostile to policemen. They see Bram Fischer and they think at first he is a policeman. Because the policeman is, what do we say, a "gogo", a thing to frighten people. They learn from that. Oppression means this. The fact that I'm now surrounded and the next thing they're going to see is their father arrested. That's how my children were taught. Even apart from telling them what's happening. When I was arrested, for instance, for the treason trial, there was nobody to care for the children at home. My wife was arrested at times. Max, the eldest son, was arrested at other times and the children were left alone. At a later time when the police came to offer food, Zwelakhe, who was the youngest of these kids, said he doesn't want any assistance from the police. That was already the attitude indicating the relationship.

How old was he at that time?

That was in 1964. Zwelakhe was born in 1950. He was 14.

But in some families, in an experience like this, the children, recognising everyone out there as a policeman, would be overcome by fear, but your children were not. To what do you attribute that?

The attitude in the house was that we are fighting anything of this kind. We are not frightened. Children admire. They see it. They see your attitude toward the police, the manner in which you conduct yourself. You are not frightened, you are courageous. You are fighting, and I think that has had an effect of politicising all my children. Now when I'm talking about all this, I'm thinking of my youngest, my baby. When I went to jail she knew very well what the situation was. By listening to the police, to all the visits of the police, the surrounding and the motorcars, any motor car, that is a police motor car. And therefore they get irritated, agitated, the police have come.

Did you have family discussions about this - did you have meetings?

Not meetings, but we exchanged views generally with my wife. My mother was also the same. She was courageous. She had tremendous confidence in me so that she became politicised without necessarily going to meetings. She was finally arrested under the pass laws with Duma Nokwe's mother in Pretoria when they came to our case. So that my mother was very much interested in politics because she was learning from our own attitude.

Then there were other relationships. Oliver was a great friend of my mother. They were both religious, going to church together and so on. Then there was Nelson who also stayed at our house. So the whole atmosphere was politicisation of the family. You know my niece, my sister's daughter, was also politicised as a young girl. She used to ring *The Star*, the newspaper, if anything happened at home when she was 15. And she was in fact even at one time paid fees for reporting events. So all my children were courageous, courageous because the atmosphere made them that way.

OTHER EVENTS DURING THE TREASON TRIAL

The Treason Trial went on for more than four years. During that time many other things were happening in South Africa. Can you comment on some of these events?

Well, I can briefly say something about certain events. One thing had to do with Bantu Authorities and the rural areas situation. (*The Bantu Authorities Act was one of the apartheid measures adopted by the National Party. It abolished the Native Representative Council and replaced it with an hierarchical system of traditional chiefs appointed by the government. The idea was to perpetuate ethnic differences in line with the apartheid policy. In 1959 the government passed the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act which created eight separate bantustans.*) In 1955 a big meeting of all the Transvaal chiefs was held at Zebediela called by Verwoerd, then Minister of Native Affairs, for the purpose of introducing Bantu Authorities. The Executives of ANC in Natal and Transvaal knew nothing of this meeting. However leaflets were distributed by ANC on the night previous to the meeting and to some extent direct contact with various chiefs was established. The result was that on the following day Verwoerd expected an affirmative answer, but the chiefs rejected the idea. This was a reflection of the spirit throughout the country. A similar meeting in Natal also rejected Bantu Authorities in toto. In the Transvaal there was the best organised peasants organisation. In Sekhukhuneland the peasants organisation was called Sebatakgomo, later changed to Feta Kgomo. The Transvaal organisation coordinated the efforts. I was on the ANC committee in touch with the peasants organisation. In Sekhukhuneland disturbances led to many arrests among whom was a woman by the name of Madinoga who was sentenced to death, later commuted to life and then later paroled.

The campaign against passes for women reached an important phase in 1958-59 in Natal and Transvaal, especially in Johannesburg. Demonstrations were held at pass offices and people were arrested in batches, about 2000 in Transvaal, 900 from Alex alone. Albertina was among the leaders. A problem arose when the City Council decided to bail out Albertina, and others, who were working for the Council. The authorities had to negotiate with the Orlando Clinic to release Albertina from her duties in order that she return to jail.

But there were fireworks in Natal not only on the question of passes, but also on cattle dipping tanks and beerhalls. The situation became very serious with some MPs, like D.E. Mitchell, seeing it as revolution and that it should be treated as such. Violence broke out. This created problems in the Movement because the policy was one of nonviolence.

What about the government elections?

The general elections took place in April 1958. In the ANC we felt there were two reasons for a line of action. One was to draw attention to the fact that our oppressed people were not voters; and second, that action would heighten political consciousness among the masses. In pursuance of this it was decided that a mass conference be held to discuss the question of better salaries and wages -- launch a Pound-a-Day Campaign. People had been critical of one day strikes and stay-at-homes and were now thinking in terms of a two week strike. Through persuasion the conference decided for a three day stay-at-home instead. This was a combined decision with all the Congresses but it was decided to have it under the auspices of the Pound-a-Day Committee. I, along with Moses Kotane, was quite unhappy about the lack of enthusiasm among the people and felt that something was wrong with the campaign. On the train I heard people discussing the strike. The talk was more condemning the strike and an attack on the ANC. They made a distinction between their employers and the *ambhulu* (Boers). Once the strike started, incoming reports indicated that the strike was a failure with the exception of Sophiatown. In addition to myself, JB (Marks), Duma Nokwe, OR (Tambo), Nelson, and Moses, received such reports and the decision was taken to call off the strike. Some, including Robbie Resha, were disgruntled that the strike was being called off. Eventually the group was persuaded with great difficulty to accept the decision. Sophiatown went on for three days, but on the third day the police climbed in and started bashing people in a house-to-house raid to ensure the people went to work.

The national conference of 1958 was held in Durban and significant changes were made. OR became Deputy President. Duma became officially Secretary General. Also between '58 and '60 the resistance in Pondoland reached a climax. This led to clashes with the Pondo group, called Nthaba (*mountain*), a progressive and militant group led largely by ANC people. A number of people were killed as a result of the clashes and about 35 sentenced to death, several of which were commuted to life imprisonment and the remainder hanged. Both ANC and SACP tried to help with legal costs. The biggest problem was that they considered themselves to be at war. In actual fact they took control of the area for quite some time. Paramount Chief Botha Sigcau had to flee and place himself under police protection.

SHARPEVILLE MASSACRE

The event of greatest importance during this period was the Sharpeville Massacre. Can you discuss this historic event?

In 1959, the joint executives of the Congresses met in Natal and discussed the general situation and agreed that a national campaign around the passes must be undertaken. The plan included provision for a large number of volunteers to go to rural areas to organise. Also the plan included the idea that leading personalities, like Bishop Reeves, among liberals, etc., get a wider committee formed whose function would be to mobilise public opinion and propaganda against passes, and form what became the Committee of 13. It was also decided that the 1959 ANC conference should work towards the adoption of a resolution including all this. Indeed the 1959 conference resolved to set aside 31st of March as a National Anti-Pass Day commemorating the 1919 African Pass Day. The aim was to whip up enthusiasm for the anti-pass campaign as a whole. The problem faced by the National Executive Committee was that they knew events would develop to invoke martial law. The aim, therefore, was to whip up anti-pass activity in rural and urban areas, thus linking it with existing hostility and activity against Bantu Authorities. The burning of passes was a possibility but no decision to this effect had been taken.

(The 1919 event, which was the precedent for the ANC was the first passive resistance campaign initiated by the Transvaal section of the Congress, in March and April of that year. Several thousand Africans defied the pass laws by turning in their passes. An item appeared in the April 1 edition of The Star based on an interview with three "natives". Asked why they were participating in passive resistance they said "they had tried to get redress through making representation from time to time for the alleviation of the grievous difficulties under which the natives of the Transvaal laboured, but all their efforts had been without avail."
A fuller account of this event can be found in Volume 1 of From Protest To Challenge, entitled "Protest and Hope", by Sheridan John III, pp. 65-66 and 106-107.)

In the meantime a special conference took place in the Transvaal to consider an economic boycott. It was decided to launch a potato boycott for a limited period. Chief Luthuli was banned as he was travelling to this conference and thus was unable to attend. Others of us who were banned (like Mandela, and JB Marks) were in constant touch with the

conference. The potato boycott proved to be one of the most successful boycotts ever launched. It was very popular throughout the country. One of the reasons for its success was that the Indian merchants were very cooperative in not buying up and stocking potatoes. Also publicity given to Bethal labour conditions on the prison farms added to the outrage of the people. The slogan "Eating potatoes means eating the corpses of those who work on the farms" seems to have had an effect. There was some controversy between the leadership and the rank and file about the duration of the boycott. The leadership was united on the temporary nature of the boycott. Branches showed a lot of opposition to this. Fortunately the decade of the '50s was a decade of intense political activity and hence conflicts were not that great, and finally it was decided to call it off.

The PAC was preparing to launch its inaugural convention which took place on the 6th of April 1959. They had debated among themselves that the name should be African National Congress- Pure (Poqo). Others wanted the name Pan Africanist included that would convey a higher concept to the masses. This was at the time when the Pan African idea was gaining momentum in Africa, a year after the first All African Peoples Conference. The only campaign they embarked upon was their "status campaign". This was making no impression whatsoever. Hence, at their national conference which was held in December in Durban after the ANC had held its own conference earlier in the same city, they saw the possibility of a campaign against passes as in the ANC resolution and they decided to follow suit. This was the ultimate thing leading to Sharpeville.

It should be noted that the period of 1959-60 was one of intensification of activity and increasing membership of the ANC. Natal, one of the weakest provinces in terms of membership, yet during the first quarter of 1960 they had already reached a membership of 16,000. If the ANC had not been banned, our national membership would probably have reached 200,000.

The PAC triggered the Sharpeville event?

The Sharpeville Massacre took place as a result of a sequence of events. The anti-pass campaign was a continuation of what the women started years before as we have already discussed. Passes were the main problem facing the African people. The ANC planned a major campaign throughout the country to begin on 31st of March. The PAC, then, opportunistically launched its own plan. The PAC took advantage of the situation which existed as a result of our plans and called a press conference of 18 March, 1960 and announced they were launching a campaign on the 21st, ten days ahead of the ANC. This was the first time they had talked about a campaign and they had made no preparation for a campaign. They asked us to join them, but that was on the 18th, so we had no time to come into a smaller campaign when we were conducting a major campaign ourselves. Their request was ridiculous. They could involve only a small section of the population. Naturally we rejected.

The PAC called for demonstrations on the 21st. The point is that the government made a blunder. They shot demonstrators at Sharpeville and killed many. The TT was still going on. Duma said: "Can we be sitting and talking about nonviolence when a crisis situation has been created?" That was the feeling of everybody. So we joined in the campaign by calling the entire country to go into action.

The PAC campaign in other parts of the country was not significant, except for Evaton and Langa where the campaign was a large success. Orlando was a flop. But the event gave status to the PAC. The world saw a now active organisation. It became recognised. When the police made the mistake of shooting at Sharpeville, they revived the spirit of PAC and raised its position.

What did the ANC do?

The ANC immediately condemned the shootings and called for a stay-at-home, and a day of mourning throughout the country. Deputy President Tambo toured the country - Eastern and Western Cape. An emergency meeting of the NEC was summoned. The Working Committee called for passes to be burned around the country. Luthuli led the country by burning his own pass.

What did you do?

I also burned my own pass.

Where?

In Soweto, on the hills, with others. Duma Nokwe was one of them, on the 28th of March. Other things were happening. There were tentative plans for OR(Tambo) to leave the country with instructions to head the external mission of the ANC. The National Executive met on the 29th to consider measures if martial law was proclaimed under the Criminal Laws Amendment Act. If the ANC was banned, it would then issue a statement that it would go underground. We were indeed timely in that. A State of Emergency was declared on 31st of March and almost all known to be active were arrested. Some were arrested before the proclamation of the emergency and I was one of them. I was detained at the Newlands police station and then transferred to Pretoria until the emergency was over five months later. Chief Luthuli was already there.

What was your experience during your imprisonment at the time of the Emergency?

Well, the Treason Trialists were attending court. During the first few days of the Emergency, there was a breakdown in communication with the outside. The songs we trialists were singing were sometimes interpreted by the people as instructions. Albertina confirmed, when I was released, that there was some confusion. We were dying to get news. The only way we knew about the attempted assassination of Verwoerd was that some of the black warders told us.

There was much discussion among us about a hunger strike because of bad food and poor conditions. We discussed at length the problem of the duration of the strike, and finally decided on three days. The women put us to shame in militancy by deciding to go for ten days. After the hunger strike, the food was changed.

Arrangements had been agreed with the prison authorities to allow the Treason Trialists to have consultations among themselves. An upstairs room had been reserved. When the warder failed to appear at the appointed time to open up for us to have our consultations, Nelson took the balie lid and banged at the door continuously until the warder arrived. This made one hell of a racket.

After our release there was a tendency to become overly conscious of security. I myself was alarmed on occasion by inadequate security arrangements. At one meeting we had placed guards to keep watch. One of our comrades noticed police and they panicked, and started jumping fences from the place where we were to the great astonishment of neighbours and passersby; Bram and JB Marks were so conspicuous in their white shirts. Moses was cool and calm. He never ran, nor did Ruth First. I toppled over the fence. All this was the effect largely of our being released from prison so recently and were extraordinarily sensitive to the idea of returning to prison so soon after being released.

The All-In Conference was held toward the end of the Treason Trial. What led to this?

One of the issues we thought about while we were involved in the Treason Trial and were in prison was the issue of South Africa becoming a Republic. One day when several of us were traveling to the trial, the idea of calling a national convention cropped up. The matter was referred to the leadership and was discussed by the Working Committee. There the decision was made to call a convention demanding that a new constitution for a Republic could not be drawn up until representatives had met and thrashed out the matter. The proposal was to call on all African bodies for an All-In Conference.

The next matter was to consult the PAC to ask them to be joint sponsors of the leaders conference. Mandela was delegated to approach them. The initial difficulty was that the majority of their leadership was in prison. The ones who were out, were consulted. The idea was finally accepted. Various leaders of cultural organisations were invited. Also Paul Mosaka, former leader of the African Democratic Party. At a planning meeting, held on 16th Dec. 1960, Mosaka levelled the criticism that the conference was really an ANC affair, but he was willing to cooperate. The PAC was fully participating up to this point and served on the resolutions committee. The resolution was to the effect that there should be an All-In African Conference whose purpose was to urge other communities in the country to support the move to demand the government convene a national convention before the day of the Republic set for 31st of May, 1961. The meeting was raided and documents were confiscated.

The All-In Conference was held in Pietermaritzburg on 25-26th of March?

That's right. Just at that time Nelson's banning had expired. He had to lie low in order to attend the conference. By this time the PAC had pulled out of the committee handling the organisation. The reason advanced was that they had received instructions from the leadership in prison, through the Cape Branch of the PAC, to pull out. My impression was that they had come around to accept the line that the conference was primarily an ANC affair.

On the eve of the conference, 12 were detained under, I think, the 12 day detention clause (*of the Criminal Laws Amendment Act*). Mandela appeared at the conference and delivered the main speech which formed the theme of the gathering. (*The conference was attended reportedly by some 1400 delegates representing as many as 145 organisations throughout the country.*) The essence was the demand for a national convention of elected representatives to determine a new non-racial democratic constitution for South Africa. Mandela was elected Honorary Secretary of a National Action Council set up to implement the decision and to present the demand to the government. Other members of the Council were to remain publicly unknown. If the government failed to call a convention, then a three day stay-away would begin on the 29th of May, to coincide with declaration of South Africa as a Republic. From the All-In Conference Mandela went underground.

What do you think the significance of Sharpeville was?

It opened up a new chapter because the question of nonviolence was reassessed as a result of the situation. It was this situation which finally led us to no longer being confined to nonviolence, but to use violence as necessary. Ultimately it led to the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe. We were still in the midst of the TT, of course, but this brought a new situation, an intensification of the campaign. In spite of the opportunism of the PAC, we were still in leadership of the masses of the people.

It led to Nelson going underground. It led Nelson to make a call demanding discussions on a new constitution at the All-In Conference just days before the final verdict in the TT. A strike was finally called, a three day strike. By this time, Nelson had taken the lead underground. He became the leader. As a result of all the activities, the government banned the ANC (*and the PAC*), on the 8th of April. Oliver left the country just before this to build the organisation outside the country. The government declared the State of Emergency and we were detained and spent the time of the emergency in jail. The total number of detainees at that stage was 250.

X SHARPEVILLE AFTERMATH

(The character of the liberation struggle in South Africa changed after the Sharpeville event. The struggle entered a new phase. The ANC and the PAC were banned organisations. They had to operate underground. Within weeks of one another, a year after Sharpeville, the final 30 in the TT were acquitted, the All-In Conference was held, and South Africa was declared a Republic. The demand for a national convention from the All-In Conference was ignored by the government. Mass arrests occurred. With dubious results from the three day stay-away protest action, the ANC decided to adopt sabotage as a tactic in the struggle. Unkhonto we Sizwe (MK) was established.)

Walter was arrested many times and eventually went underground, as Mandela had before him.

What were your activities after the All-In Conference?

Well, I was sent by the ANC to the Eastern Cape and Port Elizabeth to prepare for the three day strike and also to find out what the opinion was, whether the strike should assume the form of a stay-at-home or whether there should be more active, militant demonstrations. I was surprised that public demonstrations were rejected outright. The idea of public demonstrations was therefore abandoned.

Before the strike, the government was very active. It had introduced the 12 day detention. This was just before I went underground for the duration of the strike. And then I was instructed to have discussions with Robbie Resha. The National Ex. Com. had considered him the suitable person to counter the vicious PAC propaganda spreading in various African countries against the ANC. Resha was full of fire and he could be as wild as the PAC. I had no difficulty in persuading Resha to accept the assignment. Long discussions had preceded the assignment. Resha left during this period.

Nelson and I were together underground at this time. We lived in the same quarters and discussed all the aspects and problems of the strike. Nelson was directing the strike as Secretary of the National Action Council. Early on the morning of the strike, along with Wolfie Kodesh, Mandela's courier, I visited a bus terminus. In his report back, Wolfie said that people were going to work. The SABC had also announced that the Special Branch headed by Colonel Spengler had stated that more people were going to work than staying at home. As a result of Wolfie's report and the SABC announcement, Nelson had a press interview in which he stated that the strike had been a failure and that this chapter was closed. By this he meant that conventional forms of struggle were no longer appropriate.

This statement was inaccurate and highly resented by the people. Nelson and I were unable to defend it. Subsequent events showed that the strike was not a failure. Reports from the railways and bus companies, for example, indicated that 60% of people stayed away from work. After the strike, I emerged from underground although Nelson remained. No arrests were made.

What response came from the National Executive Committee?

Nelson prepared a report for the NEC which met in Durban. They, and soon thereafter, the executives of the Congress Alliance discussed the report. There was consensus that the strike had been successful in Johannesburg, and Port Elizabeth, but less so in Durban. It was noted that earlier Mandela had said that the stay-at-home was voluntary. This had the impact that it was not compulsory and that people were free to stay home or go to work. In Alexandra there was a hell of a debate. For example, were people entitled to picket? The debates were heated. In the executives discussion, Mandela was criticised for saying that the chapter (of nonviolent protest) was closed. The argument was that he was not entitled to make a statement of that nature before the matter was discussed and decided upon. Personally, my thought was that they had taken the matter too far because the statement merely reflected that conventional forms of action were no longer suitable. Chief himself was quite hot about it.

Was the question of continuing with nonviolent action directly considered?

Yes, we discussed the question of switching to violence. Among those strongly opposed to this were Ismail Meer and J.N. Singh. Chief and Monty Naicker did put up an argument but not as vehemently as others. Chief said that he was a great admirer of Shaka and he was not opposed to violence in principle, that if anybody went to his place for his

chickens, he must know what would happen to him. The argument was that all forms of struggle were not exhausted. Moses Kotane argued that an organisation like the ANC did not have to announce that it had adopted violent methods. It was this argument that became the basis for agreement. The NEC authorised setting up machinery for violent activity, but not official authorisation in the sense that NEC had authorised them to do so; just to emerge, announce emergence and finished. Hence Nelson went on to form MK on this basis. The beginning of sabotage must be dated with the MK. What was planned was that at the beginning we would attack only the symbols of apartheid. We would avoid the loss of life. Chief's position was that although the position had been reached within the NEC, members were not obliged to maintain the line in the Joint Executives. Thus hands are not tied. At a subsequent meeting of the NEC the idea of Nelson's going on an African tour to make preparations and get support was discussed and finally approved. Soon thereafter the Joint Executives approved also.

Even before these discussions and decisions, I had been approached by many individuals about violent tactics. Among them was Monty Berman who said he belonged to such a movement (*ARM, African Resistance Movement*) and wanted to know my views. I was asked to delay Berman, but he went ahead with his plans noticing my hedging. Just before the launching of MK in December (of 1961), Cachalia and I had gone to Natal to see the leaders who opposed the move. Chief Luthuli was away at Oslo (to receive the Nobel Peace Prize). JN and others put forth the argument that the plan might boomerang -- in Africa, for example. Objectors were prevailed upon in the end. It was necessary to obtain some consensus especially in view of the likely coincidence of action with the presentation of the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo.

(The Nobel Peace Prize was given to Chief Luthuli on Dec. 10, 1961 (Human Rights Day) and in presenting the award, the prize committee had said: "In the fight against racial discrimination, Luthuli has always advocated nonviolent methods." (p.657 Karis and Gerhart, Vol.3, "Challenge and Violence", From Protest to Challenge) Yet the first well-publicised action of MK took place on Dec. 16, Dingaan's Day, (to Afrikaners, the Day of the Covenant) practically coinciding with Luthuli's return from Oslo. The MK saboteurs, on that day, attacked a number of symbolic targets, such as power stations and government offices, with home-made bombs, in Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth. Flyers were widely distributed announcing the formation of MK. Because the saboteurs were inexperienced, one was killed and another had his arm blown off.)

Subsequently a High Command of four was formed for MK and I was the Political Commissar. Regional Commands were set up in Port Elizabeth and Natal. In January, 1962 a review meeting was held at which Chief expressed disquiet. Firstly he was embarrassed by the timing of the inauguration of sabotage (coinciding with the Peace Prize), and the apparent recklessness which had led to the casualties of Dec. 16. Another member who expressed some criticism had originally objected to the idea of violence. He characterised me as wild and unsuited to the responsibilities I was shouldering. At this meeting of Joint Executives a decision was taken to the effect that MK activities had to be controlled by Joint Executives. Chief's suggestion was that sabotage must only be undertaken in support of other political activities, eg. strikes. The suggestion was not carried, feeling that MK must have independence of action.

Were you arrested during this period?

In connection with my responsibilities, I did some traveling. After a trip to the Eastern Cape, where I was kept busy in Umtata meeting ANC activists, I returned and was arrested on an alleged pass offence. I was detained at the Fort. On the first day I was placed in a communal cell with about 150 prisoners. The following day I was transferred to the hospital section. Although I was only detained one night in the communal cell, I found the conditions to be really bad. Bullies took younger inmates as their "wives", who were beaten up if there was any reluctance. Some old timers approached me and said that things could not be left as they were. They described the whole situation to me. I agreed with them, that it was necessary to discuss the matter and I decided to do so the following morning.

In the morning I was told that nobody could get out and have a bath until the top chaps had done so. I defied this, and people started enquiring who I was. That was when I was removed to the hospital section. My new cell was tip top with white sheets, etc. The superintendent saw me and I informed him that I did not like the treatment that I was now getting and I complained that I had been removed from the people and requested to be taken back. The Colonel (superintendent) appeared to be a decent chap and spoke English well, but he immediately changed his attitude. He told me that he had been directed to the effect that I should be kept there. He told me that if I wanted to phone home, I could do so, but only after 5 p.m. when he was present. He also said I could phone Duma, and Duma could visit me,

but again only if the superintendent was present.

You seem to have been given special attention?

I was allowed to meet with Ben Ramotse, who was close by in the prison, in the presence of the superintendent. We were told we could exercise together, even sit together and carry on discussions without the superintendent being present. But one evening someone approached my door after 8 p.m. and greeted me warmly. I asked who he was and he replied that he was a certain Makena who had been in Pretoria doing prison work there. He had been popular with both Blacks and Whites during the emergency he said. He could not enter the cell, but spoke from the outside. He also asked how Joe Slovo was who had also been in Pretoria. At this stage the Special Branch was linking me and Joe together in the outbreak of violence. Makena told me that he would be calling every evening around 8 p.m. He said he could organise liquor if I wanted it, that I could drink through the eye-hole in the door through a straw. I told him that I did not drink.

I had heard Makena talking with Ben. Then on the third day or so after I met him Makena brought a letter from Ben in connection with the case. Ben had been allowed to write to his lawyer and had slipped it under the door. He also had arranged that I could be visited by Duma and Albertina. But I became very suspicious of Makena because he was moving around very freely. It was clear to me that he was a plant. During this time, the superintendent told me that he was merely a servant, and that I was in prison today, but that he knew that I would be in the government the next day.

I was taken to the doctor one day. I was asked to give a history of my blood pressure and other ailments. I did this and was made to fill in a form for this purpose. The following day the doctor returned and told me that the form had been mislaid and that I should fill in another form. This form was later to be produced in court as evidence of my handwriting.

This was one of your experiences of being arrested and incarcerated. But you were arrested on many occasions during 1961 and '62. Can you say something about this?

All the cases of my arrests are related to my participation in the activities of illegal organisations or to pass laws. It's a practice of the police to round up the suspects in the township and to look for particular people like me. Pass laws are the most convenient way of arresting you. They would go past my home wondering "is he at home or not". In fact they created a situation that when my children just hear the motor bike or motor car, they say "the police are coming." On one occasion the police knew I was not at home and they had heard about a party at Lilian Ngoyi's place. That's why they went there. It was a fund-raising party. I had gone there with Tom Nkobi and Alfred Nzo. Within minutes of my arrival the police came and I was arrested. I was charged with attending a gathering and breaking my ban. I was released the following day.

On another occasion I was walking on President street with Michael Harmel. We were returning from the *New Age* offices when we were accosted by Lt. Sergeant Carel Dirker and other Special Branch men. I had had experience with Dirker before. When I had been in detention at Marshall Square police station previously, Dirker had asked me if I knew why I had been arrested and told me it was for a pass offence. I became angry and told Dirker "You are a small man." Then he said "Sisulu, you are a big man, but I will never rest until I break your neck." (Dirker was at the Rivonia arrest and said "Sisulu, we have you now.") But on this occasion with Harmel, I was arrested. They found an innocuous document in my possession that did not relate to the struggle. On Michael Harmel, they found nothing when we were searched. My document was confiscated. Since no document was found on Michael, he sued. I was defence witness and Dirker was chief state witness. The case was heard before Justice Marais. I was asked whether I knew why I had been detained for 12 days. The real reason was that I had been under investigation. At the end of the case the judge said that he believed Michael Harmel and me to be perfect gentlemen and did not believe Dirker because it was clear he was lying. Michael won the case which was handled by David Soggett, a sharp and thorough chap.

Another time I was arrested with Kathrada for attending a gathering at Kathy's flat. Ben Turok was present and also an Israeli journalist. I was taken to Number 4, the Fort, where I slept overnight and was released the following day on bail and later acquitted.

Then there was the time I was arrested on the street in connection with documents. The External ANC mission wanted the document, a history of the ANC, explaining its policies, for publication abroad. Mandela, who was in Dar es Salaam, was delegated to get the document, entitled "The ANC: The Sword and the Shield of the People". I and Duma had collected the history where it had been lodged at a shop on Market street in downtown Johannesburg for safe keeping. And then, as we were moving away, we saw the police. I quietly slipped the document onto the pavement into the street unnoticed by the Special Branch. The shop keeper saw me drop the papers, and trying to be helpful, came out and handed them to me. The SB's attention was thus drawn to the document, and it was confiscated. I was taken to Marshall Square and charged with ANC activities.

I was even arrested once in connection with my mother's death. She died Nov.11,1961. The police came by my house and found many people there who had come to see me, including my sister. They arrested me for attending a gathering. I slept in jail and the following day they released me with no charge and no case. I did attend my mother's funeral.

How were these cases disposed of?

Several of them were lumped together. The arrest at Lilian Ngoyi's place, the case arising out of the confiscation of "The Sword and the Shield", plus the charge of organising the three day strike (which charge also applied to Mandela), I was convicted in March, 1963 and sentenced to 6 years. The defence applied for bail pending appeal, which the magistrate refused. The matter was taken to the Supreme Court where the magistrate's decision was reversed and bail was set at R6000.

While awaiting the decision on bail, I was transferred to Pretoria Local prison to serve with Nelson and Mangaliso (Sobukwe) I was there a week before being released on bail. Then on April 11th I was sent underground. The previous month Moses and Duma had already left to join the External Mission. As I left home to go underground my son Lungi remarked, "There goes the people's money."

While I was under house arrest in March, 1963, my sister died. She had died in the operating theatre. I regretted that I had not acceded to her request the previous day to call at the hospital before the operation.

What can you say about your underground activities?

The original decision about my underground work was that I would not attend any meetings for the first three months but would only receive reports. But the situation developed rapidly so that the original decision had to be jettisoned. It is important to emphasise this because things were not going well in the sense of smooth, ordinary functioning. Machinery was out of gear with so many people leaving, banned, house arrested, etc. I had to attend various meetings at Rivonia, dodging roadblocks. My headquarters was being prepared where there was a great concentration of African people. Rivonia was to be vacated and not used at all. It was clear that there was danger.

Radio Freedom was organised during the time I was underground and I was operating Radio Freedom. Later it operated in exile.

(On June 26, 1963, while underground, Walter spoke on the ANC radio. "Sons and Daughters of Africa", he began, "I speak to you from somewhere in South Africa. I have not left the country. I do not plan to leave. Many of our leaders of the African National Congress have gone underground. This is to keep the organisation in action; to preserve the leadership; to keep the freedom fight going. . . . We must intensify the attack on the pass laws. We must fight against the removal of the Africans from the Western Cape. We must reject once and for all times, the Bantustan fraud. No act of government must go unchallenged. . . . Only by united action can we overthrow this Government. . . . We face tremendous odds. We know that. But our unity, our determination, our sacrifice, our organisation are our weapons. We must succeed! We will succeed! Amandla!)" (Found on pp. 759-760 Karis and Gerhart, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 3.)

XI RIVONIA

THE PLACE

Can you give some background about Rivonia? Where is it?

Rivonia is a suburb north of Johannesburg. Not far. In fact, we must visit it together before you leave. We will go there together near Johannesburg on the road to Pretoria. More like a dorp than a suburb. A town with small farms and leaseholds. In 1960 we knew that the ANC would be banned, so we decided to buy a safe house for underground work. The Movement bought a farm -- Liliesleaf Farm, through a front company set up in London. This was important as a cover, and later, after the arrests, it prevented the government from confiscating the property because it was a foreign owner. (According to Walter and other sources --cf. Joel Joffe, [*The Rivonia Story*, Cape Town, Mayibuye Books, 1995] Mandela, and Fatima Meer -- at about the same time they bought a place called "Travellyn" near Krugersdorp and rented or "hired" a cottage in the Johannesburg suburb of Mountainview to use as a temporary hiding place when they needed it. When Wolpe and Goldreich escaped from Marshall Square jail after the Rivonia arrests, they briefly used Mountainview in their escape.)

What was the property like?

Liliesleaf, the farm at Rivonia, was about 20 acres. It had a large main house, three outbuildings, which were used as servants quarters, many smaller sheds for tools, equipment and supplies and some covered sheds for parking. One of the big outbuildings was made over into a cottage where people visiting could stay and we could hold our meetings. We called it the "thatched cottage", and Rusty Bernstein supervised converting it.

(When we visited Rivonia with Walter in February 1997, the town had changed drastically. It was no longer a dorp but was now a suburb of walled and gated elegant homes. The old farms had been divided and sold off as small estates. Neither Walter nor his aide, Dominick, could find Liliesleaf Farm. Actually it no longer existed. Inquiries at the neighbors led us to what they called "the Rivonia Trial House". Formerly the main house of Liliesleaf Farm, it was now owned by the Schneiders, a couple from Germany. Mrs. Schneider received us with warm hospitality and greeted Walter with genuine affection. The neighbor down the street, who only a short time before considered Walter and the ANC a band of dangerous terrorists, now ran over from his swimming pool carrying his baby son to embrace Walter, telling him how honoured he was to have his son photographed in the arms of Tata Sisulu.)

Who took care of the farm?

The owner was the company in London, but Arthur Goldreich was the renter, the official tenant. But in the minds, in the eyes of the other people, it was his. Arthur was quite suitable for that purpose. He was an architect and designer. In personality he was what you would call flamboyant, a man about town, concerned with dressing up and all that type of thing. He could pass as a rich gentleman farmer. He and his wife were in charge and everything was done in his name. Now Arthur was a man who had never been arrested, raided or questioned and it seemed his politics were still unknown to the police at the time. Arthur and his family moved into the main house and were the cover for the activities there. Here is a man whose very appearance showed he could run a farm like that and that is how others regarded him. Thomas Mashifane was a foreman at the farm, and there was a pensioner named Jellison. This Jellison, he was not a member of the ANC but was a devoted friend of the Movement. He brought several young workers in from Sekhukhuneland. This made the place look like an ordinary small holding. And some little farming was done.

How was Liliesleaf used?

Many people stayed at Liliesleaf Farm during the years. Nelson stayed there at the beginning, even before the Goldreichs. He was David Motsamayi, a black man servant, sent to look after things until his master arrived. Others stayed there also.

Raymond Mhlaba stayed there before he left for military training in China. (As a result of contacts made by Walter during his visit to China.) He worked on the MK Constitution with Nelson. They were visited by Joe Slovo and Rusty

Bernstein who also visited. Many people visited. Winnie came with the children on weekends when Nelson was there. Ruth First visited with her children. And we held meetings. Many meetings took place particularly during the underground operations of Nelson. In fact, I should make mention here of a very important meeting. While he was underground in 1961, we sent Nelson out of the country to the Pan African Freedom Movement of East, Central and Southern Africa (*PAFMECSA*) meeting in Addis Ababa and the Conference of Independent States in Lagos. When Nelson returned from his travels in Africa -- it was August 1962 I think -- he met with the Working Committee of the High Command to report on his trip. He raised questions that the supporting countries had about ANC's cooperation with the Communists, Indians and whites -- particularly the Communists. He proposed that we change the structure of the Congress Alliance so that ANC could be seen clearly as the leader on all issues that had to do with Africans. This was a serious and important proposal and the Working Committee thought he should go to Durban to meet with more of the leadership and especially to report to Chief Luthuli on this and other matters. Govan was opposed to Nelson going. It was too risky, especially since Nelson was ready to push ahead with MK. Govan was at this meeting as part of the High Command of MK. But the others, including myself and Nelson too, thought that it was important enough for him to meet with Chief Luthuli personally.

When was Nelson arrested?

Nelson was arrested in August 1962. I was arrested shortly after that -- for incitement and violation of my banning. We found ourselves in separate but nearby cells at Marshall Square jail. We managed to talk to each other -- about his trip and the attitude of the other African states to the Congress Alliance. We were both then sent to the jail at Pretoria Local, in separate but nearby cells, and we managed to talk more. With Nelson's support I decided to apply for bail. He thought that if I got bail, I could go underground and continue to lead the struggle.

Nelson was convicted, held for a time in Pretoria Local and then sent to Robben Island for his five year sentence. I was in Pretoria Local for a week or so, then convicted for incitement and sentenced to six years. But I was released on bail of 6000 Rand. I immediately then went underground. When I left our house in Soweto, as already noted, Lungi said, "There goes the people's money." -- 6000 Rand. I forfeited bail. On first of May 1963, the government passed the Ninety-Day Detention Law to break the back of the MK. Penalties were increased for membership in illegal organisations, and there were penalties from five years to death for furthering the aims of communism or other banned organizations.

This set the stage for the Rivonia arrests and trial?

This set the stage.

THE MEETING AND THE RAID

What led up to the raid at Liliesleaf Farm?

So many meetings had taken place at the Farm, so many meetings, and some of the families came to the farm for short holidays--a few days of a weekend. Too many people knew about the place. It was no longer safe. But in July we had to have this special meeting and there was nowhere else we could go. We were not in agreement about Rivonia. I took the view that the meeting should take place at Rivonia, but we all agreed that this would be the last one. The only other place was MK Headquarters. There is no reason we should expose MK. Let's rather meet here. Let's take the risk of meeting here rather than going to headquarters. But it was to be our last meeting there.

I was staying nearby with a family. Kathy too stayed with a family not far away. The meeting could not take place where I was. It might have at Kathy's but an unexpected guest arrived, and Kathy came to Rivonia that day for the meeting. Rusty Bernstein too, for the meeting when we got arrested. And I, too, came to the Farm for that meeting.

Wasn't there something about a dentist working on you at Liliesleaf Farm before the meeting?

Yes, I had to have some dental work done--to help the disguise of my face for being underground. I went to a dentist who the others had recommended as trustworthy, and he arranged to come to the Farm to do the work. But I don't know how trustworthy he was. He worked on me for a little more than an hour, and all the time he was looking at his watch. And he was asking me many questions. Whose farm is it? Who stays here? Who is here now? Will there be

bloodshed and violence? When is it coming? Then he said, "We must stop now. We will arrange for another time". Then he left. I went to the meeting and shortly after, the raid took place. It was strange.

Do you think he was an informer?

Perhaps he was an informer, perhaps not, but it was very strange. Not long after he left, we started our meeting. We had just opened the Operation Mayibuye document for discussion. It was in the afternoon, maybe two or three o'clock, July 11, 1963. *(Other sources indicate that the raid was originally scheduled to take place in the morning, but was delayed because the Attorney General's office wanted to be meticulous and scrupulous about the paper work involved--warrants, etc.--so that the arrests would not be overturned by any court on technical grounds. Had the raid been on time they would have missed Rusty Bernstein who actually arrived just shortly before the raid started.*

The Operation Mayibuye document outlined a plan for "the possible commencement of guerilla operations, and how it might spark a mass armed uprising against the government", as Mandela put it in Long Walk to Freedom, p. 312. The document itself can be found in Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. III, p. 760-763)

What happened?

A guard called out that a laundry van was coming up the driveway. Within minutes police and dogs jumped out of the van and were all over the place. Govan shoved the Operation Mayibuye document into the bottom of the stove where the ashes and dead coals were. But the police found it and they all testified in court that they found it open on the table.

We tried to get out the windows at the back of the cottage to head through the trees to the street. When I jumped through the window I came face to face with a fierce dog and there was Sergeant Dirker shouting at me, "I got you now, Sisulu, on a big one. I told you I would put you away for good. Me, a dumb Boer, not some smart Jew." *(This raid became, both nationally and internationally, the most renowned arrest in South African history. One hundred and six nations at the United Nations gathered at the news to call for the release of those arrested even before the charges were heard or revealed. The South African news media proclaimed this the most important political case ever, and government officials through the media claimed this arrest marked the end of subversion and terrorism in the country. The case was tried in advance through banner headlines, editorials, and quotes from officials of the police, the security forces and the government and all those arrested were presumed guilty. The Commissioner of Police described the event as a major breakthrough in the elimination of all subversive elements. There was an intense media campaign against those arrested at Rivonia and those who supported or defended them. Ministers, the Attorney General and Deputy Attorney General of the Transvaal, the Chief of Police and the head of the Security Branch, spoke out against them in the press and on radio, proclaiming the guilt of the accused which was in violation of the practice and tradition of South African law. cf. Joel Joffe).*

You were arrested at gun point?

Yes. Yes, at gun point, in my face with Dirker shouting, and the dogs. All of us, collected, taken. No one escaped. And we were sent to the jail in Johannesburg, known generally as The Fort. That's where we were. The others were put in the side of the jail for newly charged prisoners awaiting trial. *(On our visit to The Fort in January 1997, we were shown the side for newly-charged prisoners, where they were first run naked through a section called the "dehumanizing section" and then put in a holding cell.)* But I was already convicted and I was taken to F cells. Kept alone there in isolation. I was separated from the others because I had already been convicted and was starting to serve a six-year sentence. Yes. But I was put in isolation in a death sentence cell. Before there was any death sentence for anything--at Rivonia we were arrested under the Ninety-Day Detention Law--so it was already an indication of where the direction was going.

Was any violence used against you?

They were rough and spoke in a harsh way, but no violence was used. I must laugh. They were even afraid to come near my cell. Because I was a terrorist and they felt I was a most dangerous man.

But you were in jail. You couldn't do anything to them in jail.

They weren't sure of that. They didn't know that. We slept there that night. Slept there that night and then thereafter we were taken to Pretoria. *(All but Arthur Goldreich. Arthur had driven into the Farm while the raid was in progress. When he saw that something was wrong, he tried to reverse his car and drive out, but was surrounded by police and arrested. Because of the policies of racial separation, he was kept at Marshall Square in Johannesburg when the others were taken to Pretoria. Harold Wolpe, who was not arrested at Rivonia, but a few days later at the Botswana border, was also held at Marshall Square with Goldreich. On August 11th, Wolpe and Goldreich bribed a young inexperienced guard, Johannes Greef, and staged a bizarre but successful escape, along with Moosa Moola and Abdallhay Jassat, to Mbabane, Swaziland, which was then a British Protectorate. Mrs. Goldreich, who had been arrested with her husband, was held at Marshall Square. She never became part of the group of defendants in the Rivonia Trial.)*

We were together in Pretoria just for a day or two, I think, because I was already sentenced to six years. Because I am sentenced, I was separated. Others were together. I was put in the same section where they were holding Nelson, but not together, separated.

Nelson was not at Rivonia when we were arrested. He was in prison already for a year since the middle of 1962, serving a five-year sentence on Robben Island. He was brought back to Pretoria just before our arrest. The excuse was to protect him from PAC who wanted to assassinate him. But that was not really the reason. The reason was that they were preparing for the Rivonia Trial that was going to take place, and they would implicate him in it. From the documents that they took, he was implicated, especially the plan for Operation Mayibuye.

In that way he was implicated. He became, in fact, accused number one. I was accused number two.

So--we are all in Pretoria. For some time not together. Nelson alone. I alone. The others separately. But finally we were able to meet to plan the case. Together. We had to be together to plan the case. The lawyers together with us.

How long were you there in that way?

Let's see. We were sentenced on the 12th of June the following year.

11th of July is actually the arrest at Rivonia?

Yes, 11th of July. I think that's right. So then we were there until we were sentenced to life imprisonment, all of us. We were arrested 11th of July 1963, and on the 12th of June 1964, we were sentenced to life imprisonment.

THE TRIAL

You were arrested many times and went through numerous trials. Was Rivonia different?

This trial was different really from The Treason Trial. The Treason Trial, although full of activities, because of the length of time, was boring. And we did not really believe that they could find us all guilty, especially of treason. On this, there was no time of being bored. We were engaged actively, discussing the case all the time. It was part of the ongoing political struggle. Let me say first of all, when we were asked how we would plead, Nelson and I had already discussed this and decided that we would plead "not guilty". Even though we would admit to many of the events in the charges. Both Nelson and I would plead "not guilty". Instead we would accuse the authorities of being guilty of treason and we were not. We were going to put the government on trial. We were able to accuse the authorities. They were the people who ought to be charged, not us.

All the others decided to plead "not guilty" also, except in the case of Hepple, Kantor and Rusty Bernstein, for different reasons and from a different strategy. We all agreed that Kantor must separate himself from the rest of us and have his own counsel. Rusty decided to conduct his own defence and we agreed. With Hepple it was another matter and we shall come to that.

Who were the accused in the trial? How many were there?

Not just the group arrested at Rivonia. There was, of course, Nelson and me. We were accused number one and two.

Then there was Govan--Govan Mbeki, the oldest. Govan was in the High Command of MK. He was strong and a long-time leader of the Movement. And there was Raymond Mhlaba, an old comrade of Govan from Port Elizabeth. They had worked together in ANC for many years. And also Ahmed Kathrada, Elias Motsoaledi, and Andrew Mlangeni. Kathy was the youngest of the group, in his thirties, and the only Indian. Elias and Andrew had been arrested weeks before the raid on Rivonia, held in detention and then joined with the Rivonia accused for the trial. Who else? Yes, Dennis Goldberg, Rusty Bernstein, James Kantor and Bob Hepple. There were eleven accused in all. Seven were taken in the raid on Rivonia. (*Goldreich had escaped with Wolpe*).

Something unexpected happened with Hepple?

At the very first meeting with the lawyers, Hepple surprised us by telling that during detention he had been asked to give evidence by the prosecution, and he was still considering what to do. From that point on he was excluded from all of our meetings. Rusty and Dennis Goldberg had been in the same "white section" of the prison as Hepple, and they had an idea of his doubts and hesitations, but the rest of us were stunned. Since he had not refused the possibility, and still had not made up his mind, it was impossible for us to have him at our meetings. Rusty was involved in the meetings with all of us, although he was going to conduct his own defense. With Kantor, who should easily have been acquitted, we all thought he should separate himself from us and have his own lawyers. Of course there would be cooperation between his lawyers and ours. Joel Joffe was the instructing attorney. He organized it. Several people came to him and asked him to do it. Albertina asked him. Winnie asked him and Dennis Goldberg's mother. Joffe had not been involved in politics, but he was an outstanding lawyer--outstanding--and a man with a good heart who believed in freedom and equality. He was preparing to leave South Africa for exile in England when they asked him, but he stayed and undertook to put the team together. It was his way of fighting back instead of going into exile.

To lead the team he had Bram Fischer, an outstanding lawyer and and a wonderful person who could have had a high position in the country. He came from a leading family, but he put himself on the side of the people and became involved in the struggle.

But this judge in our case did not like Bram. It was something I noticed right away which I could not understand. This judge did not seem to like Bram. He seemed to be more impressed by Vernon Berrange who joined our case later. Bram Fischer was one of the most loveable persons anywhere, no matter what your politics are. He was very courteous, very warm to all people. But this judge did not seem to like him.

And another thing I wanted to say about the judge also that stays very sharply in my memory, a very strange thing. On the day of the sentencing, he sat up there, his gown was moving up and down like this. How would you describe it, you know, as if he is breathing very heavily.

Breathing very heavily. The memory is clear. I don't know how other people felt. I was very much concerned about this at that time, because, I said, if he was going to give an ordinary sentence, he would not be so shaken. It must be that he is definitely going to give us the death sentence and he is worried about that. That's how it was with him. He was not hostile, but like a South African judge, he thought an African is always suspect.

Who was this judge?

The judge was Quartus de Wet, Judge-President of the Transvaal, an Afrikaner. I don't know much about him. I think his father was also a Judge-President himself. He had been appointed before the Nationalists came to power. At first, he himself was not a Nationalist. He was an ordinary Afrikaner. He did not have a reputation for being a government puppet. We did not think he would take orders directly from the politicians, but he was an Afrikaner who believed firmly in apartheid, a typical white South African.

He sat high up, dressed in red robes, under a wooden canopy and faced a courtroom with separate seating for whites and blacks. An aisle down the center--white spectators on one side and non-white on the other. He was what you would call--stubborn, impatient and didn't like objections on procedure and points of law. (*Cf. Joel Joffe.*)

A very short time before our case was called, we were handcuffed, put into a van and taken to cells below the court. Police were all around, everywhere, inside the building and outside, all armed, with tear gas bombs as well as guns.

How did the defense proceed?

As soon as the case was called, Bram rose and applied for an adjournment. He pointed out that he had only just then received a copy of the indictment for the first time and that the accused faced grave charges which included the possibility of the death penalty. The Prosecution opposed the application for postponement. The judge ruled for a three-weeks postponement and adjourned.

But I was talking before about the defence team. They were very outstanding. Joel Joffe had given up his plans to leave the country in order to defend us. He did not know how long the case would last, and during the trial, there would be no income from other cases.

Bram Fischer was associated with the Movement for years. He was a member of the Party and an active one too. I think since the thirties. He himself went to prison for his activities and died from cancer (*8th of May, 1975*). And then we had a young lawyer, George Bizos. Brilliant. He and his father came to South Africa from Greece to escape the Nazis, and he continued the struggle against fascism here. He had been associated with the defence of progressives in other cases, and was involved in more political cases than any lawyer in South Africa. Somebody quite new to us was Arthur Chaskalson, a very fine and brilliant lawyer. In fact he was considered the next Israel Maisels--you remember, Maisels was an outstanding lawyer in the Treason Trial. Very brilliant. These for me were the leading lawyers.

But I must also remember Vernon Berrange. Vernon was the best cross examiner in South Africa. He was always in demand as a criminal lawyer. He knew psychology and how to get to witnesses in the dock, especially policemen. Vernon was involved, I think, in every important political trial from the Treason Trial on. He was a handsome man who loved danger, risks and fighting. He dressed in upper class style.

What about the prosecution?

The prosecution? They put Dr. Percy Yutar on the case. He was the Deputy Attorney General of the Transvaal. He was a small man but very ambitious, and very dramatic. Very flowery language like an actor on the stage. But when he got angry or emotional his voice squeaked.

Dr. Yutar had been a prosecutor in the trial of the mineworkers in the 1946 strike. It appears that he was especially chosen for this trial, and we were sure that a man like him who showed such a keen interest has got an objective of his own apart from anything else. He wanted to be the Attorney General of South Africa, and the government wanted to have a Jewish person to play an important part in this case to show that Jews were a part of the government, because so many Jews were identified with the Movement and were some of the accused in this case.

Bram Fischer began by attacking the indictment itself?

Dr. Yutar's indictment charged us with a military conspiracy for violent revolution and armed invasion of the country by other African states. Bram Fischer moved in court that the indictment be dismissed because it had no clarity and was without precise charges and allegations that the defence could deal with. Yutar's response was excited and hysterical, but the Judge quashed the indictment. That is, he dismissed it.

For a moment then we were free, but it was only for a moment. The court, the spectators, the police and everyone was in an uproar. We were surrounded by police, detectives and warders. Captain Swanepoel of the Security Branch thumped each one of us on the shoulder, and arrested us on the charge of sabotage. We were taken downstairs to our cells. (*Just before the indictment was dismissed, Yutar dropped the bomb that he was going to call Hepple as the first State witness. Once out of jail, Hepple fled the country. Yutar claimed that Hepple fled because he was afraid that ANC and the Communists would kill him. But the same day that Yutar announced this in court, Hepple held a press conference in Dar es Salaam in which he said he fled the country because he feared the government and its insane policies, including what they might do to him to force him to testify against Mandela and the rest.*)

After the indictment was quashed, Rusty Bernstein and James Kantor applied for bail, but bail was denied. So, we were all back in our cells, except Hepple, and we began to meet daily to prepare our defence. Kantor and his lawyer did not participate in these meetings, but we cooperated and shared information with them.

We tried to explain in political terms to our own defence team what we had been doing, what our organizations--ANC, the Communist Party, MK--stood for, how we cooperated, how we had come to be at Rivonia on the day we were arrested and what the Rivonia meeting discussed. We talked to the lawyers again on how we were going to plead to the charges and why. We were not concerned with the legal questions of the charges, but with the politics of them. We were prepared to admit in court that we had taken part in a political campaign to overthrow the government, including preparations for military action and sabotage.

You saw the trial as a political platform?

We saw this as an opportunity to make clear to the country and the world our position on the issues of South African politics. We would make of this, not a trial but a political confrontation. We would plead "not guilty", even though we would admit to the truth of many things in the state's charges.

When we convened again, the Judge asked us individually how we were pleading to the charges. He began with Nelson as accused number one. Nelson said something like "the government should be in the dock, not me. I plead not guilty".

Then he came to me and I said, "It is the government which is guilty, not me". And the judge said, "I don't want any political speeches. You may plead guilty or not guilty, but nothing else".

And I said as quietly as I could, "It is the government which is responsible for what is happening in this country. I plead not guilty".

And so it went, each one pleaded not guilty and accused the government of being responsible for whatever crimes were charged, until Kantor, who said simply, "I am not guilty, my Lord."

From that point on, the defence team and the accused saw the court case in a different light. We accepted the reality that the only possible verdict was "guilty".

The battle was to prevent the death sentence?

We explained to our lawyers that we had considered the question of guerilla warfare, but we had never decided to launch guerilla warfare. Our planning was based on the fact that if everything else failed we might have to turn to guerilla warfare. We were prepared for it and ready to admit it. But there had been no agreement to undertake it and certainly no date had been set for the beginning of such warfare. And at no time did we ever consider inviting military action from other countries, African or otherwise. We explained further that we always considered the liberation of South Africa as a long-term project, and no one in his right mind could have imagined 1963 as a possible year of liberation as the PAC did.

Were you able to be in touch with your family during this period?

Oh yes, once we had appeared, they could come. I'm not sure how often, but they came quite regularly. In fact, nearly every day they were in court. Especially when I was to give evidence. I was kept for a whole week separated from the others. I don't think it was proper under the law, but that was the case. I was separated from the others. Not even my lawyers were able to see me regularly. They had to see me by special arrangement with the prosecution. They did see me twice, I believe, by this arrangement with the prosecution.

Did any of your children come to the court or to jail or was it only Albertina?

I think the second son, because the older one--Max, the eldest--had already been arrested and escaped the country. He was still outside. But his brother, Lungi, came to see the case, and in fact was arrested for not having a pass. Lungi was only fifteen years old when he came to court to get a look at me. He was arrested during the recess for tea. And who arrested him? Dirker, of course. Lungi explained he was only fifteen and not required to carry a pass, but Dirker refused to believe him. Also arrested was the wife of Elias Motsoaledi. She had seven children waiting for her to come home to Orlando that night. Albertina went to the prison where Lungi was being kept, but she was told he would have to stay in jail. It was only when Joel Joffe intervened and threatened to sue the commanding officer of the prison, under the law, that Lungi was released, rudely and without any apology, after he and his mother had spent

the whole day at the police station.

I talked about this in court during my cross-examination by Yutar.

Can you say something about Mandela's famous speech to the court?

At this time, let me say here, Nelson was already coming forth as the leader in our group. He had those special things that I saw in him long ago when he came to my estate office and I said to myself, here is the type of person we need. He was a special type of person and everyone treated him in a special way, even the warders in the jail and the attendants in the court. (*Joffe talks about Nelson this way also in his book on Rivonia*).

Now, we all decided and the lawyers understood that because this was a political struggle rather than a trial, Nelson should not give testimony as if he was trying to defend his innocence, but should instead make a statement from the dock informing the court and the world what our movement was all about, what its history was, what its organisations were and what we were trying to achieve.

So it began with Nelson's famous statement from the dock?

When Bram Fischer announced that the defence would begin with a statement from the dock by Nelson Mandela, Yutar was in an uproar. It was not what he expected and had prepared for and he started to speak fast in that squeaky voice, "My Lord! My Lord!", but the judge paid him no mind.

Nelson, in the dock, spoke slowly from his prepared statement. His voice was quiet. Everyone was silent in the court, like they were--how do you say it? when--hypnotised.

Nelson made his statement about the Movement and its goals that became famous all around the world. It is one of the great statements of history. You know, the one that ends (*and Walter closed his eyes, trying to remember. He knew the essence if not the exact words*) "It is an ideal which I hoped to live for and achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die". Some people in the gallery were in tears, and we all sat silently for a few minutes. At the end, he expressed my own personal feelings completely.

What about your own testimony?

Then the judge said to Bram, "You may call your next witness."

I was the witness. I must tell you there was some disagreement, especially among the lawyers, about whether I should testify following Nelson's statement. Most of the lawyers thought that I would have a very difficult time in the dock, except for George Bizos and perhaps, Bram, but he wasn't sure. They thought that after Nelson's statement from the dock, Yutar would be very tough on cross-examination and that he would follow a tough legalistic line, dealing with interpretations and technicalities of the law. George Bizos thought different. In fact, he made a bet with his colleagues that Yutar would be drawn into a political argument easily and that I would be a good witness to get the better of him in this line of cross-examination. All of my comrades, the other defendants, including Nelson, thought that I should be the next witness, the best one to testify after Nelson's statement. And so I did.

Bram led me through my direct testimony. I don't know how much I remember of exactly what I said and in what order I said, but I can try, and you can check it in the transcripts of the trial records and with all of the lawyers, especially Joffe. (*We checked with excerpts from the trial. Actually the original court records seem to have disappeared or Dr. Percy Yutar is refusing to hand them over. Elinor Sisulu, Walter's daughter-in-law and author of a book in progress on Walter and Albertina, managed to locate a copy of Walter's testimony at the trial--some 400 pages. We also checked with the memories of Joffe, Bizos and other lawyers, defendants and others who were present when Walter testified. His memory was sound, even if he remembered things in a slightly different order, and somewhat condensed. Elinor Sisulu said of her father-in-law that "He always spoke in shorthand anyway, especially when he was remembering."*)

He had me tell my own story of what my life had been like, how I got involved in politics, when and how I joined the ANC, and how I became one of the ANC leaders and even Secretary General. I told him about having to leave school at standard 4, going to work at the mines, in the bakery and the other things about organising protests and strikes for

better pay and working conditions, moving from one job to another because I would not tolerate the demands made by one white boss after another. They were degrading. We talked about the sufferings of the African people, especially under the pass laws. And I remember, he asked me at some point about my own suffering under these laws for Africans.

When the ANC was banned we could not accept this, because the ANC was the only hope for liberation of the African people. We have talked about these things before and so they are already described in this record of my memories. Except for my own personal things, when I talked to the court in this evidence, I was going over the same ground that Nelson already had in his statement. I had to tell them about how we believed in nonviolent action for so many years, and now we decided that violent action would be inevitable. I was present when the plan for Operation Mayibuye was put before the High Command. Opinion about it was divided for and against and by the time we were arrested at Rivonia, no decision had been reached, although in preparation MK had been formed and a program of sabotage was underway. There were many questions we had about parts of the Plan. It was not something for an all or nothing decision.

I remember that at that point Bram asked me if I understood that by choosing to give evidence, I would be tested by cross examination.

I explained that I understood but I wanted to make it clear to the court that I would testify about myself and my organisations but would not answer any questions which might lead to arrest and prosecution of any other people. I could talk about myself and the other accused but would not be a willing informer on anything or anyone else. This might make it more difficult for me when the time came for a verdict and sentencing, but I have no other choice. I cannot do otherwise.

What did you expect in this trial? Did you expect the death penalty?

Oh yes, in my mind I had no doubt about it. What else can I expect. It must be the death sentence. When I was arrested at Rivonia under the Ninety-Day Detention Act, I was interrogated by the Special Branch several times. I did not know the charge against me yet. Even my lawyers did not know. But the Special Branch told me it was a very serious charge and could even carry the death penalty. They told me that they were sure that I had certain information that would be helpful to the State. If I would share it with them, confidentially of course, I could escape the death penalty. It would never be known by anybody. They said that some of my comrades had done this already and that some of my white comrades had given information about me. I remembered that when some members of Poqo (*allied with PAC*) were arrested, they tried to reduce the charges by giving limited amount of information to the Special Branch about their comrades and others, but it didn't work. The Special Branch gave me many examples of people executed for rebellion against the State, even going back to 1914 when Jopie Fourie was hanged. But I said I would never give information about my colleagues or organisations and they could do whatever they wanted.

So you did not accept any offer to collaborate or give information even though it may had saved you from the death penalty?

Yes, and at that time I still did not know what the charges might be--treason, sabotage or what.

After that it became a battle of wits with Dr. Yutar, the Prosecutor?

I had to plan and carry out strategies--some even reminded me of my days of stick fighting as a boy--attack, retreat, stop, wait, attack again--but this time without the assistance of my comrades or even the lawyers. I testified for a week, and for the whole time I was kept separate--in isolation, separated from all contact with my lawyers and the other comrades, as I said before. It was not proper, but that is what happened. My lawyers were able to see me only twice, by special arrangement with the prosecution.

How did the cross-examination go?

First, Yutar started fishing for information. Who wrote this document and who wrote that? Where did this meeting take place? In whose house? Who drafted this pamphlet? He kept searching for names and I refused to give any. He became more and more angry and I told him that I refused to give names. He kept asking and I kept on refusing to

answer. The judge intervened and I told him the same thing. "I am not prepared to answer." "You are not prepared to answer." the judge said. He started shaking his head and I knew then and there that my verdict would be guilty of all charges, but at that moment we moved forward. What could he do to make me answer unless he sent me back to the cells to be beaten and tortured and that would be too risky for the government and its case at this time.

(This was something new in South African trials. By refusing to answer, Sisulu and the other accused broke new ground. They set a new standard for the political trials that followed. They had transformed this trial into a form of political struggle, according to Joffe.)

He was prying and I would not let him pry. Both the prosecutor and the judge challenged the right of ANC to claim to speak for the African people when its membership was so small compared to the population.

I told him we speak for the aspirations and the hopes of the African people. We listen to what is in their hearts whether they are members of ANC or not. Dr. Yutar then said sarcastically--"Sisulu"--he always called me this, never "Mr." or any other title. He started out trying to address me as "Walter" but I would not accept that--"You think you know what is in the hearts of all the Bantu, or do you spend your time agitating, telling them what ought to be there."

That was when I said to him, "We do not have to tell the African people what ought to be in their hearts. Dr. Yutar, I wish you were in the position of an African. I wish you were an African and knew the position.

He asked me if I had been persecuted by the police myself. "What is this so-called persecution and arresting indiscriminately with no offence? How do you know they arrest people innocently?" I told him they arrested my wife. In 1962 I was arrested six times. I have been persecuted by the police.

I said to him, "Dr. Yutar, you have a young son about the same age as my son. How would you feel if your son came to court to see you and he was arrested for not having a pass, especially since he is only fifteen and didn't have to carry one. But the police would not believe him. How would you feel? That is persecution of the innocent by the police". *(George Bizos called our attention to this exchange which had remained indelibly etched in his mind. He said then that the lawyers all agreed that Walter was more than a match for Dr. Yutar.)*

But it was Operation Mayibuye that they asked me most about. I repeated over and over again that we were discussing the plan still, some for, some against, that we knew violence would come but we had not yet agreed to guerilla warfare. At the time of our arrest no decision had been taken. I myself did not think that conditions were right for such an operation to be undertaken. And we were never planning to encourage or collaborate in an armed invasion of South Africa from outside. Everyone, my comrades and all of the defense lawyers, were pleased. They felt I had done well in my contest with Yutar. George Bizos said that he could now collect on his bet. He had wagered with the others that Yutar would be drawn into a political discussion and that I would best him. So I was pleased.

But still you expected the death penalty?

What else could I expect. It must be the death sentence. They had charged us with sabotage instead of treason because a charge of treason would have required a preparatory examination and the accused would have to know the evidence against them so that they could prepare their defence properly. But whatever they call the charges, in terms of the material found, it qualifies as treason, and I could not see anything else but death.

You were all certain there would be no acquittals as there were in the Treason Trial?

There was expectation of possible acquittal for Kathy and for Raymond Mhlaba. We expected that at most, maybe three would be acquitted. Indeed, one was acquitted--Rusty Bernstein. That was not my expectation. I did not expect Rusty to be acquitted. I expected Raymond Mhlaba to be acquitted. I did not see how they were going to convict him. But Dr. Yutar was determined to have him guilty. At one stage in the testimony of the prosecution, they were talking about Raymond, and the judge said to the Prosecutor. "This Raymond, is it not the Raymond they were talking about who was in exile? And, indeed it was Raymond they were talking about. But the Prosecutor says, "No, my Lord, no, no, it was not." He was trying to find a way of convicting Raymond Mhlaba. The line of reasoning of the judge that he was in exile at the time would have acquitted him.

We heard that at one point as you were passing the other accused in the court, you made a sign across your throat with a finger, implying that you were going to get the death penalty. Did something like this happen?

I have no doubt that I did. Because when we were arrested, I said--I think I was talking to Govan Mbeki then--you see, there is no way out of here. I was sure there was no way of escaping the death sentence. I'm not sure what Govan's attitude was. I'm not sure, but I was certain that for at least six of us there could be no verdict other than guilty. The question was the sentence. And I was certain that at least four of us would hang.

When did the verdict finally come?

On May...yes, May 20th that was it, the prosecution handed out their final statement. They were very fancy--bound in blue leather, I remember.

There was an exchange between the judge and Dr. Yutar which gave us a little bit of hope. It seemed that the judge accepted that the MK and the ANC were separate organisations and that the plan for guerilla warfare had not as yet been approved. In fact, at one point he interrupted Bram's closing argument to state that he accepted that no decision or date had been fixed on for guerilla warfare. He adjourned the court until June 11 when the verdict would be given. During that time, Nelson wrote his law exams for London--while we were waiting.

When the day came for the verdict, the police packed the court and the streets around it. Justice de Wet gave his verdict very quickly. He said he would give the verdicts without reading the reasons for them, but he emphasised that he had very good reasons.

Nelson, I, Dennis, Govan, Raymond, Andrew Mlangeni and Elias Motsoaledi were guilty on all four counts. Kathy was guilty on one of the four counts and Rusty was acquitted. The judge then stood up and adjourned until 10 o'clock the next morning for sentencing.

Why do you think Rusty was acquitted?

I don't know. You know Rusty is an amazing chap. A very amazing chap. His very approach, his behavior. He is a perfect gentleman. Well spoken. And then he's quite a bright chap. He was working on his case, not relying only on the lawyers. He was working his case on its own merits, and he was sure that on the basis of his working of that case, he would be acquitted. I think that was the only reason. That is what happened.

And you were preparing yourself for the death sentence?

I was preparing myself for it. I wasn't going to be taken by surprise by anything as far as that is concerned. Albertina came. The lawyers, especially George Bizos, said, prepare yourself. So they were also now. And Albertina was warning me to be strong, you see, on that situation because they were sure of the position.

And what were you thinking as you prepared yourself for the death sentence?

I was thinking how I must go to the gallows. And I thought I must go to the gallows singing--for the sake of the youth who follow us, so they will know that we went without fear and that we had fulfilled our task in life. I would sing with a strong voice so that they would all hear. We must show that our death would not mark the end of the liberation movement, but would be an inspiration to our people in their struggle. The rest would now be up to them. I was ready.

Then came a message from Joe Matthews saying now he was happy. They would not give the death sentence. Joe Matthews--

How did you get that word?

I don't know--lawyers...lawyers.

Was Joe in a position to know something?

Well, you know Joe is quite an enterprising chap. He could have got it through various methods. But it was something to take seriously when it came from him. *(When we discussed this with Joe Matthews in 1997, he claimed that he had no "inside information" at that time, but that his conclusion came from talking with Afrikaners and his knowledge of Afrikaner history in their struggles against the British. Prejudiced as they might be against Blacks, Afrikaners were romantically sentimental about martyrs who gave their lives in a struggle for their people's identity and therefore he was sure there would be harsh imprisonment but no hangings. The Afrikaners' own struggle had been a violent one and illegal. The sentencing of those who had been imprisoned became fathers of the Afrikaner nation. Joel Joffe also deals briefly with this in his book on Rivonia).*

It was something to take seriously but it did not change my mind. I only thought, well good luck if that happens, but my mind was on the question of the death sentence, and Albertina's too. When they took us from the court she was dressed in the clothes of a Xhosa woman from Eastern Cape and led the crowd in singing Nkosi Sikelel i-Afrika! They all raised their fists in the ANC salute and called out "Amandla", and we pushed our hands through the bars of the van and answered "Ngawethu!".

When we were back in our cells, the lawyers conferred with us once more. We agreed to their suggestion to have a plea in mitigation, but only to try to persuade the court not to give the death penalty. We were not prepared to apologise for anything we had done or promise to behave differently in the future. *(One of those who spoke in mitigation was Alan Paton, author of Cry, The Beloved Country, and president of the Liberal Party.)*

If the judge asked us if we had any reason that the death penalty should not be imposed, we would have much to say--about the government and its behaviour as we did in the opening statement and our testimony from the dock.

We also agreed that if we were sentenced to death we would not appeal. Nelson, Govan and I thought that such an appeal would be taken as an act of weakness by our people. We thought that our behaviour should inspire our followers.

The next morning the court was packed with people, and so was the square outside the Palace of Justice. Once we were properly assembled, Justice de Wet nodded to all the accused to rise. As I described before, he was breathing heavily and looked pained. I was sure the sentence would be a bad one. But very quickly he said that as we had not been charged with treason, the sentence in all of the accused will be life in prison. Then he swept out of the court and it was over.

When the sentence was finally rendered what was your feeling?

Oh, it was like a discharge. It was like a discharge because I said, well, I really felt that legally we were guilty of what they call treason and I could not see how you can escape it. Therefore when they came with a sentence like this, I thought, well, it's like a discharge. Our Movement should have been broken, without leaders and without hope. But instead it was alive, singing, marching in procession right there around the court, with ANC colours flying.

It was not just our celebration, but had become a world celebration with ANC colours waving. We were expecting death and now we were all alive preparing for the next phase of the struggle.

International pressure helped us avoid the death sentence. No doubt. No doubt about it. We had very good lawyers, but the situation in South Africa was such that it was not going to be the ability of the lawyers that determined. The attitude of the government was so hostile, so clear, so worked out, so systematically worked out that on the basis of that there seemed to be no way we were going to escape the death sentence. Now we were a central part of a worldwide movement.

XII PRISON YEARS

ROBBEN ISLAND

When did they take you to Robben Island and how?

The same night of the sentencing, they woke us all after midnight. (*Andrew Mlangeni says it was about 4:00a.m. See Voices Of Robben Island, Ravan Press, 1994*). We had fifteen minutes to pack our things. Then we were marched down those long corridors. I can hear the doors banging closed behind us. Clang! Clang! Clang! We were handcuffed and loaded into a police van that was waiting. It was in the dark. No one else was there. Just warders. None of our lawyers or anyone else, and we didn't know where we were going. These warders were pleasant enough. They passed out sandwiches and cold drinks. We sat on the floor of the van together -- singing. There was one warder especially, he told us to be optimistic. We would not be in prison very long. With all the pressure -- a year or two at the most.

Where did they take you?

We were driven to a military base in Pretoria and that same night we were taken by a plane to Robben Island.

So you flew directly to Robben Island?

We flew direct to Robben Island. Whatever they call the plane, it was able to land on Robben Island. There is a strip where planes land. (*According to Mandela in Long Walk, the plane that took them was a very old Dakota military transport that had seen better days. There were no seats and no heat and they shivered, huddled together on the floor of the plane. Kathrada said, when we spoke to him in January 1997, "The Rivonia group -- Mandela, Mbeki, Sisulu, Mlangeni, Motsoaledi and myself -- arrived on Robben Island on the 13th of June 1964. It was a Saturday -- cold, windy and raining." Mandela calls it "a grim, overcast day," but Sisulu did not remember it that way.*)

Was it a grim day?

I do not remember it as a grim day, but an ordinary day for that time of year, before the rising of the sun.

Didn't you go through Cape Town?

No, straight to Robben Island, all of us together. Speaking for myself, I was sick of Pretoria already and wanted to see what my situation is going to be. My life was now decided for many years to come.. When I got to Robben Island, although I knew the place was notorious, I felt that I am clear. I know where I am going. I know what the situation is. And I was relieved. I was quite relieved. I was relaxed when we arrived although I knew how brutal and humiliating the treatment was to prisoners.

We were chained, handcuffed and in leg irons. They were taken off only when we landed. We were met by a large bunch of armed guards and were taken to cells which were prepared for us. What was to be our permanent cells, they were still in the making. You know, they were preparing new premises. But we were taken to old premises, in the old jail, a stone building, separated away from the others -- away from the new building that was being finished with cells for us -- where we were kept for a few days, perhaps even longer. Yes.

Did anyone in the Robben Island authority, like the Commander or his representative, speak to you as a group before you were taken off to your cells?

No, but we were ordered to strip naked standing outside. They then threw us clothes -- the khaki uniforms of Robben Island prisoners. All the Africans got short trousers, shoes instead of sandals as a special concession, but no socks. Only Kathy got long trousers. Nelson had already fought the battle for long trousers when he was on Robben Island before. We did not make another struggle for them now. It would come later.

Did you look upon prison as an extension of your struggle?

Yes. In prison we had to create a life for ourselves or we would become just prisoners, following the routines and trying to survive. But like the trial, we wanted to make of prison a stage of the struggle for the Movement, and we developed strategies for that, to organise ourselves because no one could do it alone. We knew that the Island was no ordinary prison. Its main aim was to punish and demoralise. Right from the start the authorities were clear -- the purpose was to break our morale and destroy any political ideas we might have. But we were conscious of the legacy of Robben Island and the political leaders who had been imprisoned there. We were inspired by these great leaders. In prison, life is governed by regulations. Kathy told us it was Tolstoy who said that in prison the warders have regulations instead of hearts. We were not allowed to sing or whistle, we had to treat the warders with respect, we could not mix with prisoners from other sections. When a political prisoner goes to jail, he tells himself he will not allow himself to go under. We decided that we would always speak as a group and through a leader, never as individuals alone or everybody and anybody talking with the authorities and taking positions. From almost the very beginning Nelson was that leader and we forced the warders and prison authorities to talk to us through him, although they tried to break that up over and over again. But we stood together, and they failed. (*An outstanding account and documentation of how the prisoners organised and the role of Mandela as the leader can be found in Karis and Gerhart, From Protest To Challenge, Volume 5: "Nadir And Resurgence, 1964-1979".*)

When were you taken to the new prison?

After several days, maybe five or more, we were taken in a covered truck to the new prison which had just been constructed and put in a part called "Section B", where we were each put in a small cell. Each cell was marked with our name and prison service number. (*Mandela's number was 466/64. Sisulu could not clearly remember his number, nor for that matter could anyone else we talked with. Many guesses were made by Walter and others as they searched their memories, but nothing definitive ever emerged. Voices From Robben Island gives his number as 471/64. There should be Robben Island prison records in the archives which would contain this information.*)

Did you have contacts with your lawyers?

A short time after this move, Bram Fischer came, accompanied by Joel Joffe. They came to talk with us on the question of appeal. We told them before that we were not prepared to appeal. Appeal would be a sign of weakness for the others in the Movement. So they came to verify our position.

Why did you make the decision not to appeal?

Nelson and I had made the decision long before, even before the trial ended and before we knew what the sentence was, and the others concurred. My own attitude was that an appeal could actually lead to even worse -- even to death penalty. It was better that we take this sentence than to go and attempt something which might dig us further. That was also Nelson's view.

So under South African law at that time, the sentence could be increased?

Yes, increased. Also we believed that an appeal would weaken the Movement and the leadership no matter how it turned out. The eyes of the people and even of the world were on us now.

But we were concerned with the people who could have got acquittal, like Kathy, like Raymond. But they themselves wanted to be associated with us in no appeal.

What happened when Bram Fischer came?

I greeted Bram when he came and asked especially how Molly was. When Bram answered he had difficulty talking. He--how do you call it--stammered. He always did when something upset him emotionally. He just said, "Walter, Mo-Mo-Molly is all right...Molly is all right." But his tone was like someone who is destroyed inside. I was puzzled.

When our meeting was almost over and Nelson asked him about Molly, Bram just walked out, then he came back after a short time. It could almost seem rude, but Bram was not that kind of person to be rude. Something was wrong.

After Bram and Joel left us the commanding officer of the prison told Nelson that Bram had lost his wife--in an automobile accident, (*in which Bram himself was driving*). He and Joel came to us only a day or two after the funeral. That explained Bram's behavior.

We were shocked by this news of the death of Bram's wife. Now you see Bram was a type of man so dedicated he didn't want to disturb us. He didn't want to tell us. He did not want private grieving to interfere with the needs of others, of us, of the Movement or the work that had to be done. We were shocked by the news. Bram and his wife were very special people. (*Cf. Stephen Clingman Bram Fischer, Afrikaner Revolutionary, David Philip Publishers, Mayibuye Books, South Africa, 1998*). They both came from well-established Afrikaner families--Molly was related to General Smuts. They are important in the Movement. Very important.

ADJUSTING TO PRISON LIFE

Can you describe the cells they took you to at first while they finished building the others--the new ones?

The cells they took us to first were in old buildings. They were not really typical jail cells. The new cells in Section B that we were taken to later were even more acceptable. For example, they had windows, big windows for us. Each cell door had a window too with four panes of glass, sealed shut at first. But when the warders found they could not communicate with us without opening the door, the top panes of glass were opened. I could see my opposite in his cell, and then I could talk to him, even though we were not allowed to do so. But you could talk to him if you wanted to. So the new buildings were an improvement, a big improvement.

How big were the cells?

The cells were small. You have seen them, yes? Less than half the size of this room that we are in now. (*We were at the Sisulu home in Soweto at this time.*) Perhaps five by ten. Maybe that is correct, or five by nine.

How many steps across the cell could you take?

I could take one, two, three steps across the cell

And you had a cot in there?

A metal bed, yes. When we went to see Robben Island after our release, Albertina was with me, and she said, "Man, I'm surprised. How does a bed come into a cell like that? And even a chair. How does it go in?" That's an indication. It was unbelievable that a bed and even a balie (*toilet bucket*) can be put together in there.

You had a mattress?

I had a mattress, yes, on the bed. That applied only to Nelson and myself. I don't think the others had--they used mats. Only later on did they get beds.

The whole group was one to a cell?

Yes. Each one had a separate cell.

And washing facilities?

When they open the door, you could go to the bathroom or wash, only when they opened the door. If you want to wash your hands or do anything else, you can wash your hands in your own balie there in your cell.

Did you get soap?

Yes, we did get soap.

What about a shower if you needed to bathe?

Shower...yes there is a shower. In any event, you shower when you go there. Cold shower, not hot. And not fresh water. What do you call this water which is salty? It was a mixture of fresh water and sea water. Brackish, and only a small cloth about the size of a baby's nappie to dry yourself.

And the clothes you wore? The prison clothes?

We Africans got short trousers and shoes without socks. Nelson protested about shorts. He had protested when he was on Robben Island before and won. He protested on our behalf again later and won, but he refused to accept long trousers for himself unless all Africans got them. Eventually they did.

And this went on in prison for all those years.

Twenty-six years. Eighteen on Robben Island.

But I knew in my experience we were better off than ordinary prisoners. You go to jail determined, knowing the conditions. You may not have experienced them, but you are expecting horrible conditions, even worse. That makes the situation for a political prisoner much more tolerable than it is with an ordinary man. Work. We had been expecting to be working very hard. We knew we would have to use cold water to wash after a day's work. Actually it is one of the most horrible things, cold salt water early in the morning and in the evening when we knock off from work. That is something which one finds very difficult to tolerate.

What kind of work did you do?

In the beginning we worked in the yard at napping stones. We broke stones that were dumped in the courtyard each morning and we had to work in silence. The warders walked among us to enforce the silence and they enforced every rule and regulation with threats. We had to load the stones we broke into wheelbarrows and then fill the big empty buckets with stones. Kathy who was small and slender had trouble at first moving the wheelbarrow that was heavier than him. But in spite of the silence rule, Nelson and others called out to him how to do it and he managed. They had quotas for us to fill the big buckets with stones, but right away this led to our first go slow resistance and a policy of no quotas.

Who were the other prisoners in Section B? How did you get along?

Other prisoners, not from Rivonia, were also put in Section B with us, in single cells, and not just ANC people--I remember especially Billy Nair from the Natal Indian Congress, Neville Alexander, a very educated man from the Non-European Unity Movement, Fikile Bam, a law student from the University of Cape Town, and Zephaniah Mothopeng, a teacher from Orlando, and a member of the National Executive of PAC. But not everybody they put in Section B was a political prisoner in some part of the Movement. There were also some old men from the Transkei who were convicted of trying to assassinate Kaiser Matanzima.

Some other well-known leaders from ANC, the MK, and other organisations, were added later, after we started to work in the lime quarry--like Mac Maharaj, Wilton Mkwayi, and Eddie Daniels, a member of the Liberal Party who was Coloured. And there were more from other groups and organisations at different times and from all around the country, from different races and classes and ideologies. This was all part of a government strategy of control. They were sure that there would be conflict among us and that they could use the groups against each other and at first they looked to be right. On our arrival, the dominant group was PAC, a lot of people from the Transkei and other places. The relationship between our people and PAC before we got to jail was a very unhealthy one.

In the general cell block, the senior PAC chap there sat at the centre. He says, folding the blankets and sitting there, he's going to address the prisoners, including ANC. He ridiculed almost everything that ANC has done. We were the object of laughing and all that. Gradually things became better, especially after the arrival of Zeph Mothopeng.

At the same time the government thought it could keep us powerless by having us all in one maximum security prison under their power. And we were sure that they would also put in some serious and tough common law prisoners--in for

muder, rape and robbery--to disrupt political discussions among us and to act as informers or even to try to intimidate us. But we developed cooperation and learning from each other and greater political understanding, even though we often had hot debates and arguments. (*Neville Alexander, of the Non-European Unity Movement, speaks of this in Voices From Robben Island*). It laid a base for the struggle after we got out of prison, even if cooperation did weaken once we were all free. For ANC it became part of the later strategy for negotiations and the formation of the new government and a new constitution after the election of 1994--the Government of National Unity.

Did you think that the government made a mistake in keeping you all together?

Nelson and I agreed that the greatest mistake the authorities made was keeping us all together.

It didn't run smoothly among us in prison or after prison, even for the leadership within ANC. Nelson had said that prison was a crucible that tested a man's character. We were like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. We came out better and stronger and many of us found a way to work together although we had differences. The government never thought that we could make that happen, but we did.

What was the work like?

At first our daily work was to nap stones. We had to fill wheelbarrows and dump the stones in the big buckets. Then when we carried on there, I don't remember exactly how long, a year, maybe two years, we were sent to the quarry. There were two types of quarries on Robben Island. The stone quarry was for prisoners in the main prison. And then there is the lime quarry. That was for the prisoners in Section B. That's where we were for many years.

What was the attitude of the warders--the guards--at this time?

Nelson said that the conditions at first were harsher than when he had been on Robben Island before. Harsher and more iron fisted. There were no black warders and no white prisoners. Everywhere there were threats and intimidation, and for Section B, at first there seemed to be as many guards as prisoners. In the courtyard they continually walked among us to enforce the silence. And they push you hard to work, you have got to fill those wheelbarrows, even though we did not accept quotas for each man, you have got to fill that wheelbarrow. Otherwise you appeared before the prison court and were sentenced to isolation or so many meals only or no meals at all for two days or three days. At first the warders were so frightened of terrorists. They would stand as far as where we saw that creche before. You stand as far as that.

That's a hundred feet away.

Ya, you can't come nearer. As you move, even if you are supposed to bring in food, his food, he tells you to put it down there. You can't come nearer. That was the atmosphere. Those were the instructions. That is how our relationship was. In their eyes we were brutal terrorists and in the early days the warders came from other parts of the prison to stare at us.

But from the beginning they did not use brute force?

No. They did not use brute force against us, although sometimes there were raids on the cells and violence was used.

Did you get a sense of sympathy from any of them?

No, no. Not at the beginning. Just this relationship of-- Most of the time we were abused, psychologically not physically. One of the things they did to demoralize us was to keep moving us around from one cell to another, for no reason, until for a long time you did not know what cell was really yours. Mental torture was there all the time, to take away our dignity and kill our spirit. We were forbidden to sing. Threats, yes, and the punishments of isolation and loss of meals.

Was there any difference in work assignments because of people's ages?

No, everybody did the same...same thing.

Did they push you hard to work?

Oh, they push you hard. You see, you got to fill that wheelbarrow, otherwise you appeared before the court--the jail court--the jail authorities, and sentenced to isolation or so many meals or no meals at all for two days or three days.

Did that happen to you?

It happened to both Nelson and myself. We were sentenced to isolation and three meals more than once, others got even more.

But it did not happen on the first resistance, the resistance in setting the pace of the work?

They did recognize that when Nelson said how fast we would move to go to work and how fast the pace of the work would be, there was not an immediate punishment that actually could be brought about.

Now they wanted to discuss that. There was no way of punishment because already the method we had used was effective. Terrorize them. They can't beat us, they can't do anything..

What was the typical day like when you worked at the lime quarry?

When we were moved to the lime quarry, we get up at five. By 7 o'clock we must be ready. On the very first day we were given the order "hardloop!" which means "run fast". We had by this time, by the way, decided that Nelson must be accepted as the leader in jail, whatever the situation is outside. When we were given these orders to move very fast, to run, Nelson was the first to say, let's go slower than we have ever been, as we are walking, we were standing down. He began and we followed his example. That paralysed the authorities. For the first time they had to recognize that there must be a leader. And they approached Nelson as the leader. That was at once a recognition of leadership in jail which was generally not acceptable to jail authorities. But they had to do it. It was good for them because they realized that unless they work in a proper way, they themselves would have difficulties. Threats and intimidation did not work. Rather than take orders, we discussed our plans and supervised ourselves. The world outside, as well as inside South Africa, was following our situation. They could not, you know, whip us like they do ordinary prisoners. The methods we had used were effective. There was no way of harsh punishment to get results. They can't beat us. They can't do anything, so they had to find a way. They wanted to discuss. They agreed to talk to Nelson and an agreement was arrived at. The question of being closely supervised and ordered about, we didn't want that, so we planned our work on our own. We knew we have got to clean the cells. We knew we have got to take the dishes and put them--and get them ready. We had to keep the place tidy. That was the daily life.

What about the food?

The food was horrible, always horrible in jail. We were on what was called F diet. It's what you call it--mealies. Boiled mealies, that is our staple food, morning and evening. Whereas Coloured prisoners and Indian prisoners were on D diet. They got bread. But it was not suitable for Africans, they said. It was even damaging to their teeth and so on. But we also negotiated and arranged the question of food. That we could share with those who got bread...

With other prisoners?

Other prisoners, the Indians and Coloureds, we share with them so that our food did not make much difference whether you are on what was called D diet or F diet. By about 1975 we got bread too.

Did you eat in common?

Yes, during lunch we were together, all at the same table, and so on. Fortunately we were at a table during lunch. During night you eat in your cell.

What happened if you were sick?

At first there were two types of treatment. For instance, I think Kathy had an operation of some kind and he had to be treated in those cells there, not taken to a hospital. But later the position improved, and on the question of health services they were good. You needed a specialist. They call for a specialist. You go to CapeTown. So at the beginning we were treated locally. Later on we were allowed to see a specialist in Cape Town.

How did you keep track of time?

Well, you count from Monday. Sunday is church. Monday to Friday you are at work. You know Monday you go to work and you keep days. You know tomorrow is Sunday and we're not coming to work.

Did you mark some place what date it was so you could keep track of whether it was this month or that?

Yes, we got it from other prisoners, from new ones coming in, from preachers who came for the Sunday services, even from some of the warders and we were always looking for scraps of newspaper that were left around. Once we organized ourselves it was easier to get even this kind of information.

You mentioned that early on Mandela had been chosen as the leader.

Leader of us in prison. The ANC prisoners.

How did that happen?

We discussed it. It was obviously the best thing to do because we had already appointed him to be leader underground. He had already traveled to various parts of the country--of the world. Although I was also underground, he was the leading person in Umkhonto we Sizwe. And we thought, well this is the suitable man for this sort of thing. He'll be a unifying factor.

How did you have an opportunity to talk about this so quickly and make a decision so soon after you arrived?

That's because we had no difficulty. At the beginning, we were not allowed to talk as we were working, but we were talking even when we go to have a bath, or cleaning our balties when the guards would not come near because of the smell. We had to exchange views. They never completely succeeded in silencing us. So we were able to have these discussions.

Was there ever any competition for leadership?

No. There would be no competition in our case. Nobody could challenge Nelson in that position. I wasn't challenging him. Nobody else was going to challenge him, so there was no competition.

Then you and -- this is a personal kind of question -- you and Nelson have always been very close?

Ya. That is why there was no -- no way in which we were going to be competing. Because we understood each other. We agreed in almost everything and knew how to settle our differences and we exchanged views. This must be done by so and so, etc. No competition. Nelson and I knew how to work together. From the time he joined the ANC to this day.

So there was never any kind of jealousy or envy that enters into it?

There would be people who would insist on me taking the lead, some people because they know me as Secretary General. Why do you allow the situation, they ask me, to where you as a leader are no longer taking a leading part. I had sized up the situation and realised that success will depend on how we are in this situation. No competing, but taking a positive line.

EDUCATION ON THE ISLAND

There are other things that may come up in relation to Robben Island?

Yes, in a short space of time, we were allowed studies. There was a great deal of discussion on that. Younger fellows, especially in the Unity Movement, sort of Trotskyist type, they thought it was too much of a compromise to apply for studies. And studies were governed by the decision of the commanding officer or jail authority.

And there were other kinds of studies, were there not? Educational classes got started. In Long Walk To Freedom, Mandela talks about the fact that you were the greatest living historian of the ANC and of the struggle. You conducted a class for the prisoners on the history of the ANC and of the struggle, did you not?

Yes I did.

How did that work, not just in your case, but in others. What kind of classes?

First, let me give you an idea. When we settled down in Robben Island, we did two important things. We had to create machinery for -- to operate as ANC. We also had to create machinery for all prisoners, not necessarily the ANC alone, for discipline and all. And in that situation where we had already created machinery of the ANC, one of my tasks was to educate people about the history of the ANC and that is what I did.

How did you do it? Where did you do it?

We were working at the quarry. Now we worked there as groups. So those of us who were taking particular classes would group together, work together. Then a lecture takes place there while we are working.

You mean while you are actually handling a shovel?

Yes, Oh yes.

Handling a shovel, you are talking about --

History. Yes, we did that. We chose a suitable spot. While standing with our picks, our shovels, a lecture goes on.

And the warders were not close enough to interfere with this?

No, they could have if they wanted to be nasty, they could have come closer always. They themselves had reached a position whereby they had to face, they had to respect us. So they were not always interfering. In fact some even came closer to listen when they could. But there were times when they were moody and they would want to interfere. And sometimes changes in prison commanders made a difference.

This position of respect with the warders, how did it begin, what caused it to happen and how did it gradually grow?

Well, Madiba, you know, fortunately could speak Afrikaans, and then he was respected by the prison authorities. The ordinary warder had to follow suit, and as they exchanged views on things, they began to like him, not only was he a good prisoner, but like him as an elderly man, their father. That is how it developed. So they came even for their personal problems. They came to him, and all through the time he spoke to them--directly to them in Afrikaans.

Yes, and you see this must also be related to the question of negotiation. People talked about negotiation. The very fact that Madiba would be speaking to the officials who come from Pretoria. His task was to explain the policy of the ANC. So that this developed--this explanation of the policy of the ANC. It was the same type of strategy that we took for our defence in the Rivonia Trial. Now you are talking to -- the what you call the prison head, the Minister of Prisons. Nelson has got to explain to him what is the policy of the ANC. What does ANC aim at, what is it doing and all that. Others take interest to find out what exactly are these people after. In that process he was driving the point home, so that there was a process started from this source that became later part of the negotiations when they began.

Did they give the same kind of respect to you?

Respect, yes, but not to that extent. And we were not trying to win the warders over to our side, but simply to make them more human in dealing with us. And it was part of our early strategy that when we needed something, it would be better to get it from a better relation with a warder than by protest and petition to prison authorities. They accepted Nelson as the leader in the prison, so that the respect would not be the same. Although they respected many of us, it would differ. And the warders began to come closer to our classes, not to stop them, but to listen.

How would you deal with the history while you were working in the quarry? Would you start with the creation of the ANC?

No. No. I would start with the colonial wars. I must bring up, you know, the leaders of the past. The leaders of the great Khoi. Those who have been sent to Robben Island like Autshumao, who was known as Harry the Strandloper in the history of South Africa. Harry the Strandloper, and later we found out that his real name was Autshumao. He was a Khoi who was originally the leader of a group of Khoi without cattle, (known as Strandlopers). You want to bring that--you want to bring the question of Makana, the left-handed--the general, You want to bring Maqoma in. You want to bring in the war of Cetywayo. All those parts of the struggle. And even Moshesh (Moshoeshoe), fighting with the Boers comes in. The wars of Sekhukune, they come in as part of this. So that we don't start with the ANC. ANC comes much later.

We have given the position. This was your land and this is how your land was governed. In it the leading personalities were so and so...so and so. In that way, we bring up the outstanding leaders of the colonial time.

This was the background out of which the ANC grew.

That's right.

How did you learn all this history yourself?

I myself, you know, I think of all subjects history was my speciality, and even when I was allowed to study on Robben Island, formal studies, that is. But I never succeeded to get a degree or a diploma studying because my studies were interrupted several times for punishment. In fact, five times they were interrupted, that means suspended. They'll be suspended for two years, for three years. I gave up the question of protocol. But I at least have done courses like history and had some background in it.

Also in the past when you wrote for *The Bantu World* wasn't some of what you wrote about history?

Was about history. Yes.

Had you done a great deal of reading?

A great deal of reading, especially in history. I told you about the Bible, the Bible because of its history aspect so fascinated me. These people lived and were in struggle. I could see a new world unfolding.

When you were growing up, in your home, was there oral history in which--?

Yes, from elderly people who told stories, especially women. I listened to that too. How they--the history comes about. They would talk particularly about the wars. Of the wars of the past. And not so systematic history there. You just get ideas and stories.

What other kinds of classes were there?

Literacy. These were very important. We were trying to help everybody to learn to read and write. And political discussions which also included theory, for instance, the question of freedom, what does it mean? What does it entail? We discuss these things--the class struggle, national struggle, all those were discussed. And controversy occurred as a result of that.

On Robben Island there was a great deal of educational work done. Yes, and one thing had to do with dealing with the

illiteracy.

How did you deal with that?

The same way as the history and other things. There was general education there. There was education for those who were illiterate, taught by prisoners. Then there was education for nearly all of us who had taken up studies. And that is why the name University of Robben Island came in. Many of us were studying, studying various courses in addition to the groups taught by other prisoners--like history, literacy, political discussion. Section B of the prison was like a big study hall. And you know, in this section the lights were never off. At bed time there was no lights out. A warder walked along the corridor and gave the word to each prisoner to sleep.

And were there not courses for which you gave certificates?

Those were the prison authorities. I've got a vague idea now about that. I think these certificates were really given by prison authorities. Some people for instance like to learn building, some to be a plumber and what not. These would be encouraged. The course would finally end up with certificates.

What kind of course was it? Classes?

Apprentices. Mostly they worked as apprentices and learn that way.

We attached great importance to education, great importance. As I said before, some were opposed, not only young hotheads, but even a chap like Neville Alexander, himself an intellectual. They thought to allow education was compromising with the authorities, and was a way of allowing us to be corrupted. That is, to sell out, not to make interest of the Movement foremost. We indicated constantly that no, on the contrary, this was to our advantage. Where do you get the material to study, material to read, even history itself. We needed to do this type of thing. They finally accepted and that is why there was now education. There was now what you call the "University of Robben Island", and it meant a great deal, tremendous improvement in the conditions to have something like that.

When you say they initially opposed it as a way of selling out and then they finally accepted it, who is "they."

A small group from the Unity Movement, the Neville Alexander group. They really were the people who were opposed, but they came to accept it finally. (*In Voices From Robben Island, Neville Alexander speaks of his "radical and rebellious nature," and then goes on to say, "Finally people like Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu made us understand. They said, "Look chaps, we're going to be here for quite a while...you're going to kill yourselves if you keep knocking against the granite wall.'"*)

Many of us were studying, studying various courses. I think Madiba was doing his LLB which he completed thereafter and others were doing degree, various degrees. So there was extensive education with the people there. It was a serious affair to study. May I say in my case I was--I did, you know, general certificate of education. After that I did a diploma in local government. Then I had a lot of problems with the authorities. They discouraged me. They said, no, that is no longer permitted. In the midst of the course I abandoned it. I had no intention of doing a degree. But that changed me.

I entered, you see, for a UNISA (*University of South Africa, a correspondence university*) degree. And even that I could not go as far as I wanted to. That was discouraged because when they discovered the hidden pages of Nelson's biography on which he, Kathy and I had worked, that meant an end of education. (*Mandela explains in Long Walk, pp. 415-418, that he had written his memoirs over a period of time, with help from Kathy and Walter. The manuscript had been buried in a garden area available to those in Section B. But it had been discovered by the prison authorities, and because it was against the prison regulations for prisoners to write anything of this sort, the punishment had been loss of study privileges for four years.*) Because they said, well this now is permanent, although it did not become quite permanent. So I myself, you see, with my ambition of doing a degree--and even the diploma--I was unable to complete it. In my case I think it became permanent. I'm not sure if it really was, but maybe it ended my desire to get it--to continue when there were chances of going back. I've had those problems, but there are people who had a number of degrees. A man who came to do Standard 6, Eddie Daniels, came out with two degrees and others, you see, with similar courses. So there was a serious effort for education.

We understand that some learned Afrikaans and this improved the relationship with the warders.

I did that with Ray Mhlaba. I was doing Afrikaans, many others too. I did not go far enough with that, but Ray and some others were able to converse and make themselves understood in Afrikaans.

Did this improve the relationship with the warders?

Yes. Once you use the language you've got the Afrikaner. It shows the importance of language to people. I remember there was a General who was also a professor, but he had difficulties sometimes explaining himself in English. Indeed it made them uncomfortable to speak English. They feel happier--more comfortable--when they speak Afrikaans. And relations between us and them, when we spoke Afrikaans, improved.

We understood that when you first went to Robben Island, the warders wanted you to address them as "baas" but you refused to do so.

I'm not sure if they exactly wanted that, but we were people who had all been in jail before and as leaders it was important to maintain our dignity, so there was no question of "baas". They tried to take advantage. I think they did so in the main section--the general prisoners. But they would not dare it with us--any of us to say "baas" in the senior leadership.

Later when the student uprising took place, it was against education in Afrikaans.

That was a totally different situation. For us it was part of a strategic and tactical plan to achieve certain goals within the Robben Island prison situation and later it became an issue that gave us certain insights after our release, but with the students it was totally different. These were events taking place outside. This came together with Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement. Biko's contribution was very vital. To begin with, he wanted that the African leadership--the Black leadership--should be better able to assert itself. And he was unhappy with the liberalistic trends of what you call it--NUSAS--the student organisation.

The National Union of South African Students.

That is it. He was unhappy with his colleagues about this type and wanted a more assertive approach. They, therefore, created a student organisation independent of NUSAS. Later on these ideas and the ideas of resistance were to emerge very strongly when the students decided to reject the question of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction. That had a tremendous effect with the students, the teachers and finally the leadership. It finally led to a clash on June 16, 1976.

It had a tremendous impact. It was an uprising in the true sense of the word. We didn't get the information directly from the beginning. But when some students and Black Consciousness youth who were convicted, were brought in, we were able to begin to get the full information of what was happening. And I think that was a very important stage in our development. Once the students were taking the lead, it was something desirable that the young people, the future leaders of this country, should themselves be convinced of the struggle we are conducting. To that extent, the contribution of the students, of Biko had a tremendous effect. We had to learn that the students now running away from this brutal oppression were now going into exile. They filled the camps in exile. It also had a tremendous effect on the whole Movement. So that is the contribution that cannot be over-emphasised. Especially the manner in which they killed Biko. It raised great indignation among the African people. We in the ANC did not regard the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement as hostile. We regarded it as part and parcel of the struggle and welcomed it as a progressive idea.

What effect did it have within Robben Island when the many young people were arrested and came to the Island?

Well, as I say, we welcomed the formation of the young student movement, but we were also careful in handling it, and they also suspected at the beginning that we may dominate them. So there was a bit of friction which has always been there. Bit of friction between us. You take Lekota (*Patrick "Terror"*), he was one of the top leaders of the Black Consciousness. He had been in touch with me. When he came in, he took a great interest in me. I would try to say to him, "Be steady. You don't want to break away from the people." But he could not be stopped. He had great

respect for me but he was almost impossible to control. His desire was to be ANC, nothing else. And so they expelled him. They expelled Lekota and there was actually even an assault on him, on the grounds that he wanted to take away members of the Black Consciousness Movement. There were those factions. But we tried to see to it that it did not develop into hostility between us. And it was my particular job to be in touch with them. And I think we kept it. It was never an open conflict between us. There were factions here and there.

Quite a few joined the ANC?

Quite a few of them joined the ANC, even in prison.

Did any join the PAC?

I don't think so. I don't remember a single one. They joined the ANC.

The student uprising, the refusal to attend school with Afrikaans as the language of instruction was a great contribution to the invigoration of the Movement itself, but did this also create problems such as the media frequently put it, of a lost generation, youth without education, things of that sort?

Yes, it did have that. The question of education to us in the leadership has always been an important issue, very important.

We never took that line on education, "freedom first and education after." It had never been our policy, even outside. We continually emphasised the need for education. Take the example of what some people were saying to me when Duma Nokwe and I came back from abroad, even back then. Duma should not study. He was doing law, should not study. Some of my colleagues like Jack Hodgson were very strong on that. I said, no, education is the key. Let this man receive full education. He will be even more useful. Look at Nelson. Look at Oliver. And indeed that was proved. Duma became Secretary General. He had already attained his LLB. And what I'm trying to say here is that education to the leadership of ANC has always been a priority. It still is.

But then we welcomed the revolt of the youth on the question of education. We had made it an issue back in 1954 when Verwoerd introduced it, this so-called Bantu Education. Made it an issue. We made the country feel it, so that the pass laws and education were among the top issues in our policies.

Back in the fifties there was schooling organised outside the schools very frequently. It was considered illegal by the authorities and could result in severe punishment.

Yes indeed, because when they tried to force this thing of Bantu education, we began to set up clubs to give people education. It was the result of the impact of these classes that the government decided to make it illegal for two people to come together to educate each other. You could be arrested, fined and sent to prison for having chalk, a slate and an eraser in your home. So on the question of education, we never had been in doubt. When I came out of prison, first thing in my speech was to say go back to school. I say go back to school. That's where your salvation is. When Nelson came out, he did the same thing.

And have young people responded to this?

Very much. They have responded.

Do they see the difference between going to school in the period after being released from prison and going to school when they rebelled?

They see that. That was during the height of the struggle when there were so many young people who wanted to get out of the country to join us. Those we did not discourage because it was not in conflict with the policies of the struggle. Those who left school and went outside, we welcomed. Because we would be able to educate them and at the same time give them ideas of what the struggle was about. But what we discouraged is simply to neglect school and say then education thereafter. So this was all very different from the situation with education inside the prison.

In addition to education there was a great deal of activity on Robben Island?

Yes, a great deal of activity.

In the Mayibuye Centre we saw awards for sports competition. There seems to have been quite a sports program on Robben Island?

Yes. Tennis in particular was the most popular in our section. Nearly all of them, except me, were playing tennis -- Madiba, Govan Mbeki, Ray Mhlaba, all of them playing tennis.

You created your own tennis court?

There was a tennis court which we used. Prisoners repaired it and put it in good condition. We mixed with other prisoners who came later. This is now the Black Consciousness prisoners who were put in what was called A Section. We could make the court with them and play with them, and discuss things with them.

There was also an effort of football. It did not last very long, but we were also playing football. And there were competitions in many things at the end of the year. There were competitions in, what you call it -- scrabble and other games like chess, draughts and all that, cards, playing cards. Those were particularly used at the end of the year, competitions when we make them into a big affair.

The prison authorities allowed this?

Yes, they allowed.

How would you fit it into the prison program, with your work responsibilities?

No, usually, you see, during the time preparing for Christmas, it's relaxed, so you were able to do things.

This was not true when you first went in?

No, it was not. But as time went on we were able to do that. When we first went in, I could not speak to the man in the cell opposite me. It was an offence to do so. But as time went on that broke down. Not by change of regulations, but simply by practice. Yes, practice.

ANC ORGANISATION ON THE ISLAND

How did the ANC organise itself inside the prison and how relate to the other political prisoners?

One of the first things we did when we got to Robben Island was to set up our own machinery and to conduct political education, to guide us as it were. We set up machinery we called the High Organ. In other words this was the controlling body in the Island prison. Not for the whole island. The main section continued its own activity. It had its own machinery, and we were merely starting our own in the area in which we were. That also brought about a relationship between us. That is how we, the leadership, got together with the main section. The main section--at one time I think the PAC had something like 2000 there. By this time, by the time we arrived it had more or less gone down from that, but they were still dominating that main section.

When you arrived?

When we arrived we found that the PAC had a dominating group, but there was already a political setup in the main section by our own comrades. So we tried first to bring about coordination within our own organisation in the main section. Not only that, we also thought that we should set up a machinery that will cater for prisoners, to look into the affairs of the prisoners, the problems of the prisoners. And this was one of the things we were keen to do despite the problems our people had with the PAC. We thought there is a great need for unity of the prisoners as such. It is the unity against the oppressor that we need to nurse. So that you got then a machinery called the High Organ of the ANC. And we got then another machinery for all the political prisoners.

Which included representatives of other political groups?

Yes. We didn't just say let's have the PAC. Let's have the Unity Movement. We made it possible for them at first to be part of some of our meetings, and we suggested let's have, you know, a broad organisation that will include all, not necessarily representing various groups. The main consideration was the unity against the oppressor.

Who was on the High Organ of the ANC at that time?

Nelson, Govan, myself, Mhlaba, yes, I can't remember all, but this was the setup. That was now the High Organ. I'm not sure that Madiba ever served on the broader prisoners committee which we used to call Ulundi.

Ulundi?

Ulundi. There was at one time a very widespread interest in naming, even possibly a new name for the whole country. There was a discussion along those lines that there was a need to think of names. One of the names that came up that possibly could be used, you see, for the whole country, was Ulundi. Ulundi would be the Drakensberg mountains, which does not refer to any particular group--just covers the entire country. This was never developed further. Now I think the men who formed the Ulundi committee would have been Neville Alexander of the Unity Movement; I served on that committee with Neville Alexander and Kwedi Mkalipi, but that was not static. From year to year we will change, except that some of us continued serving, for continuity. Ulundi had something to do with visitors to Robben Island, especially the yearly visits from the Red Cross. They had to be met to discuss, to explain our policies. The unity of prisoners was an important thing. It was important to take advantage of having been brought together. It was important to ignore some of the differences, especially the petty ones. We were keen to give a leadership that was united, and unifying through the committee I have referred to, Ulundi.

What did Ulundi do?

We will, for example, discuss a question of a protest or a strike and discuss how we should handle it. When we should strike. We would discuss those things. We would communicate with the main section. Some were working in the kitchen. They were bringing us our food. You would take a document, a written document--carefully written, small, small on thin paper and send it back to them there, or send a document informing you of what the situation is in the main section. A document that is put into your mealie pap nicely tied up and as we are dishing out, we dish it up. We know that this is the communication. So there was regular communication with the main section, and through them communication with the outside, even outside the prison. In view of the fact that we were barred from talking to them. This was the only way of talking to them, of discussing issues. You could discuss issues there, while there was a hunger strike, whether it is a political issue concerning only ANC. And various discussions on theoretical questions were conducted in that way.

You had hunger strikes?

Ya, a number of hunger strikes.

What were the issues that brought on the hunger strikes and how did they work?

The condition in the prison, like the food, but other things as well. When things were not right, we made demands and when these demands are not met, we resort to strikes, including hunger strikes, and some were political protests like the one about the death of Bobby Sands, the Irishman, his hunger strike when he boycotted food until he died. His was an issue we supported. But there was also the danger of our demand becoming very sharp. Some of the prisoners were thinking of taking the example of Bobby Sands and fasting until death. But we discouraged them, you see, that it should go to that extent.

Would the hunger strikes last for several days?

Yes, they lasted for several days. As a matter of fact, just before we were removed from Robben Island, there was a strike. And they used it as an excuse for our removal, to say that we, because we were on a hunger strike, we were the ringleaders of the prisoners. That's why they decided to move us. That is the reason they gave, but no one believed

them. It was clear that they had other plans, broader plans than that.

The information about the Irish hunger strike came to you from the outside?

From outside.

In a communication with a document in the porridge?

Ya.

How could this take place? How could this be done so that warders didn't lift the document out?

Well, the majority of the chaps, our chaps in the kitchen, they'll be dishing. And there it is easy. Your bowl is pounded nicely and it's dipped in and smooth. It's dished in like old food. So it came from the workers, the prisoners who were organised into the work group in the kitchen. We in turn would use similar methods, not exactly that, but we had our ways. For one, we never emptied our bowls completely no matter how hungry we might be. So we would also communicate with them, find a way of communicating with them.

The success of the hunger strike would depend partly on getting information to the outside?

Yes.

So that the authorities could be pressured from the outside?

That's right. Sending information. We devised ways of getting information out, especially with men who were being released. We were in fact in communication even with the ANC in exile. A full document could be sent to ANC in exile. You know, we had very bright boys among ourselves. They would write in very small letters something which will be put in a book like this. You think this is a book, and yet sealed in it is a document, nicely done. That document will reach exile.

How?

Prisoners being discharged. Among books will be a book that contains this information. So it was a by-hand system, a hand courier.

You kept in touch with Oliver, with the ANC outside, with the organisation in Lusaka?

That's right.

How did this work?

Now, one of the other mistakes of the authorities was that newly convicted prisoners would be sent to a particular section together. This section happened to be near our situation, in our vicinity, so that we contacted these people who were being sent in as new prisoners. We got information of what the situation is in Angola, what the situation is in Tanzania, getting it from the prisoners themselves. That also applied to the home situation as well. What you did not get through our other different methods you would get through a new prisoner who comes to jail. And then he gives reports, a detailed report of who he is, what he is doing, what he was convicted for and what is the situation. Get all of that information.

At this point were there any warders who were drawn into these activities, who were convinced enough to assist you in what you were doing?

No, we did not, we could not trust them that much. Our policy toward the warders was not so much to try to win them over to our cause, but simply to help them become more human and treat us with dignity. There were some who did help in certain ways through Nelson. You see Nelson, the elder, he became like a father to many of them, particularly the younger warders, but he would never want to give those chaps material that would be a risk for us or that could get

them into trouble. Even when they are keen, they say they want to do so and so, we would say no, you are all right as you are. So there were young warders who were developing a sympathetic approach. You remember the famous Mandela concert outside in London. The concert in London, the International Concert? It was a concert that took three hours. To get that inside to us, we had to use some of these warder chaps to work it out. So there were certain things which were done.

You spoke of two organizations among the prisoners. One is the High Organ.

That's right. That was for ANC prisoners. The other was broader--that's Ulundi.

Was there any conflict at all?

Quite a great deal of it, even within the High Organ itself. But we were able to smooth them out. We have differences. We discuss it. We come to an agreement. (*Cf. Karis and Gerhart, vol. V.*)

What about some of the critical questions that may have come up within the High Organ? For example, there was some difference on a question about Matanzima.

Ya.

Who wanted to visit Mandela and there was some difference within the High Organ on this one. Can you say?

There were differences in the High Organ of a political nature and of an ideological nature, but this one you are quoting, it did not really have--there were no sharp divisions. We unanimously agreed that Matanzima should not visit Nelson at this stage, at this time when he wanted. We allowed a visit by George, the brother of Matanzima, and found no problem. But Matanzima wanted to negotiate the release of prisoners, and was particularly interested in three of us. And so we thought that the idea of Matanzima meeting or coming to us and meeting with Nelson should be discouraged. He was going to be an instrument, although he appeared to be taking the initiative. The intention was to divide us, to split us, to break us up. The intention was to break us, so on this issue we unanimously agreed. As a matter of fact, for the first time, on this issue we were allowed to get people from the main section to come to a meeting on that.

When you say "allowed".

Like Harry Gwala and others who were in the main section were allowed to meet with us, because they--the authorities--they thought it's an important thing for them. So they allowed the discussion to take place on the question of Matanzima. Finally we rejected.

This took place with the permission of the prison authorities?

With permission by the authorities. The first time you have a meeting like this of prisoners authorised by the authorities.

Wasn't there a question at one point about whether the South African Communist Party and the ANC were and should be one or be separate from one another? Was that the case?

That type of discussion might have come in. I don't think it was ever really an issue. There may have been a difference of opinion on the question of the strategy. But it was unlikely to dominate and become an issue, because we existed as the Communist Party and as the ANC and it was to the interest of both organisations that it should be maintained that way. Because we were a broad group and you had some from the main section of the prison, this type of thing would come up and be discussed. But it was never a really serious issue for discussion.

But in both the High Organ and in Ulundi there were political differences. What kind were they?

Well, one of the things, for instance, was the question of participation, the strategy of participation politically. In the Bantustans, for example. We had sharp difference within the High Organ. You had Govan and Ray on one side, Nelson and myself on the other. Although we agreed on the general strategy as correct, we disagreed on whether

participation in Bantustans would sometimes be utilised. The others would not even want to hear a type of thing like that. So there were differences.

One of the differences came just at the time that Mac Maharaj emerged. I think in '76. No, no, later. Madiba had an idea that we should be very firm, even sharp, with the authorities. That we should take up a line of action, for example, of not standing when they come in, but simply remain sitting down. That was the strategy to be followed. He approached me. We differed on that issue. My attitude was, man, the world all over uses hunger strikes as a method of struggle. You take this line of action which may lead to people being beaten up. I don't think it is correct. You know, he convinced the representatives of the Liberal Party, of the PAC and of SWAPO, but he could not convince me, so we argued. It was now a hot issue, and involved the people in the main section. Then finally he abandoned it. But it was a big issue at the time. It was discussed at length and there were plans and preparations for briefing people outside, but that never succeeded.

VISITS

What can you say about visits -- your wife, Albertina, and other prisoners who had family coming? What was that like?

Let's talk first about official visits and V.I.P. visits. The visits of government, the Minister of Justice, for instance, coming to have discussion with Nelson. And there were visits from important people abroad.

One of the first visits arranged by the prison authorities was for a group of journalists from England who were coming to photograph us and hear our story. We didn't know who they were, perhaps they were some liberal journalists who were interested in our situation. In any case, meeting with them would send a message to the outside world and keep an international interest in our imprisonment. We allowed them to take that, by now well-known photo, of Nelson and me talking in the courtyard. Actually what we were talking about was this very visit and how to deal with it. As it turned out, this was a very reactionary group from a right-wing paper in Britain and so we said never again.

But there were other visits, very important ones, like the Red Cross, the visits of Helen Suzman and people from the Committee--what was it called?-- the Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons.

Let's begin with the Red Cross.

We had yearly visits by the Red Cross. It was necessary to brief the Red Cross when they came. Brief them about the situation--about our conditions, our treatment by the authorities, about matters which we believed should be taken up by them. We had never stopped agitating for newspapers. One of the things we did was to invite the president of the Red Cross, to ask him to come visit us, because we thought that would have an impact in the country and with the government. Indeed the president of the Red Cross did visit and we think he did get an impression of our situation, our conditions, our needs and demands.

Do you remember when that would have been?

Well, no.....In the seventies, yes, yes in the seventies.

Did his visit produce any changes?

Let's not talk just about his visit. It made some changes, but the important thing was the yearly visits from the Red Cross. The Red Cross did create an impression. We thought they were generally reactionary. But for our purposes we needed them. We could make use of them. Their representative, a man from Scandanavia, went out of his way to tell us how liberal he was. He stated emphatically that he was not a colonialist. But their visits helped. One of the things, for instance, was a change in our clothes. It was during one of those visits we were given proper prison clothes. Before we were given short trousers, torn. Something that was absolutely humiliating. We were agitated by the very nature of what we were given. So it was not a small thing, just being given those other clothes and not feeling like a naked person. In cold weather too.

They, the Red Cross, finally were the people who brought about a change on Nelson's demand that we had better clothes,

proper prison clothes, clothes that fit better too. Also one of the changes which was brought about by us in which these visits helped was a question of education--studies.

What about visits from Helen Suzman?

She was very important. We paid particular attention to Helen Suzman. Even before we were convicted in Pretoria, Bram Fischer and Helen Suzman were meeting and briefing each other on what was happening. Of course, Helen Suzman did not want--she had to be very careful, meeting Bram was not an easy thing. It might appear to be some planning in the cause of the Communists. So she had to be cautious and hesitant, but we did meet Helen Suzman already in Pretoria, before Robben Island, through Bram Fischer. When we went to Robben Island, it was important to be in touch with Helen Suzman. It was important that somebody here in the country who is in touch with higher-ups in the government should be in touch with us. And she supported the struggle for freedom in South Africa. The way it worked--she comes, she looks at the situation, we discuss with her the conditions, our complaints and our goals. She did that continuously, until we were released, as I remember it.

Would she then publicise what she saw?

Not generally. She would discuss with the Minister and I think even in Parliament. I haven't got a specific case. But that is the purpose, that she should be informed to discuss the matter with the Minister and maybe also discuss the matter with the press and with radio.

When she came into the prison was she able to move around? Could she talk privately with Nelson? Could she go to the quarry to see what you were doing there?

She could talk to Nelson, although there were always warders nearby. But she was an MP and got pretty much what she demanded on her visits. She could have gone to the quarry, but I don't think she did. I don't remember, but she could have gone to the quarry as a visitor. She wasn't an ordinary visitor, she was an MP.

So that a certain importance would be attached to her, but the important thing for us was that she would have a long discussion with Nelson to get the actual situation and the actual spirit. In turn she would meet with the head of Robben Island Prison, with the Minister of Prisons, and with the Minister of Justice and have discussions. Sometimes even she would raise matters on the floor of Parliament. So that the visit of Helen Suzman was an important thing. *(For a fuller discussion of Helen Suzman's visits to Robben Island and her activities on behalf of political prisoners, see her book In No Uncertain Terms, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1993.)*

And there were other V.I.P. visits?

The visits of the Minister of Justice and other government officials to have discussions with Nelson. I think I did indicate what later became what we call negotiations actually started here, was at its starting point with these visits in my opinion. I don't know the opinion of anyone else on this. But because Madiba was the man meeting with leading people, he had, as a matter of principle, to put forward the policy of ANC, with a view to convincing the other side of our aims and goals. There was no other way but this way.

So he was meeting with government people, parliamentarians and so on, along these lines. He also had the chance to meet with some from what was called, I think, the Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons. I think perhaps I am not using the actual name. These were prominent people from several countries who came with a view of discussing with the South African government the next step forward. It had leading personalities like the former Prime Minister of Australia whose name I think I remember was Malcolm Fraser, and others like that from other countries, like General Olusegun Obasanjo, the former military leader of Nigeria. These were important discussions with Nelson alone. None of us, as I remember, were involved. One of the reasons he was separated from us to Pollsmoor was the type of meetings like these. In the past when he would have discussions he would then discuss them with us, but here it was delegations and officials and they did not want him to meet with other prisoners about that type of visits. These discussions were interesting and special--an indication of how far things had moved. Okay, that's as far as the visits of officials and leading personalities go, for now. We may talk more about this later.

What can you say now about family visits?

At first we had difficulties about visits. I think we were allowed two visits a year. One visit every six months, and even the conditions of those visits were horrible. We were all in one big room with a wall of that twisted wire, like the Cage at the Treason Trial, separating us--prisoners on one side, visitors on the other. No place to sit down, talking through the wires. And the noise there. You can't hear what your visitor is saying. The first visits were like that. Finally they changed to allow some way of talking to your visitor. I am not giving a good picture of how it was. Finally it developed into a way of speaking to your visitor through a telephone. It developed to that.

Was there a glass between you?

Yes, a glass, and a warder standing nearby to listen and watch, and another listening to what you said on the telephone. I'll give you an example of what it was like. My son, Zwelakhe, came to visit and whilst we were talking through the telephone, Zwelakhe says, with a view to finding out what my opinion is about Bantustans, he says, how do you like to be a citizen of the Transkei? So I say, am I? He says, yes, you are. And I ask him, what about you. No, he says, you are a citizen of the Transkei, not me. They say stop immediately, turn off the telephone, pull down the glass and that was the end of the visit.

At one point I was talking about a boyfriend of my daughter and they warned me. If you do that again we will stop the visit. You are supposed to talk only about the visitors themselves. I was angry about that. And I said to Lindi, talk about anything you like. Let them do what they want. By this time they were also a bit intimidated. They could not do much to punish except end the visit. But visits were like that. As you are talking there is a warder behind you and there is a warder in front, making notes. Every time you mention a name and if he thinks he doesn't know the name, he'll stand up. It's intimidating to the visitor. That's the type of visits we had.

Did Albertina visit you?

Yes. Yes. We both protested this intimidation. Later visits were changed to be more reasonable.

Did they ever reach a point where visits included contact, where you could touch someone?

Yes. We reached a point where our visits were contact visits, especially with our wives. You could sit next to her on a bench. You could kiss her. You could do anything like that right there as far as they were concerned. We reached that kind of visiting towards the end of the 1980's, but if I remember correctly that was at Pollsmoor. But even if she sat beside you, the conversation had to be loud enough for the warder to hear. If he thought he didn't hear you he had no hesitation to come and sit next to you.

Going back a bit to the official visits, when the official visits took place, they took place not with a group, but only with Nelson as the elected leader. Is that correct?

No, more than that, because when the Minister, the Minister of Justice would come, although he would have discussions, deeper discussion first with Nelson, he also had discussions with some of the prisoners, the willing prisoners. But with international personalities, like Malcolm Fraser, it was different. If they think this is an important international person, they could make a choice, that only Nelson sees him.

In the beginning Nelson had the opportunity, after the visit, to discuss it with the rest of you.

Yes.

The content of the visit?

Yes. Yes.

Later he was unable to do that.

He was removed to Pollsmoor and more and more removed from us.

THE MOVE TO POLLSMOOR

Why were the group of you removed to Pollsmoor?

Not the whole group. I think there was a plan. We believed there was a plan to split the leadership and now we know there was one. What they said was that they were removing the small group of us because of our political activities, strikes and all, but that was never really the issue. Clearly what they wanted was to--they were already beginning to prepare for discussions of some kind and they wanted, as I said, that whilst they would allow Madiba, who had become such an international personality, to see people coming from abroad, it was not acceptable that he should see them and then report to us. But they found that they could not truly stop it, not completely. And it was one of the things that made them decide to isolate Madiba, so that they should be able to discuss with him, without him reporting back to us. These were the factors that influenced this decision for isolation.

How were you informed about the move?

About his move? We weren't. It was simple for them. The commanding officer came to our cells, to mine, to Raymond Mhlaba and Andrew Mlangeni and told us to pack our things for immediate transfer. He didn't say where. Nelson was ill--I forget now whether it was first the trouble with his prostate that needed an operation. I had such an operation too. Or whether it was the TB. It was the prostate. He needed surgery. One day he was taken to hospital. He just did not come back. And that was the beginning of this segregation. (*Mandela deals with and tells a somewhat different story from Walter about this move to Pollsmoor, his hospitalisation and the process of separating him from the others in Long Walk To Freedom, as well as his conflicted feelings about holding discussions alone without having the opportunity to talk to his fellow prisoners. Mandela in his account emphasises that the authorities were motivated by an attempt to remove the leadership of the ANC from the Island and thus rob their incarceration there of its symbolic impact in the liberation struggle. p.448*).

But later, after the move to Pollsmoor when Nelson was in hospital for his prostate surgery, we would still make representations that we want to go and meet with him, and he, because he continued to have an influence with the higher-ups, he would say, I want to meet so and so. Arrangements were then made, for instance, for me to go and meet Nelson. He was in a posh clinic at that time. That was clearly the beginning of his removal. I arrived in the midst of lunch once, and I remember that because that's the time I tasted Appletiser for the first time. I said to him what's this? He said it's just an ordinary cold drink, apple-flavoured. Now I know he can be mischievous, and I thought, no, this is liquor of some kind. I began to feel drunk. Just because of the, I mean, tasting this thing for the first time, and I thought, no, I'm drunk already. Let me put it down. That was the psychological effect of it. But that is how we would meet, you see. In that position he would arrange supper and all that and have discussions. But through it all, the hospital, the transfer to Pollsmoor, the idea was to isolate him, to make it difficult to meet with us, perhaps not to meet with us at all.

To make him as leader separated from his own comrades?

That's right.

Were all of you taken to Pollsmoor, all of the Rivonia Trial prisoners?

No, no, no. They took to Pollsmoor, Nelson, Kathy, Mlangeni and Mkwazi, that's all. There was not even a way of finding a pattern in what they did, bringing a small group of us together. Why did they bring Mlangeni? In fact, I am wrong on Mkwazi. It was Madiba, myself, Mlangeni, and Mhlaba--four. Ya. Later they brought Kathy too, but that was late.

You went by launch to the mainland?

We went by boat, yes. By boat to Cape Town, then put into trucks and driven for more than an hour to Pollsmoor. We went through a number of check points on the way.

What were the physical circumstances at Pollsmoor? Were they different from Robben Island?

Well, on Robben Island, we had created conditions of our own. We were now in a new atmosphere. Although we were free compared to some things at Robben Island, still conditions were not the same as on Robben Island. We were a small group living together.

You were together or were you in single cells at Pollsmoor?

First of all we were together, three floors up, up on the roof. A special room had been made for us, with toilets, sinks and showers, and four proper beds, with sheets and towels. And there was a separate small cell for Madiba to use as a study. Then after he was returned from the hospital following his surgery, they isolated Madiba downstairs on the first floor in a special arrangement of cells for him. The rest of us were left on the third floor. We objected and protested about this separation, but Madiba thought that perhaps it was best to accept it for now without protest. He was certain that they had something in mind, a plan, and that it would be worthwhile to go along to see what that plan was. I understood what he was thinking. It had to do with negotiations. I agreed and Nelson persuaded the others so that they finally agreed and we concentrated on developing a plan whereby we could meet and talk among ourselves frequently. Kathy protested the most and the longest, but he finally agreed, and he, Mlangeni, Mhlaba and myself remained on the top floor.

(In January 1997, when we visited Pollsmoor, we met Mike Green, a warder from Section B, Robben Island who had been transferred to Pollsmoor, as he put it, "to look after Mr. Mandela." Mr. Green took us to see the "rooftop" three flights of stairs up where a cell had been built for the group of Rivonia prisoners who had been transferred and a small additional adjacent cell for Mandela to use as a study. He described all the special security arrangements that had been made to prevent a rumored rescue attempt by helicopter. He showed us too the suite of cells that had been set up on the first floor for Nelson Mandela, for his convalescence after the prostate surgery, and to separate him from the other prisoners. We also met Mrs. Oerson, the nurse warder who looked after Mandela during his convalescence and, as she put it, "nursed him back to health." Both warders expressed affection for Mandela and the clear recognition for them, even then, that he would some day be the President of South Africa.)

(Warder Green talked freely about himself, emphasising his closeness to Mandela, his own political education and his sympathy for the ANC. He had first been assigned to Robben Island in 1980. He had been working with criminal prisoners and it was a change for him to work with political prisoners. He was impressed by their honesty "even if you left money around," and their discipline. They would not touch a wallet, but if you left a newspaper around, it would be gone. They were so hungry for news. "It was a pleasure to work with the leadership section because they were very disciplined and intelligent." They actually ran things for themselves in the prison and they were constantly getting more and more educated. Green told us that he discussed politics with many of them, especially with Tokyo Sexwale and that Mandela was a teacher for him. He reminded us many times that his photograph was in Voices From Robben Island, page 60. He was a warder in Section B, Robben Island, from 1980 until his transfer to Pollsmoor. In 1994 he was liaison officer for the Department of Correctional Services in the Western Cape. He was host for our visit in January 1997. To hear him, he was a true convert to the philosophy and policies of the ANC and its leadership. He thought that Nelson Mandela would make a great President.)

Did you ever get an impression of what the removal to Pollsmoor did -- what effect it had on the people left behind on Robben Island? Did they just go on with the organisation there that had already been established?

It did have some effect. I can't now remember the details, but it did have some effect. It did worry them. They could not, first of all, make out the reasons for it. And so they were quite disturbed by it.

In effect, a new leadership for Robben Island had to emerge. Did somebody else --?

Well, you still had Govan Mbeki there. You had Raymond Mhlaba -- no not Raymond -- Mkwayi. *(Mhlaba was with the small group at Pollsmoor. Mkwayi was still at Robben Island.)* You still had Elias Motsoaledi. These are Robben Island, the Rivonia leaders together with others who were already there. So there was in actual fact a continuation of leadership there.

Was it easier to have visits at Pollsmoor or was it the same?

It was the same. The situation did not change.

You still had two visits a year, one every?

NoNo. This changed very much earlier still on Robben Island to have visitors every month instead of one in six months. And it continued that way at Pollsmoor, and then at Pollsmoor it developed to such an extent that you could now have what we called "contact visits."

So the first contact visits were at Pollsmoor, not Robben Island?

Yes, Pollsmoor. And even with the question of other things, radio, TV, and newspapers. A radio was now allowed. In Pollsmoor we could see TV. There was even a TV down in Nelson's group of cells on the first floor and we could, from time to time, go and watch. We could see news. Newspapers came in, selected ones. There was a relaxation, relatively more freedom, not only in Pollsmoor, but generally. This was general, Robben Island too. We were more connected to the outside world. We knew about the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) with close links to the ANC, and we knew that ANC was growing in popularity. We knew about Bishop Tutu getting the Nobel Peace Prize.

XIII RELEASE AND AFTER

While you were at Pollsmoor the release of prisoners began. Govan Mbeki was the first released, was he not? When was he released?

Yes, he was the first. Nelson had already been negotiating directly with the authorities. It would have been something like a year before the rest of us were released. I was released in October, 1989. He had already been out for a year, more or less a year, maybe more, but certainly not less. (*He was released at the end of 1987.*)

He wasn't well?

No, he was well. He was well. They were just releasing him. He was not unwell. No explanation was given.

Why do you think they released him first?

They probably had considered. They wanted a way. It was a stage, and he was a convenient person to release from the point of view of age and health and all that. And his release was a test to see what he would do and what the reaction would be. I think the reason was that they had already made up their minds to release us. It was preparation, just as after him they were preparing for our release and leaving others inside. Remember I was isolated for three months because a decision had already been taken, and it was even brought to my attention, I don't remember how, but the word was "they are going to release Walter". They had discussed the matter with Nelson, and somehow they found difficulties to release me. Their fear was that I would do something, you know, activities. They even asked Nelson that he should speak to me not to cause problems, and they began to realise that it was not going to be an easy thing. I could not go out and not address the people. It was impossible.

Was Botha still President when Govan was released?

Yes. Botha was still the President, and very much involved with my release and the others too. He was involved with a letter which we received asking us to agree to being released. We were to be sent--I remember this very well--We were going to be sent to the Transkei. We replied to that letter, all of us, Madiba, Kathy, Raymond Mhlaba, Mlangeni and myself. We rejected the proposals. At that time Botha was still very much in power.

This was a communication from Botha?

Communication from Botha and us replying, about us going to the Transkei, but more than that, it was a general question, a general concession to release prisoners. (*The public announcement came in a speech Botha made in Parliament on the 31st of January, 1985, but the condition was that those released would renounce violence.*) More than us, because I think that a number of people were released in the PAC. And I think it is this letter that finally led to the release of Dennis Goldberg. Dennis accepted Botha's conditions for release, and we in the ANC accepted the release of Dennis Goldberg. We did not think it was a betrayal on his part. We understood the situation that he and other white comrades were in. They were not in the same position as us. We were together, solidified by being together. Black leadership of the ANC, and the white comrades were in a different position. We understood that position that they accept these conditions for release. And doesn't Madiba deal with this in his book?

Yes, he does. You were removed from Robben Island to Pollsmoor in 1982?

Yes, I think so, 1982. It is in the records.

Now these years were very important under the presidency of Botha because some so-called reforms were put into effect, such as the Tri-cameral Parliament.

We didn't regard these as reforms at all. A facade for the rest of the world to help ease sanctions.

And the United Democratic Front was organised. By that time you were in Pollsmoor.

That is correct. We got limited information about this from radio, TV, newspapers, and the very same day, Zwelakhe came to see me because it was held in Cape Town. It was an exciting moment. Between 15,000 and 20,000 people attended the opening of UDF that day. Albertina was elected one of the Co-Presidents.

UDF was organised on whose initiative?

All of us, in prison and out of prison, in the country and in exile. It was a link between exile and the people in the country. And Oliver was quoted as being one of the inspirations. He did not openly call for UDF, but it was implied in his speech. And the leadership of UDF took advantage of that to have UDF as an independent organisation. It had a tremendous impact, the attendance of so many people on the founding day. What made it even more important was that the community called Coloured under apartheid participated in the formation of UDF more than they had ever done in anything before. They were dominant. Perhaps that is not the word, but they were, what you say, high profile.

After the formation of UDF a great deal of action took place.

A great deal of action. There were boycotts. There was great inspiration, great enthusiasm throughout the country. It stimulated new thought, new outlook, new actions. I should also mention that it stimulated the religious movement into taking more active part, active interest in these affairs.

And international sanctions were reaching their height also.

Yes, it gave more stimulation to the international movements for sanctions.

Did you feel at the time that all of this was important to the gestures that government began to make for discussions and negotiations with Mandela?

Generally. It's a general picture.. Not only this, it's not one happening, one event, one incident. Government, by these things, at this time, was compelled to take note that we had reached a situation whereby bloodshed would increase in the country, the struggle would be intensified. There was no way in which they could defeat the Movement, even if the Movement could not overthrow the government by armed action. The Movement was becoming--what do you call it?--was being stimulated by events not only at home and in exile, but throughout the world--the interest which international community was taking--so the authorities were influenced by a number of events.

What about the beginnings of the government's discussions with Mandela?

They too, the beginning of the discussions were influenced by the intense activity, the intense power and the support that the Movement was receiving, not only in our own situation, but from all over the world. It had become clear that this clash would finally end. The end by--what shall I say--the intensification of war would take place. And everyone realised--I am talking about now the leaders of the oppressed people, that they can't defeat us. If we are not able to defeat them, still they cannot defeat us. Therefore, something had to be done. I think the sanctions and international public opinion and then the intensification projected at home here by the armed struggle, these things put together brought about a new situation.

And the discussions really began while Botha was still in office.

Still in office.

And there is that famous, or at least famous with the media outside, thing about the invitation to Nelson to have tea with Botha?

For Nelson to meet Botha, yes. (*Mandela describes this tea with Botha in some detail in Long Walk To Freedom, p. 479-480).*

Were you able to meet with Mandela after each of his discussion sessions with government? How were you informed?

Not after each, but the effort was always made that when there was something new he would insist on meeting us. And we did meet him. When he was taken to Victor Verster, it was a prison but he was put in a special cottage on the prison grounds. He was able to call for us, sometimes all of us. Sometimes only one or two. So we were exchanging views, we were meeting.

But you were still in Pollsmoor after he'd been removed?

I was still in Pollsmoor until we were moved--that is, sent home.

But you were able to go where he was.

To Victor Verster.

Was there any feeling that he was giving too much ground in these discussions, that he was compromising?

The core of the leadership had no fears. They understood the position very well and they knew Mandela. So there was no question of doubt. But there were fears expressed by individuals, by people who are not yet fully matured in the struggle. Yes, these were taking place.

Was there any feeling about the fact that he was often making decisions without prior consultation?

Yes, there was also--there was also that feeling. There was that feeling, but I did not share that. I understood the situation very well.

How was he keeping in touch with Oliver on the outside?

Occasionally he wrote along the lines I have already explained. Communications were sent. Then at that time also he could use Winnie to communicate with Oliver.

Was there any feeling that the UDF might be in competition with the ANC at a later point in time?

No, no. In fact the idea for such an organisation came from ANC in exile, even though Oliver in his speech did not say so directly. And many of the leadership of UDF were ANC people who could not operate as ANC because it was banned. UDF helped to mobilise the people.

I got that other view only when I came out. Then there was the suggestion which was even shared, you see, by Albertina and others, that the UDF must be dissolved. I did not share that. I thought there was still big scope for UDF. Cultural activities under the wing of the UDF could be promoted. But there was a strong feeling outside here that it would be competing and therefore should be dissolved.

Also by 1979 there was recognition of the trade union movement. Steps were now being taken by the government that were an indication that the powers that be were not quite certain of the situation and thought there was a need to do something about it--about the trade unions. We had been urging this on them for years. At last they accepted it. And it had a tremendous impact too and inspired the country to new heights.

You are thinking in particular about the formation of COSATU (The Congress of South African Trade Unions)?

Yes, the formation of COSATU. But I'm now talking about the recognition of the trade unions which led to the formation of COSATU.

What was the reaction of other political prisoners who were with PAC or the Unity Movement or APDUSA about these developments that took place in the eighties--the formation of the UDF, the recognition and increased activity of the trade unions, COSATU?

I have no recollection of their comments or their reactions on this. This was happening with the influence--the leadership

of the ANC and it is something which they would hardly be wanting to talk about.

Let us go back to a question that relates to the communication between ANC in exile and the leadership that was in prison. Particularly at the time of the ANC Conference in Morogoro in 1969 when there was an important shift in policy. The ANC was opened up to white membership which it had not been before. Was this something that you who were in prison were consulted about? Did you know about it?

We knew about it. We were consulted. We knew about the conference and we were told about the general plan for the meeting in Morogoro.

This made it possible for Joe Slovo to be a member of ANC. Up to that point he had not been, had he?

Well, it made it possible for very many important personalities to be members, including Joe.

In his case particularly because he was so important in MK.

Yes, he was. He was, I think, already at this time, he was a chief commander. He did have great importance. And it meant really a change--a changed situation--something which was long overdue--to work together as members of one organisation.

Let's talk further about your release.

I think that the stage had been reached, the stage that they needed to release us had arrived. They were concerned really with the stages and the effect it was going to have. They had a distrust that I might just arouse the indignation of the people, public opinion, in a very delicate situation. This was not going to stop them altogether, but they had to rethink their plans. They were discussing this fully with Nelson, openly. They didn't say to him they are not going to release me now, but they expressed these fears. And I think they finally decided there was no point in releasing me alone. Rather let the release take place, which finally did take place, for all of us. I think that in examining the situation they thought it was the wisest thing to do.

What was the effect of the international campaign for the release of Mandela and the political prisoners?

Well, that is a very important question. The actual starting of the campaign began even before the trial in Pretoria. Kathy had been dealing with the release of Mandela from Robben Island, and this changed to the release of all political prisoners. This developed and became a big issue. It became one of the most important campaigns as time went on.

We had started it even before we were convicted, before we went to Robben Island. Kathy was with us, but he had already started the campaign for the release of Madiba and sometimes myself. It went like that, but it developed into an international campaign. We encouraged it.

When did you begin to feel that perhaps you would be released?

They were discussing the matter constantly with Madiba. I knew he was asking them to release me. So it wasn't something that came suddenly or accidentally. There was discussion on that. And I was not happy about being released alone without my colleagues, because I thought it would have more impact when we are released together.

The plan of the authorities was to release me at the suggestion of Nelson. As I already said, I was isolated for about three months in Pollsmoor, maybe even longer. Apparently a decision had been taken already and it was even brought to my attention that they were going to release me, but they couldn't make up their minds. They had discussed the matter with Nelson but they found difficulty in releasing me. They expected that I would be a cause of trouble when I go out. As I said, they even asked Nelson to talk to me about that. Will I not be causing trouble? Without that guarantee they had doubts. And they realised it was not an easy thing. It was impossible that I would go out and then not address the people. So they wanted a plan whereby I would commit myself not to be active. Steps were taken. I was isolated in preparation for the release.

Did the authorities discuss conditions of release with you? And did they raise the question of releasing you to the

Transkei?

No, they only discussed the conditions with Nelson. But the earlier question of the Transkei was a different matter. It was the initiative of Kaiser Mantanzima. He wanted to meet Nelson to discuss releasing him, Govan and myself. This happened first when we were still on Robben Island. We refused Mantanzima's initiative. Under his plan we would be released near his home and be given plots of land where we would live. This would be a recognition of Transkei as a Bantustan.

Several times, first Botha and then de Klerk, tried to set conditions for the release. These conditions were not, were never acceptable, not even deserving a serious consideration. So they had to find a more realistic way to handle the situation than their "pipe dreams" of conditions. One condition had to do with accepting the Transkei as a Bantustan. That was rejected.

Were there other conditions?

Yes. Renounce violence. Botha's initiative was to allow release if we would agree to give up the armed struggle. This was supposed to be a general concession for the release of prisoners. As I said before when we talked about some of this, some people from the PAC were released and Dennis Goldberg was released on this basis. I think I already explained we ourselves had no objection to Dennis accepting these conditions. We understood the situation the white comrades were in. It was different from ours. We Africans were solidified by being together. We did not think that his acceptance was a betrayal. However when we were finally released, it was unconditional. They put that now as a general condition for all, asking people, not only us now, but all people to renounce violence. They had tried the stance of the Transkei which was also the ambition of Mantanzima, so now they tried to ask the entire people to renounce violence. The government put that as a general condition for all. It was a last resort as to how they were going to handle the situation. They had done all these things. Bantustans had collapsed. They realized they had to find more realistic methods of normalising the situation. The intellectuals, the professionals and the business people among the Afrikaners were also busy discussing these matters. You will remember that various delegations throughout the country went to Lusaka to discuss the situation with the ANC in exile. So a period, an open period for re-examining the situation was now taking place, and Botha had to fit in.

And the younger Afrikaners were worried about the economic conditions and the effect of external pressures on these conditions.

Yes, that's right. They knew that the question of the pressures on the economy would affect them. After all, they were now the controllers--the captains of industry.

Perhaps this is a good place to raise the question of the effectiveness of the armed struggle as far as the changes taking place in South Africa are concerned.

I doubt if change would have taken place at the speed and in the manner in which it did if we did not have the armed struggle. Armed struggle was the only effective way of bringing about a change in South Africa. The events showed it. Our people were dedicated and determined to see that change would take place. Without an armed struggle they would have had great difficulties in carrying on. Certainly the time had gone for passive resistance and nonviolence. But we don't say that the struggle must be carried on only by violent means. Both armed struggle and nonviolent political action are effective when they are combined. I think that the establishment of MK had a tremendous effect that was needed in South Africa. It brought about an important change in the situation.

How important was external leadership?

We had capable leaders in exile--men like Oliver Tambo, Joe Slovo, J.B.Marks, Moses Kotane, Yusuf Dadoo--outstanding leaders of the Movement. They guided the Movement along in proper ways. They were informed both on questions of practical politics and theory. I don't know if I am exaggerating or not, but if you read history books you find the question of exile, the importance of people in exile. I mean, take the period of Lenin himself. They were six. These were men of ability. It was Lenin. It was Trotsky. It was Plekhanov--men of ability, but the situation was difficult. And what I am trying to illustrate here is the importance of the leadership given by our men in exile. Thousands of people were there. But what is more amazing was that in the leadership, once you exercise leadership,

you don't have uniformity, you don't influence everybody the same way. But Oliver did just that. Everybody felt even when he came back, at a time when they should have been frustrated, they still had confidence in Oliver as a man of standing, as a leader of caliber.

What I am trying to say is that the type of leadership that we had abroad, the type of work they did to keep together thousands of people, thousands of people even in the armed struggle where you get a lot of frustration, they managed it. This again emphasises not only the armed struggle itself, but the type of leadership we had there to conduct the struggle, and the revolution.

I think that people sometimes don't realise what a great revolution ours is. I talk about our revolution. It is one of the greatest, simply because they did not surrender in the field. People often think that it is something that is achieved on the battlefield or you are given freedom on a platter. It is not. The retreat on the enemy side was because we exercised leadership in able men. No petty competitions. That is what armed struggle meant. It was a combination of armed struggle and the political struggle which was carried on at home. We have to pay tribute to the people who conducted the struggle at home under very difficult conditions. You've got now two sides to the Movement--the armed struggle led from exile and the political struggle at home. Priests and all kinds of religious groups came in, and it is that which brought about the change. In South Africa.

At the beginning, the armed struggle was not very successful. The attempted invasion through Rhodesia led by Chris Hani, a joint action of ANC and ZAPU. Was that as early as 1967?

Yes, that did not work very well. The starting of that was a bit--it showed us badly, there had been a premature beginning at the time. There was that but it was not the end. It was the beginning of what was to come.

The problem was that it started in Tanzania and Zambia which were far removed from South Africa.

I think they were already in Lusaka, not Tanzania. They were already in Lusaka when they crossed, you see. That section of our people were already in Lusaka.

They had difficulties, but more or less they crossed. They arrived in South Africa, some of them, in spite of all those difficulties.

But as you say, it had to be a combination of armed struggle and political action. Much of the action inside the country was based on boycotts and -

Boycotts and strikes.

Strikes?

Yes, and that was not by accident. It was by proper planning that there should be a combination of these, they should interact with one another.

And I must say that the Morogoro Conference had a tremendous impact on the whole question of Southern Africa and revolution. It had a combined effect. It was planned and the leadership was given. Criticism was accepted and they determined the methods that were to be followed. We pay tribute to the leadership in exile. We pay tribute to them with their outstanding qualities of leadership.

SISULU RELEASE

And now de Klerk became President and you were released. All these events led up to that. How were you notified that you were going to be released and when?

I don't think I received any notification, but Madiba was told and it was through him that we knew.

So on release what happened to you?

We went first to Victor Verster by arrangement. We were there and we met with Nelson and he explained what the situation was. We then turned back to Pollsmoor and we slept there to prepare for the following day.

Can you describe your leaving prison, going from prison to your release into freedom after 26 years?

Yes, well I have no words to describe that situation. It was -- It was exciting, yet as I think back it wasn't as exciting as all that, but it was an exciting situation.

Did the group of you simply walk out the door of the prison onto the street?

No, you see we were expecting to be released in Cape Town that next day. We were not released that day. We went to Johannesburg jail.

Number four?

No. It was Diepkloof. We went there before we were actually released. And then we were told by the commanding officer, "You will be released tomorrow." That is now the (*October*) fifteenth. We then prepared ourselves for that. We were not put together, you know, those who go to Orlando and those who go somewhere else. But we were prepared for that now. We already had the idea what it is going to mean. I found out that at home, people had been squatting for a day or two before, waiting for my release, and there was great excitement.

Let us understand as clearly as we can. You had been taken from Cape Town to Johannesburg?

To the Diepkloof jail.

You were flown?

Flown, yes.

Did you know what was going to happen?

No, we didn't know. We were just transported, as I say.

From Pollsmoor?

Yes, as I was saying, we were then told. We were expecting that from Cape Town, we would land at the airport or if we are taken to jail, we'll be released from there, only to find that we were not going to be released that day. We didn't know what was going to happen. Then finally after that the commanding officer said you will be released tomorrow, on a Sunday, I think it was.

(The actual sequence of events was that the announcement of impending release was made by TV, which they heard at Victor Verster, on Tuesday, the 10th of October. They were flown to Johannesburg on Friday, the 13th. They spent two nights in Diepkloof and were released on Sunday, the 15th.)

How many of you?

We had already parted with Raymond. It was Mlangeni, Motsoaledi, Mkwaiyi, myself and Kathy. And I think it was about five, five of us.

The five of you were released all at the same time in Johannesburg? As a group? What time was it when you actually started to leave?

It was early in the morning, about five or six. We were taken home by the police, not as a group. I had my own transport. Others had their own transport.

Was anybody there to meet you?

At the prison? No. Nobody, because they did not know. They were expecting us at home. That is all. They knew we were going to be released, but not when. They were expecting us to be released already several days before. Albertina, Cyril Ramaphosa, Jay Naidoo and others were at Victor Verster for a meeting with Nelson. They went to Cape Town for the meeting, not for release. It was there they were told that a statement was going to be made that night (*October 10th*) about the release of these comrades.

Nevertheless, there were people gathered when you were brought home several days later?

It was packed -- at six in the morning. It was as if it is a meeting, a rally. They were singing, dancing, doing all sorts of things. The word had gotten out this was where the released prisoners were going to come. They were waiting. They were expecting us long before that date. So that date they had slept there, waiting for the release of the prisoners. The same day we conducted a press conference. We arranged for a meeting. We addressed a meeting in Holy Cross, the Anglican Church across from my home, declaring our position that, although the ANC was still illegal, we are now operating as ANC. That statement we made. And then a decision was taken to organise a rally which was held a few days, perhaps a week or ten days later at the FNB Stadium.

But when I first got home there was a community welcome. It lasted the rest of the day and even the following day there was still the same spirit. People came singing and all that. There was jubilation.

The whole family was there?

All except Max and Lindi. You see, Max and Lindi had been in exile, so they were waiting for their own turn to come back. They were not yet at home, but I was there at home.

So you had a tremendous family welcome at your home.

At my home and in the streets, more than a family welcome. A community welcome. I was excited to be back home, to be with my family again, and when I was asked about what changes I noticed, I said I was particularly impressed by the tremendous politicisation of the people, particularly the youth. It was beyond my expectation, that excited me.

As I said, we held a press conference the same day, the 15th, and then some days later on October 29 there was a very big rally at the FNB Stadium outside the township. It was a tremendous affair, 80,000 or more. The stadium was full. It was over-filled. Could have been 100,000. I was the main speaker at the rally. There were others. I don't remember who else spoke except Cyril Ramaphosa and Jay Naidoo, but I was the main speaker.

The ANC was still banned.

Yes, but we started operating. We made an announcement then that we are now operating as ANC, but it wasn't really in defiance. We were merely describing the situation as we saw it.

What activities were you immediately drawn into?

Well, we went to Lusaka about two weeks after my release. I went especially to meet our people in exile and to meet the leaders of the Front Line States who had been supporting us. To say thank you to them. It was most of all a kind of welcome back. Preparations were being made at this time for elections in Namibia and the leaders of Namibia were also there, including Sam Nujoma, president of SWAPO. And I think that all the Front Line States were represented by their presidents. It was at this time too, I think, that I was appointed interim leader of ANC.

Before you went to Lusaka, were you involved in activities on the ground here after your release?

Yes, we were being briefed, having discussions, having meetings, so we were, to that extent, preparing.

Did you have any contact with Mandela after your release?

No, I don't think so. Not directly. He was still in prison. We were in Johannesburg; he was in Cape Town. I did not

have direct contact, but he was very much involved. He was informed of the changes that were taking place. He was informed of a new committee set-up. He was informed of all these things and more. Although cut off because we were here, he was not cut off from the leadership as such.

INKATHA AND BUTHELEZI

Was Inkatha active at that time?

Yes, Inkatha formed its own organisation much earlier (1975). I should mention that the Zulu King sent a message that he wanted to see me. It was one of the missions, one of the things I had to discuss with my colleagues in exile. The King wanted to meet with me and I was quite interested in meeting him. This was a situation in which Buthelezi could not be left out. We got a mandate that we should make arrangements to meet the King. The only alteration we made was that we did not want to meet the King at Ulundi, because Ulundi was the political headquarters of Buthelezi, and it was the so-called capital of the Bantustan. I am not sure that we were right in refusing to meet the King there. The point I wanted to make is that we wanted to meet the King, but we wanted to meet him at the Great Place, Nongoma, the home of the King. We didn't mind Buthelezi being there and supervising whatever he did. As long as it was held at Nongoma we would have been happy. We were authorised by the Executive to try to get the views of the people of Natal, which we did.

We went with a team from here, including Albertina and others, to Natal for a week, addressing the people, telling them what our plans were, telling them we'd like to meet the King and were anxious to respond to the King's request.

Before we knew where we were, Buthelezi had already indicated his opposition to our telling the King where he should meet with us. And I was told later by one of the King's brothers or an uncle, one of the Princes, that they felt insulted by what I did. I had no right or reason to tell the King where to meet me. On the other hand, the people of the country were not expecting me to go and meet the King at Ulundi. I wanted to meet the King as the King. But sometimes I think these days that we might have gained much by meeting him, even in Ulundi, because that issue spoiled the whole atmosphere of a possible meeting with the King.

When Madiba came out, that question was still being debated. He tried to intervene to say this was not Walter's decision. It is the organisation which takes this decision. Don't look at the matter on a personal level. And he was still persuading them that they should allow the meeting to take place. Events were fast taking place and the situation became even more confused because there was now Madiba. He wanted also to take part in this. He was keen to go and lay stones on the graves of the Zulu kings in Natal. This was the beginning of hostility. I think I will not go into the details of that at this time. *(At the time of our interviews with Walter, Inkatha, headed by Buthelezi, was in opposition to ANC, although Buthelezi was serving in the cabinet of the Government of National Unity. The rewriting of the Interim Constitution was in progress).*

Would you say though that the failure of arranging this visit was not so much a personal insult to the King as it was a measure of Buthelezi's attempt to control the situation?

Yes, he really thought it dangerous coming in the midst of the whole battle he was fighting about the King, that it was going to separate him from the King, even though we and the King made it clear that Buthelezi was welcome. But the very fact that we seemed to be dictating terms and saying we will meet the King at his own Palace was an insult to Buthelezi, he thought. He wanted to exert his own influence.

MANDELA'S RELEASE

Did you have any information at all that de Klerk was going to make the speech he did on February 2nd?

No, I had no idea whatsoever about that speech. It came as a surprise to the extent that I did not know about it. In any event, though, I expected, we all expected something like that to take place sooner or later.

Did Mandela have any feeling that this would happen?

Well, we were so busy that it was difficult to be exchanging views and asking questions. I think he was more informed than

I was on the situation because, you see, he had established contact with the authorities, the highest authorities, even though he was in prison. So I think he was more informed than I was on this situation. Still, I don't know whether he expected this to happen now.

So the Botha presidency came to an end. I believe that we discussed previously some aspects of why that happened, but do you have any further comments about why the Botha presidency fell and de Klerk came in?

Well, I don't know if I can be accurate in commenting on that. You must remember that Botha himself came in from the Ministry of Defence in a kind of palace coup. He immediately began to construct a police, military, security state on all levels with himself as the Executive President. He pushed the civilian members of his own party aside from the decision making process, including his own cabinet. He was creating a fascist-like military security state. *(Described in greater and more specific detail in Shore, Herbert, "Southern Africa: A Dream Deferred" and "South Africa: Apartheid's Waning and Dangerous Years", African Studies Institute, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Australia, 1989.)*

My impression was that the time of Botha was ending in any event. His cabinet and the members of his own party, especially in the Transvaal, were in rebellion against this military/security takeover. Botha was unhappy that he was to be succeeded by de Klerk. But de Klerk was clever. He mobilised the cabinet itself and the party membership, and succeeded in winning the cabinet as a whole in his favor. I think that is one thing that Botha regretted and it made him bitter because he was ending his period on a dark note as it were.

But did you have any impression at all that de Klerk would take such dramatic action when he became President?

No, I don't think he was ever regarded really as progressive himself by anyone. He would, I thought, take perhaps a middle course within the Afrikaner group. But for myself, in that period he impressed me as having a certain amount of insight and ability and he was clever. I was in favor of him coming into the limelight rather than Botha. I have always regarded Botha as a dangerous and thoroughgoing reactionary compared with de Klerk. But remember de Klerk himself was born in the politics of the Afrikaner. His father was a cabinet minister, and he was never really regarded by anyone as being progressive. Perhaps at best you could say he was in the middle of the road.

Did you--any of you--have any premonition that he would come out with a speech like that on February 2nd?

No, no, although when you think about it, it was inevitable. It was a changing situation and as the head of government he had to say something. It was inevitable that he would have to deliver a speech of that nature at some time.

And you did expect at least that he would continue a process of discussion which had already begun under Botha?

Oh yes, I did expect that he would advance that course because he was now committed to that. He had used the argument himself to say that Botha was also committed to reform. The differences were differences of approach, but fundamentally they were agreed on the question of reform.

Did you or any other members of ANC have the opportunity for any discussion with de Klerk before he became president, before he took over from Botha?

No, I don't think so because I think that even Nelson would have had discussions only later. My first meeting with de Klerk was at the first of the negotiations, the very beginning. He was there and I was there. I was impressed with the beginning of the negotiations. I thought it was a tremendous affair and I thought there was good will on both sides at that stage. Nelson had commented on de Klerk, saying that he was a man of integrity. This was not quite acceptable to many of our people. I thought that at the time, Madiba meant it. He had sized up de Klerk and had come to the conclusion that he was a man of integrity. Madiba meant it when he said that. People sometimes wanted to know why he changed later. He became disappointed with de Klerk's maneuvers because, although they were willing for negotiations, they still wanted to remain in power. They wanted to control and dominate the process of change itself. They wanted terms to favor them. The discussions had to be discussions that favored them. They still had ideas that they could maintain power in one way or another and that they could control the process of negotiations.

Where were you when the speech was made on February 2nd? Did you hear it? Were you watching it on television? And what reaction did you have at the time?

I don't think I was watching it or even hearing it. Just read it in the press. And my reaction? Well, nothing surprised me in the speech, you see. It is a speech that I thought in any event was--was inevitable. He had to make a speech along those lines. The situation had reached a point whereby preparations for negotiations had to start.

If he had not made a speech like that what might have been the alternatives? If he had not taken that step what might have happened?

I'm not sure what would have happened, but he was the leader of the government and he had to move forward. He could not avoid it. The government was already committed, not only the Nationalist Party, but I think that the Afrikaner intellectuals and the business people particularly were committed to change. I think they pioneered the ideas of change from that side.

Had they expected a speech like that?

Well, they expected a change. A change, you know, had to be introduced. A change they were expecting and a change could only be introduced in the form of a speech such as that one.

And a week later, de Klerk made the announcement that Mandela would be released.

Yes, our release was already a pointer to the release of Mandela. It also was inevitable at this stage. He had to be released.

Where were you when he was released?

I was in Cape Town. We went there to greet him. I can't remember the exact date, but we knew he was going to be released on that particular day (*February 11th*), and we made, therefore, preparations. The government itself had to prepare for the release of Nelson because the view among the whites was that the release of Nelson would lead to bloodshed. But that was not the case. It was peaceful. A tremendous mobilisation of the people. Tremendous crowds in Cape Town.

I was there at Victor Verster. Whether I was in the gates or not, I was at the entrance and I was there. I was there, you see, with Albertina. That night there was a huge rally in the center of Cape Town. He had to address that. I'm not sure if I also addressed the crowd, but I was there. It was a great moment, very great indeed. Exciting, exciting and remarkable discipline was shown.

TOWARD TRANSITION

And sometime after this you met de Klerk, as you mentioned?

Yes. We met at the first talks about negotiations. It was in Cape Town at what they call Groote Schuur, not the hospital with that name, but the government property (*the residence of the first colonial governors.*)

What kind of meeting was it?

Negotiations meeting. To set up the negotiations. You had the government side and the ANC side. An equal number of people from each side participated there. The ANC side, Nelson was there, I was there. And there were Joe Slovo, Alfred Nzo, Thabo Mbeki, Ahmed Kathrada, Joe Modise, Cheryl Carolus, Ruth Mompati, Archie Gumede and Beyers Naude. (*Actually Walter had difficulty remembering all who were present. The source for these names is The Long Walk To Freedom, P. 504.*)

You said at one point this was the best part of the discussions as far as your relations with de Klerk were concerned. Did you have a feeling that this is a guy I can talk to?

Yes. Yes. I had a feeling that he would be able to conduct himself in a manner that will advance the transition.

What was he like? Was he relaxed at this time? Was he amiable? Did he seem to be open?

Well, he's the type of man in whom you really don't easily detect relaxation. There is an intensity about him, unlike some of the cabinet ministers who were completely relaxed. But he fit himself into the picture very well.

Comments at the end both from Nelson and de Klerk were particularly impressive. And I think that both made a statement that there was no question of who wins. The idea was that it must be a victory for the people of South Africa. This was the attitude displayed through the negotiations. And this was the first meeting when there was face to face contact with official representation from the ANC and official representation from the government.

What happened next?

Next was to have the leading people selected, you see, to work now for the transition. We had selected people to carry on and take the discussions to that level. People like Thabo Mbeki, like Cyril Ramaphosa and Moosa Valli. They were the people to continue the work. But it was more than Executive Committee members. We had specialists within the country, like Arthur Chaskalson. These were persons already chosen to prepare the discussions on transition.

Wasn't there a conflict right at the beginning in which the National Party attempted to indicate who could or could not participate from the ANC?

Yes. Yes, they did. For instance there was the question of the Communists, Joe Slovo in particular, a prominent leader there. They said he would not be welcomed. There was that effort to undermine the question of representation. On the other hand, we were not prepared to be told in a situation like this who to appoint and who not to appoint. So they saw from the firm attitude of the leader and the firm attitude of the organisation, that there was no way they could win that battle if they were to go on with the process. It had to be accepted that we are working with the Communists. They have been part and parcel of the Movement.

Then there was the period when there were talks about an all-party convention or conference.

Yes, CODESA, the Convention For A Democratic South Africa, came out of that.

Were you in on any of these discussions?

No, the only discussions I entered were the initial discussions which started the process. And the President himself was not in all. He was in some of them.

At what point did the idea of a Patriotic Front arise? What was the relationship of ANC and PAC at this time?

There had been discussions in both the ANC and PAC, and the OAU was particularly keen on this issue. We, ourselves, were interested in having discussions of this nature, and it finally led to a conference of ANC and PAC. In fact, AZAPO (*Azanian People's Organisation*) was included but they withdrew because they could not agree that people who had participated in the Bantustans should be included. We had indicated right from the beginning that the Front should include everybody. You are creating a united front, let people come along. So on these grounds, at the end, when it actually took place, AZAPO was not there. I was presiding at the conference on the Patriotic Front. It went very well from both sides. PAC was showing cooperation, and all the people who participated made it a success. A Patriotic Front was formed, but without AZAPO. We still did work with the PAC and with others. It was formed.

How long did it last?

It didn't last long. There were hitches. At one stage these became very hot and it is that which determined it. There were difficulties. The PAC was so keen to see that it worked that they were in the forefront in excluding AZAPO. Unity between PAC and AZAPO did not really come up. In that sense we were closer to PAC than AZAPO and PAC were to each other. AZAPO had no clear understanding of politics and the very idea of a Patriotic Front was beginning to create hostility in them and this was used as an excuse, and they were discussing whether this was a sell-out. PAC at first resisted, but PAC had the advantage of being part of Africa and part of discussions of the OAU. This was not the

case with AZAPO. But later it affected the PAC too because of weak leadership and lack of clarity on the part of the leadership.

Many groups participated in CODESA and in the Conference on the Patriotic Front. Up to about 27 groups, and that included some of the trade unions in COSATU.

Could you comment also on your view at this time and the view of the other leaders in ANC about the emergence of Inkatha during this period?

The emergence of Inkatha worried us even before we left prison. I think at the beginning there was no one more favourably disposed to Buthelezi than Madiba. Madiba had been a member of a royal house. There was a warmth between the two of them. Before he left jail Madiba had written a letter to Buthelezi, a warm letter in which he was urging that the two of them, Oliver and Buthelezi, should meet and discuss things. He was worried about the apparent conflict and he was urging that. That is, just a few months before he left jail there was this letter.

Well then, dealing with the process of negotiations and the setting up of CODESA there were a number of things that threatened these discussions. The ANC walked out at one point, is that not correct?

Yes, that is correct, and the issue was the attitude of the Nationalist Party. It appeared that the Nationalist Party was maneuvering to dominate the talks.

And it also had to do, did it not, with the violence that was taking place in the townships, and there was a certain tie-in with Inkatha there.

The violence started I think in 1982. Again here one may not be quite accurate about the dates. Buthelezi had resented people coming in to canvas the Zulus, what he looked upon as his sphere. He considered the sphere of Natal his. I remember this even before I came out of jail that he had made a statement I won't be able to quote exactly what it was, but he was implying that this was his sphere. So that the violence, you see, began really with that. We ourselves, when we came out of jail, had to meet with members of Inkatha to discuss the question of violence. We discussed with leaders--not Buthelezi himself, but other leaders--Mdlalose and Dhlomo.

The Third Force comes into the analysis of the situation and to the causes of the violence. We were satisfied that the government was not acting to end violence or prevent violence, as it were, but was helping to keep it going. Our analysis came to the conclusion that whilst the Nationalist Party was committed to negotiations, they wanted these negotiations in terms of their own interests. And it is at this stage that we laid the charge that there was a "third force", tied to government itself, committed to violence. We charged that the government was not in any way acting to prevent or combat violence. This therefore, you know, affected the negotiations seriously. Their purpose was to divide the people. The Nationalists must appear to be the champions of the majority at the expense of the ANC.

The press in several parts of the world came up with evidence that there had been payments from government and governmental agencies, including the security forces, to Inkatha.

It finally led to the exposure of payments to Inkatha. The ploy of the government and Inkatha was that this was done, yes, not to advance Inkatha as such, but in order to champion the cause of democracy in the country. And that Inkatha believed in peace, so that this was going to bring about greater peace.

At this point can you speak about the attack on Shell House. Was that an Inkatha affair?

That was much later in the period of the negotiations than we were just talking about. Inkatha decided to hold a meeting, a rally, a protest meeting against the ANC. ANC indicated to the police that this was a dangerous move. The police must be on the alert and the police must prevent it. But it did take place. I was in the building itself. I was here and Cyril Ramaphosa, Thabo Mbeki and others. We were in the building. The fear now of our leadership was that a meeting held so very near Shell House would erupt into Shell House itself. The point about that protest, it was not only where it was held in central Johannesburg. It had started even in Soweto. The clashes began to take place there. So the attack on Shell House was not really the beginning of violence. Violence was already taking place as a result of Inkatha's demonstrations, not only this one in the center of town.

What happened at Shell House?

Well, we asked the police to intervene, to try and prevent this thing. The police were unable to prevent it. The next thing was that there was shooting. Now I am not quite sure as to the authority for the shooting. Madiba puts it that he gave instructions on that, but the point was that its intention was to defend Shell House. Whoever gave instructions and however he did it, the intention was to prevent Shell House from being attacked. There was a route which Inkatha should have taken. To come near Shell House in this way was already a provocation. You would not expect the leadership to be quiet on that situation.

And there was a feeling that there was about to be an attack, an armed attack, on Shell House itself?

That's the thing. That Shell House and the people in Shell House were in danger from this protest march that was not even taking the route it was supposed to take, but was coming nearer. The shooting actually took place in the immediate vicinity of Shell House, when these people were not supposed to come here. They were supposed to take other roads.

At what point in the negotiation process did this take place? Where are we in the process of negotiations when they--?

In the midst of it, in the midst of the negotiations. Negotiations were going on. You will remember that at one time negotiations were not going well and we decided to pull out. Thereafter we held discussions with the Nationalist Party, and there was an agreement on the process which was to be followed, which Inkatha resented because it was an agreement between the Nationalist Party and ourselves. We had been protesting against the Nationalist Party.

So the discussions continued.

The discussions continued. Terms were set, terms of what should be discussed. That is what this meeting was about. Our demand was that we must have specific discussions on specific issues and agree on them. And it is that agreement which unfolded--the discussions and the procedures.

I think the Nationalists were faced with a dilemma. They wanted to maintain power in some way. That was in conflict with the other parties, the ANC in particular. ANC wanted genuine discussions, genuine negotiations leading up to the majority leading the country. And an agreement was arrived at, a definite agreement of what lines of discussion we should follow. It bound both the ANC and the National Party. The only thing that would lead to successful negotiations was an agreement on those terms. After that things moved smoothly.

So the ANC had the support of the other participants to the terms which it laid down?

No, no. We never agreed with Inkatha. Sometimes Inkatha did not agree with the National Party. The right wingers, their parties could not agree on things. We could sometimes get support from the trade unions and the Democratic Party. But what finally emerged was the interim constitution. It was the result of the successful negotiations that took place.

That paved the way finally for the elections. The adoption of an interim constitution led to preparations for the election itself.

ELECTIONS

What can you say at this point about the campaign that ran up to the election?

It fascinated me. I was excited by the behavior of the people. I was in the township electioneering and worrying. We were all worried about the talk of civil war. We were very much concerned that Nat tricks could come up with something like that. But in the field this was not the position. The remarkable thing that happened there which makes our revolution one of the greatest was the fact that while there was tension throughout the country and many powerful forces were talking about civil war, on the days of the election the masses of the people were determined only on one thing, to make their cross, to make the election a success. They started early in the morning, five o'clock.

They were patient, they tolerated even the weakness and the mistakes that emerged. It was a remarkable moment I can never forget. A situation which I am unable to describe properly, where the masses gave us all the leadership in an amazing way, by determining that all we want is the election. This day must go freely.

Where did you vote?

I was in Soweto.

What kind of line waiting to vote was there--were there a lot of people in lines?

O yes, a lot of lines, lots of people. Albertina and I were there the whole day. We had been there even before in campaigning. We did a great deal of work in the area there, even before the date of the election. By April 26th we were ready. Our machinery was ready.

What problems came up in the campaigning, in the registration of voters and things of that sort? What sort of problems did you find?

Well, you know there was no voters' roll. And you had shortage of papers, even the ballot papers themselves. They had to be borrowed from somewhere. And other things which were required for the election. And the country had to conduct a vast education campaign on the process of voting. How to vote. Most people had never voted before in their lives. They did not know how.

And I should mention the remarkable way that the campaign was conducted. You would have been surprised to listen to the people, ordinary people doing the job of educating.

And they knew much more about elections. They trained and they held workshops. And the people voted and it went smoothly for several days.

And when the results came out, they were satisfactory for you?

Very exciting results came out. Very exciting results. The results were that the ANC led the majority in the country.

ANC came very close to winning two-thirds of the votes. Would it have been better if they had won two thirds or was it better this way?

No, I think we wanted two-thirds, so I think it would have been better if we had succeeded. But we won a sufficient majority. I think it was 62%.

This is what I had been working for all of these years, my comrades and me. My whole life was geared toward this. I was working for the day when we would be able to rule the country as a majority party. That is what I had been working for..

And now?

I sometimes feel that my enthusiasm is too--what you call it--I am unable to see that the people truly appreciate what stage we have reached in our struggle. We have not sufficiently educated people to appreciate what a great stage we have reached in our lives.

In retrospect are you surprised that there wasn't a violent revolution in South Africa to bring about this change, as over against ending all these years of conflict and struggle in an election?

When we talk of election, I think I myself described it as a miracle. I don't exactly know what a miracle is, but I describe it as a miracle of the 20th century. Because of the forces that were at work, the danger point had not been reached until that day, you see.

So many people wrote about the fact that the South African conflict would end in some great Armageddon. A conflict -- a destructive one.

That's right, everybody thought of it, and of course we shared that. That there was going to be bloodshed, that the dangers were great of a civil war. or something like that. I think that one of our great strategies was the attention we paid to the right wing. Because when you talk of civil war, the people who were in a position to conduct a dangerous war were the right wingers and they had their followers in the security forces and the army. Our discussions, I think we carried on discussions for six months, no nine months, with the right wing, where you got differences of opinion even in our top leadership. "What do you hope to get with these people? Are you ever going to give them what they want?" But the core of our leadership believed it was necessary to carry on these negotiations, these discussions, all the time. I think we were right. I think it was that strategy that really prevented the situation from deteriorating.

That is why I describe it as a great revolution, because it had all these elements. The nature of the struggle itself and the fact that we prevented the actual bloody conflict in that way. And as I said earlier, right from the beginning we had a clear vision of where we were going. The question of nonviolence and violence must be examined from the point of view of the objectives that we were going to achieve. Some people never believed. They thought, for instance, we were going on with the negotiations. Even among the leadership, you had some people who thought, well, where have you seen freedom given on a silver platter? There are those people who failed to examine the concrete conditions in which we were operating. They were in fact giving credit to de Klerk and the rest. It was the struggle and the strategies that were applied both in exile and at home that brought about the change. It was not something we were not expecting. We were expecting that the culmination of all these things must bring the victory.

When we speak of the right wing we're talking about the AWB, the Freedom Front, the Conservative Party. Did they participate in the election?

The Freedom Front participated. Came in at the last moment. And this was the most important because it had a number of generals attached to it. In fact it was led by General Viljoen and therefore we attached significance to it. The Conservative Party did not participate, and the AWB. They did not participate, but they were less important than the Freedom Front.

Do you think there is any threat at the present time from the organised right wing?

No, I don't think so. We have a unity of leadership almost unheard of anywhere in any part of the world. Despite differences in ideology, we are united. We have worked, you see, with the Communists, with the labour movement and with others for years to reach the position which we have. It's that type of unity which we have carried on over the years. It brought about a matured leadership, and I thought I should mention that.

Let's talk a little more about the possibility of a right wing threat. After all one of their aims is the setting up of a separate state for Afrikaners. There had been discussions that took place?

Yes. Well, I myself think that the time has passed when the right wing could be a real danger. We have played our cards well on this issue and at times we can discuss and work with the right wing better than with the Nationalists. They no longer have ideas of themselves coming in to power. Whereas the National Party is aiming at some key position of taking the government. They still entertain those ideas. Now, the right wing is strong compared with all other elements. It may not be strong in numbers against the National Party, but it is powerful and the quality of its leadership is high. But I think the danger of the right wing revolting and doing something that could undermine us is not there.

Do you think they will participate in future elections, local as well as national?

Yes, I certainly think so. The Conservative Party is likely this time to participate. They did not participate in the last election, but this time they are likely to. The Afrikaner now begins to see the situation more clearly. That old phase has passed. You are not going to bring it back. Perhaps that is why they are insisting on some sort of, what do you call it, an Afrikaner state, a Volkstaat. They want to be settled. They have no other home. South Africa is their home. They know that now the ANC is the majority and it is not likely to be reduced in significance. Therefore they must find their way of working in such a manner that they themselves will have some peace. I think that that is how they are beginning to think, even though they toy with the idea of an Afrikaner Volkstaat. But I don't think this will be a serious issue in the time to come.

But the military elements of the right wing tried to support Mangope in Bophuthatswana and Buthelezi, what about that?

Well, you see there was a time just before the election when right wingers, black and white, came together. You had the Mangopes, you had Buthelezi, you had Gqozo, all coming together. But by the time of the election, that had already disappeared. The only thing that worries me is the reorganisation of the Zulus on the basis of tribalism. That is my biggest worry. I know that you deal with a sensitive question, the question of tribalism. We had mastered that view when Seme called for unity of African people, to forget about Sotho, Zulu, Xhosa. Over the years this has had a deep impression on the people. We were advanced on this question. But with the emergence of an emphasis on Zuluism, we are unfortunately reversed back to that position. That disturbs me a great deal. The Movement is powerful enough to deal with that situation, but it is nonetheless a very difficult and dangerous situation.

This is something that both ANC and the government will have to have a position and a policy on. I think the ANC in particular has a grave responsibility of dealing with this situation. We have to bring together the more progressive elements within the government, but it is an ANC responsibility more than anybody else. That is why the alliance of the ANC, the Communist Party and the Trade Unions is very vital. It has seen us through. It must see us through this. It is very vital. I get disturbed when I see all types of elements here coming up with demands. Some demands are reasonable and justified, but some of the methods they are using endangers the very existence of democracy.

The Government of National Unity is working, but it can't go beyond 1999. After that the majority party will have to lead. I have sufficient confidence in the leadership of the ANC that it will be able to work with other elements even though we haven't got a Government of National Unity any longer. It will find a basis of working with other elements. So there will be a leadership by the majority.

What about the danger of an Inkatha breakaway?

Sometimes I think we exaggerate the Inkatha breakaway. Buthelezi has been very effective in what he's been doing. We still have to find a way.

Is there a change in Zulu tribalism?

In spite of what I said earlier, I think it is no longer such a threat. I think the situation is changing. I think the participation of Inkatha in government is having a great effect. Buthelezi is not a fool. What I am trying to say is that he knows that really we have the country in our hands and he has to take that into consideration in whatever he does. The establishment of the ANC killed the roots of tribalism. I thought that tribalism could disrupt us and it can do a lot of harm, but I have never contemplated the success of tribalism. It is a matter of concern, but cannot win the victory.

Why have you not taken a position in the government or in Parliament?

The position is this that by the time that became a possibility, I'd already indicated my line. I wasn't going to be active. I was going to retire and not occupy any position. If I wasn't going to occupy a position with the ANC, even less would I take a post in the government. My age is such that I must take it into account.

We have achieved something great, and within that situation I can work in a manner that will benefit both the movement and myself. And that is to take it easy and not to take on jobs that are beyond my capacity. Here I have documents just sitting here, documents one after another. I can't analyse them even. And then my participation in discussions is not as I would like it to be.

Yet you come to the office every day?

Well, I have written to the Secretary General to say I'm not retiring in the ordinary sense of the word, to go and sit next to the kraal. I'm going to continue to do my work where I'm still able to. The President has called upon me to form a very important committee which consists of some of our leading people like Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Steve Tshwete to deal with a situation in the Eastern Cape. I am chairman of that committee. And there are other things.

People come from England, from Holland, or Switzerland, from various parts of the world and they want to know the situation in the country. They come to this office. They may have already seen the President, but they still want to come here to see me.

By the way, where we are is the office of the Deputy President (*of the ANC*) and I'm using the office because Thabo (*Mbeki*) is busy in various departments. In fact, this is his office.

But you were the Deputy President and this was your office then?

This was the Deputy President's office and I still live in it.

So your position of semi-retirement is not really retirement. You're still active?

Very active. Sometimes, if you take the last few months, I find that I have been more active than even when I was Deputy President.

So you feel your task will be essentially to be called upon by government or by ANC to carry out various assignments?

I don't know about government, but I know the ANC will call upon me to do certain things.

When the President called upon you to head this committee on the Eastern Cape, was that in his capacity as head of ANC or of the government?

I think as President of ANC. You see, we are dealing with a situation of violence there. There are patches of the Eastern Cape that have got a problem. The creation of new sub-divisions in the provinces make these problems. Let me give you an example as it related to a different area with a similar problem. One day a number of people, about 35, came to see me. They were coming because there were demarcations, new divisions in Eastern Transvaal, and Gauteng. And people who had originally been in the Eastern Transvaal, or in Gauteng, with realignments, would be in a different province. They came to me, not asking me to exercise my duties as a former ANC leader, but simply because they know me. They came to put their grievances. This question was to have been settled by a referendum, but that was now being ruled out. They felt that they were members of ANC in Gauteng, not Eastern Transvaal. Their livelihood was in Gauteng. They work with people in Gauteng. To put them in Eastern Transvaal would even deprive them of their livelihood.

After discussion with them, I said that I was a loyal member of the ANC and whatever I did must be in accordance with the Constitution and practise of the ANC. But I was not prevented from listening to their grievances and that I would use my influence where I could. I rang Valli Moosa, who was the Deputy Minister dealing with this department. Valli has worked with me and knows me very well and he felt obliged to look at the situation. They have more or less settled the problem. My intervention there relieved the feeling of desperation. They felt they were being heard. That happened in many cases.

This is the type of thing I can deal with.

Can you comment on the process of reconciliation which is being talked about so much in South Africa now?

You are touching on something that is in my heart. The question of uniting the people of South Africa is now the greatest task that faces us. We dare not fail that. Our success in that is a global success. We become an inspiration to any other country that may be faced with a similar situation. I consider my next task is that task of doing everything possible to bring about a united South Africa. The problems that exist in South Africa now are as complex as they were before. To deal with those problems is not a small thing. I am proud of the part played by the President. I've got great confidence in him. When he decides to tackle an issue, he does it with all his heart, gives it undivided attention. And he is going to succeed. Nelson has never needed the support of the leadership as he does now.

Think of all the years that you and your family have been in prison, and faced so many difficulties. Do you, or members of your family have any bitterness? Do you want to get even with anyone?

No. Well, I doubt my family feels it, although I can't say they haven't. I think I have the support of the entire family. I've no bitterness. I don't think my wife has got bitterness. We both get angry about certain situations. But bitterness? No. Bitterness would be in conflict with the whole policy to which I have dedicated my life. Bitterness would result in trying to mobilise people for revenge. So bitterness has no room in me.

What do you mean by reconciliation? Is it just a black-white process?

I think it is something wider than that. You want even political differences to be reconciled and without people abandoning their own policies. The idea of driving the white man into the sea has passed long ago. No one must entertain an idea of racial and ethnic division. There is a great deal that can be done culturally, to unite the great cultures. In fact that is one of the most important things which I would do if I had a way of influencing people. Create this great culture, a culture of diversity, but united with a view to building the country. People who have been engaged in a struggle do not find it easy to abandon that. But they must engage in this task which is creative.

My understanding is that reconciliation depends on people accepting it. People are still worried about who killed Goniwe, who killed Calata, and why. If they get to know some of these things, not with an idea of revenge, the tension is lessened. And finally they accept the way of reconciliation. We renounce the idea of the Nuremburg trials. That time has passed. If people are assured of that, they will cooperate.

How would you go about setting up the structures for and the processes of reconciliation?

First, I think we should support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. That should be a starting point. The next things must be done in the field of the economy, culture, and education. Education is one of the most important things in our country. That's the field in which we should work -- not only to improve the quality of education, but to bring about an understanding of the situation in the country and how best to improve it.

XIV WALTER SISULU - REFLECTIONS

POLITICAL BELIEFS

Do you think of yourself as a Marxist?

Yes, certainly. By Marxism I don't mean necessarily becoming a member of the Communist Party. My whole development has been influenced by the ideas of Marxism. I sometimes think that utopianism is an effort to achieve humanism. And the ideas of Marxism are that of humanism. I'm leaving aside people who will practise cruelty whilst professing to believe in Marxism. But I say that the very origin of Marxism was to promote the ideas of humanism. That is not to say that blunders have not been made. I have been shaped by these ideas. After all, Marxists throughout the world have worked for liberation of oppressed people. And they have been the main contributors to this. And I see no reason why I should change my mind now.

How would you relate Marxism to the Freedom Charter?

I think in fact the Freedom Charter is influenced by those very ideas. The Freedom Charter is one of the greatest documents ever produced in Africa, not only in South Africa, but in all of Africa. A great deal of thinking went into that document and I think we looked at the world as a place everybody must feel comfortable to live in. No room for persecution or oppression. But only room for creation. For creativeness. Create a world without wars. A peaceful world.

How would you relate this to the role of the Bible, of Christianity and other religions in terms of ideals and what they stand for?

I have great respect for the great religions of the world. They may differ, but they have a common objective -- greater understanding, greater freedom for humanity. I myself developed through reading the Bible as a child. I began to understand things. I began to look at the world in a global sense. As a child I began to say where was Christ and why did he do what he did. Today I have gone beyond Christianity. I embrace religion as a whole.

Do you see any risk in the fact there is such adoration amongst people for Mandela that a kind of individualised personality figure will pervade this transformation?

No. I see no such danger. I think Mandela is a highly developed man. He understands precisely what his role should be. And therefore I have no fears. I have no fears that you will see a dictator arising from him. Perhaps one of my mistakes is to have too much confidence in man. I have so much confidence in the leadership that I believe they will prevent anybody developing ideas of dictatorship. I think we have suffered sufficiently never to think of oppressing anybody else, but creating a world in which people live in harmony. Even young people are being brought up in a situation whereby they must value democracy for its own sake. One can't rule out the danger of individuals developing other ideas. But I think the leadership is capable of preventing that.

Is there a contradiction between the ideals of the Freedom Charter and the reality of what one sees in South Africa today with a very few people who have so much of the wealth and the poverty of the great mass of people?

Well, the Freedom Charter did not visualise creating equality suddenly all over. The imbalances have been created over generations. To correct those imbalances will take time. Some may think that correcting imbalances may create communism. But it doesn't necessarily mean that. It's a process that will take place. Inequality is a reality which must be faced as a result of decades in an unequal society. To put that right, is not an easy task. That is what people should understand. It's a process. It's not a thing which you do overnight. And it's not what many whites think will be, that is that suddenly communists will take over. It's a process which we must carry out jointly as the people of South Africa, the builders of this country.

What do you see as the most important issue South Africa must face?

To struggle against racism is still our very important task. It's not an easy thing. There are suspicions growing out of

the past. Innocently you may want something to be done but what you say may be interpreted wrongly because you are white. Someone says : "He talks like that because he is a white man". Racialism is a process which is very difficult to beat. The most important thing you must destroy is the basis of racialism which still exists in this country.

What do you see as a great strength of South Africa?

The diversity of cultures. There is strength in this diversity which can bring about greater unity if properly utilised. It enriches our culture. A great culture can emerge and be an inspiration to the world.

Crime is a problem?

Well, you know, crime in South Africa is not an ordinary crime, like in England, for example. Various elements lead to it. The very fact that this country was dominated by fascist ideas of the Nationalists was the basis for the development of crime. When a man works, he is working for a white man. He doesn't work freely, trying to build the economy. He is not paid well and therefore to steal is a natural thing. And you know they say "umzebenzi womlungu awupheli" (*the work for the white man is never completed*). The white man will never be satisfied. The more you do, the more he wants you to do. So what I am saying is that the question of crime must not be looked at in isolation. It's part of a system. As you destroy the system, so you are going to undermine the development of criminal tendencies. You must create in the minds of the people the importance of being responsible and creative.

INFLUENCES

Who would you say are the people who had the most important influence on you throughout your life?

Well, I think Dyanti (Hlakula, my great uncle) had a great influence. I worshipped him. I can't think of any other person who had greater influence than he. He formed my character. However his influence on my ideas was little in the sense that he, himself, was linked to a colonialist outlook.

My teachers did have influence although I am unable to single out the teachers which did, except William Macozoma who influenced my life generally, and S. Ndaka, who was my teacher in standard four at All Saints. But I was influenced by the history I studied under the teachers. Now we had English reading material that gave us history in an unintended way because it separated us from our history. Stories were told about Shaka and Moshoeshoe. Exchanging views on this with boys in the school is something which influenced me. I see the Sothos rolling stones, fighting the whites and then the whites are defeated. (*The rolling of boulders was a method used in warfare.*) Same thing with Shaka. We regarded Shaka, contrary to the view of his cruelty, as a builder of a peoples' culture, peoples' life. He was known as a notoriously cruel and brutal man. That's not how we looked at him, particularly Moshesh, the battles of Lesotho, and the Zulus had tremendous influence. And Makana. The fascinating thing about Makana is his notifying the hotel keeper that they would be arriving at 8:00 o'clock tomorrow. That was the signal for the starting of the 1819 battle for Grahamstown. And Cetywayo (the Zulu King). He was the hero of the battle of Isandlwana. The Zulus won the battle against the British. This had tremendous influence.

Makana is a man called a witch doctor, the General Makana, the left handed, the leader. But books emphasise the question of witchcraft. We don't. We emphasise his ability to lead the army, to invade Grahamstown. That's how we look at Makana and that had an influence. We wanted to read more about Makana and his ability, his fighting, his strategy, the way he notified the hotel keeper at 8:00 o'clock I'll be with you for breakfast. (*This is an allusion to the message which Makana sent to Lieutenant-Colonel Willshire, who commanded the British forces at Grahamstown on the eve of the battle, that on the morrow he would "breakfast" with him. This was a critical battle which the British won by dint of superior weaponry, especially shrapnel shells. A more detailed account can be found in Noel Mostert, Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People, Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 1992.*)

How did you learn this? Was it through books or was it through discussions with your family, with teachers?

This comes from the books and discussion with the boys, at school, not formal discussion. Just exchanging views, the excitement in reading the stories with other boys. Then, because of all this, comes the influence of Wellington Butelezi. Wellington was to us a black American, whereas in actual fact, as we mentioned earlier, he was a Zulu. He

brought the philosophy of Marcus Garvey. He was preaching the power of the black man, how the black man is finally going to conquer the whites. I did not meet him myself, but his assistant, Twala.

Now Twala was also friendly to one of my relatives who was a teacher. They made an effort, during this period, to have separate schools from the missionary schools. So for a time we left school and went to my aunt's school. The intention was to build a separate independent school. These were the beginnings that influenced me.

But you will recollect that I said influence, political influence, came from scripture, from religion. Because scripture gave me a picture of the world. I could see the world in which these people lived. We were told that Israel, Jerusalem, to us was in heaven. You crossed the Jordan to go to heaven, not in this world. So that teaching of scripture had a tremendous impact on me. I could have an idea about every one of the prophets. People like Joseph, like Moses, like Joshua, and like the story of Jesus Christ himself -- the type of life they lived, the bravery of Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego. These were the men who courageously defied and even walked in the fire. That's how brave they were - tremendous impression. Before I had a systematic learning, these were the events that influenced me.

Did this come from going to church?

Yes, we went to church regularly and particularly in my situation, where I was living. The story and the way you interpreted it in church was a matter of pride to my relatives. It was my duty to go to church and come back and relate what happened there. It did not have to be religious, just natural about how someone did this or that. But this influenced me. This was the beginning of my development. I told you I would go to Red Mountain, not necessarily because I was looking after cattle and livestock. At such a time I would look at the world and imagine these events taking place somewhere. That's how my politics began to develop.

I linked this all up with other people, with Wellington. And then I was to meet Clements Kadalie, Richard Godlo, Walter Rubusana -- these were the people who began to influence me. And particularly when I was in East London, that is 1930 and '31. For some reason I wanted to go to East London. My mother had been there and my uncle had also been there. So one day I decided to go there to look for work. I came across one of my relatives and I stayed with him. I was employed by a garage owner, not in the garage, but as a domestic servant. I was doing quite a lot of reading at the time. I had made up my mind that I wanted to learn more. I listened and I attended meetings. This was the beginning of my politics.

What kind of reading were you doing at this time?

I was reading history. It fascinated me. Especially African history because what I was keen to learn about was the battles, the wars, colonial wars, great admiration for people like Maqoma, a Xhosa chief, because he was a great general. So I was linking now my meetings with the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) and Clements Kadalie, a very powerful speaker and a man who spoke with confidence. Just to give you an example, in later years when we were discussing the Programme of Action, he said: "Unless the government of this country knows that I, Clements Kadalie, am behind this programme, there will be no move". That is how confident he was. And then he would say that "I'm a man of all trades. I can do anything. . . ." Very impressive to a young man because this man is confident. There's nothing he can't do. Then, in addition, you hear stories about the strikes led by him. I arrived in East London looking for a job. They say go to Kadalie, just as they say today, go to Mandela. Every Sunday I attended his meetings. There was Walter Rubusana, a known politician found in books of history, a founder of the ANC. And Richard Godlo, a member of the Native Representative Council from its inception in 1937, a very sophisticated speaker. These are people who influenced me.

When did you become aware that you were among the oppressed?

When I learned about Garvey from Wellington and Twala. I was then aware that the white man was oppressing us. And I began resenting any teachings at my home about loyalty to whites. I didn't like loyalty. I despised the fact that I must respect the white man just because he was white.

Did you look upon the white man as the enemy?

Later on I regarded the white man as an enemy, from the reading of history. I am not talking about history books as such which you study in Standard 4 and so on. I'm talking about dribs and drabs which you see in English reading. You come across stories that built up in me a hostility, especially the murder of Hintsa, the King of the Xhosas. I regarded that as brutality of the highest order. Here they take the King and then he escapes and then they shoot him. The story created a feeling of hostility in my mind.

Whilst in East London, I read this book *Up From Slavery*, by Booker T. Washington. My interest in that book was different from some of the events that influenced me. I was interested in Washington because he is poor. He's got only one shirt, one trouser and so on. He's got to wash that trouser for the following day. It was an interesting story on how he was determined to go on improving himself, developing himself, determined to go ahead with what he wanted to do. That influenced me. There was nothing political in this, but I had great interest. I used to read this book at home. It had an influence to be ready, to be determined, to be neat, to wash every night if possible. It was one of the first books that interested me, to see how other people grow up and develop.

How about W.E.B. Dubois?

He influenced me. I read some of his books, and read about him. Booker T. Washington was a different kind of influence, not so much political, but cultural. The chap was poor, but was able to maintain himself. Even my mother developed a term to say "Booker T. Washington", meaning you have only one suit, one trouser, one shirt, one this or that.

In Johannesburg, after leaving Premier Biscuits, I came to the *Bantu World* for a temporary job. I met the man who was the editor. Very impressive, very good in discussing things and fearless. No white man was bigger than him. I liked that. This was a man who was not dominated by anybody. He does what he likes. Not a "yes man". His demeanor impressed me. This was Selope Thema, the former Secretary General of the ANC. But we were to part ways when I was Secretary General and he formed an Africanist organization, the ANC National-Minded Bloc. I felt very painful about that. But he had an influence on me.

Then I think I told you about the grandsons of Hintsa, Xhosa Paramount Chief, who had a great influence on me. It was 1938 that I was appointed the secretary of the Orlando Brotherly Society. I worked with the Mdingi brothers, three of them, on social and cultural things. I parted with Herbert, as I said earlier, because we had agreed to oppose the war and I found him in civil defence uniform. I was very disappointed. Just to show how important Mdingi was to me, I thought my wedding would not be complete without Herbert saying something. So I invited him to be one of the speakers. He didn't show up because we had parted ways. As I said, this was mostly a social relationship, semi-political around the Orlando Brotherly Society. Because of Mdingi, I was also interested in sports, particularly rugby. I was chairman of the supporter's club. I never really played rugby. I was so enthusiastic about rugby around the mines, where we had games every week, I used to go. That again was the influence of Mdingi who also was a top leader of the cricket team.

What about your relationship with Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo?

I knew Nelson before I knew Oliver. As I already have said, I came across Nelson when he came to my office in 1941. I said right from the beginning when he came, I was inspired. And I had plans for him. Here is the man I am looking for. Because I had taken so much interest, he stayed with me for some time. Later without my knowledge, he was to fall in love with my cousin, Evelyn, who had been studying in Orlando and staying with me. All of this brought the friendship closer. It got to the position whereby we could hardly sleep without meeting each other, talking, discussing various things whether it was the chiefs or a common interest in education. That's how my relationship developed with Nelson.

Nelson was involved in my relationship with James Mpanza. Mpanza was never looked upon as a politician, but he was interested in civic affairs and bound to be political in that sense. My politics began with the Civic Association. I met many people, like Paul Mosaka and others. In the Civic Association when we were canvassing for Association elections in 1944, Mpanza came to me and said he wanted to ask people to occupy that land across there and take it over. At first I thought it was a crazy idea. Indeed that very week he told the people to occupy the City Council's land. That was the beginning, as far as I know, of the squatter's movement. Later he asked Nelson and me to prepare a motion to be put to a meeting at the Orlando Communal Hall with the aim of asking residents to kick out their

sub-tenants so that they would become squatters on this land on a particular day. We were not the authors of the scheme. We were merely the instruments of Mpanza and he was taking advantage of Nelson being a lawyer in drafting a resolution. This was Mpanza's leadership and it is sometimes ignored because he was not a leader of the ANC and so on. He was on a different level, but he has done a tremendous amount of work in that field. He was a pioneer in the informal settlements, the squatters movement.

And what about Oliver Tambo?

Now about Oliver Tambo, I met him in the circles of the Youth League even before the official formation of the League. Oliver was elected the Secretary and our friendship starts from there. He was my co-officer and in any event at this stage I have got considerable influence in the Youth League. The Movement really pushed me. I had an office and people came to see me, arranging functions to raise funds. Now Oliver took an interest in me and he became a regular visitor to my home. And by coincidence he and my mother were both members of the Anglican church. So he would come and sleep there, spend the weekend and then go to church with my mother. I took a great interest in Oliver in the same way I did with Nelson and our relationship was firm. And he is a man I admired. Very artistic in the way he addresses a meeting. And, like taking a snake by the tail, Oliver will just fascinate you the way he does it. Oliver was now a friend of the family, friend of my mother, friend of my wife, my sister too. My sister was a teacher, like Oliver, so there was that in common too.

I am not sure to what extent I had influence in Oliver going abroad after Sharpeville. I know I had Oliver in mind and also J. N. Singh. Singh did not accept my proposal. Oliver was a teacher at St. Peter's school. He was a musician and I was fascinated by music. This very fact led me to St. Peter's because there was singing. My friendship with Oliver developed with this.

Oliver was articulated as a lawyer. I don't think I proposed the article for him. But he was articulated by Tugh and Kramer who joined Kawalski, my lawyer. You remember that Kawalski was one of the speakers at my wedding. For politics, for music, for social relationship, I was influenced by Oliver.

The friendship between Oliver and Nelson started at Fort Hare. That friendship developed from political aspirations to legal aspirations. While Oliver was in exile, Nelson was very keen to continue the relationship by writing. Nelson also made use of Oliver's wife to convey messages abroad. But we had that friendship with Oliver in the Youth League, in ideas and styles of work, we were identical.

Did you always agree with one another?

One issue had to do with whether we should work with the Communists. We had meetings of the Executive of the Transvaal ANC. We took a vote there. I took the line to work with the Communists, whereas Lembede, Madiba and others did not. That meeting was to decide the issue. I'm not sure whether we beat them. There's nothing wrong, I thought, working with the Communists. They are working for the liberation movement. According to my cousin, Nelson said I will never speak to Walter again. But that wasn't to be so.. Our friendship has never ended.

What about all the years on Robben Island?

During those years, the man who was in touch with Oliver was Nelson. Whether it was a private matter or not, he communicated with Oliver. On the question of negotiations, for instance, he discussed this through methods already mentioned with Oliver. And I should have mentioned earlier how Nelson and Oliver worked together here in Africa. They played a very important part in what was later to become the Organisation of African Unity. They had worked together politically at Fort Hare where they were both expelled. They were law partners. I became involved because Nelson discussed almost everything with me.

Do you still at this time have a very good consultative relationship with Nelson?

Yes, of course, definitely. Definitely because over these years we developed so much confidence in each other. He knows what my line of thinking is on a particular issue. I likewise do know his line of thinking. So nothing would have changed. I am today convinced that he is playing a tremendous part in the new government and in the building of a new Africa. Now he's a chap, when he's convinced, he's got the ability to push his point of view. He can defend

his point of view. And I think mistakes will occur with Nelson only because he becomes angry. And sometimes he does become that. But on the political line, he's all right. Same thing with Oliver. I have so much confidence in Oliver that I know once he has taken a particular line, I have no hesitation. And so when we went into any battle, we went as a real team. Nobody ever doubted the other.

Others who influenced?

One can't really count all the people I have been influenced by. I had great admiration for Moses Kotane. Great confidence and trust in him. I had confidence in JB Marks on a particular level. He was a very lovely person, but not in the same sense as Moses Kotane. Moses was a thinker and in a way, a theoretician. JB was a man of the masses, warm, great influence on the people.

Dr. Xuma, who happens to have been in the family, his family was known to me as a boy. I was to meet him now as a doctor, and when he became a leader of the ANC, I admired his leadership. I think he was one of the best Presidents. Neither left nor conservative. But a man of ability. I thought I should mention something of these three people with their influence.

Among outstanding African personalities, I was especially influenced by Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah, and Nnamdi Azikiwe.

Michael Harmel was an outstanding political individual. I worked with him as a creative thinker. He was militant as a Communist, a dedicated Communist, but was constructive. Many of my friends might not agree, but this is my view of him.

Rusty Bernstein and Hilda, I have such regard for them. I believe a chap like Rusty never says a word out of the way. He is such an impressive character, a creator. How I admired that couple.

Bram Fischer, wonderful demeanor. Created an impression in the leadership. We all loved Bram. He came from a high class family of the Afrikaners. His boldness cannot be really properly measured -- boldness, daring and dedication. His father was a judge and also his grandfather. But this chap went and worked with the common people. I haven't got words to describe my feeling.

COMMENTS ON OTHER INDIVIDUALS

Can you say something about a few other people who were prominent in one way or another? For example, Dr. Yusuf Dadoo whom you have mentioned a number of times.

I should comment on Yusuf Dadoo because he was a very dynamic individual. He was dedicated, and when he came back from university in Europe, he threw himself heart and soul into the struggle. His main concern was to promote non-racialism. We can't talk about non-racialism without thinking of people like Dadoo. And he was so impressive a person that, in spite of South Africa using the issue of Communism to divide and undermine the Movement, the Indian people accepted, without reservation, Dadoo's leadership. As a matter of fact he was a very practical man. What he wanted and was concerned about, was for the struggle to proceed along practical lines. You will remember he played an important part in the Defiance Campaign, and in other events right up to the time he went into exile. So, he is a person who was so much a part of the struggle from the beginning. And Dadoo came from an aristocratic family. His father was a big business man. He took a line that broke him away from his family, because he believed in Communism. He operated in the struggle on the basis of a Marxist ideology. His leadership in the Indian Congress inspired me. He was not just an Indian leader, but a leader for all, as Kadalie, for example.

Would you place Dr. Dadoo, in his thinking and leadership, on the same level as Moses Kotane?

Dr. Dadoo is in that class. But Dr. Dadoo himself regarded Moses as his mentor. He highly respected Moses.

Would you comment on Trevor Huddleston?

Now the Anglican Church, even before Huddleston, was liberal and therefore more sympathetic to the black man. Prominent members of the Anglican Church in the Rand were members of what was called the Joint Council of Europeans and Natives. I'm not necessarily giving the exact name. I think this was formed in 1921 following the visit by James Aggrey. The basis of this Council was the famous quote from Aggrey who talked about playing on both the white and the black keys of the piano. The point I am making is that many Anglicans were prominent in that. By the time Huddleston came along, we already had Rev. Michael Scott who was even more militant in his language and action. (*Scott was expelled from South Africa in 1951.*) He was an Anglican. Nearly every Archbishop would condemn repressive measures. Now Huddleston comes to South Africa in 1943 and throws himself right into the struggle, especially he came out at the time of the Sophiatown removal. This showed that Huddleston was naturally a good man and concerned with what was happening. I already mentioned how Huddleston jumped in to intervene when the police tried to arrest Nelson and me at a protest meeting against the removal just after our ban had expired. "You can't arrest them", he said.

He went into exile from South Africa in 1956 when he was recalled to England by his Community of the Resurrection and later became an Archbishop in Tanzania. He kept in contact with us and when he went to England he became a leader of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. To show in what respect he was held, he was one of the first to receive the *Isitwalandwe Award* from the ANC. This name comes from a traditional rare bird whose feathers were given. Originally these feathers were given to heroes. So Father Huddleston was regarded as a hero and was given this same award at the Congress of the People along with Dr. Dadoo and Chief Luthuli. This award is given to highly honoured people in the movement. We, all of us in the Rivonia trial, were awarded the *Isitwalandwe*. What I'm trying to show is that this award was an indication in what high esteem Huddleston was held. (*More detail on Huddleston may be found in his book, Naught For Your Comfort, published in 1958.*)

You've mentioned several times the importance of the Defence And Aid Fund, especially in connection with the Treason Trial. Can you say something about Bishop Ambrose Reeves? He was the Anglican priest at the Johannesburg Cathedral and was chairman of the Defence And Aid Fund, was he not?

Ya, he was the chairman of the Defence And Aid Fund. I had contact with him. I was an Anglican and he was our bishop. But what I thought was happening was that in the process of this situation in South Africa, he was learning more and more and becoming even more courageous. By the time he left the country, he was now like a freedom fighter.

When did Canon John Collins come into the picture? He had his D&A Fund in London.

Collins first came to South Africa in 1954. By the way, when he came here it's important to note what he says. There is the question of Communism, people were angry about Communism. When Collins was here there were some interesting meetings. He said at one, "I'm not surprised people become Communists. If I were a South African in this situation I would have been a Communist." The man who was saying that was a moderate, a British moderate in outlook. But that is how he looked at the situation.

It's important, you see, to take note of that because people do not quite understand the situation that we have, an alliance with the Communists. They were the only whites who would stand up, who joined the liberation movement, who supported openly even more than the liberals would do, and therefore that created confidence on the part of the people.

You know a very interesting thing. One day I was having a party at my home. Not far from my home is a police sergeant, a black police sergeant. He came to me and said, "I'm also a Communist", you see. Because the belief on the part of the police was that anybody who fights for freedom is a Communist and therefore he's proud of being a Communist. "I'm also a Communist", he says to me. That is how people looked at it.

By the wording in the Suppression of Communism Act you didn't have to be a member of the Communist Party?

No. You didn't have to be a member of the Communist Party. Your protest against oppression was sufficient to make you a Communist and therefore that brings in everybody. Anybody who fights for freedom is a Communist.

What are your thoughts about Chief Luthuli?

Chief Luthuli was a very outstanding personality. As a man who worked with him, I had the highest regard for him. Right through this period, the leadership of the ANC had no hesitation in endorsing the views and the general behaviour of Chief Luthuli. He was a devout Christian, but not a narrow-minded man. He was broad. He was a man who accepted the great religions of the world. Luthuli was a man of integrity, great integrity, a man of dedication who played a very important part in the struggle.

Chief Luthuli was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in December 1961. Of what importance was this to the movement and what was the reaction of the apartheid regime?

There was not quite a clear reaction as to the effect and importance of this award. There was no excitement at the moment. I think the fact that the government authorities were hostile made those in the Movement appreciative of the award. It was later developments that made the Nobel Peace Prize very important.

There were criticisms of the ANC due to the fact that Umkonto we Sizwe went into action on the eve of the Noble Peace Prize ceremony indicating to some people that we were critical of Luthuli. That was far from the truth. The two historical events just happened to coincide. But it was not directed against the Chief. There was no doubt about Chief Luthuli, his integrity and his leadership. And therefore we stood behind him when he was awarded the Peace Prize. Although, as I said, there was not excitement at the time, that would appear later. But we respected the award precisely because it was given to Chief Luthuli.

During the period of his Presidency, you were Secretary General of the ANC. Although you were in the Transvaal and he in Natal, did you have a lot of contact with him?

We met regularly. It was my function to keep the President informed of activities and events and political trends. I had to go to Groutville regularly. It became even more compulsory when he was banned and I was not banned. You will also realise that even when I was no longer officially Secretary General, I continued to do my work and therefore was often the suitable man to keep in touch with Chief.

He gave good advice. As I said earlier, during the Defiance Campaign, he had doubts about the Indians. When that question was cleared up, he worked very well with men like Ismail Meer and JN Singh and others. He was a man who, once he had gained confidence, there was no doubt about his support. Nothing then would disturb him. That was the position particularly with Moses Kotane who I think he believed in even more than he believed in some of the rest of us. The confidence he had in Moses was amazing, to say the least. *(Although Kotane was a member of the Communist Party.)*

Would you comment on Professor Z.K. Matthews?

Professor Matthews shone particularly in the Native Representative Council. He was an intellectual of high standing and a man who could analyse the situation. Very cautious. Sometimes he was not liked by others because of his caution. Criticisms from the Youth League were directed more toward Prof. Matthews than anybody else. Prof. Matthews was able to handle the situation. He never really made an enemy, but people in the Youth League were cautious about anything done by him. But I think all this was buried when he came up with the idea of the Congress of the People. He brought in something that was accepted throughout the country without reservation, right and left. His brother-in-law, Dr. Bokwe, was also liked and active in the movement. He was Treasurer of the Cape Congress and Prof. Matthews became the President.

Perhaps more than any other people, I worked with his son, Joe. He took a great interest in me and he was very helpful to me. Even when I was preparing my report for the year *(for the annual ANC conference)*, I would get some tips from Joe. He would write to me and make suggestions, suggestions sometimes even criticising his father. Joe was a brilliant man. His analysis is generally profound. I don't know now as I can no longer say the same thing. That used to be the position. It was, I think, a disappointment to many when he made a statement giving the impression that he was accepting the Bantustans. Knowing him as I do, I didn't think so. It's easy to say that he was already preparing for the stage in which he now is. But he is a brilliant young man.

(The statement that Sisulu refers to is a newspaper interview Matthews gave in April 1976 when he was in Botswana. He criticised the ANC for going too far to the left. He said the ANC "is not and should not be identified with socialism and communism. The ANC is a national movement, fighting to obtain freedom for all Black people." [from an interview with J.H.P. Serfontein in the Sunday Times of April 18, 1976.] He was expelled from the SACP, which he had joined in 1957, later in 1976. He was in exile for thirty years until his return to South Africa in 1991 and became chief executive officer for the Inkatha Freedom Party and Deputy Minister in the Ministry of National Security and Safety.)

Can you comment on two women who were very important in the struggle -- Lilian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph?

Those two women played a very important part in the national struggle for freedom. They were leaders in the march of 20,000 women to Pretoria in 1956. They had good qualities of leadership. They were dedicated. They did everything to improve the organisation of women. Lilian was even on the National Executive of the ANC. She was a fearless lady.

Helen Joseph was equally dedicated. And her position was very impressive. She was in the Congress of Democrats which had been characterised as Communist. Now Helen was a devout Christian. Nothing to do with communism. But she was never intimidated by the talk that branded the organisation. She had confidence in her colleagues and she was determined to go on with the fight. She made a tremendous impact in the country.

Helen and Lilian are buried together in one grave. *(Helen and Joe Slovo were the only two white people buried in Soweto.)* They were both involved in the Treason Trial and later discharged. They were persons who had a particular role to play. You think of them when you think of the fact that today women are playing a dynamic part throughout the world in the struggle for democracy and dignity.

Could you talk about Joe Slovo ?

I was more in touch with Joe Slovo's wife, Ruth First. She was editor of the journal that took different names at different times. It was her duty to see me at least at the end of every week to collect news for the paper. As such we had constant discussion. We began to have a better understanding of one another, but we quarreled at times.

Now later I had contact with Joe Slovo when he was an advocate. I used to visit their home and sometimes slept there after we had meetings. Joe was quite a brilliant man, steady in his approach and very jolly too. Not talkative. His wife was quite sharp. She was a tiger. Not so with Joe. Their relationship would be the same. They would quarrel sharply and Ruth would win the day. Joe was a brilliant and creative man. He liked to discuss his ideas and to develop them. And we got used to Joe because, unlike some others, he was part of the youth movement. The brilliance of Ruth was also important. She took the initiative in such things as urging the Youth League to take part in the international youth movement. I already discussed how Victor Mboob was our delegate to the 1947 Festival of the World Federation of Democratic Youth. There were quarrels with Ruth in the Youth League, yet the Youth League decided to send a delegation to the international conference in Prague.

Joe was one of the finest leaders that the organisation has produced. It was a pleasure to listen to him discuss his point of view, not emotionally, but analytically and quite determined too. During the period of the negotiations, Joe Slovo played a very important part. I should mention that whereas you might expect him to reflect extreme militancy, he did not want to shine. Often his statements were greeted with applause. He is the one who made the motion to suspend the armed struggle. He piloted through the sunset clauses. When a person backs a position which is known to be unpopular, you know there is something to him. He was like that. He was bound to play an important part in the Government of National Unity. His whole concern was to see to it that we achieved what we had been fighting for.

I think it is fair to observe that Joe must have surprised the Nationalist leadership. He was not the type of Communist you would expect to get their trust. He would discuss logically, reasonably the position and was prepared to make compromises. I learned much more about Joe and his method of discussion during the negotiations.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Do you remember moments in your life when unfortunate or dangerous things were happening and you had

doubts about yourself or moments of fear?

Well, yes, fears I would have; doubts, I don't remember. You see, I have what you might call super optimism. That's what guides me. I have great fears. The period of the banning of the ANC did create a lot of fears. What is likely to happen, I asked myself. And especially now and then after arrests, I had great fears.

But you never had moments of self-doubt? Or of your ability to deal with your own fears?

No, I don't remember that.

Did you have moments of personal fear because you were in danger? For example, how did you face the fact that you expected to get the death penalty in the Rivonia trial?

I was going to use that very event to show people who in the future would face this, not to be afraid. In fact I was thinking I must go to the gallows singing to show that I do not fear death. This final culmination will be the liberation of the movement. So this event would be something I would use. Right from the beginning when they arrested me, I was committed to use this moment to advance the movement, not to retract.

Were you ever tortured when you were in prison? There are some terrible stories from some of your comrades who were in prison.

No, I was not tortured. You see the problem the authorities faced was that they feared the public. We were a team of tried politicians. It was not easy for them. They feared even to torture us. I don't think any of our men, that is the top leadership of the Movement, were tortured. The only type of torture was mental torture. You are moved from here to there and from this to that without notice. That has a bad effect on you. You want to settle in a cell. But in jail they would say *kom jong*, "come take your things."

One day, the 28th of May, 1971, I think, when we were in Robben Island, the warders raided our cells about 7:00 or 7:30 p.m. I was not feeling well. I was feverish. I had fears then. They came in and told me to put my hands up, to hold the wall. I thought, well, this may be my last moment. I debated whether I should fight physically. I had already thought of a plan how I would do it. I thought that they are going to kick me the whole night and that I would develop pneumonia and die. I debated the question. Should I accept this that I should die like this or should I fight back? But I said, no, there is still a chance.

What makes you such a great optimist?

I don't know. I can't explain these things. I think my whole life, my whole upbringing, my whole thinking is this way. I'm positive, never negative. I have a firm belief in the future. When I took the position as Secretary General, I went all out and I knew I had taken a position in which I could not do otherwise. I must give a lead. I must see it through to a success. That was what was driving me. Everything I did from that point onwards, I did with that in mind. So I had no two ways, no two minds, just one mind.

Would you say that this is true of Nelson and Oliver too?

I think so. By the way, Nelson is even far more courageous than I am. He would do things which I thought, "no man, this is craziness." He would challenge at a very awkward time. He is determined, and he is going to fight for it even if ... no police, not anybody is going to stop him. So he is like that. He's got tremendous courage. In his case, I think he has super courage. Now Oliver is a man also who is confident in himself. He is well calculated in anything he does. It's well thought out. I don't think Nelson and myself are always like that. Oliver is systematic as if he has rehearsed his plan.

You have lived in your house in Soweto a long, long, time. Your situation has changed, but the place you have lived has not. Why?

Because I have a sentimental attachment to the house. It is in that house that I planned many things. It is that house where we have had many discussions. When I think where we have come from, well, it's not going to be easy from

me to move. It would be as if I was removing myself from nature. I say, no, I remain here. Now, I am not at all quarreling with those who have moved. It's a natural thing. It's correct that they should do so. They have been fighting for it. They have been fighting to live where they like. And it would be incorrect to criticise them because they now live in town. That is what they have been fighting for -- better houses, better accomodations. And there's nothing wrong with that. That's not the issue with me.

But if you wanted to, if you wanted to have a large house with lots of land around it so that you could develop a garden, you could do it?

Yes, of course I could do it. I could do it, but it would mean moving away from where I am. It is a choice and that is something the struggle is all about.

If you moved, would it mean you would be removed from the people?

No, I mix with the people wherever I am. If I move to Yeoville, it will be the same thing. So I have no problem.

You are married to your work, but do you do something for recreation?

I don't think so.

But you said at one point that you liked rugby?

That's many years ago, in the '30s. And in recent years I have not worried about rugby, or soccer, or cricket.

But you did attend the World Cup?

Yes, oh yes. I was excited about that. That was a new situation. That has made me take a greater interest in rugby. I have the idea that where we are in our development now, we must shift our emphasis to economics and cultural activities, and especially sports. As long as people are not actively involved in something, you are going to have a lot of trouble. And I'm even worried about the type of music now. Some of it is very unpleasant. During the days of Umkhonto, we wanted to kill the Boers. That may have been all right during those years. But it is no longer fitting at all. It's distasteful in our situation now. Now you are building unity of the people, not shooting them. The point I am making is that cultural activities must have a place in the new South Africa. The unifying effect is tremendous. And it gives people something to do. I am mentioning sports in particular because I think they have a greater following than anything else. I include music. I'm interested that the music of the past be maintained. What I'm trying to say is that people must be active one way or the other, building creatively. That's what we want.

It was said that during the Rugby World Cup , celebrations were the most unifying factor among the population since the elections?

Yes, I have no doubt about it. But I think it unified a particular section of the people. We want something that can unify everyone. For instance, soccer will unify Africans and blacks. Rugby unifies more whites, you see.

Was it not true that in Robben Island, some of the sports activities were a unifying factor in the relations of the ANC, PAC and other movements?

Yes, to a limited extent anyway.

Do you have any hobbies aside from your work?

Well, you know what my hobby was in Robben Island? It was Scrabble. I'm not even good in spelling. But at least I could win, you see. I could win the competition. Yes, scrabble and draughts were my game. My hobby really would be music. Yes, singing , and listening to music, whether it is classical, whether it is jazz, but music fascinates me. Do you see that photo over there (*Walter pointed to a picture on his office wall.*) That is Whitney Houston. I was talking with the American Ambassador, William Swing, about jail conditions and I explained that I liked Whitney's singing. He passed this on to Whitney who then sent me that photo. I liked Paul Robeson who used to

fascinate me.

What about rock and roll, do you like that?

All types of music, rock and roll, pop music, reggae too.

Is there a cultural institute or an institute for cultural research in South Africa?

I'm not aware of that. You know one of the things you must remember is that events have been so crowded, the negotiations and all the rest of it, that people have been taken away from anything else. Sometimes I think we should establish a think tank to keep track of what we are neglecting and not neglecting. I feel we of the leadership are failing to appreciate the great victory we have won in South Africa. I feel the mass of people have not been educated sufficiently. That's a key question today, to give a political education in such a manner to appreciate how great a victory it has been. The Executive members are so busy going from one meeting to another, they hardly have time to develop their own departments, to sit down and reflect. They need someone whose task is to watch developments who are professional observers to say that a dangerous situation is coming up. Guide us. This is the task of a think tank.

ASSESSING SISULU'S ROLE

Can we get some perspective on what your contribution to the struggle has been? You have played a key role in all that has happened certainly since the early '40s. For example, when the Youth League was being organised, what role did you have? Were you an organiser of it? Were you one of those who conceived of the idea and how did you relate to the others?

Well, once a motion was passed by the national conference that the time had come for us to give guidance to the youth of the country, I saw my position very clearly and I took initiative, together with Willie Nkomo and Lionel Majombozi. These were the ones who took the initiative in mobilising the youth. Many things were done, you know, in raising funds, organising, administration. I did all sorts of things to bring the youth movement into being until the provisional committee was set up. Again, we were the key people in it. That led, really, to the formation of the Youth League and to the inaugural meeting. Even after that, it was my duty to mobilise, to work, to raise funds as the treasurer. That I did, and I was satisfied that I was a driving force in the whole effort, together with my colleagues Nkomo and Majombozi.

Did you meet with them to decide who was going to do what?

Yes, yes, we did. At first the movement was unrelated to politics. We attempted to change this. I was in a position to mobilise the youth because the young man who was working with me had been one of the convenors. We tried to bring the youth along, but they were not ready to accept the direction. They were sort of the *tsotsi* type. So they thought they would not fit into the kind of thing we wanted. Then we sat down to discuss how we could bring in certain youth of influence. Now Nkomo and Majombozi knew the intellectuals at Fort Hare more than I did. They suggested various names. I was doing the organising work and the administration. Once someone was brought in they were introduced to the movement. Finally this led to the election, and the real formation of the Youth League. *(In our interview with Joe Matthews in February, 1997, in his office at his Ministry, he stressed that Walter's great strength was his organising on the ground.)*

I was elected Treasurer. I knew that this was a grave responsibility to see to it that the movement is born and moves. I had the support of the Provisional Committee first, and then the Executive. The Executive included in particular the President, Lembede, and the Secretary, which was Oliver Tambo. We were the key people. My office, the real estate office, was always convenient for them to come to. We worked harmoniously and we moved forward.

Beyond the Youth League itself, that is, in the development of the whole Movement from the Youth League onward to the present day, how would you describe your most important function, your role?

I think I have described earlier that when I was elected Secretary General there was nothing else I could think of in my life. I had a mission to do all I could to build up the Movement. Not only that, I was committed to mobilise and

organise a movement whose ultimate aim was to take power. I was clear about this.

I was the organiser. But I was also the administrator. I had to combine both functions in the work. In those early days, nobody was employed. No official was employed. Everything had to be done voluntarily. My office was used, although no rent was contributed, just using the office.

Take a specific campaign, such as the Defiance Campaign, by that time you were in the ANC office, were you not?

Yes, by 1949 I was in the ANC office. But the Programme of Action was discussed much earlier than that, which gave us the idea of how we were going to move.

How did you collaborate with others in the preparation of the Programme of Action? Were there joint meetings?

Yes, the Programme of Action was an idea of the Youth League. They were particularly concerned with it. They were enthusiastic about it. Later there was a common interest among the people who believed in militancy. The ANC Youth League and the Party worked closely together in shaping the final document, particularly men like Lembede (on earlier drafts), Mda, Nelson, Oliver and Ngubane who were not in the Party.

Were you also a strategist in planning the Defiance Campaign?

Well, I played an important part in this stage. We were now working with men like Yusuf Dadoo. He was very enthusiastic and very keen to push. He was a worker. So strategy is not one man's job. Strategy really at this time was shared with five key men -- Yusuf Dadoo, Yusuf Cachalia, JB Marks, myself, and although Dr. Moroka, the President of the ANC then, was not really involved in the strategy, it was necessary to bring him in.

When it came to the Congress of the People, did you have the same kind of role leading up to it?

Yes, particularly at the beginning. Once it was adopted by the Cape Province, as leaders we immediately pushed it to prepare for its being adopted at the ANC conference itself. Again, these key men already mentioned in planning the strategy, carried forward the plan jointly to see that no region is left untouched. We visited various regions of the country and chartered the way.

You sat in planning meetings with your comrades and after a course of action was agreed upon, it was your function to see that it was carried out. Is that the way it worked?

It was my duty to see to it, as Secretary General, that what we wanted to accomplish, we accomplished. Happily I did it with my colleagues.

Did you have friction at times?

Well, there was some friction because of unhappiness with the new leaders in Natal. That is with Luthuli, as I mentioned earlier. But in the course of discussion he accepted working out a genuine relationship between the South Africa Indian Congress and the ANC. It's very interesting that once Luthuli had come into leadership he was able to see the way clearly. He cooperated with all elements and became very useful. I must say the same thing about Nelson. Nelson is a wonderful worker. He may take his time to agree on something, but when he's accepted it, he works. He knows how to work, not only on paper, but actually meeting with people.

In persuading Chief Luthuli to agree to the action, did you play an important part?

I was part of the discussion, but I think Ismail Meer, in particular, and JN Singh mainly. They were the leaders of the Communist Party in Johannesburg. They were the leaders now in Natal, in the Indian Congress and they were concerned with Chief Luthuli. And I think they played a very important part in changing the situation.

Did you ever feel you were wasting time in your life by being in prison?

No, certainly I never did. I never did because I went to jail knowing precisely what my purpose is, my object. Never for a moment did I think it was a waste of time. I knew it had an effect, it was doing something. I mean, the way the authorities handled the prison situation, it was a problem for them more than a problem for us. You know that you are working for something -- the unity of the people, the leadership coming together. It is one of the finest moments, whatever the disadvantages, when we were able to be together and to make an impression.

What would you say has been your ambition in life?

Well, I think the struggle. I know no other thing that has really occupied my mind as the struggle has.

How would you try to sum up all we have been talking about? How would you like to be remembered by the people in the Movement, by the people of South Africa, in Africa and the outside world?

Well I would like to be remembered as a man dedicated to the struggle of the people. I think that is what I was. That is what I did. I would like to have reached a position whereby I inspired the youth to have greater ideals.

I feel we are entitled to say we have achieved a great revolution. I think rarely do you find people who have achieved a thing as we have. I described that moment of the 27th of April as a moment of a great revolution. We succeeded. Our objectives were achieved. I consider the South African revolution as one of the greatest. I'm not talking in terms of just conflict, you see, and about having won, you know. I'm talking about the type of things that were done, not about the armed struggle, or passive resistance, but the peaceful means of fighting one of the most dangerous things -- racialism. I think racialism is one of the most horrible things. Having succeeded in fighting that, we are now voting and we are having our government. This achievement is one of the greatest assets of South Africa. It is the beginning of something new.

EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF WALTER SISULU
(A Chronology)

- May 18, 1912 Born in Qutubeni, Transkei
1913 Baptised Anglican
Went to live in Cofimvaba with Aunt Agnes and great grandmother
- 1917 Met mother for the first time since separation.
1918 Returned to Qutubeni to live with mother in the household and under the influence of his uncle, Dyanti Hlakula
- 1919- 1927 Started school, Anglican Mission School, Standard 1 and 2. Continued Standard 2 at Manzane. Standard 3 and 4 at All Saints School.
- 1922 (approximate) First arrest -- for gathering sticks (for stick-fighting) in government forest
- 1927 To Johannesburg. Nine months work in a dairy in Germiston and then worked at the Rose Deep Mine as a stone crusher.
- 1929 Returned to Qutubeni for male initiation. Then back to Johannesburg to Rose Deep Mine to work underground, pay at 2 pounds a month.
- 1930 Left the mine, returned home and then went to East London where he was influenced by such leaders as Clements Kadalie, Walter Rubusana, and Richard Godlo. Was employed as a domestic by the owner of Barnes Garage.
- 1932 Back to Qutubeni
1933 Returned to Johannesburg to work in Premier Biscuits at 18 1/2 shillings per week. Lived in Doornfontein with mother and step-father.
Started night school at Bantu Men's Social Centre.
- 1934 Moved to Orlando East (to "grass house") with mother and step-father. Arrested on train for protesting maltreatment of a girl by the conductor. Spent week-end in jail, bailed out by mother with help from his natural father, A.V. Dickenson
- 1935 Organised strike at Premier Biscuits (demand for 21 shillings) and left job. Began work at *Bantu World Press* in advertising. Influenced by Selope Thema, editor.
- 1935-36 Employed in Herbert Evans paint company (a year or so), then at L. Suzman and Co. Pay at one pound ten a month.
- Employed at Union Bank of South Africa doing estate work. And then opened an office with Lipshitz. Met his natural father during this period on a financial matter since Dickenson was chairman of a building society.
- 1936-39 Secretary of the Orlando Brotherly Society. Active in the Civic Association. Influenced by Mdingi brothers. Parted with them on a civil defence issue as WWII began, which he opposed.

1940 Joined ANC. Membership two sh. and six p.
1941 Met Nelson Mandela and Albertina Nontsikelelo Thetiwe.
1942 Moved to home in Orlando West where he still lives. Resolution on creation of Youth League passed at ANC Conference. Alexandra bus boycott campaign. Squatters campaign led by Mpanza.
1943 William Nkomo, Lionel Majombozi, and Walter form provisionnal committee of Youth League.
1944 Youth League formally launched with Lembede President, Tambo, Secretary, and Sisulu, Treas. Walter and Albertina are married.
1946 Indian-led passive resistance campaign and the Mine Workers strike take place.
1947 Began framing the Programme of Action of Youth League.
1948 The National Party came to power with Malan as Prime Minister.
1949 Youth League delegation calls on Dr. Xuma about reforming ANC in line with Manifesto and Programme of Action. ANC adopts the Programme and Dr. Moroka elected President and Sisulu as Secretary -General.
1952 The Defiance Campaign
1953 Sisulu takes trip abroad for six months. Protests begin against the Western Areas Removal Scheme. Sisulu banned. Duma Nokwe becomes Secretary-General of ANC and Oliver Tambo, Deputy -President.
1955 Congress of the People. Adoption of the Freedom Charter. Sophiatown removal takes place.
1956 20,000 women march to Pretoria protesting passes for women.
1957 156 leaders arrested on the charge of treason including Walter. Sept. 11, preparatory examination completed in Treason Trial. Charges dropped against 61.
1958 In August the trial continued with 96 accused.
1959 Trial continued with 92 accused.
1960 March 21, Sharpeville Massacre, 69 killed in anti-pass demonstration, 180 wounded. State of Emergency following Sharpeville. ANC and PAC banned.
1961 March 29, the Treason Trial ends with the final 30 acquitted, including Walter. The All-In Conference held in Pietermaritzburg March 25-26. Walter arrested six times during the year, mostly for violating his ban and for membership in banned organisation.
1962 Sisulu given six year sentence, goes underground while on 20,000 Rand bail which is forfeited.

1963	July 11, arrests at Rivonia.
1964	June 12, Walter and six others found guilty of sabotage and given life sentences, flown to Robben Island prison.
1969	ANC conference in exile at Morogoro, Tanzania.
1976	Soweto uprising, June 16.
1979	Meeting of ANC delegation, headed by Oliver Tambo, with Chief Buthezi in London.
1982	Mandela, Sisulu and others removed from Robben Island to Pollsmoor prison on mainland.
1983	Founding of the United Democratic Front.
1989	Oct. 15, Walter Sisulu released from prison.
1990	Feb. 11, Mandela released.
1994	April 27, South Africa Freedom Day

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