

Document  
ZEPHANIA MOTHOPENG

*[We have been given the following document, together with an introductory account. When this was received there was no news of an impending release, although it was known that Mothopeng was grievously ill. Part of the document tells the story of Mothopeng's life, and we only regret that it is so short. However, there is much in the document with which we disagree, in its philosophy and outlook, in its political and economic perspectives, and other problems. But we print it, because Mothopeng has played his part in the South African struggle, and his account should be known. We have been told that other papers or organizations have refused to print this document, including the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), of which Mothopeng is President].*

Zephania (Zeph) Mothopeng was sentenced to 15-years jail on 26 June 1979, for trying to overthrow the government. He was 66 years old.

He was in solitary confinement for about sixteen months before being brought to court. His trial, which lasted for 18 months, was held in the small town of Bethal, several hours' drive from Johannesburg. He and sixteen others were found guilty of 'terrorist activities' and furthering the aims and activities of the banned PAC. He was charged with having recruited and sent men out of the country for military training and with having instigated unrest in the township of Kagiso, near Krugersdorp, on 17 June 1976, the day after the start of the youth revolt in Soweto.

The state accused Mothopeng of having begun an underground organization of the PAC in 1964 while serving an earlier jail sentence on Robben Island.

The PAC central committee elected him President at a meeting in Tanzania in August 1986.

Shortly before being imprisoned in 1979, Mothopeng wrote this account of his life and of his political beliefs and hopes. The document was brought out of jail.

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I was born in September 1913 in the district of Vrede in the Free State. I was baptized as a child in the Anglican Church in the same district where I was born. I attended my primary school at St Mary's Primary School, Daggakraal, in the district of Amersfoort, Transvaal, ironically about fifty miles from Bethal. It was the home of my parents where they lived until they died. It was where my grandfather had bought land under a freehold

scheme arranged by P. ka I Seme, who was then their lawyer (and an early leader in the black struggle).

I passed standard six at St Bedes and St Chad's College, Ladysmith, Natal, an Anglican Training College. I had my high school education at St Peter's Secondary School, Rosettenville, Johannesburg, under the Anglican Community of the Resurrection, from 1933 until 1937 when I passed matriculation examinations. I was an assistant prefect at St Peter's for two years.

I trained as a teacher at Adams College, Natal, where I was one of the first students to study for a post-matric teacher's diploma. I passed Teacher Training Certificate in 1940. I was elected chairman of the student body in my last year. In 1946 I passed BA (by correspondence) at the University of South Africa, Unisa, while I was teaching at Orlando High School from January 1941. I taught at Orlando High School for about thirteen years. I taught Maths and Physical science.

I conducted the senior school choir for all these years. My choir won all competitions in which it participated. In 1947 Orlando School choir was chosen to sing to King George VI. I conducted it at Orlando Communal Hall when the King and his royal entourage visited Orlando during their tour of South Africa. I was one of the founders and first chairman of the Johannesburg Bantu Musical Festival in 1946 which enjoyed the sponsorship of the Johannesburg City Council.

In 1950 I was elected president of the Transvaal African Teachers' Association. In 1951 my executive embarked on concerted campaigning against the Eiselen Report on Bantu Education by way of extensive pamphleteering by using our clandestine pamphlets such as *The Voice* and *Education for Change* and of course the teacher's magazine, *The Good Shepherd*.

By these pamphlets we succeeded in influencing the teachers to such an extent that in June 1952 the teachers at the TATA conference in Witbank passed a resolution rejecting Bantu Education in toto and they pledged themselves to work for its complete destruction and thereafter to restore free and universal education to the Africans. It is a resolution which the teachers never reversed up to this day. Those who continued teaching in Bantu schools did so under protest. This resulted in the dismissal of three members of my executive by the Transvaal Native Education Department: the president, the general secretary and the editor of *The Good Shepherd*. I was the president, Professor Ezekiel Mphahlele, who is an outstanding author, was the general secretary, and Mr Isaac Matlare, who is now a lawyer in Lesotho, was the editor.

Since then I abandoned teaching and decided to devote all my energy to work politically to achieve the total rejection of Bantu Education and to

attain the overthrow of white domination in Azania.

I joined the African National Congress Youth League in 1943 and from 1954 I became one of the members of the Africanists in the ANC. We were against the influence of the whites in the ANC and we also contended that it was not militant enough. In 1958 when we broke away from the ANC I was elected to the working committee of the Africanists which was to prepare for the inauguration of a new organization. I was entrusted with the drawing up of the draft constitution which was presented for approval at the inaugural meeting of the PAC. It was adopted with minor amendments.

I acted as chairman at the inaugural conference of the Pan-Africanist Congress on the 16th April 1959 at Orlando Communal Hall where Mr Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe was elected the president of the organization and I was elected as one of the members of the National Working Committee.

The National Working Committee of which the president was the chairman was responsible to plan and to direct the PAC anti-pass campaign of the 21st March 1960 which resulted in the police killing many Africans in Sharpeville and Vanderbijlpark, and Langa and Nyanga in Cape Town, and the biggest demonstration to the Parliament building in Cape Town led by Mr Philip Kgosana.

The objective of the anti-pass campaign was to achieve human dignity. The pass laws assail in a most degrading manner the dignity of the black man in that they restrict his freedom of movement and he is expected to produce this slave document on demand to any policeman at any time and anywhere.

Black people suffer daily humiliation which they receive at the pass offices where these iniquitous laws are administered. During this campaign the effectiveness of mass action was patently demonstrated in that as a result of this concerted positive action the then Commissioner of Police, Major-General Rademeyer, was compelled to suspend temporarily the operation of these iniquitous laws.

During this campaign I was arrested and sentenced to two years. I was charged jointly with PAC National Executive members including the President Sobukwe and National Secretary Potlako Leballo. I was arrested again in March 1963 for furthering PAC activities (the organization was banned in April 1960). I was kept under arrest until the end of July 1963 when my case was withdrawn and I was immediately arrested and detained at Randfontein Police Station and Pretoria Prison. [An added note states that during this time, Mothopeng was tortured: a canvas bag was put over his until he was close to suffocation: he was also given electric shocks]

I was sentenced in May 1964 for three years for being a member and furthering PAC activities. I served the sentence on Robben Island. There

were many riots which took place due to PAC activities during 1962–63 at Kingwilliamstown, Paarl near Cape Town and in Johannesburg.

When I was discharged from prison in 1967 I was taken to Qwaqwa and banned for two years. I remained in Qwaqwa for about six months and was allowed to return to my home in Johannesburg. In 1969 my banning order was renewed for another two years. So I was under banning orders for four years.

In my present trial I was detained in August 1976. At the time of my arrest I was employed as a director of the Urban Resource Centre, a voluntary community organization. It conducted many programmes in Kagiso Township, Krugersdorp, among others adult education, community bulk buying, youth organization. It had a training centre at St Ausgar's, Roodepoort, which trained people in some skills and arts and crafts. It had study centres at Soweto, Thembisa, Natalspruit, Sebokeng and Evaton. I have been studying a Bachelor of Commerce degree at Unisa.

All the campaigns which PAC embarked upon flow from the resolution of the National General Conference of the 19th December 1959 at Orlando Communal Hall which stated that the organization must embark upon positive action to free African people from domination. This action was to be based on an unfolding programme which had to be executed relentlessly until total liberation and freedom were achieved.

Our struggle for freedom since 1960 has made great strides. In 1960 the boundaries of freedom were as far away north as Ghana. Today they have reached our borders. We share common borders with free countries such as Botswana and Mozambique.

The superstructure of white domination based on apartheid has cracked to its foundation. Apartheid as a philosophy has collapsed and it is in complete disarray. The black people have discovered the potency of their power — mass action, and from now they will employ it with devastating effect.

As the doors of prison lock us in, this time our spirits are very high because we realize that victory is in sight and freedom is on our threshold. We are fully aware that the oppressors are confronted with formidable onslaughts from every angle. Their economy is foundering upon the rocks despite the repeated assurances of its recovery. The cost of living is escalating at an unprecedented rate, there is alarming unemployment and thousands of workers are thrown out of their employment. Scarcity of oil is inflicting havoc on our economy. The housing shortage is mounting while rentals are shooting high into the sky. The ordinary man is baffled and buffeted in every direction. In such a situation can total economic collapse be far? Our education is in a shambles, it is hopelessly in need of finance. Indeed one perceives deeply an imminent mass upheaval resulting from this economic collapse.

The African people have acquired a complete self-reliance and accepted the principle of fashioning their own destiny and evolving their own ideology and method of liberation based on their own experience emanating from the objective conditions of Africa.

The youth of our land are determined to work and sacrifice for our freedom based on one man one vote which is the only sure way to guarantee human rights, liberty and dignity, the only way to banish permanently and irrevocably racial discrimination, economic exploitation, social degradation and poverty in our country.

Our land is faced with armed onslaught on our borders which is fast creeping in our country. The white youth of the land are posted on the borders to try to stop the inevitable. It is indeed a fruitless exercise. These young men should be employed to provide wealth instead of being engaged in this wasteful venture.

The black people of this land are striving to establish a new social order which will guarantee their rights to equitable distribution of wealth in a society in which there will be no exploitation of one man by another, a society which will protect the wealth and raw material of Africa from being exploited and exported outside the continent for the benefit of international capital, a society which will guarantee full employment and education for all.

We grant no one the right to balkanize our country Azania. We claim the right to manage our affairs in Azania without impairment. It is in this just society which we are striving to establish where justice will be attained and meted out, otherwise justice becomes a sham and mirage as it is unfortunately the case in our country at present.

We approach prison with full certainty that freedom is at hand. In this we are supported by the knowledge that thousands and thousands of the black people in the country are working hard and are willing to sacrifice everything to achieve it. We will soon be walking out of bondage into free Azania in which the above objectives shall have been accomplished and put into practice.

PS: An African is any (black) person who is committed to an African destiny and who finds himself oppressed by the oppressive laws and policies of this land, directly and indirectly by virtue of being dispossessed or displaced as a result of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

*[The Sowetan, 14 December 1988, printed an interview with Zeph Mothopeng in which he offered a revised definition of an African. Mr Mothopeng no longer insists that only black persons are so designated. Eds]*