Freedom in our Lifetime

by

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with

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Preface

South Africa has been in the headlines of the world press often in the second half of the 20th Century. Some stories were about the atrocities of the apartheid regime. Others told of people and organisations in South Africa who were struggling against the regime. For the older generation of South African activists, these stories were about the forces which shaped our lives.

Many of us have lived through big changes. We were born in

rural areas and as children were brought up in traditional ways. The village was a close knit community with a stable social order, in which families helped each other in times of trouble. When we were older and went to town we found social disorder, and powerful authorities whose business was to make our lives difficult.

The African National Congress and trade unions were modem political and industrial organisations, struggling for democracy and justice, but they also in some ways tried to recreate the caring society in which we had grown up.

My generation was involved in one struggle after another. We built our mass organisations in the 1950s, we went through the Treason Trial, we had many crusades culminating in the campaigns against the Pass Laws. We suffered under the State of Emergency, and after the banning of the ANC in 1960 we were forced underground.

After this, our paths began to diverge. Some were betrayed, arrested and imprisoned, while others - myself included - were sent overseas for military training. Some managed to lie low and keep the flame alight in townships and factories through the darkest days of apartheid.

Many have died in battle or at the hands of the apartheid state, and illness and old age has killed off others. Some of us who were fortunate enough to survive met up again when the frontiers and prison doors opened after 1990. We even had a big get together at a reception for "stalwarts", held by Nelson Mandela after he was elected President.

We all had stories to tell each other, and I found that my

particular story with its experiences of the struggle in Cape Town, of Umkhonto We Sizwe and of international solidarity was a unique combination. I decided it would be worthwhile telling to a wider audience.

In my years in Cape Town and in exile I discovered it was not just in African villages that people cared about and cared for each other. My family and I were helped and supported by many people of all colours in the harsh apartheid years before I left South Africa.

Outside, Umkhonto We Sizwe was able to survive and become a powerful fighting force because of the support we received from many countries in Africa, particularly the others - suffered and still suffer grievously from the vengeance inflicted on them by the apartheid state and its stooges for giving that support.

The socialist countries too - especially the Soviet Union, East Germany, China and Cuba - behaved like brothers and sisters, like comrades, and gave us shelter, education, training and moral and material, including military, support. In the capitalist world a few governments, including the Scandinavians and Dutch, found ways of helping us.

My most heartening experiences, though, were of the many organisations and people in countries with governments hostile to our struggle, who welcomed us and raised money for us. I worked mostly with trade unions, and their generosity was crucial in helping comrades at home to keep organising workers through the 1970s and 1980s.

The people of South Africa struggled long and hard to free

themselves. The struggle would have been longer and harder but for our friends abroad.

This book of mine describes the South Africa in which I grew up, and my involvement in the liberation movement before I was sent out of the country in 1963. I hope it will help young people and others who do not know much about the recent past of South Africa to understand the background of our struggles, and the price paid for our freedom.

Then the book tells of the help we received from our brothers and sisters in many countries. It is my way of saying thank you to them. It is also my way of encouraging the new South Africa to adopt international policies which try to repay the debts we owe to our helpers, and to help others who are struggling for their freedom.

I hope my readers will find *Freedom in our Lifetime* both entertaining and informative.

Acknowledgements

I have never kept a diary, and I have consulted few sources except some letters my wife kept, and three books. They are *Organise - Or Starve.* by Ken Luckhardt and Brenda Wall, *South Africa Belongs to Us,* by Francis Meli and *Striking Back* by Jeremy Baskin.

Apart from these, this book depends on my recollections. I apologise to those who should have been mentioned, but whose names I have missed out. There were so many heroes, big and small, that my memory must have missed some of them. I also apologise for all the other omissions and

inaccuracies, of which there must be many.

I have reluctantly used the apartheid terms African, coloured, Indian and white. Please read these terms as shorthand for 'so-called African', 'so-called coloured', ,so-called Indian' and 'so-called white'.

Ben Turok, Ken Luckhardt, Brenda Wall, Phil Norushe, Zodwa Norushe, Zolile Nqose. Alfred Willie, Richard Mdala, Vanguard Mkosana, Senator Christmas Tinto, Notnvuyo Mtyekisane and Phil Leeson jogged my memory on some things, and Merryn Cooke and Shirley Walkley also helped. Mary Smith word processed for us and patiently coped with all the alterations made and Edna Robinson and Sue Dally also helped in the last stages of producing the script. Karen Mac Gregor of Indicator Press was a great encouragement to us. I owe all these people and other friends my grateful thanks.

Most of all I want to acknowledge the part played by my wife, Joyce Leeson. It is literally true that without her, the book would not have been written, because she is the one who wrote it all down.

PART ONE

THE ORIGINS OF A FREEDOM FIGHTER

CHAPTER 1

The way we were

In the 1930s and 1940s, when I was a child, people in many parts of rural South Africa were still following traditional ways of life.

Let me take you back to those days.

In some villages all the people were "Red" (Amaqaba). They were called red because they always dressed in blankets, and those blankets and their bodies were dyed with red ochre.

Other villages were mixed, with some red families but others who had converted to Christianity. They wore clothes and sent their children to school but otherwise lived much the same as their red neighbours.The red families seemed more prosperous and satisfied with life, but most of both sorts of families had all they needed. Each home had fields which produced enough crops to last all year, and owned not less than 20 cattle and 200 or 300 sheep and goats as well as horses, pigs and poultry.

Men from both sorts of families had to go away to work sometimes when money was scarce, but red men went less often. They had to pay taxes but otherwise had less need of money because they did not have to buy clothes and shoes, or school books for children.

The villages were scattered collections of big homesteads. When sons married, often they brought their brides to live beside their fathers' homestead, so some of the extended homesteads were like little villages within a village.

The basic layout of a homestead was always the same. It consisted of huts in a semi-circle facing away from the wind.

The huts were round, with walls made of wood and mud, and roofs with a wooden frame, thatched with grass. The windows were very small, and when there was a fire in the hut, smoke escaped through the windows. In cold weather rags or small pillows were used to close them up.

There was a carpet of green grass around the huts, kept short by grazing sheep. Stone or gravel footpaths led from one hut to another.

The huts were not expensive to build as all materials were available locally. The work of building a hut was shared between men and women, the men building the wooden framework, and the women finishing the walls with mud and the roof with grass. These simple structures were ideal to live in ,warm in winter and cool in summer. Women made the huts look fresh and beautiful again each year by adding fresh mud and replacing the grass if necessary.

Inside the hut the floor was shiny and smooth. The women covered it with cow or sheep dung and then polished it with a smooth round stone. In the centre of each hut was a round area with a raised rim, used as a hearth, if ever a fire was wanted. The huts contained few possessions, except for mats and blankets and sometimes a box in which to keep precious things. Clothes were hung from the roof. In some huts a bench made of bricks stood next to the door, to provide a seat for visitors.

The main hut was the kitchen: this was the real centre of family life, with other huts used mainly for sleeping or storage. A fire was always burning in the kitchen hearth, with a kettle of water suspended over it and a calabash of sour milk

standing nearby.

Food preparation and cooking were done in the kitchen, and families ate their meals and sat and talked there too. Children played by the fire in cold or wet weather, supervised by grandmothers. Grandmother herself slept there, often with some children beside her. Grandmothers always seemed to outlive grandfathers.

There was a hut for the father and, when invited, his wife. He kept his money and valuables there. It was a respected place, in which children were not welcomed. The mother had another hut, shared with the baby and younger children. If there was more than one wife, each had her own hut.

Older boys and youths had their own hut, or more than one if they were many. This was their private place, not often visited by older people, and inside they were free to do whatever they liked. It was here that they discussed their problems and told stories and kept secret things. These might include herbs which they believed would make them loved by girls and gifts from their girlfriends, as well as the sticks which older boys used for stick fighting.

Mature girls also had their own hut. It was semi private and males would not enter except in an emergency. The mother, though, had to keep a watchful eye on the hut, because if anything happened to the girls she would be held responsible. In many cases the mother knew a lot about her daughters, who confided in her, whether it was good or bad news.

The last hut was the storehouse, where seed corn for next year was kept. The cats lived there, to guard the corn against

mice and snakes. Tools were also kept in the hut, and it was used for sheltering sheep in very bad weather.

Most food was kept in a small tower shaped grain store usually made of basketwork. It held potatoes, dried beans and peas, pumpkins and watermelon for the coming year, as well as the staple food, mealies.

If there were surplus mealies, the grains were stripped from the cobs and stored in an underground pit, as a reserve in case the next harvest was poor. If the reserve was not needed, that corn was often made into beer, to be drunk by those harvesting next year's crop.

In some homesteads there was a garden fenced by prickly pears and aloes. Fruits like peaches were planted here, but mainly it was the women's vegetable garden.

About 200 metres away was the kraal where animals were enclosed at night. It was divided into five compartments, the biggest allocated to cattle, the next to sheep and the third to goats. Another was for calves, and the last for lambs and kids, which were kept together.

Between the huts and the kraal there was usually a big tree. It was in this place, called *inkundla,* that serious discussions and ceremonies took place.

In everyday life there was a clear distinction between women's work and men's work. Men and boys were responsible for heavy work in the fields and big livestock. They ploughed with oxen and planted the main crops of mealies, wheat and kaffir corn. They also planted peas, beans, pumpkins, potatoes and melons in the fields.

Women and girls gardened around the homestead and tended the freely ranging chickens and pigs, while looking after the younger children and preparing and cooking food. Young women had the duty of fetching water from the river, a welcome opportunity to leave the homestead, meet others and exchange news. Everyone - men, women, boys and girls - took part in hoeing and weeding the fields.

At harvest time the whole family was involved, not only in bringing in corn from their own fields but in helping neighbours. These were happy times of sharing, with a sheep slaughtered and beer drunk at the end of the day. Usually villagers who had no fields, or whose harvest was poor, went home with bags of mealies from the fields of more fortunate neighbours.

Such occasions brought all villagers together and reminded them of their membership of a shared community and of how families depended on each other. From earliest days children were aware of this.

Children were regarded as belonging to the whole village. Every person who was the same age as their parents was like a parent to them, to be obeyed as their mothers and fathers were obeyed. Wherever children went in the village there were adults to watch over them, and put them right if they did wrong.

Adults were convinced that since they had more experience than children, they were in a position to tell children what to do. Children were not expected to argue. Their parents loved them, and knew better, so of course what their parents said was sure to be for the best. Adults had to be obeyed without

question, and always treated with respect.

Once they could be independent, running about and feeding themselves, children were encouraged to spend most of their time with other children. They did not take part in or listen to conversation between adults.

Probably the adult they spent most time with was grandmother, their father's mother, who taught them and told them stories. Sometimes she was their defender from over strict parents who were believers in "spare the rod and spoil the child".

Children ate together from one big bowl, which discouraged fussy eating. If anyone did not like some food, others would be happy to eat it instead, and no one was offered alternatives. Of course, mother or granny kept an eye on things, to see that little ones got enough to eat.

Children were encouraged to co-operate as well as to compete, and to strive to be helpful and carry out all duties given to them. Girls in particular often were responsible for looking after babies and younger children.

Stress was placed on speaking properly and clearly, on good manners and good behaviour. Children learned how to behave to older people, people with disabilities. strangers and poor people. They were told about all their relatives. even distant ones. and as they grew older they were encouraged to visit them. They knew how to behave there, and how to welcome relatives visiting them.

Most teaching took place in the evening after supper, when granny would spread her mat beside the hearth and the young

ones would gather around to listen. Often her teaching was by way of stories, all with a moral message, and from them children learned about all aspects of life. Usually she carried on with her stories until the children fell asleep.

Some of the older women were particularly good story tellers, and children from other homesteads would gather to listen. The following tale is an example of the stories grannies told:

"There was a cruel man who was troubled by crows eating his wheatfields. He thought of plans to chase away the crows: he tried many methods but failed. At last he thought he would catch a crow by setting a trap and tying a rag with paraffin to its leg, lighting it and letting it fly to other crows. Of course the other crows would fly away from the one with a burning rag and he thought they would not come back to his fields.

"He did all this but the crows, instead of flying away from the fields, just flew around until the crow with the burning rag fell down, and the fire lit the wheatfields and the whole place caught alight. The cruel man lost all his wheat."

Children were intended to learn from this that one must not do something that might rebound on oneself; one must think properly whether what one is about to do is good in the long run.

The villagers were still subsistence farmers. They produced almost all they needed. The only foodstuffs bought from a shop were salt, sugar, tea and coffee. Tea and coffee were

seen as luxuries and were reserved for adults. These purchases were possible because money was gained from selling some products to the local shops. Eggs and wool were most commonly sold.

The staple food was mealies. supplemented by beans, peas and so on. fresh or dried according to season. Many fruits were grown and eaten. including peaches. apples, figs. pears, guavas and sometimes grapes. Wild berries were collected too, and wild leaves, particularly dandelions and nettles.

Above all, sour milk was popular, as a drink. or stirred into thick porridge. Meat was not eaten daily. If asked, people would say they slaughtered only for special occasions like Christmas, but in practice special occasions were fairly common. They arose whenever visitors came, or when a marriage, funeral or circumcisions were celebrated in the village. On these occasions, neighbours too would receive a share of the meat. Rabbit and buck meat were also eaten from time to time.

Chapter 2
Childhood

It as in just such a village, called Kwezana, that I was born on March 3, 1928. Kwezana lies in the Tyume valley, about 10 to 16 kilometres from Alice in the Eastern Cape. it was a beautiful area then. The Tyume river rises from a spring on the summit of Kwa Bukazana, part of the Hogsback range of mountains.

The mountains extend for many miles, and were covered in forests. They were green all year, except in June when they wore white caps of snow. The green forests were cut by white streaks where waterfalls ran over the face of steep rocks. Within the forests you could find all sorts of wild fruits, berries, and wild animals. Luckily there were no lions, for it was on these mountains that we grazed our cattle and horses in summer.

Kwezana was a village of about 30 kraals, mostly red but with some other Christian families, like ourselves. It was an important village, because it had the churches which served the area, and the local school, also used for official events. The school principal lived in the village, and it was he who translated official documents for us, and interpreted at meetings when white officials came to speak to Tyume valley people.

My father was a respected member of the Jwareni clan, and when I was born we lived in the upper part of the village known as Majwareni.

Father's first wife had died, leaving four children: two girls and two boys. Much later he married my mother. She also had four children, Nontsikelo, Temba, myself and Nombulelo. By the time I was born the older four had grown up and were no longer at home, although Norntandazo, the orphaned daughter of one of the older sisters who was older than any of us, also lived with us.

Unfortunately my father died when I was very young and my mother raised the four of us. Perhaps because of this we were

a very close family.

Like all the children, I had duties to do even before I was old enough for school. We boys had the job of looking after the calves and the lambs: they should not meet their mothers before the cows and ewes had been milked. An hour after the sheep and cattle had gone to their grazing, I had to open the gate for the calves and lambs to graze among the houses, or drive them to the stream for water.

This was a job usually enjoyed by the youngsters, except when cows, which are over enthusiastic about their young ones, escaped from where they were grazing and appeared unexpectedly. When that happened we usually ran for our lives into the house, instead of driving them away. Some of these cows were vicious and chased everything. We knew what disasters this could cause.

We had no bought toys, but plenty to play with. Around the houses, trees and bushes provided good playgrounds for all sorts of things. We made swings, and built houses out of branches where we could play hide and seek and play families, boys imitating their fathers and girls their mothers.

In fact, if the mothers did not call us for food, we played until sunset. We got so absorbed with playing that sometimes adults could stand watching us for ages without being noticed. Some of our games, like climbing trees, were dangerous but still popular. Sometimes an adult had to be called because one of us could not climb down from a tree.

When I turned seven my mother said it was time for me to join my elder sister and brother at school. Our school was

built, equipped and maintained by the community. It was one big schoolroom and had nothing else, not even toilets or a staff room. In the room were desks with benches, each with space for three children, and we had some slates, exercise books and reading books. Parents did not pay fees, but uniforms and books had to be bought.

All that the government contributed was the salaries of the principal, Mr Impi Siwisa, and the two other teachers, Miss Kukuse Gugwini and Miss Tombokazi George. The salaries were not high, and the community supplemented with gifts like chickens, offered as thanks for the education they gave the children.

There were many new experiences for me when I started school, but I had been told by older children what to expect. What I found hard was sitting at a desk from 9.00am until 12 noon, and again from 1.00pm until 4.00pm.

In the schoolroom we were arranged in three classes, to be taught by the three teachers. All teaching was in Xhosa. Mostly we learned things off by heart whether they made sense or not. School was not a place for discussion or children's questions. Often we were asked to recite what we had been taught the day before, and if we failed we suffered.

There was punishment, both for not answering correctly and for naughty behaviour. The punishment was to hold out your hand and be hit with a switch, which hurt, but not too much.

We had no clocks, either at home or at school. We knew when it was time for school because one of the teachers, Miss George, lived beyond our homestead. She rode to school on a

horse, so we waited until she appeared and then ran behind the horse to school.

At school, we were taught to tell the time with a cardboard clock, but more usefully we also learned to tell the time from the sun's position. There were holes in the school's tin roof through which sunbeams shone. When the spots of sunlight reached certain points we knew it was break time or home time, and would stamp our feet to remind the teachers.

Usually we had nothing to eat or drink between leaving home at 8.30am and returning at 4.30pm, but in drought years the government sometimes provided bread and sour milk for us to have in the middle of the day.

One of the most popular activities at school was singing in the choir and particularly, travelling around the district to take part in competitions. We also used to sing at fund raising concerts, to buy things like sewing materials and garden tools for the school. We were in demand to perform because Kwezana School Choir was regarded as good. Concerts were usually on a Friday evening. Sometimes we went by bus to the venue, but often we would walk up to 16 kilometres and back again afterwards.

Sports were also popular, and we tried most things which did not need much equipment. We ran all sorts of races, including relays and sack races. Out of school hours we boys liked to play soccer, but it was not a game you would recognise. We played with a tennis ball on a large open space. No one had boots and there were 25 or 30 or more on each side- the whole school joined in. Later, when I went to Alice, I

took up rugby, which was played properly there.

On one afternoon a week the girls did domestic subjects like sewing and cooking, and the boys worked in the school vegetable gardens. All vegetables were eaten by the principal and his family, except for those we stole! We used to leave the lettuces and turnips, which we did not like, but helped ourselves to tomatoes and carrots. At home we did not grow any of these crops, an example of the gap between the culture of home and school.

Looking back, it seems our school was not geared at all for preparing us for traditional life, or for changes which were already happening. Only boys did gardening, but it was women who looked after vegetable and fruit gardens round the homestead, and when the menfolk were working away they had to be responsible for growing all the family food. The girls, but not the boys, learned to sew and cook, even though the men who went to town would have to mend their own clothes, and cook for themselves. Indeed, some men became tailors or restaurant workers in the cities.

Out of school hours, there was never a time when we had nothing to do. There were duties to be done from the time we got up until we went to bed. For instance, in the morning we milked the sheep and goats while the girls fetched water for drinking and washing before we went to school. After school, boys joined the men looking after the sheep, goats and cattle and driving them to the kraal before sunset. Girls helped their mothers around the home.

At weekends we were full-time herdboys, taking flocks and herds far from home early in the morning and bringing them

back in the evening. We had to keep the animals out of people's fields and make sure they grazed on the veld. We also used to help ourselves from the fields, digging up potatoes, taking pumpkins and mealies. On Saturdays we would make a fire in the base of an anthill, then extinguish the fire and put the potatoes in and seal it up. They were left overnight, and next day they were delicious. There were peach trees everywhere, and we ate our fill.

While working as herdboys, we still had time to play. Playing with mud was one of our popular games, using clay to make models of what we saw about us in our limited world. We made wagons with a span of 10 oxen, houses, kitchen utensils like spoons, plates and knives, and calabashes for sour milk. We made bulls, to fight with other children's bulls. We also fashioned people: men, women and children. The whole game was very serious to us.

Another game was to dig small furrows, catch beetles and try to make them race along the furrows. They were very unco-operative! We also played football with a homemade rag ball, and *utinti,* which involved hitting a mealie husk with a stick and then running for base before you got caught. As we got older we liked to hide and watch the girls go by, though funnily enough we were frightened to speak to them, or even be seen.

Because of all these engrossing things, sometimes we forgot the herds and found they had disappeared, or were eating people's crops. We would panic and run around like mad trying to round them up, and hope we were not seen, otherwise we would be punished. We enjoyed herding more

then we enjoyed school, but we had no choice - on Monday we were back at school.

My mother was a Christian, and she agreed with the church's view that education was very important. She could read and write and was keen for all her children to be educated. She wanted us to do better than she had, to go to secondary school and then train for a profession.

In practice, this was difficult. Nsiki got married young, while still in standard five, and when it came to us two boys there were problems which I will describe shortly. Only Nombulelo, the youngest, had a smooth path. When she was ready for secondary school Temba was already working and could contribute, so she was able to proceed and eventually qualify as a teacher.

The problems that Temba and I had were due to having no father. There was no man in our home, so although relatives and neighbours helped with ploughing, most of the men's work fell on my brother and me. This meant that for most of the time we were at primary school, each of us went to school only on alternate days, taking turns to tend the livestock.

As you can imagine, this was not the way to do well at school, and as the work got harder we both started to fail end of year examinations. Eventually I dropped out to allow my brother to go full-time, and for one year while out of school I had sole charge of our animals, staying with an uncle.

My mother was working in Cape Town so she could pay for Temba to go to boarding school to start his secondary education. When she returned she decided it was my turn,

and made arrangements for the care of the animals so I could study. To help me catch up, I was sent to stay with Nsiki Somniso, a relative who was a teacher. She lived in a village called Gelmahashe, and from there I went to a good school in Alice where I worked hard and completed standard five and standard six.

As I have said. my mother's commitment to education arose from her Christian beliefs. She was a keen member of the Presbyterian Church of Africa, and our family life was built round this. At home we prayed together ever,. morning, before each meal, and every evening. Sometimes mother would call on one of the older children to lead the evening. prayers - perhaps this started my brother on the road to becoming a minister. I have to admit that sometimes I fell asleep or pretended to fall asleep during prayers, and slipped under the table.

We also sang hymns at night, and I was happy to join in because, like all the family, I loved singing. We could all sing well, and often we attracted neighbours to come and sit at our open door to listen.

Personally, I was never persuaded that people went to another world after death, but I respected my mother and I always went with her to church. Of course, there were other reasons for going to church. It was an opportunity to dress up and socialise, and look at the girls.

Sunday was the only day we put on shoes, and even then we carried our shoes over our shoulders until we were near church and then put them on, taking them off again on the way home. Perhaps it was just as well, because the shoes

were not always a good fit. We used to laugh at some of the young men who had been to the mines and spent some of their hard earned money on shoes, tie and suit. They looked most uncomfortable in church in their hot and often ill fitting outfits.

Even though our shoe wearing was so brief, to red people it symbolised desertion of our culture and as we grew older we were mocked as "softies" by mates our age who did not attend school or church. As a result we banded together to defend ourselves on the way to and from school and particularly when we went to other villages, for example with the school choir.

Actually we liked fighting, and organised stick fights with rival groups. Sometimes adult men came to watch the fights. It was dangerous, like boxing, and boys were sometimes injured and occasionally killed, but to us it was exciting.

In my day, the lives of village children and young people were full, purposeful and enjoyable. At no time were we bored. Even though there were some hard times, my childhood and youth were the happiest days of my life.

These happy and carefree times drew to an end. I wanted to continue my education, but we had no resources for me to do so. The big herds my father had left had gradually decreased to pay for the family's needs, and no more could be spared for sale. Money had to be raised by other means if I were to go to high school. We decided I would go to Cape Town for a year to work.

Chapter 3
Cape Town for the first time

When the time came for me to leave home, arrangements were made for me to stay with relatives in Cape Town. I realised that uncertainty and hardships lay ahead. The year was 1948, and I was not yet 20.

The journey itself was an ordeal. I was given some bread, cooked chicken and orange squash for the days spent travelling and set off, carrying my blanket roll, to walk the 16 kilometres to the railway station at Alice.

The train left in the evening and we had to change twice, at Cookhouse and De Aar. In every train the third class carriages were crowded, smelly and uncomfortable. The train I joined at De Aar was third class only, presumably for the convenience of the ritual which lay ahead at Bellville on the outskirts of Cape Town.

When we reached there we were treated like cattle. The train pulled into a side platform and we had to get out and form a queue. I did not see the relevance of this, and was amazed to find that we had to strip naked and put all clothes and blankets into 44 gallon drums filled with DDT powder. While the drums were being stirred we had DDT powder pumped all over our bodies. Then we were allowed to collect our crumpled belongings, dress and climb back into the train.

This was a shocking experience for me, confirming that I was indeed entering a different and dreadful world. Like all blacks

in South Africa, I had to come to terms with how we were to be treated in our own country.

We had no rights and could be forced, at any time, to suffer humiliation and loss of dignity. Life could not be planned ahead with confidence, and even a simple thing like a train journey could turn into an ordeal. Uncertainties and anxieties were everywhere. We survived because we had to, helped by others in the same boat. In my case, on this first visit to such an alien world, I was greatly helped by the support of relatives already in Cape Town.

Some of my relatives were waiting for me at Cape Town Station, and they took me back to Langa, to the section in which Kwezana people lived. There I was welcomed and fed by Sibekos and Somnisos, and given a place in the bachelors' quarters where I could stay while looking for a job.

To find work, job seekers went at nine in the morning to the Pass Office. Prospective employers came and either picked up people from the crowd, or asked officials for five strong men, or whatever they wanted. Some people had work permits, others were given them when a boss said he would take them on. Then the permit was usually to work for that boss only - real tied labour, because if you left him you had no permit to work anywhere else.

After a few days I was picked up by an Indian vegetable merchant. He did not bother to get a permit for me, so I remained outside the system altogether, completely illegal.

His warehouse and shop was in an area known as Koeberg, and business was also done selling from door to door in Sea

Point. There were four young African employees, and we slept in servants 'quarters behind the house, which was behind the warehouse and shop. We were given bread, potatoes and bones to cook for ourselves twice a day. We avoided malnutrition by supplementing these with fruit and vegetables which we stole from the shop and travelling vans.

Our daily routine was that two of us got up at 3.00am to go to market and load the vans. This was the hardest part of the day, especially in winter. Usually we were back by 6.00am, to eat the breakfast the other two had prepared before going off to sell to hotels, flats and private houses. By 7.00am we would be on the road to Sea Point, to get there before rival hawkers.

The shopkeeper had four sons, and each son had a "boy" to help him. The father himself sat at the shop till, by the door, from 6.00am to 6.00pm, and his oldest son acted as foreman in the shop. The other three sons drove the three vans which went to Sea Point, each with one of us to carry the vegetable basket around the streets and to shout to attract customers.

We stopped selling by about half past two and then the vans would be parked up at Sea Point. Our young bosses had a car garaged nearby, and off they went. We were then free for a couple of hours as long as one of us guarded the vans. All we had energy for was to sleep, or stroll along the beach.

One day the routine was disrupted when the oldest brother arrived at the vans and asked where his brothers were. Unwittingly we gave away the secret of their car, about which the family knew nothing. We were told to say nothing and next day when they drove off as usual they were tailed by their brother, who found they were visiting unapproved girl

friends. The upshot was that the older two of the young men were promptly dispatched to India to marry suitable girls and the oldest brother left the shop to take over their rounds, with two helpers.

We usually got back to the shop at 5.00pm. Then we tidied up and offloaded the vans, sorting out vegetables which had to be thrown away, cleaning the vans inside and out, and reloading what could be sold tomorrow. When this was done, at about 7.30 or 8.00pm, we had finished for the day. Needless to say, all we could do then was cook, eat and sleep.

We lived like this for six days a week. On Sunday we were free and I would visit my relatives at the compound in Langa and later on a cousin, Lucy Sibeko, who lived much nearer, in Kensington.

Funnily enough the new experiences made little impression on me. During the week we may as well have been in prison, and on Sundays I went to my own people. Relatives warned me against getting involved with town things and town people.

I had been brought up with a philosophy of acceptance that God had given different people different lives, and that those of us who suffered now would be rewarded later. I did not entirely agree with religious ideas, but clearly they must have influenced me: I did not question the hard lives we lived, while others prospered.

Nevertheless, I came across street meetings in Kensington, and heard trade union activists talk about workers' rights. They explained that bad employers wanted workers with no

work permits or tied permits so they would be frightened to protest or strike. If they did, they knew they could lose not only those jobs, but also the opportunity to work anywhere.

I heard there was a large compound near the docks where no one had a permit. Workers from there were given temporary work when the port was busy, and used as scabs if ever the established dock workers went on strike.

I must have been influenced by these things, because as I reached the end of the year I had given myself to work in Cape Town, I decided to challenge my employer for a work permit. We had been told to disappear through the back of the shop whenever someone official looking came in, but our presence must have been known, as police from the nearby station often came in for gifts of fruit. Clearly there was some collusion, but still I decided to have a go. My fellow workers were not happy, but it was important to me, as I might want to return and work in the future.

I told the oldest son that I knew the law said we must have permits. I asked him to go to the Pass Office to get them for us. I said if he did not, I would have to go to the police and report that he was employing people illegally.

I am not sure I would have carried out the threat, but my bluff was not called. The old man called him over when he saw our argument, and the son came back and said "just wait". He went in to put on his tie and then came out and called us all to go with him. Within an hour we were back from Langa with passes.

After this I felt I had to wait a bit before giving my notice,

but the employer was still annoyed when I said I was going. I explained that I had long planned to continue my education, and showed them my school application form. I even said I would come back and work for them again if they wanted. As it turned out, they would have taken me on again despite the pass incident.

I had been paid £12 a month and saved it all, being fed by my employer and relatives. I bought new clothes and my return ticket home, and my relatives organised a farewell party and a collection for me. I left Cape Town with the princely sum of £80, to see me through secondary school.

Chapter 4
Becoming a man

I did not go straight to school. Another ordeal awaited me at home before could do that.

Our culture accepted that youths, despite having serious work to do, could be troublesome and irresponsible. It was natural, therefore, that when these troublesome young people reached their late teens or early 20s, steps should be taken to transform them into responsible adult members of society. This applied to boys of both red and Christian families.

As each of us reached that stage a convenient time was chosen, like the end of the school year. A group of boys was then sent to the bush for circumcision and preparation for

manhood.

My time came when I returned home after my year in Cape Town. About 20 of us from local villages were to experience it together. The process began with beer being brewed and a cow slaughtered with everyone joining in the party - umgidi. A goat was slaughtered especially for us boys.

Early next morning we took off our boys' clothes for the last time, and were given two new blankets each in which to wrap ourselves. We then went into the nearby bush, to where grass huts had been prepared for us by the women. From then on, women were not allowed in the area around the huts, and would not see us for months. I shared a hut with two other boys.

When we reached the hut, the circumcis or-*ingcibi* -and another respected man waited for us. We were circumcised in turn. It was a matter of pride not to flinch, but the cut was so fast hardly felt it at the time. Later we felt pain. The other man wrapped a soft leaf dressing over the wound and covered it with leaves from a mealie cob. He changed the dressings for us every morning until we were healed. He also had the responsibility of teaching us how to behave, now that we were men.

We were now *abakwetha, the* newly circumcised. Our faces and bodies were painted white with chalky soil every morning, announcing to everyone who saw us what we were.

Younger people looked after us. Each of us had a young boy to stay with us and run messages. it was a popular task, and when we returned later to the villages, these boys were each

given one of our blankets as a reward.

Girls prepared food and brought it to us twice a day, staying to share it with us. They were not yet women, so were allowed to see us. Later, most of the young women went through initiation ceremonies called *intojane.* There was no circumcision for them, of course, but they were segregated and taught what it was to be an adult woman.

After several weeks, when our wounds were healing, we were allowed out at night, to local villages. There we would bang loudly on kraal fences to let people know we were there. Men would come out and give us a sheep, to slaughter and eat. It was the season of late summer, when the fields were full and we could help ourselves to mealies, pumpkins and whatever we liked. It was no wonder that we returned from circumcision looking fat and well.

Usually the segregation lasted for three months or more, although for us it was less. During that time we learned what was expected of us as Xhosa men. We were to be transformed into responsible people, ready to build our own homes and become independent. In most cases the experience did indeed change irresponsible boys into responsible men.

When we were regarded as fit to return to society as men, the huts and our under-blankets were burned and we washed off the white chalk for the last time. We were given a new blanket to dress in, and a cloth to wear on our heads, and all of us - "reds" or not - had our faces reddened with ochre.

At our home village, there was a ceremony and celebration to welcome us, and within a week or two we had all left to

work in one of the big towns, usually Cape Town or Johannesburg. We had been taught that as adults we must be independent, and the only hope for most young men was to earn some money to buy livestock, tools and seeds so that they could start to farm.

In my case, my mother wanted me to further my education.

had earned enough money in Cape Town to pay boarding school fees and buy books and uniforms, and now I was ready to study again. My brother was already at Lovedale in Alice. I joined him there.

Lovedale High School was a boarding school for boys and girls: one of the three high schools for black students in the Cape. It had been established by Scottish Presbyterian missionaries and the principal and the chaplain were appointed in Scotland. Many other teachers were Scottish too. I remember a Mr Mactavish and a Mr Macgillivray.

There were a few black teachers, including George Matanzima, later one of the notorious Matanzima brothers who misruled the Ciskei Bantustan. As our teacher he seemed kind and conscientious. I do not know what changed him.

Lovedale enjoyed the reputation of being an excellent high school- probably the best in the country - perhaps because it was next door to Fort Hare, the only black university in Southern Africa. Certainly, like Fore Hare. it attracted students from far and wide, including from other countries with English medium education, like Nyasaland and the Rhodesias.

When I started at Lovedale I was one of about a hundred new students. We were divided into two streams, one class

being those who had passed a scholarship entrance exam and were to follow an "academic" curriculum which included maths and sciences. They tended to be the children of Fort Hare academics, in which case they went home every afternoon and did not play as much of a part in school life as boarders did.

The rest of us were divided into two classes, following a "general" curriculum which included arithmetic and biology, but no other maths or sciences. We also studied history, geography, Xhosa, English and commercial subjects.

In the afternoon we did sports and athletics. Among the students very few carne, as I did, from village backgrounds. Most had grown up in towns and were more sophisticated and knowledgeable than rural students. They tended to shine at sports, too, because they had played games on proper pitches, with proper teams before.

I was not the only student in my year who was already a man. Indeed, some were several years older than I. The "academic" stream were mostly younger. Their schooling had not been interrupted by the sorts of circumstances likely to affect most black children, like having to drop out of school for family reasons, or working to raise money to pay for their education.

We men were certainly serious students and I was able to complete my three years to junior certificate without any failures. It was not all hard work, of course. I enjoyed sports and the choir too. One particular choir performance sticks in my mind.

We were combined with the Fort Hare Choir to be conducted by Professor Jabavu, the first black Southern African to gain a degree. The occasion was the arrival of the Royal White Train at Alice with King George and Queen Elizabeth, and their two daughters. We had to sing 'God Save the King' and other similar songs. Afterwards there was much slaughtering of cattle and feasting, so on the whole we were in favour of the visit.

All this time I had very little to do with politics. The only struggle I remember was at school, when I supported a strike against food discrimination. We had one dining hall, but some tables were reserved for the scholarship students and better food was served there.

As I have explained, they were mostly from richer families, and the rest of us who were eating really poor food resented their privilege. We won the battle, and the discrimination was stopped, but some students who were called ringleaders were expelled. Luckily I was not one of them.

When I passed my junior certificate I had depleted my Cape Town earnings and, like other students from poor families, my choices were limited. I could have gone for an apprenticeship to a trade like carpentry or printing, but for some reason these skills were looked down on, and I never considered this option.

I saw my choice as lying between the only two further education choices for which the government would give a grant: teaching or agriculture. After both, you were expected to go into government service.

I decided to go for agriculture for two reasons. Firstly, my brother had already gone in for teaching, and it seemed better for us to do different things. Secondly, I had in mind our 12 hectares of land at home, which wanted to tend scientifically so we could produce enough for the family to live on.

In addition, did not want to work for anyone. I wanted to be independent. In 1951 I applied to and was accepted by Fort Cox Agricultural College in Middledrift - about 14 kilometres from Kwezana.

Most Lovedale students went for teaching. Agriculture, like apprenticeships, was seen as involving dirty manual work. The point of education the thought was to avoid that sort of labour.

In fact, the large majority of Africans with some education, including those who went to Fore Hare and got degrees, finished up teaching. There were almost no other white collar openings, and only a few exceptional individuals like Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo made their way into other professions - in their case, law.

Fort Cox was a small college, taking in about 25 students a year. At that time all students were male, although later women were admitted. More than 25 years after had studied there, my eldest daughter, Nomonde, took advantage of this.

I was the only person from the Ciskei in the college: for some reason Ciskeians were even more against agriculture than others. The college was keen to recruit local students, and was able to give me a small bursary to cover my studies.

At Fort Cox our teachers were all Africans except for the

principal and the veterinary instructor. Fees were low because our education was practical and we were almost self sufficient. Our animal husbandry course involved keeping dairy cattle and making butter and cheese. We also had sheep, goats and horses. There was a piggery where those economical animals thrived on kitchen swill and other waste, and we kept poultry for eggs and meat.

In field husbandry we ploughed and planted various staple crops, and in horticulture tended gardens and orchards. Of course we did some theory as well as practical work and studied bookkeeping and other management skills. Our two year course included an introduction to forestry and veterinary science - some students stayed on longer to study these in depth.

We were very busy, but did have time for other things, particularly at weekends. I was still a keen sportsman and took part in athletics and rugby. Also, I found out that a former teacher from Lovedale had become principal of a nearby school, Mkubiso Secondary School, and I used to visit him.

It was there, in the second year of my course, that met one of his students, a beautiful young woman called Letitia Lindiwe Hina. I fell in love with her.

To be in love with a girl in those days had to be an underground affair. Parents were very strict with their daughters, who would always have to be at home or accompanied if they went out. Letitia was lodging in the village at Mkubiso, and the people she stayed with were as strict as her parents.

Usually, if I wanted to see Letitia in the daytime in Mkubiso or at her home in Mxumbu, I would have to stroll past the homestead as if were heading for the next village. Once she saw me, she would take a bucket and go to the river to fetch water, and find me waiting there. If I wanted to go to her home I would have to find a really good story. I did it once when was walking past, coming from the railway station. It was a very hot day and I went to ask for a drink.

Other opportunities arose for us to meet on Saturday or Sunday afternoons when there were competitive games between local schools and our college, and students came to support their teams. We always had to part early, but not before making plans. We had to get back to the college to milk and tend to the animals, and she had to return to her lodgings.

But when we had done our chores, had our supper and supposedly gone to bed, we waited for lights out and then sneaked out to visit our girlfriends.

Letitia shared a hut with another girl, but she was co-operative and did not raise the alarm when I climbed in through the window. We had many happy hours together.

I reached the end of my course and was awarded a diploma in agriculture. I had to decide on my career. It was expected that we would all become government agricultural demonstrators, but I was reluctant to do that. I had always thought I would prefer to farm for myself rather than be employed, but by now other factors had been added to that.

The National Party had been in power for more than four years, and their apartheid policies were politicising the whole

community, including me.

The Nats had made the mistake of banning the South African Communist Party (SACP), and communists had taken their militancy and organising skills into other organisations, including trade unions and the African National Congress (ANC). The ANC had been transformed into a mass organisation, running campaign after campaign against the oppression and injustices of apartheid.

Politics spread everywhere, even to villages and schools, and I found myself attending local meetings addressed by ANC leaders. I was not a member but was caught up in the general wave of political enthusiasm and was prepared to support ANC policies.

I learned from the ANC that agricultural demonstrators were used to carry out the government's dirty work. Their duties included instructing and persuading African farmers to cull their stock - reduce the size of their herds - and poor, as they were, to pay for fencing the grazing lands.

All this was to be done, it was said, to prevent soil erosion. It was true that our land was deteriorating because it was too small to support the sheep and cows that we needed. But literally across the river, all land was controlled by just one farmer - white of course. He had plenty of grass for all his hundreds of animals. What our people needed was more land, not less stock. I was not prepared to be a government stooge, urging stock culling.

The only option open to me was to work in town again, so I could acquire money to buy tools, seeds and stock, and use

my diploma knowledge to farm as best I could. There was another complication. Letitia had told me she was pregnant. When I told my mother I knew what her response would be - she said we must get married, and that she would send people to Letitia's parents to discuss it. I persuaded her not to make any moves until I had discussed it further with Letitia.

Letitia thought that her father, a tribal chief, would take it very badly, as would his whole village. So we decided we would marry secretly and both leave our homes. She would go to relatives in East London, and once there ask them to write to her parents informing them that she was married and pregnant.

My mother accepted this and agreed to delay sending my uncles to Letitia's people until we had carried out our plan.

In January 1953 we got married. Letitia went to East London and I set out once more for Cape Town to look for work.

In due course my uncles made peace with Letitia's family. Of course their discussion involved the payment of *lobola,* the price expected when a woman leaves her father's home to join a husband. Neither Letitia nor I agreed with *lobola,* but my mother said she would be shamed if we did not pay at least a token. She was prepared to part with her own livestock for *lobola* if necessary, so to avoid this I did pay something later. I had help from Letitia, as well as from my mother and brother.

PART TWO

WESTERN CAPE BATTLES 1953 to 1963

Chapter 5 - Drawn into the struggle
Chapter 6 - Trade unions battling against the odds
Chapter 7 - The treason trial
Chapter 8 - The struggle intensified
Chapter 9 - Law and disorder

Chapter 5
Drawn into the struggle

In January 1953 arrived in Cape Town to look for work. I went straight to Langa to stay with family, as had before, and set about recovering my pass. When I left five years before I had lent it to a relative to use. It was possible to do that in those days, as passes had no photo or fingerprints, just a name.

That relative had gone home, handing it to another relative. This nearly led to a disastrous outcome as the second man, looking for a job, had chanced upon a factory where the first man had worked. When he produced the document the employer said he knew the owner of the pass and accused him of stealing it. Before the police could be called he grabbed the pass and ran off, later getting a job elsewhere. So my pass was saved, and as far as records were concerned I had been working continuously in Cape Town since 1947.

The next thing I did was visit my old workplace to look up the people I had worked with before. Everyone was pleased to see me - even the employer, who seemed to have forgotten my trouble making and promptly offered me a job. I refused, saying was already working. This was not true of course, but I was not prepared to work there again. It had been super-exploitation. I was a man now. I had been influenced by the ANC, and was not prepared to be a mere slave.

I set about looking for more acceptable work, which meant moving about the city. I was no longer blinkered as I had been as a boy, and what I saw shocked a rural person like me, even though it was much quieter then than the Cape Town of today.

Cape Town was smaller then, without the rigid segregation of residential areas which was already being imposed on other towns, and which came later to Cape Town too.

Africans were living almost everywhere, in the city centre and in suburbs like Maitland, Kensington, Windermere, Koeberg, Elsies River, Bellville and Retreat, alongside whites, coloureds and Indians. They also lived in surrounding urban areas like Stellenbosch and Simons Town. Of course wealth distribution ensured that Africans were often crowded together, with families renting one or two rooms in big houses, or living in slum housing or in *pondoks* - shacks - built in big yards or at one end of open areas.

The only 'African township' was Langa, meaning sun, where people had been relocated from Ndabeni earlier in the century, and where the major 'compounds' - single sex hostels - in Cape Town were situated.

In circumstances like these it was impossible for the authorities to impose night curfews, and Cape Town was relatively liberal, with less severe enforcement of the hated pass laws compared with other towns.

Although to a country man it was full of strangers and danger, in fact Cape Town had less violence and other crimes than most other cities at that time. Even to me it seemed less menacing than East London, the only other town I had been in. All these features were to change during the 10 years I lived there.

This time I decided not to go to the Pass Office to wait for an employer. I felt better able to present myself in English and would try my luck in the city centre.

Early in my quest, when I went knocking on office doors asking for vacancies, I came across a trade union office in Plein Street. I knew nothing about trade unions but knocked on the door. I was invited in and given a chair to sit on before I could say anything. This was very unlike receptions I had had elsewhere.

A man came and introduced himself to me as Oscar Mpetha. He wanted to know my name and work. I told him was looking for a job. He said he would ask his comrades if they knew of any work, and I heard the word comrades' used for the first time. He added that I would have to wait until everyone broke for tea, which someone was already making. He was sure I would like a cup after wandering the town all morning.

When a call came that tea was ready, out came comrades from different offices -people of all colours, Africans, coloureds and whites - to drink tea together happily. This struck me as wonderful, but was taken aback by the multiracial office full of

friendly people. Iwas a peasant from a small village, and the most amazing thing was that the woman serving the tea was white.

I was introduced to the staff and Oscar explained that I was looking for work. Someone said he thought there may be jobs at the railway station soon. I was asked if I would like that, and said yes. Before I left, Oscar explained that this was the office of the Food and Canning Workers' Unions.

It was agreed I would keep in touch with them and I headed off. I could not forget what had struck me about that place, and it was the first thing I related to those I stayed with. A white woman had made tea for Africans, and some of the Africans were even cheeky enough to tell her the tea was not strong enough and that next time she should make it better. It was a friendly discussion, obviously among equals.

Oscar Mpetha had invited me to visit the office from time to time to help with a backlog of paperwork. At the same time they would prepare me for working in town and give me a general idea of what a trade union was all about. I had agreed readily, and they said they would pay my train fare.

Soon afterwards I accepted the invitation. I was asked to copy records of workers' subscriptions. I listened to their discussions and, while doing so, got interested. I went often after that, to do some work and to learn.

Every morning they would discuss a certain area and how to organise workers there, forming an area committee and taking up grievances of the workers.

Oscar Mpetha took me under his wing and gave me mini-

lectures on trade unions and how they were run. He covered the duties of members, shop stewards, factory and area committees, and even full-time officers. He also took me along with him when he went to meet workers, pointing out different streets and landmarks as we went.

I learned that the law said if Africans wanted trade unions, they had to be separate from other organised workers. The progressive unions, therefore, had been forced to have parallel organisations.

The office I had discovered housed both the Food and Canning Workers' Union (FCWU) and the African Food and Canning Workers' Union (A-FCWU). In practice they ran as one. with one conference at which all workers were represented. But they had to maintain the pretence that they were two unions, with two conferences etc. The two conferences had the same agenda, the same resolutions, and took place at the same time in the same hall. However, the meetings had to be recorded in separate minutes, each one with different movers and seconders of resolutions and so on.

The unions also had to have two sets of officers. Oscar Mpetha was general secretary of A-FCWU, with Elizabeth Mafekeng as president, while Ray Alexander was general secretary of FCWU. At the time Ray had been banned, and a young woman called Becky Lan was acting general secretary. Eventually Betty became general secretary until she too was banned. Throughout, Ray remained a powerful force in both unions - and indeed in the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) when it was set up.

. Ray Alexander was a giant of the early trade union

movement in South Africa, and of the SACP. She was completely dedicated, very determined and dominated almost everything - it was fortunate that her line was usually correct.

Although she was not allowed to be present at conferences, she was always in a nearby room, influencing delegates one by one. The office administrator, Wilma Yon - the tea maker that first day - had worked with Ray for a long time. She made sure all the union's papers and minutes had Ray's approval. She and workers in the office made frequent visits to Ray's home. Oscar took me with him on some of his visits, and later Becky Lan would send me by myself.

In those days, when I was new to town, some of the people I met made profound impressions on me. I have already mentioned Oscar Mpetha, not only a trade union leader but also a leader of the ANC and of the civic association in Elsies River. He was a powerful character, very independent, and admired that very much. It is probably because of him that I have spent nearly all my life working for the trade union movement.

A second person who impressed me was Jack Simons. He was a university professor, married to Ray Alexander. When visited their house for the first time, I went around the back to be inconspicuous and noticed a small room in the basement where a man was working at a desk.

It was Jack: he came out, greeted me, and asked me about myself. When he heard I had recently arrived from the village he warned me that I had come into what was becoming a jungle, with no traditional leaders or village meetings to solve problems and no agreement about what was right and wrong. It was each

man for himself in this place.

This struck a chord, putting into words what I was feeling, but the whole episode meant much more than that to me. Jack spoke to me as one man speaking to another, not as a white man speaking down to a black man. From then on we had a warm relationship.

I remember much later when was working for the union, he stopped me as I was leaving after a consultation with Ray and asked if I was now cleverer than when went in. I laughed and said yes, I supposed so, and told him we had been talking about imminent negotiations with employers. He immediately asked if she had told me to wear a suit and tie, as first impressions were very important on these occasions. When I said no, he said go back and say Jack said she must organise respectable clothes for us at once.

After some weeks of visiting the union office Iwas told about a job vacancy at the railway station and was taken along to see the foreman. He said I would start at 7.30am. and work until 4.30pm, Monday to Friday. My wages would be £4 a week and could go up if I was a good worker. My job would be to help carry goods being delivered to or collected from the station. By now I was not just going for a job, I was also thinking of helping to organise railway workers.

On Monday I started as arranged. I must say it was not easy at first, because Monday was a busy day, and old hands have little respect for newcomers. But the days passed and I got used to the work and the workers got used to me. When I knew them better I found them to be a jolly crowd, not diplomatic but blunt and straightforward in their language and always happy and

noisy.

Soon after starting the job, I moved closer to the station. I stayed with cousin Lucy, who lived in Kensington. This was near to another relative, Sidinile, whose mother was a Sibeko. Sidinile also had a big influence on me. He was, and still is, a straight and straightforward man and I respect him deeply. Perhaps he influenced me even more than I know because when we visited him in 1993 - his 100th year - my wife said that listening to him was like listening to me!

At that time Sidinile was chair of the Kensington branch of the ANC, and I soon got involved, and joined. The ANC was already influential among Africans in Cape Town, and was involved in all aspects of people's lives.

Leaders were well known to everyone and warm to people. Their houses were open and people pitched up at all hours of the day or night with problems. One of the things that appealed to me about the ANC was this caring attitude. The organisation seemed to bring a version of some of our good traditional ways to town life. One of the striking examples of this was when an ANC person died.

Funerals are very important community events all over Africa. When an African dies, there is a gathering every evening for two reasons: firstly, to prepare for a great funeral and, secondly, for people to show their sympathy with the family of the deceased. How his should be done depends on what kind of people the family are: whether they are ,religious or non-religious or belong to an organisation. The tone must necessarily follow that the person believed when alive.

When the deceased was an ANC supporter, the ANC took over everything. They paid the expenses and organised all services. The death was immediately reported to the region of the ANC, and the region authorised each branch to collect money or arrange or delegations to attend the funeral. The relatives of the deceased comrade were asked send the body to the mortuary until either Saturday or Sunday, when everybody would able to attend the funeral.

The unique part was that the ANC changed the pattern of the nearest relatives carrying the full load and the responsibility of the funeral. Instead, it became the responsibility of the whole community and the ANC ensured that even non-ANC members were involved.

The funeral started with an announcement that the deceased was a member of ANC, and all present were expected to respect the ANC until after the funeral. The funeral procession then passed through the township led by ANC leaders, some whom were church leaders. Immediately behind them came the ANC Women's League and Defiance Campaign Volunteers, in khaki uniform. The volunteers took turns carrying the coffin. It was very dignified and even those not taking part lined the road to the cemetery.

After the funeral people went back to listen to short speeches by people from the ANC branches which were donating money.

We did not need to pay preachers to speak at funerals: most Congress people religious or not - seemed to be preachers. Any of them could deliver the address. At an ANC funeral, the occasion was not just for mourning: the service was turned into a big meeting. Delegates who spoke were addressing not just

convinced ANC people, but the whole community. As well as commemorating the deceased, they had to speak about local concerns and what ANC policy was regarding them. This was particularly important later, when ANC and all public meetings were banned.

People were prepared to defy the law to ensure a proper funeral even then, with respect paid to the deceased's political beliefs. When an ANC member died, you we sure to see the Women's League and Defiance Campaign uniforms and clenched fists the air, and hear ANC slogans and revolutionary songs.

In the old days, after big funerals, local ANC leaders were often flooded with people wanting to join them. It seemed humanity as a whole wanted to be assured that when they died their bodies would be treated with respect and closely associated with what they were when they were alive. They knew the ANC would ensure they had a dignified burial.

This was the first time many people heard about ANC policies, and they were impressed by them. In the later dark days, morale was greatly raised by the evidence that many people held firm until they died, that others - also still ANC - were prepared to honour them in death.

As everyone who saw TV coverage of the funerals of comrades Chris Hani and Joe Slovo will realise, ANC tradition on funerals looks set to remain as strong as ever in the new South Africa.

To return to the 1950s

We held mass meetings almost every Sunday morning in the open air in townships The leaders of the local ANC branch would just pitch up with a microphone and people would rush to hear

what we were saying. In a short space of time we would have a crowd of hundreds, and before the police caught up with what we were doing, we would be finished and gone.

Then as now the Youth League was the most militant section of the ANC, painting slogans, distributing leaflets and calling meetings. The Women's League was effective too, with many powerful women also active in the ANC. During the day most men worked far away, and women bore the responsibility for whatever struggles went on around our homes. They were the backbone of most ANC activities, as well as taking the lead in recruiting and fund raising.

When started work at the station I had already joined the South African Railway and harbours Workers' Union (SARHWU). As I got to know my fellow workers, I tried to interest them in the union.

I continued going into the Plein Street offices to help out on Saturday mornings. Other unions, as well as FCWU, were based there and it was always busy, as workers from different industries and workplaces came to pay their subscriptions and record problems they were having with employers. I used to make out receipts and take down statements which were then checked by more experienced comrades.

I got to know Johnnie Mtini, chairperson of SARHWU in Cape Town, on my Saturday mornings at the office. One day he arrived at the station at lunchtime, looking for me. He invited me to a stretch of beach at Paarden Eiland where he was to meet the area trade union committee. The committee had been started by Food and Canning and was expanding to cover other industries in the area. Their job was to organise local workers

into joining a trade union, to look into grievances and to collect subs and other money if needed for strike funds.

I accepted the invitation and went with him to be introduced to the committee, who asked me to join them at lunchtimes in going around the area and having small meetings with workers from different workplaces. I agreed at once.

Railway officials were not pleased by my union work and eventually I was sacked. When I left I made sure I kept my railway overalls, because Johnnie Mtini had a plan in mind. SARHWU had never had a full-time organiser and he wanted me to take this on. He managed to raise some funds from the union and other sources to cover a small wage me and minimum office expenses. I did not always get that small wage, and we had office of our own. We begged the use of one corner in the office of the Laundry workers. A start had been made.

I used to put on my overalls and trespass on the railway. I carried a Bible in my pocket in case I was challenged. The railwaymen knew me and welcomed me to join them and talk at lunchtime. We discussed their grievances and many joined the union. If a foreman came to see what the noise was about, he found the Bible open, and us talking about biblical texts.

This kind of work interested me very much and, I must confess, I began to forget my plan to go home for the scientific tilling of our 12 hectares. I saw myself settling down in Cape Town, with my wife.

I was worried because had received no letters from Letitia since we both left home, although had written to her. I had heard indirectly that the child she was expecting had not lived,

but that she was all right.

I decided that now had a job and a room to live in I should write again, asking her to join me. She still ignored me and eventually I wrote to her mother explaining the problem. She replied that I should buy a ticket for Letitia and send it to her and she would help. Sure enough that worked and my wife arrived. We stayed with Lucy before moving room with my cousin, Sidinile.

I can understand Letitia's reluctance to move to Cape Town. It must have been daunting to her, a village girl, to travel nearly 1200 kilometres from her family to set up home in a big city where I would be the only person she knew. She would have to change completely to fit in with urban life.

Her fears were justified. She had to get used to living in one room which served as bedroom, sitting room and kitchen. She had to learn to cook on a primus stove, to dress as they dressed in town, to shop at the market and all the other new things, all among strangers. Everything must have seemed so fast to her, particularly against the background of town clashes with the police.

But one has to keep up with changing situations or perish, and she succeeded in adapting as so many of our generation had had to do.

Chapter 6

Trade unions battling against the odds

Unions were growing in numbers and strength all over the country. In 1955, when I was working for the railway union, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) was formed.

Regional conferences were held, and at the Western Cape regional conference I was elected secretary, with Ben January of the Laundry Workers as chairperson and Mary Eaglehoff as treasurer. The secretaries of affiliated unions plus a few others completed the regional committee. Later we were joined by Louise Kellerman, from Food and Canning, who became joint secretary to help me with the workload. The Food and Canning, Textiles and Laundry unions, which were all well organised and had strong progressive leaders, became the backbone of the new organisation.

Some of the other big unions - like the Building Industrial Union led by George Peake, the Sweet Workers' Union led by Jack Heeger, the Furniture Industrial Union led by Edgar Dean, the Garment Workers' Industrial Union and the Seamen and Line Fishermen's Union - did not come into SACTU. These unions were mostly coloured, with some having a few white members too.

Like some of the SACTU affiliates' they were registered unions, but unlike them they did not have parallel unregistered unions for Africans. They were not anti-SACTU - in fact they were co-operative and let us use their facilities - but probably they did

not want to annoy the authorities.

SACTU was committed to non-racialism and SACTU unions were bound to try to organise African workers in their industries, which inevitably antagonised the regime. The new SACTU regional committee decided we should pool the resources of some of the smaller unions like SARHWU, which had no offices, and get an office for them and SACTU in the Plein Street building where the Food and Canning, Laundry and other progressive unions' offices were. From then on I worked for SACTU as well as the other unions, together with Ben Turok, who was also secretary of the Metal Workers' Union.

Ben made a great impact on me. He was the first white person I had even been close to, and I found in him a good comrade and friend. He was, and still is, a very clever, energetic and brave man. Like me, he combined his union work with more directly political commitments. He was an elected "Native Representative" on the provincial council and a Congress of Democrats activist. He was also a communist. He was rebellious about a lot of things, not just politics, and at one time was thrown out by his family for marrying Mary, who was not Jewish.

Ben expanded my political and organisational education and later after the Treason Trial, recruited me to the SACP. In the end, in exile, both of us found ourselves outside the party. I do not know Ben's circumstances, but in my case I was never expelled. It was just that when I moved to Manchester in 1972 I was dropped, and never heard again from the London SACP structure.

In SACTU, Ben Turok and I seemed a good partnership. We

tackled the task of organising with enthusiasm and soon became popular with the workers. We also seemed a good pair to negotiate with employers: Ben educated and articulate and myself obviously close to the workforce. We made it a point always to look neat and clean when we went to meet the bosses, as Jack Simons had advised.

Some white comrades - Ray, Sonia Bunting and Naomi Shapiro and others - provided us black trade unionists with respectable good quality suits, passed on from well wishers, some of them widows. They also used to pass on everyday clothes, because with our poor and irregular wages we had no money to buy clothing. When asked by friends why we sometimes looked so well dressed we always explained we were wearing dead communists' suits and overcoats.

SACTU's policy was for industrial unions, with one union to cover all the workers in one industrial sector, such as the Railways, Textiles, Food etc. We encouraged the formation of local branches as soon as there were 50 members in any industrial sector. The workers were then asked to meet and elect their own chairperson, secretary and other officers for their branch. In this way a strong layer of grassroots trade union leadership grew.

Another policy we developed in the Western Cape was to set up informal committees of shop floor leaders in localities, like the one I have already mentioned in Paarden Eiland. The idea was to have groups which could meet during the lunch hour, including local leaders of both SACTU affiliated unions and other unions.

These committees by-passed union bureaucracies and built

real workers' solidarity at grassroots level. They were able to raise financial and other support for strikes as well as mobilise workers for wider issues like bus boycotts.

We engaged in many battles with employers, with varying degrees of success. One early episode which stands out in my memory was when I started to organise woodworkers at the General Box Company in Retreat. The majority of workers were Africans, but there were also some coloureds.

This detail was important because under the notorious Industrial Conciliation Act Africans were allowed to form African-only trade unions if they wanted to but these unions could not carry out basic trade union functions. They could not become registered unions, and only registered unions were allowed to negotiate with employees on behalf of their members.

Unions with white or coloured members, which Africans were not allowed to join, could become registered unions. When registered, they could demand that the labour department set up an industrial conciliation board where they could negotiate with employers on workers' demands.

As you will realise these laws made it difficult to organise black workers, because there was little chance of quick gains being made. The only practical approach was to raise the political level among workers so that they would accept a long term strategy.

I decided to approach General Box's African workers away from the factory, and to do this involved the Retreat ANC branch. I asked the branch committee to set up a special sub-

committee dealing with trade union work, and to organise lectures and training for shop stewards. This immediately paid dividends, as all ANC members who worked in the woodwork factory joined the union. In addition, trade union work was always put on the agenda at ANC meetings, and workers in other local industries got interested, including railway workers.

Simultaneously I began to organise coloured workers at General Box and this was not easy either. They were a minority, and feared they could be victimised, which was true. But about 100 did join, and I was able to apply for a conciliation board meeting to demand better wages and conditions at the factory.

As soon as the employer was told this, without hesitation he sacked all the coloured workers. He was probably surprised when the Africans came out on strike in sympathy. He used a group of stooges to try to persuade the African workers to go back and, when that failed, to organise scabs (strike breakers). We held mass meetings in Retreat under the auspices of the ANC, and people rejected the stooges.

Eventually a conciliation board was held, as the law required, and the coloured workers appointed me to represent them. Ben Turok was at the board meeting too, and the officials started to question him. Ben pointed out that they should address me, as I was leading for the union side. This was too much for the chairman, and he ruled that it was against the law for me to speak.

This led to another strike, during which I was arrested for incitement. After a weekend I was bailed out of the police cells and we found we had an unforeseen problem to deal with. Every night big trucks arrived at the factory, with goods from

another timber factory in Stellenbosch, belonging to the same company. They were running an evening shift in Stellenbosch, making up for the production lost in Retreat.

We turned to the ANC Stellenbosch branch for help in organising workers there, but encountered a major problem. The workers used for the extra shift were unemployed coloured farm labourers who were backward politically. They were even working for a lower wage than usual, the reason being that any work at all was manna from heaven for them.

They were unemployed most of the year, only getting work for about three months when they picked grapes and other winter crops for the farmers on whose land they lived. Even then they were not paid in hard cash, but by the "tot" system: payment of liquor and rations. It was going to be very difficult - next to impossible - to get solidarity from people in that plight, and in addition the police were interfering.

I was arrested again, this time for entering Stellenbosch without a permit, and although I could have paid a fine on the spot was detained in prison for some days. I will tell of my experiences there in a later chapter.

Few concessions were gained in Retreat, and the strike had been a partial failure despite the brave fight put up by the workers. Very few strikes are a total failure though, and in this case, as in most others, the workers learned a lot and their class consciousness was raised. In the union too, we learned a lesson. It was a mistake to organise in one factory only, and to think we could take on an employer who had another factory he could use against us. We should have found out about the other factory and organised the whole industry in the Western Cape

before we even thought of putting forward demands.

This early lesson I learned is one we tried to pass on to workers in the western world later when working for international solidarity with the workers of South Africa. The exploitation and low wages of South African workers were a threat to all of them, particularly to those working for multinationals with South African subsidiaries. It is a lesson which still needs to be taken seriously by workers everywhere, as long as low wage economies persist in the world.

One good outcome of the general turmoil in Retreat was that it aroused the interest of railway workers, who invited me to visit their compound. As a result some of them joined the union.

Although we had already built up some membership at Cape Town Station, the railway industry was particularly difficult to organise. Railway workers were directly employed by government, and none of the industrial laws covered the railways. Further, almost all the African workers were casuals, taken on each morning for that day only and even within that day liable to be sacked by the foreman at any time. All this was on top of the general situation that no black union could negotiate on behalf of members. So in the case of the railwaymen, even more than most workers, the task was to organise and educate them for the long trade union and political struggles ahead.

A railway union structure did not yet exist at national level. Every province had a regional structure, usually located in big towns, and they all called themselves the South African Railways and Harbour Workers' Union but had no national officers or

office.

Our only links were when we met comrades from other regions at Trades and Labour Council and later SACTU national meetings. We always found it helpful then to exchange ideas - for example, we learned from Johannesburg the idea of negotiating the right of a worker with a grievance to call for an interpreter of his choice to go with him to meet the boss and making sure a SARHWU officer was that interpreter. We also picked up the idea of the value of letters of complaint being written by sympathetic lawyers or other people of standing~ liable to frighten generally ill-educated railway officials. If necessary, we should write such letters ourselves!

Much as we needed to have regular exchanges, we had no resources for a national office or national officers to serve widely dispersed railway workers, all employed by the one organisation.

Now, as I write in 1995 the situation is very different. SARHWU is a powerful national force. We still have plenty of problems to deal with, though, and lessons to learn. I will write more about these later.

Another early conflict I was involved in as a full-time trade union official was at a factory called Boston Bags. When we started, the factory was not covered by the Industrial Conciliation Act, so workers were at the mercy of the employer. However, all the workers were coloured, so if they were union members they could demand an Industrial Conciliation Board and start negotiating for better wages and conditions.

Comrade Ben Turok was working with the Paarden Eiland area

committee, which covered the Boston Bag factory area, and he started organising its workers. In the middle of it he was placed under a banning order, meaning he could not meet more than on person at a time. That did not stop him. He continued seeing workers one by one at horne but it did limit what he could do: for example he could not go to the factory. So he involved me.

I soon found that most of the workers lived - as I did - in Kensington, so at Ben's suggestion I invited some key people to a small party at my house. The union had no funds, so Ben raised the money to pay for refreshments.

As I was not yet as experienced as Ben, I asked him to be there, in a separate room of course so he would not be with more than one person at a time. At this get together we decided to delay calling a meeting at the factory until the majority of workers were in the union. As people joined, we would invite them to visit the union offices on Saturday mornings and tell them about trade unions, so that they could all learn to be organisers We also decided not to approach workers who were close to management until much later.

We worked so secretly that even workers involved from the start were surprised when we finally called a factory meeting. Only three workers - the ones we had decided not to approach - were not members. All the others had joined.

We formed a union branch that day, adopted a constitution, elected office bearers and made a list of demands to be submitted to a conciliation board meeting - all unanimously. Following the procedure laid down in the law, the demands were submitted to both the labour department and the

employer.

He was shocked. He called a meeting of the workers and wanted to know who was behind the union activity. The chairman. secretary and treasurer came forward, as their names were already on the documents. They said they did not want to discuss issues until the date appointed by the labour department. The boss got angry, saying the factory belonged to him, not to the labour department or the workers, and he would show them who was in charge. He pointed to the three union officers and told them they were dismissed. This did not bother them at all.

We had already explained to the workers the legal position following an application for a conciliation board meeting. After an application it was illegal for an employer to dismiss anyone. It was for this reason that we had taken the papers to the labour department and got their acknowledgement before posting the other copy to the employer.

The workers knew the law of the land, even if the employer did not, so the three marched to the nearest phone booth and phoned the union office. We phoned the labour department and told them about the incident, saying that if the workers were no reinstated within an hour there would be trouble.

The labour department assured us that they would put things right as obviously the employer did not know the legal position. The workers were quickly reinstated - a great victory for us. Even the three who were not members asked if they could join!

At lunchtime we went to warn workers to be more disciplined than ever as we did not want the employer to have any excuse

for more trouble. As expected he did try to provoke them but failed. For the first time in the history of this bag manufacturing factory, the employer had to sit down together with workers to negotiate on wages and better conditions. I learned a lot during this time and I dare say the workers did too. They learned that they had a power which renders employers harmless - the power of unity.

Obviously the good organising done in the Boston Bag factory, and the wage increases and improved working conditions, were the talk of surrounding factories, and workers started inquiring about trade unions. We distributed leaflets to the whole area explaining what a trade union was, where the offices were, and what days and times to visit the offices.

Boston Bag employees were good propagandists for the unions. They made sure everyone knew what had happened at their factory. This was what we wanted. Once workers themselves were involved and had confidence in the power of trade union organisation things would really move.

I remember another occasion, not long after this, when I was involved in a strike at the Lystra Zip factory. We had organised the workers, formulated demands and applied for a conciliation board meeting. Then we heard nothing, and discovered that the labour department had forgotten to fix a date. The law stipulated that a date must be fixed within a certain time and that, if this were not done, workers were legally entitled to strike.

The zip workers were all women and they were very keen for action. They had learned from the Boston Bag struggle that unity could move mountains and get them what they wanted,

and they were ready for a showdown. I told them at a lunchtime meeting that they were entitled to strike, and they decided at once that they would not return to work at 2.00pm when the hooter ended lunch hour.

At 2.00pm I raised the question of whether I should go or remain with them, and it was decided that I should remain during the trying period ahead. I told them that I would be arrested, and the reply was they would not go back to work if I were taken away.

By now the employer was hovering around, but he was ignored so he called the police. When the police arrived, they asked the question that they always ask: "What's going on here?" Nobody replied. Then to me: "You, where's your pass?" I produced it, but they arrested me just the same. "You girls, go back to work." A big "NO" was shouted back.

Meanwhile the employer had phoned the labour department and informed them of the situation. An official arrived to inform the workers that an early date would be fixed for the board meeting. By now the situation had been complicated by my arrest, because the women refused to go back to work unless I was released and brought to the factory, so that they could see me for themselves.

The employer begged the labour department official to help, so they instructed the police to return me immediately. By the time I was released and driven by the police back to the factory it was too late to resume work, so the whole afternoon was wasted and the employer lost thousands of pounds.

This was another victory for workers and I was also very proud

of the incident because we had made the government and the employer bow to our demands. During subsequent negotiations, the workers got their increases and improved conditions.

We learned a lot as we went along. We had some setbacks and some victories. We tasted gaol life, and got used to living this way. I was fully involved in political life, being a member of the residents' organisation as well as the ANC and the union.

Although I was an ANC provincial executive committee member, my main involvement was with the trade union movement. This dated back to my meeting with Oscar Mpetha in my earliest days in Cape Town and I saw no contradiction in it. My own experience was teaching me that trade union and political struggles were one and the same thing, especially for Africans in South Africa.

We knew that trade unions could win only limited advances for people without political rights. African trade unions were prevented by law from carrying out effective trade union activities, and the government cared nothing for them because politically they did not matter. Their members had no vote and no party would lose an election because they ignored African workers' demands. Even Coloured and Indian workers, who had registered trade unions and could negotiate, had wages and conditions far below those of white workers because they too had no political clout. So trade unions needed political change before they could work effectively.

On the other side of the coin, the ANC needed black workers and their organisations involved. It would be hard to advance the correct policies unless working people were involved in policy making. And of course, the mass of urban blacks were

workers, so the ANC had to involve workers and work with their organisations.

In practical terms, too, trade union and political work needed to go hand in hand. Workers' struggles gave opportunities for them to be politicised, and ANC branches in townships could give moral and practical support to the struggles of local workers.

Some of the experiences have described show how the ANC's involvement in trade union issues benefited workers' organisations and strengthened the ANC's links in the community. Most comrades in those days could tell similar stories.

In the Western Cape, in particular, all ANC leaders were involved with trade unions, and all the African SACTU unions had ANC leaders. The downside was, of course, that when the ANC was attacked, the unions were hard hit too. A major instance of this was the Treason Trial.

Chapter 7
The Treason Trial

Early one morning in December 1956 I was rudely awoken by a knock on my door. I was sure it was the police, I knew their sort of knock. I opened the door and found two uniformed men there.

"What is your name?"

"Archie Sibeko"

"Good. We have a warrant for your arrest. Do you want to read it?"

I said I did, and they handed it to me. I read it twice, puzzled.

"What the hell is high treason?"

"I don't know. It is our duty to arrest you, that's all. You had better dress quickly, the magistrate is waiting."

I was in for many rude shocks. I was taken to Cape Town central police station and found others already there. I knew them all. Most were leaders of the Congress Alliance organisations, the ANC, the Coloured People's Congress and the South African Congress of Trade Unions. I remember there was a freelance journalist there too.

Ben Turok was among them, of course. We never worked out why these particular people were arrested while others were not, but as far as Ben and I were concerned, we suspected it was because of our repeated involvement in strikes.

At about 6.00am we were taken to a magistrate who said we were to be transferred to Johannesburg. I could not understand what was going on at all - magistrates before dawn, transfers to Johannesburg, charges of high treason, all of it to me seemed a farce.

We were taken to a military aerodrome, Ysterplaat, where we found more comrades from outside Cape Town. There were 20 of us in all, representing all parts of our region and all the people who lived there, Africans, coloureds, Indians and whites. Because of apartheid we were to board different military planes, the whites in one, and the "non-whites" as they called us, in the

other. Even dangerous whites could not travel with blacks.

We left Cape Town at 9.00am and arrived at another military aerodrome at about 1.00pm. It was a terrible journey, with the light military aeroplane - a Dakota -jumping up and down all the way. We all vomited, including the police, who apparently were aboard an aeroplane for the first time, like we were.

When we arrived at the gaol, called the Fort, we found many leading comrades from different parts of South Africa. There were 156 of us who had been arrested in the early hours of the morning and taken to Johannesburg accused of high treason. Although we were all regarded as traitors, as in the aeroplanes, whites had to be separated from the rest of us, and locked up in another part of the prison.

In the midst of all the amazing things happening, I kept feeling surprised that I was considered important enough to be included in such distinguished company. Until then I had not thought of myself as a national leader.

Once inside the Fort, our mission was to sort out the prison regime and put warders straight, especially the Africans. Once we saw a warder beating up prisoners. We shouted : him that this would not be tolerated, really frightening him, and after that no warder beat up prisoners.

Every morning we sang our national anthem, and everyone - including those in -charge - had to wait until we were through. We made friends among the warders, and they carried our messages to and from the outside world. We made friends among the other prisoners too, and when we were bailed out some of them cried, saying they would e forced back to the

same old bad conditions and ill-treatment.

The Indian community in Johannesburg organised themselves into cooking groups, and sent in three meals a day for 156 people. Not once did we ever eat gaol food. It was the first time many of us had tasted curry, and we found it strong; it even made us cry ut at the same time it was delicious. We were very honoured that people cared enough about us to make sure we had good food every day. None of us will ever forget that.

Every afternoon from 2.00pm until 4.00pm it was visiting time. It was out of the question for families to visit those of us from the Cape, Natal and the Orange Free State, so the ANC made sure we had other visitors. This was often a joke as we were called to see unknown people and had little to say. Sometimes it turned out that a young girl visitor had picked the name of an old man, or an old lady called for a young man. But having visitors cheered us up and we made jokes out of the embarrassment.

Our first day in court was one day of my life I shall not easily forget. There were thousands and thousands of people who had come to see the trial, which the whole world, ever mind the whole of South Africa, knew about. The truck we were travelling in was completely closed - with only ventilators for air. Newspapers called it a "singing box", because as we went through Johannesburg we were singing revolutionary songs at top volume - all 156 of us.

At court, police made the mistake of telling the crowd outside they would not be allowed in. At this, they decided to gatecrash and in no time the fence around the Drill hall, where the trial was to be held, went down and the whole multitude surged into

the courtroom. They beat up the police and the presiding magistrate, FCA Wessels, chief magistrate of Bloernfontein, ran for his life.

In the crush some of the crowd overflowed into the dock where we were, and it was really chaotic until our leader, Chief Albert Luthuli, appealed from the dock for order to be restored, asking our supporters to leave.

In the confusion two of the accused, Moses Mabhida and Wilton Mkwayi, were cleared out of the court with the public, and the police refused to let them back in! They sent a note to inform Luthuli, and he instructed them to just go away. They returned to the township, and went underground until later our machinery sent them overseas. They were both trade union leaders and went to the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in Prague, where they stayed to represent SACTU.

The court proceedings were adjourned until the next day. The "singing box" had to return to prison, to the thunderous applause of people in the streets.

Protest meetings were held all over the townships, calling for the release of the leaders. At the same time, the Transvaal Bus Company decided to put up bus fares by a penny. It was a spark which triggered national action, demanding cuts in bus fares. Alfred Nzo in Alexandra Township was at the forefront of the protest.

People boycotted buses and walked to work for weeks, until the bus company surrendered. It really annoyed the government, but we were inspired by this militancy. The government thought they had all the leading "trouble makers"

in prison, on trial for their lives, and straight away new leaders arose and the struggle went on. We were convinced the government could never destroy our movement.

Undoubtedly there was a revolutionary spirit at that time and morale was high. What we lacked was a revolutionary theory and programme, and a strong organisational structure to carry it through. The Communist Party no doubt believed it had the theory and the programme, but it had not yet made much impact on Africans.

After a few weeks the lawyers applied for bail. They were successful, but rigid conditions were imposed. We had to attend court every day when in session and report to a police station daily if we were away from Johannesburg during court recess. I went to stay with my niece, Matilda Sibeko, in Pimville. She lived very close to the home of Mark and Gertrude Shope, and I spent most of my spare time with them.

Mark Shope was also a treason trialist, and we became close friends. We had a lot in common. Like me he came from a rural background, in his case in the Transvaal, and he had a limited education. He had travelled to Johannesburg as a migrant worker, working first in the mines and later in a laundry.

He had become a leader in both the ANC and the trade union movement. He was chairperson of the Laundry and Dye Workers' Union and general secretary of SACTU, where he was a dynamic force.

His name will appear again in my story because we left the country and were in MK together in 1963. He was luckier than me because later he was called to WFTU in Prague and his wife

was able to leave the country and join him with their children, who grew up in Czechoslovakia. Mark and Gertrude are now back home, and Mark has been elected honorary president of the Postal Union, POTWA.

For the treason trial defence we had some excellent lawyers, progressive or even communist like the great Bram Fischer. They seemed to enjoy the work, and the court became a platform for progressive ideas.

We also enjoyed the proceedings. It was nice to see police officers being made fools of. At first they were confident and arrogant, only to be exposed later. Certain instances stick in my mind as nothing but farces.

For example, when one police witness was questioned about how be had obtained detailed notes of a conference, he admitted he had been in a cupboard in the conference room from before 6.00am until the room was closed that evening. We howled with laughter at the idea of him stuck there, hungry, thirsty and with full bladder all the time.Another witness claimed to have verbatim records of speeches made at a township open air meeting. It turned out he had been sitting on his motor bike and sidecar at the back of the crowd. We could not believe he had heard a thing. Our leading advocate, Vernon Berrange, insisted on creating a mock-up of the whole situation in the courtroom itself. A motor bike with sidecar was brought in for the police witness to sit on at the back, and a meeting was held.

Robert Resha was the speaker and the rest of us, the accused, became the crowd, shouting comments and mocking the policeman as at any township meeting. At the end of the

performance, the policeman was asked to produce his notes of what Resha had said, and of course he had not got down a single coherent sentence. We enjoyed the entertainment, which discredited yet another prosecution witness.

The government produced various people claiming to be former leading ANC members, to give evidence against us. Some we knew to be Johannesburg gang members, currently in prison, and they were easily exposed. I remember one who claimed to be a graduate of Fort Hare University, who was unable to pick out the university's principal, Professor ZK Matthews who was among the accused. Needless to say, Matthews had never set eyes on him before. The imposter's downfall was complete when he was asked to write the Bachelor of Science (BSc) qualification which he claimed. He put it down as B.S.C.

The prosecutors were really desperate. They even produced a Russian cookery book, found in the raided house of one of the accused, as evidence that the owner was a Russian agent.

We came to despise the proceedings. The prosecutors and their witnesses were nothing more than comedians. They were keen to sentence us to death, but their case was pathetic, and we were sure it would completely collapse in the end. We laughed openly at many witnesses, and we talked freely, passing notes among ourselves and to our legal team.

Sometimes we played cards when the evidence being presented referred to another part of the country, and once we nearly beat up the magistrate, a government appointee, because he insulted the crowd when they made a noise. We were restrained only by Luthuli.

We were a troublesome lot of defendants, as far as court officials were concerned.

The magistrate often got annoyed and threatened us. Eventually our lawyer objected. He said if his clients were breaking the law, the magistrate should lay a charge, so he could defend them. This annoyed the magistrate more, but it did stop his threats for a while.

I spent nearly a whole year in Johannesburg, first in prison and then on bail. Only once, during a court recess, was I able to visit Cape Town funded by Defence and Aid. It was the only time I saw my wife, my young son Zola Siphiwo, and our baby son Nqaba Vuyo, born while I was away. We called him Nqaba, meaning Fort, because I was in the Fort prison.

Fortunately Letitia was receiving some support, financial and other, especially from the wives of other people on trial with me. Mary Turok, who in Ben's absence had taken over as secretary of the Metalworkers, was one, and Ruth Gosschalk was another. Both had children the same age as ours.

In Johannesburg that year I helped revive the ANC branch in Pimville. I was not supposed to appear in public, but I did not accept that and used to disguise myself, sometimes wearing a Sotho blanket and hat to address public meetings in a place called Thaba Besu, a little rocky hill in the centre of the township.

In December 1957, nearly a year later, I was among the group of about 70 against whom all charges were dropped, and was freed. Those who were not discharged were committed for trial at the Supreme Court - a trial that dragged on until 1961.

The trial was disruptive to our lives, and to the ANC and other organisations, but it did have some benefits for the struggle.

Young people like me had the opportunity to be with great national leaders of the ANC and other Congress Alliance organisations, many of whom we would not have met otherwise.

They included Lilian Ngoyi, Florence Matomela, Frances Baard, Albert Luthuli, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, OR Tambo, Nelson Mandela, Dan Tloome, ZK Matthews, Robert Resha, Ruth First, Joe Slovo, Reverend James Calata, Raymond MhIaba, MB Yengwa, Archie Cumede, Dorothy Nyembe, Dr Yusuf Dadoo, MP Naicker, Dr GM Naicker, JB Marks, Moses Kotane, P Molaoa, Billy Nair, Dr AE Letele, MK Mpho, and many others. We used to have discussions every day and I got to know some of our leaders well.

All of us left that courtroom stronger and clearer than before, with our organisations more strongly welded together. Presumably these were unintended consequences of the government's great attempt to stamp out treason!

When we heard the news of our discharge, we had already left Johannesburg for an adjournment. I was in Alice, where I was born, visiting my mother and relatives. When I arrived in Alice I was a hero to the people of the surrounding villages. It was funny because Matthews was also there, and he was a treason trialist too, but he did not belong to the local people as I did.

I was a son who had become a leader, and I think they felt they all had the right to feel proud of me. By traditional

standards, young people do not lead, so it was embarrassing to me. But all old customs were waived and ignored so I could be given a leader's welcome. Sheep were slaughtered and roasted and a lot of people came to see me. Speeches were made and even known collaborators felt it necessary to say something. I replied to the speeches, very briefly.

I visited the traditional paramount chief, Justice Mabandla, who had been at school with my brother. He said he was glad to see me and was sorry he had not been able to attend my welcome home, as he was not allowed to attend any such thing unless it had been discussed by his counsellors. He invited me to a meeting of traditional leaders to be held at the "great place", and I accepted the offer.

At the meeting I spoke about the treason trial, and then talked about things that affected the land. When had left for Cape Town, the government had decided to stop cultivation of the small fields at the foot of the mountain, because of soil erosion, and had collected all title deeds (certificates of ownership of the land). Government officials had promised to issue new ones but this had not happened in the five years I was away. I exploited the point, saying that meetings like this must be used to fight such injustices, or the title deeds might never be reclaimed.

After my speech there was a burst of applause and I was satisfied I had hit the nail on the head. I suggested that a deputation be sent to the government and the matter discussed. Someone moved my name to be included in the deputation and a few days later we all went to the government offices in Alice.

We saw a fat native commissioner, who listened attentively to

our grievances and looked sympathetic. He informed us that he had been transferred just a week before. But he would write immediately to his headquarters. We should return in two weeks time, he said. Unfortunately, I had already left when they went for the second time so I did not hear the outcome. But I felt satisfied that I had tried to do something for my people.

It was at this time that one day the police in Alice stopped me and demanded my pass - something unheard of in that small town. I did not have it on me, and they arrested me. My brother challenged them to arrest him and everyone else on the street as well, all of whom did not have passes with them, but they were not impressed. They were special branch, and intent on harassing me. We had to pay an on the spot fine for my release. The police said the sooner I left Alice, the better.

The chief had invited me back to discuss the tactics of forming an ANC branch in the Tyume valley. I introduced him to Matthews in Fort Hare, but I think nothing came of it at that time.

Back in Cape Town, my prestige was high. Because I had been in the treason trial I was now seen as a national leader of our movement. Presumably the government took the same view, and it was not long before I received a banning order, preventing me from attending meetings. Luckily I was not confined to the house, as some were. I was able to continue my work, although being prohibited from attending meetings was a handicap.

At the time Ben Turok approached me to join the Communist Party, and I agreed readily. I was attached to his group, in which there were two other comrades: Sonia Bunting and Reg

September.

Chapter 8
The struggle intensifies

The Treason Trial had been an attempt by the regime to cripple black opposition and to frighten white voters with the spectre of Swart Gevaar - black danger. It backfired, but they pressed ahead, tightening their grip on the country. In the late 1950s they stepped up the enforcement of existing discriminatory laws and passed new oppressive legislation.

In Cape Town, the National Party policy of removing Africans from the city centre and the suburbs gained momentum, and people were uprooted from all over the peninsular to form a second township which they called Nyanga (Moon).

We were renting from an Indian landlord and our part of Kensington was not threatened at first, but African families living in *pondokkies* at the Windermere end were told to move. The families decided to club together for lawyers to fight the removals.

I asked Jack Simons's advice about this, as he was a lawyer, and he advised me it was a total waste of money. He said lawyers knew that the law clearly stated that people could be removed, and that they were just making money out of poor people for whom they could do nothing. We agreed I should first add my money to the kitty and then try to explain that we were only making lawyers richer. I did this and the people were convinced and got rid of the lawyers.

Jack asked me what was going to do when most of the Africans moved out of Kensington. He said that if I were a true leader, I would go with them. I explained I had no materials to build a house in Nyanga, but Jack solved the problem. He took me around collecting pieces of corrugated iron and other materials that he knew were spare in the back gardens of his friends. Then this university professor spent several weekends helping me build a *pondokkie* for my family in Nyanga West. He was, of course, right in his analysis that people who claim to be leaders must be close to those they lead.

It was becoming obvious to the ANC that bitter struggles lay ahead, and we prepared by improving our organisational framework. The regime had unintentionally made this easier by concentrating Africans in townships. Nelson Mandela's M-plan - an ANC strategic document to work underground efficiently and so named because it was drawn up by Mandela and approved by the ANC - built on this to create very efficient machinery. Comrade Elijah Loza was responsible for implementing the M-plan thoroughly in the Western Cape, and branches were quickly divided into wards, zones and cells, each with its own leadership.

This structure enabled regional and branch leaders to communicate very quickly to all members. We could call a branch meeting on a Sunday morning within 30 minutes, or mobilise people to deliver leaflets to every household in the township in a short space of time.

I remember one occasion when we in the Western Cape impressed Comrade tom Nkobi, then national organiser, with our efficiency. Thomas arrived in Cape Town unexpectedly on

his way to the Eastern Cape. He had very little time, but said he would like to meet as many as possible of the leadership in one township.

We asked him to give us half an hour and then led him into the bush nearby, where he was very surprised to find not less than 200 comrades, branch, ward, zone and cell leaders. He was very happy. We were also keen on other aspects of efficiency. I recall getting a letter from Comrade Walter Sisulu praising our region. He had sent out a directive to all regions, and only the Western Cape had replied to his letter.

The organisation was now well prepared for struggle, and as the pass laws intensified it was decided in 1960 to launch a campaign against them. This was to culminate on March 31 with the mass burning of passes all over the country.

As often happened, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) opportunistically tried to exploit people's anger and climb on the back of the ANC campaign. They jumped the gun and led demonstrations to police stations to bum passes in several localities on March 21.

Predictably the police fired on the only two large demonstrations, at Sharpeville and Langa. Sixty nine people were shot dead at Sharpeville and two died at Langa. In response the ANC immediately called for a stayaway from work on March 28. That day Chief Luthuli, president general of ANC, publicly burned his pass and called on people everywhere to do the same.

On March 30 the government declared a state of emergency, banned the ANC and PAC, and arrested many of our leaders.

Luckily we had ANC members in the police, and they used to warn us when there was going to be a raid. So on March 30 we were prepared.

When the police knocked on my door at 3.00am I was expecting it, and went out of the back window and over the wall into the railway yard, escaping arrest. I ran around, waking up other comrades, warning them to get out. When I knocked at the door of Dr Krishna Moodley - our neighbour, friend and doctor - his wife told me he had already been arrested. I went on to Aron Gaika to ask for a lift to Nyanga West where my hiding place had been pre-arranged, but he had already left and I decided to wait for a bus.

At about 5.00am a police van passed the bus stop and called me over. They were not security police, luckily, and did not know me. They wanted to know my name so I gave my Xhosa name. They asked if I knew Archie Sibeko and I said I did. They asked me if I knew where he slept that night and I said no. They warned me to move on, and not to intimidate people who wanted to go to work. I decided it would be safer to walk to Nyanga West.

Next day I heard that Gaika and Mpetha had gone to my house to check on me and been arrested there by the police, who were waiting for me. I went underground for a full five months. My family moved to our new house in Nyanga West during this time. I was not able to help with the move but managed to visit once or twice under cover of darkness, to see my wife, two little boys, and our new baby girl, Nomonde Linda.

My hiding place was in the ceiling of a house in Nyanga West which belonged to witch doctor, Comrade Chizama Mgeba. The

house was very secure, with a high corrugated iron fence with a strong locked door in it, and another door to the house itself. Because it was the witch doctor's house people-including policemen-were reluctant to intrude.

On one occasion there was a big police raid in the area, and I could hear doors being kicked in down the road. There was no one at the house, so when they started banging on the fence door, I quickly went down my rope ladder, replaced it, went out of the window and with a gigantic leap - which I could not repeat to get back - went over the back fence and on to the hill behind, where I had to stay all day.

I had a bed base, mattress and blankets which were placed over the trap door, and I remained there during daylight except for coming down briefly to eat etc: when the coast was clear. When darkness fell I went around the township to meet comrades.

One of the comrades who helped me a great deal was Priscilla Mngeni. She acted as a courier, bringing messages from people still above ground and making arrangements for me to meet them. A relationship started between us and as a result two years later she gave birth to my youngest daughter, Shula. Shula grew up as the youngest child in Priscilla's family, but later her mother told her about me.

I was the only African leader in the township who had not been arrested, so I had to lead alone, and at first had no links with other areas.

I heard that some white comrades had escaped arrest, and one day I received a message to meet one of them after dark in

the park behind the Red Cross Hospital. I made my way to the meeting place and saw a man there whom I did not recognise. It turned out to be Fred Carneson - a leader of the communist party in the Western Cape - wearing glasses and a beard very well disguised. He told me that Sonia Bunting, like himself, had gone underground and escaped arrest.

We discussed our strategy and decided we must continue campaigning for burning passes and winning support for the national call for a three day stayaway in protest against bannings and arrests. It was agreed I would prepare and copy a short leaflet in Xhosa, and they would arrange transport for me to be taken to Paarl and Worcester to pass the leaflets on for mass distribution among activists there. The leaflet would explain the political situation and call for action.

Luckily I had a small typewriter and roneo machine in the ceiling space with me. I drafted the leaflet and took a long time typing it out with two fingers. Then roneod it.

I was picked up by an unknown man near the township at about noon and taken to Worcester and Paarl, where I left the leaflets and was then driven back and dropped once more near the township.

The following day at Worcester it was not only passes which burned, but schools, churches, the pass office and more. Chaos reigned over the region but I was particularly worried about Worcester, because that was where I had been and there was a lot of damage done. If the police had discovered I was there the day before, I would have risked being put in gaol for a long time.All over the Western Cape people stayed away from work. Three days later all townships were surrounded by troops and

police combed them, going from door to door, demanding passes, and arresting, beating up and murdering people along with other atrocities. Teams of police combed the township where I was, and I was sure I would not escape this time. But miraculously they did not search the ceiling space and left without seeing me.

There was an advantage to having troops surrounding the townships. We arranged girls to get friendly with them and invite them for drinks. They were young white conscripts who did not know why they were there and did not care. They were bored and frustrated and some accepted. When they were drunk, their rifles were stolen. The rifles were used to train some of our people.

Our work continued, despite everything. To send out messages we used ambulance staff and other municipal vehicles, as well as sometimes taking the risk of going ourselves. I went out of Nyanga West three times. This meant crawling through the encirclement to the enemy soldiers, who had instructions to shoot any black breaking the emergency rules, and then returning the same way later in the night still under cover of darkness.

We had to continue producing leaflets and stickers to keep up the momentum of our campaigns. We also had to mobilise support for families - including mine - whose main breadwinner had disappeared, been arrested or gone underground. Our machinery was damaged, but not destroyed.

I worked underground for five months and foolishly never changed my hiding place. I can only thank people for hiding me, and for my continued sanctuary there The only reason for my

being safe there for such a long time was due to the people protecting me, not to any skill on my part at all.

In the fifth month, half of the people arrested were released. The knowledge that our machinery would not be crippled probably affected my vigilance, and on August 1 I decided to risk visiting my new home in daylight. I found nobody, but I knew where the keys were hidden, so I went in. A split second later some African special branch men followed me in. Apparently they had been watching the place for five months. They told me I was under arrest.

I immediately went to my room for my weapon, I would not allow myself to be arrested by an unarmed man, and African police were not armed at that time. I shouted at them to leave my house quickly, before I harmed them. They ran out very fast, although they had not really seen what I had in my hand. I suppose this happened when they were due to change shifts because almost immediately, as I was locking the door, a van appeared with a group of police. They rushed into my house and ransacked it, but I had already hidden the weapon.

Of course I denied that I had a weapon, saying that I had just threatened the policemen and they had run away. I was arrested and sent to the Central Police Station in Cape Town for interrogation. The first question I was asked was who had driven me to Worcester and Paarl the day before the burning of passes, in a black Chevrolet, registration number so-and-so. I did not know the driver, never mind the number plate. Others had arranged the transport and I had just been told to meet the person at a pre-arranged spot.

As allowed then, I said I would give a statement in court and

not before. In later years of course, there was no question of anybody ever dreaming of doing this: the police would torture you or beat you to death.

From the Central Police Station I was taken to prison, but was kept in an isolation cell.

After a day, I was called and told there would be an identification parade that morning. Ten comrades were called in and told to make a line. I was told to fit myself in any position I liked among them. This I did but I told the police it was unfair, as I had no lawyer present.

A white man appeared and I immediately recognised him as the driver who took me to Worcester. He had no difficulty identifying me. was sure I was going to prison for a long spell. Later on the police (CID) came to me and said I had been identified: to make things easy I should tell them everything. They also informed me that they knew the transport was not arranged by me. I repeated that my statement would be made in court.

Apparently the car had been spotted in Worcester by the police and they went to the owner to ask his whereabouts on that date. The poor man had not been out that day. He had lent his car to a friend, who was an ANC sympathiser and had offered his car for help if needed. On this occasion, his car was out of order so he had borrowed his friend's car - without even saying he was going to Worcester. He had been told to pick me up at a certain spot, at a certain time, and that I would tell him where to drive me to. This was what happened. I told him to drive to Worcester. I never even introduced myself to him. I had sat in

the back, and he did not know what I was carrying.

In short, the owner of the car did not know a thing. His friend the driver knew nothing except that he drove me to Worcester and Paarl. I was the only one who knew what the journey was for, and I did not intend to talk. If I did, I would imprison myself for many years. The case collapsed for lack of evidence.

The state of emergency was lifted but our organisations remained banned. It was obvious that the regime would not take the slightest notice of non-violent protest by black people. The policy of the minister of police was to shoot first and ask questions later. Peaceful demonstrations were dispersed by police shooting to kill. With our mouthpiece - the ANC - banned, it was clear we would have to prepare for a new stage of struggle.

The whole organisational machinery was overhauled again, and security greatly increased. The provinces were carved into regions, and I was put in charge of a seven man committee, co-ordinating all ANC activities in the Western Cape region.

The committee operated under great security and its composition was kept secret, although now it can be told. The other members were Chris (then knows as Martin) Hani, Bernard Huna, Elijah Loza, Zoli Malindi, Looksmart Ngudle and Sidney Sikweyiya - the cream of the leadership in the Western Cape.

Every branch was similarly controlled by a seven man committee. The seven members of the regional committee were drawn from different branches in the region, which meant we were in touch with each other and had experts on matters

affecting the various branches. Apart from their own members, branch committees did not know the composition of the regional committee. We were organised in this way when the Pietermaritzburg conference was convened in March 1961, with delegates from all parts of South Africa.

All along my aim was to rejuvenate the ANC, as I believed that the future of the movement should be in the hands of young people. From the beginning I brought young people to positions of responsibility. I was very interested in young intellectuals because they could teach our people. But before they could do this they needed ideological preparation. I made them work in the trade unions, so as to appreciate the struggles of the working masses.

Some of the ANC leadership, including members of the regional committee, were Communist Party members. They had been elected not because they were communists, but because they had showed themselves to be loyal and hardworking ANC activists. The overlap made it easy to co-ordinate ANC and SACP work.

The SACP leadership, like the ANC, was also keen to recruit young people and give them positions of responsibility. I remember Brian Bunting and Bernard Gosschalk agreeing with me that as well as youth, we needed to recruit more Africans, especially African workers. The party could never be effective if it consisted mostly of whites and a few African intellectuals.

Our campaigns continued. A national strike was called at the end of May 1961 to protest against the establishment of the so-called Republic of South Africa. In response, the racist regime quickly enacted a law giving the secret police the right to detain

people for 12 days without recourse to the courts. This was done to keep leaders of the people in prison, and leave the masses leaderless at crucial moments. I was detained a few days before the strike and released after 12 days.

After the May 1961 strikes the organisation took stock of the situation.

The fascists had used ruthless methods to crush the strike. The army had been called in and there had been violence and intimidation. There was a growing feeling that we needed to find new methods of struggle to counter the growing brutality of the enemy. The ANC had been non-violent since 1912, but many of us could no longer stand by and watch while an army used naked force of arms to suppress the legitimate demands of our people.

On December 16,1961, Urnkonto we Sizwe (MK) was formed. It was set up by Nelson Mandela and other comrades with the agreement of the ANC national executive committee, but it was notionally separate from the ANC. In practice it was to function as the military wing of our movement.

Mandela had gone underground and he travelled the country explaining MK to the people. In Cape Town the seven man regional committee met him and set up a regional MK command headed by Loza, Mountain Qumbela, leader of the Youth League, and Ngudle. I was to attend all meetings, in my capacity as chair of the Western Cape regional committee of seven, to which the command was accountable.

Our first task was to set up MK units, and we selected our best, most disciplined young cadres as unit leaders.

There were about 11 units established in the Western Cape. Jiyane Mbane and Leslie Spelmaan led the two Langa units, Mziwakhe Kondleka and Freddy Mninzi led the Nyanga West units, and Richard Mdala and Patrick Mathanjana ~ whom we called Black Mabaza - led in Nyanga East. The two Retreat units were led by Zolile Nqose and Zami Tamana, Charles Ngamlana led the Maitland unit, Mncedi Nontshatsha led Cape Town Central, and Teddy Nqaphayi led the Kraaifontein unit.

We needed training in sabotage and called on the expertise of white comrades. Denis Goldberg was an engineer and Wilfie Kodesh had served in the South African wartime army, and they undertook to train us. Denis hired a farm near Mamre, north of Cape Town, and a military camp was set up there.

Ngudle and MK activists went there for training. The activists - MK names in brackets - included Goodman Mhlawuli (Rashidi), Mncedi Nontshatsha (Alfred Sharp), Patrick Mathanjana (Alfred Scott), Bethwell Tamane, Christopher Mrabalala (Wellington), Teddy Nqaphayi (Peter Mfene), Leslie Spelinaari (Sapasi), Charles Ngamlana (States) Mziwakhe Kondleka (James Masimini), Freddy Mninzi (Hermanus), Freddy Nakana (Mbijana), Nrnnuse Klaus (Ngambaza) Richard Mdala (Wana Holo), Alfred Wilkie (jambo) Thembekili Ndawule (Lubisi), Milton Tafeni (Mackay), Mongameli Mdlikiva (Rani), Charles Buqa (Sishuba), Zolile Nqose (Wilson Msweli) and Jiyane Mbane.

Marnre was probably the first MK camp set up in South Africa. Three of these pioneer comrades - Kondleka, Buqa and Nontshatsha - fell in battle at Wankie in Rhodesia in 1967.

Unfortunately local people became suspicious after a while and called the police. Some of the young men were picked up

later and interrogated but our lawyer, Albie Sachs, was able to produce a good enough story for there to be no case brought against them. No doubt the police kept the incident on their files.

In spite of this setback, our knowledge of sabotage was developing and we were successfully damaging telephone lines to police and other government buildings and industrial targets.

We were confident that in the Western Cape the police had not yet succeeded in infiltrating the movement to any great extent, and none of our leading people became traitors. Our machinery was working well, which put down to the tireless vigilance of our leading comrades.

Our emphasis on youth was also paying dividends. Our MK unit leaders were young men who showed ability and commitment. It is a source of pride to me that many of the young comrades whom I had helped to bring forward and trained, performed with such credit later in former Rhodesia and elsewhere. As well as fighting bravely, those who were captured - including Tamane and Mninzi - never broke down.

Many others have distinguished themselves then and since, including Sidney Sikweyiya (Zola Bona), now a cabinet minister. But probably the person who gave me greatest pride was Chris Hani. He was good when he was a student, bringing many young people into the movement even before he became an MK leader. His name will appear often in this book, because we worked closely together for years.

The longer I knew Chris the more I appreciated his qualities. He was brave, forward thinking and articulate, and he always

listened to the masses. He became a national leader, and I regard it as a national that he was murdered before he could fulfil his potential in the new South Africa. His calibre was such that I believe when he died we may have lost a future president.

I did not take part in the training at Mamre because I was still banned and confined to the magisterial districts of Cape Town and Wynberg. This made it difficult for me to work properly for the unions and I became a full-time organiser for the Communist Party, responsible for work in the township, which I could do under cover of darkness.

I was not the only one banned, and some banning orders were much worse than mine. Some people were confined to their house from 6.00pm to 6.00am. Since many lived in houses without inside toilets, they were not supposed to go to the toilet at night without the permission of a magistrate!

At this time Letitia took a more active part in meetings in Cape Town and elsewhere, sometimes taking messages from me to meetings. There was some benefit from my being forced to be at home often: it was the only opportunity I had to spend time with our children, who had now become four with the birth of another little girl we called Nompuctiko Yolisa.

Bannings never stopped us from doing political work, but meant it often had to be done in the middle of the night, when it was dangerous to move about townships. We had to carry weapons, tomahawks and eventually guns, in case they were needed for self defence. They were rarely used, though, because political leaders did not get molested: even *tsotsis* - criminals - treated us with respect.

As I have pointed out, our machinery was becoming increasingly efficient. We were extending our activities throughout the Western Cape. Sabotage was on the increase and so was the wide scale distribution of leaflets.

But disaster struck a group of us in 1962. Chris, Faldon Mzonke, James Tyeku and I decided to prepare leaflets for wide distribution. In response to our sabotage campaigns the regime had introduced a bill providing for heavier punishment for sabotage, and periods of up to 90 days detention for "suspects".

We needed to explain this iniquitous legislation to the people, and warn that these detentions were sure to be accompanied by torture and brutality of all sorts. We also needed to repeat the reasons why the ANC had been forced finally to add the tactic of armed struggle to non-violent struggle.

We decided to run off the leaflets one night at the home of a coloured comrade, whom we did not know but who was recommended to us by the Coloured People's Congress. After we had completed the leaflets we packed them into Tyeku's car, ready for distribution. Mzonke went off to work and the rest of us set off for the townships to hand over the leaflets to branch officials for distribution.

Before we reached Nyanga East we were stopped at a police roadblock. It was the security police, and it immediately dawned on us that the trap was deliberate. When we stopped, my presence in the car got them very interested. They were sure we had been up to something. I had eluded them for a long time, and now they thought they could nail me down and have me at their mercy.

They immediately searched us and found the leaflets. Chris and I were separated from Tyeku and taken at gunpoint to a waiting car. We were led by a security branch policeman with a goatee beard. His name was Van Wyk and he was a ruthless man. He cursed as he put us in the police truck, telling us if we tried to escape he would blow our brains out.

I whispered to Chris that he should not answer any questions. I was worried, because he was young and inexperienced. He replied that he would not co-operate with the police and felt reassured. I had pinned my hopes on this young man. Even then I thought he had great potential and was grooming him for the future.

We were hustled to the nearest police station, Phillippi. I was terribly agitated and felt we had been careless. Firstly, we should have checked the reliability of the arrangements for roneoing. Secondly, before we left with the leaflets we should have sent someone to the township to make sure there were no police roadblocks. Thirdly, we should have used gloves to prevent any fingerprints. I vowed inwardly never to repeat such mistakes.

At Phillippi police station, I was immediately separated from Chris. The aim was to demoralise him. They assumed wrongly that, because he was young, they would be able to frighten him into giving evidence against me. I was taken to Athlone police station.

We were arrested on Friday, and on Monday we were taken to Wynberg Magistrates' Court, where we were formally charged under the Suppression of Communism Act with carrying on the activities of a banned organisation. Bail was refused on

the grounds that people usually absconded afterwards and fled the country. We were remanded in custody for one month. We were handcuffed and driven to our homes, which were then searched. They found nothing. Then they drove to SACTU regional headquarters to cheek the typewriters. After that we were driven to Roeland Street Prison. There was separated from Chris, and we were placed in isolation cells, as was government policy for politicals.

Alone I faced up to the prospect of solitary confinement for 30 days. I braced myself for it, determined not to give in. I made up my mind to beat my tormentors at their own game

The comrades outside were very good. They organised our defence, and brought us food and books and newspapers to read. After 30 days we appeared before the same Afrikaner magistrate at Wynberg. To my surprise Mzonke was there too, and wondered if one of the others had given him away. It turned out that he had been picked up from fingerprints on the leaflets, as he had a missing finger on one hand.

The case was adjourned again, but this time we were allowed bail of £125 - a lot of money then - with strict conditions. We were to report daily at the nearest police station. We were not to leave the magisterial districts of Cape Town and Wynberg, and were not to attend meetings. So we were able to rejoin our families, even if only temporarily. My kids and my wife were happy to see me again and to find that I was fit and well.

Comrades who had continued the work while we were inside reported on the situation and we reviewed our task with the object of intensifying the struggle. We threw ourselves back to work. By this time it was clear that armed confrontation was

inevitable. Sabotage was only in its embryonic stage, but the regime's reaction was already vicious. "Suspects" were being rounded up and tortured.

Meanwhile, the national high command of MK sent an envoy to us in Cape Town with instructions to pick a group of disciplined young cadres to go for military training abroad. They were to be a nucleus of experts who would come back and train the rest of us in the art of warfare.

We chose some of our best unit leaders, including Teddy Nqaphayi, Zolile Nqose, Bethwell Tamane, Freddy Mninzi, Mziwakhe Kondleda and Jiyane Mbane. They set off for Johannesburg on the first leg of their journey, but were intercepted by police at Kroonstad in the Orange Free State. After interrogation they were all allowed to proceed except for Mbane, who was detained and charged with violating bail conditions. Later he made another attempt and was intercepted again, eventually finishing up on Robben Island.

We kept busy until our case came up: we were sentenced to 18 months 'imprisonment with hard labour, and no option of a fine. Our bail was extended while we decided whether to seek leave to appeal to the Supreme Court.

Albie Sachs was sure it was worth appealing. He felt that ,I at least, would be cleared by the Supreme Court, because the police had failed to show I had any direct connection with "the said crime". I was in the car, of course, but no fingerprints of mine were found on the leaflets. We had claimed Tyeku had seen me standing by the road looking for a lift to the township, and had picked me up. There was no evidence to contradict

that.

We did decide to ask leave to appeal, of course.

Fortunately at our last court appearance the magistrate had somehow missed re-imposing the strict bail conditions and I seized the respite to visit my mother and relatives in Alice.

From Alice I went to Lobatsi, just over the border in Botswana, for the October 1962 ANC national conference. Delegates were there from all over South Africa, and so were Oliver Tambo and others who were out of the country establishing our external mission. It was a highly successful conference, which reviewed the struggle and decided on our future tactics. We returned home full of vigour and enthusiasm.

Back in Cape Town I was surprised to be told that the police had been looking for me. It seemed that the lawyer handling our case had forgotten to submit our decision to seek leave to appeal to the Supreme Court within the 14 days allowed. The police had therefore come to collect us to start our sentences. Before they found us our advocate had applied for condonation of late appeal, and this was granted, but the former strict bail conditions were re-imposed.

We continued our underground work, despite intensive efforts by the security police to shadow us.

The ANC regional committee and the Communist Party district committee both discussed what should be done if our appeal failed.

All agreed we should not go to prison, because by then the regime was detaining people for repeated periods of 90 days after they had completed sentences. Our policy was that

married people should not go overseas for training - and three of us were married - but at the time we thought the absence for military training would not be longer than the years we might spend in prison. It was decided we should go into hiding and work underground until we could join a group leaving the country.

For me, this meant trying to strengthen the regional and branch structures and leadership, and handing over to Looksmart Ngudle, so that if I had to leave the country my absence would not damage our work.

In February 1963 we were told we would not be allowed to appeal, and our sentences were confirmed. This came suddenly after months of silence and caught us unprepared. We had to improvise where to hide.

We divided into two groups of two. Chris and I were together. Intensive patrols were looking for us in the townships when Bernard Gosschalk. came to collect us. He drove us to Jack Tarshish's flat in a suburb of Cape Town. Jack was a garment factory owner with a strong commitment to the struggle. He was taking a big risk having wanted men in his flat.

We were given strict instructions to keep quiet, stay indoors and never open the door to anyone. This led to a bizarre incident. Jack had a tendency to fall asleep, suddenly and unexpectedly, in funny places. We called this "sleeping sickness". One evening he came back to the flat and just went off to sleep, standing up, outside the front door. We could see him through the spyhole, but could do nothing. We were not to open the door, and in fact we did not even have a key. We just

had to wait until he woke up.

The flat was not a good place in which to hide. There were adjoining flats on all sides and when the owner was away we had to maintain total silence. Visits to us were kept to an absolute minimum, because of the danger that comrades were being shadowed. The whole thing was nerve-racking, and I was sure we would soon grow tired of each other. But our spirits remained high and we looked forward to the day when we would be given assignments.

Later we were moved and split up. My last place underground was in Paarl. My controller was Liz Abrahams, who by then was general secretary of the Food and Canning Workers' Union. She was also a leader of the Women's Federation. She was responsible for me for at least a month. It was a risky job because had been discovered she would have been imprisoned for long years. She moved me frequently, mostly keeping me in farm worker compounds, but once I was in a house in a canning factory compound, right opposite a police station.

While was on a farm near Paarl, Liz arranged for Letitia to visit me. Before I went underground we had agreed that our four children should be sent to our parents in the Eastern Cape - the two boys to my mother in Kwezana, near Alice, and the two girls to Letitia's parents in Mqumbu, near Middledrift. They had already gone and we confirmed the arrangement.

Letty had been at home herself, before coming to say goodbye. Her return to town cost her dearly. She had evaded the police when coming to Paarl, but they picked up her trail later and followed her, hoping to be led to me. When they realised I was no longer around they detained her for months

and then expelled her from Cape Town.

Liz continued to hide me until the message came for me to proceed north. She was the last of the Western Cape leaders to see me before I left home.

Chapter 9
Law and disorder

You will probably have realised by now that I had very little respect for the laws of my country. I was not alone.

Most people of my generation grew up in an ordered village society where we generally agreed on what was right and proper and what was not, and everyone played a part in maintaining that order.

There was a very different society in town, and the laws we met there did not command respect. We had no part in making those laws - but that was not all that was wrong. We could see that the laws were specifically intended to make life difficult for us, and we soon learned that law enforcement agencies had little respect for the law themselves. We had no moral qualms about defying such laws, and later it was easy to persuade most black people to respond to Oliver Tambo's call to make the country ungovernable.

Younger black people, born in town, have never known anything except a society in which unfairness, insecurity and dishonesty are rife. They know of no laws except oppressive ones, imposed on them by an enemy.

I suspect many whites did not care much for the law either. Generally, they were above the law. They could beat, shoot and exploit with little fear of trouble, as long as their victims were black.

It is no wonder, then, that it is such an enormous task to create a law abiding, peaceful society in the new South Africa.

Our laws need fundamental change. That takes time, but is really the easy part.

Our law enforcement agencies also need to change. That is more difficult, probably even more difficult than changing the army, schools, the civil service and all other arms of the state.

In addition, our culture needs to change, and that is the hardest of all.

Any society with the gross inequalities we still have in South Africa will contain people who feel there is still no social justice. Peace and order cannot exist without social justice and the government has to move quickly to rectify this. But that is not all. All our people have ever known is a criminal justice system which made a mockery of the word "justice". Our legal system has to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the population before it can operate effectively.

Let me give you examples of its lack of legitimacy.

From the 1950s until the beginning of the 1990s there were very few urban African men who had not been arrested from time to time. The pass laws alone ensured this happened to hundreds and thousands of people every year, and it was bound to happen to someone like me, active in the ANC and the trade

unions, far more frequently.

Whenever we were running a campaign or involved in a strike we received the attention of the security police. They often raided our houses, seized our progressive literature and carted us off to the station - even if they had no intention of charging us.

Often we were picked up on the way home on Friday nights and kept in police cells until Monday morning. The police would then release us without charge just before the time came for prisoners to appear before a magistrate. I suppose this was a sort of "preventive detention". It prevented us from being active in townships over weekends. On weekends we were involved in both ANC and union activities ~ if there was a strike pending it could never be successful without the support of people in the townships.

Because of the possibility of detention we sometimes did not go home after work on a Friday. We had better things to do than spend two nights and two days in unpleasant police station cells. Later we found out that these cells were nothing compared to prison.

Although I was an ANC leader most of my arrests - apart from the treason trial - were connected to trade union work. The police seemed happier picking us up in industrial areas than in townships which, when things were hot, could be no-go areas for the police at nights and weekends.

My first encounter with the police while doing ANC work was in Paarden Eiland, an industrial area. Together with a young comrade, Bennie Sacks, we were to stick slogans on public

places like bus stops, post offices, letter boxes and telephone booths. They were ANC slogans protesting against the law for the separate registration of trade unions, according to colour.

Comrade Sacks was driving while I was doing the sticking. Halfway through our work we noticed a car following us, with no lights even though it was dark. We were sure it was the police, and immediately headed for the main road.

Our worry was getting rid of the glue and slogans so when they caught us there would be no evidence.

We decided to overtake four or five cars fast and then dump the load. We knew the police would have a car radio and that other police would intercept us before long, even if we gave our pursuers the slip.

We kept moving steadily, but they were closing in and we were forced to accelerate. We overtook one car just before a circle. We went around the circle and shot a red robot. The car we had overtaken stopped, forcing the police car to stop.

I frantically started throwing out the slogans. Motorists behind us hooted in protest as papers flew about wildly and hit their windscreens. By now we were heading towards Pinelands and a busy railway line. The lights at the gate were already flashing, indicating that a train was coming and the gates were about to be closed. We just managed to get through, miraculously cutting the police car off our tail again. This gave us ample time to dump the rest of the stuff from the car while moving on.

We had lost the first police car, but they must have reported our number plate to all patrol vehicles because we were

stopped at the intersection opposite Karl Bremer Hospital.

I was arrested and put in the police car. Bennie demanded to be taken too, but the police refused, so he followed us to the police station.

This happened at a time when an accused still had some rights. You were not forced to give a statement on arrest, only your name and address. Police had not yet started torturing and terrorising people as they did later.

When they wanted a statement from me I told them it would be made in court. These police were used to criminals who were not aware of their rights. They had never had this kind of response before, and it infuriated them. I accused them of trying to take the law into their own hands and, luckily for me, a senior constable heard me. He told his juniors to leave me alone as I was one of those "black Englishmen". "That type knows the law," he warned them.

While I was sitting in the police station I was called to the door, where Ben Turok gave me money to bail myself out. Bennie Sacks, still a student at the time, had phoned Ben to report my arrest, and Ben had responded quickly.

The police did not know what charge to lay against me because they still did not know what we had been doing at Paarden Eiland, and I refused to tell them. So fixated were they on what we were doing that they forgot what speed we had been driving in the chase, not to mention our crossing the railway line with the lights against us. In both respects we were breaking the law, but ironically the offender. the driver, was white. They were far more interested in putting this black "boy"

in prison. It was a stalemate.

In the end, a security branch policeman who knew me entered the charge office, saw me sitting on the bench and asked why I was there so late - it was past midnight. I told him to ask his friends as I did not know.

The policeman on the other side of the counter burst out in anger:

"That kaffir was discovered trying to break into factories in Paarden Eiland and now he is pretending he knows nothing. That is why we are keeping him here, well show him he is not clever."

The security branch man was confused, because it was clear to him most politicians were above petty crime. He asked whether I was alone at the time of arrest.

There was another burst:

"No. he was with another, a Jew.

"Oh! Where is this Jew?"

"Well, he was outside in his car."

"Have you searched his car?"

"For what?'

"Oh no, you are stupid. Show me where this car is."

Naturally the car was no longer there. The policeman told the security branch man that in fact, another Jew had come and given the kaffir money to bail himself out once a charge was preferred against him. The security branch man shook his head

and ordered my release.

"This lot are not interested in breaking into any factories," he explained. "They just want to overthrow the government. They were doing something else. Your mistake was that you did not search that car; that is where the evidence was."

I was released at about 3.00am. There was no bus or taxi at that time of night so I demanded transport. Of course, I was demanding the impossible from the South African police. The only time an African got into their vehicles was to go to prison or a place of banishment, or when there were mass removals of our people to "resettlement" camps like Dimbaza and others.

I had to walk home, hoping I would not encounter any thugs.

Although I knew police stations and cells well, the first time I was put in prison was during the woodworkers' strike. We were in Stellenbosch trying to organise a factory there and were picked up and charged with being in the town without permits. There were several of us, including Nqose. Because we were politicals we were taken to Roeland Street prison in Cape Town. This time, although we could have paid a fine or bail, we were remanded in custody for several days.

The whole prison regime, from the moment you went through the door, was designed to intimidate you, particularly if you were a newcomer.

Roeland Street, like other South African remand prisons, was run mainly by prisoners - that is, by a hard core of convicted criminals who had the privilege of assisting warders. Being thoroughly brutalised appeared to be the qualification for this privilege. The warders usually stood at the gates or doors, with

big bunches of keys, giving orders. Of course their hands or batons were always ready to strike if they felt like it.

Unemployment and other pressures had turned some of our young men into thieves or killers, making them regular customers of this dehumanising place. There some had adapted quickly to their circumstances and had become the tools of white warders, doing their dirty work for them.

Sometimes young chaps who had just come in, but were "old hands", were already commanding others in the reception area. There was an immediate relationship between newcomers who were tsotsis and those tsotsi convicts who were already running the prison. Ordinary remand prisoners immediately suffered at the hands of these allies.

When we arrived at Roeland Street, the main door was opened and we found ourselves in a reception room. Nobody told us what to do. We had to watch the procedure and try to follow it. Any mistakes led to blows.

It was the start of the reign of terror. Fortunately part of our political education in the ANC covered prison survival, so we were fairly well prepared. We were able to keep up our morale, and we actually made an impact before we left the prison.

We were pushed into a line where they registered our names and those of our fathers and mothers, and for those who were married, our wives. Then they listed our possessions. They had their best fun with anyone who had money. If you had, say, five pounds and five shillings, the prisoner next to the recording clerk, who was supposed to repeat to him what you said, never shouted the five pounds, he just shouted "five shillings".

Money was always the last of your articles to be called out, so before you could say: "No, it was five pounds and five shillings," the prisoner had said "next one" and pushed you on. We had been warned and knew it was better just to mention the pounds. They were sure to take some of your money, so it was better if they just got the shillings

This money was later shared out among the warders and convicts. Some prisoners who were warders' friends left prison with a lot of money, and some nice possessions. If you had a nice watch when you went in, you could forget about it: when you were released you would be given some cheap old thing instead. If you had a beautiful shirt, it would disappear, even though remand prisoners wore their own clothes. You would come out with a rag.

After enrolment names were called out, and you had to listen carefully. If your name was called twice, there was trouble! Sometimes white warders could not spell or pronounce names properly, so you did not recognise the name, but you took punishment just the same. Once your name was called you had to jump and say "my baas" - my boss - loudly. Then you were "a good kaffir".

The agony went on as we were moved into the residential section. To get there we had to pass a sort of hatch in the big gate. The last men through got lashes from the warders' batons. We learned that it was always good not to be hear the back in any prison fall-ins, or journeys.

Then we had to strip naked and jump high with legs apart so if there was anything hidden underneath it would drop. The jumping was called "*tauza*" and it was meant to reveal

concealed tobacco or dagga. It was rarely successful. Old hands likely to be bringing in things knew about *tauza* and had already passed on their parcels to long term prisoners before they had to jump. This immediately placed them in the good books of hard cases. They were earmarked as pals, and got better treatment.

It was evening by the time we passed through reception and we were put into cells at once. They were about three metres by four, with one small, high barred window. They had cement floors and were completely bare except for a bucket or occasionally a toilet in one corner. In Roeland Street there were about 20 men in each cell.

We were given prison supper - porridge with a few beans. On three nights a week there was a small bit of meat in it. Generally newcomers got few beans and no meat at all, the cell thugs reserving most for themselves. Breakfast was porridge alone, with boiled maize for lunch.

Each prisoner was given three blankets, usually old and dirty. If by chance you got a better blanket, it did not last long. One of the thugs immediately changed it for his worst blanket.

We found this bullying was only the beginning. Each cell was ruled by a gang of thugs. They smoked tobacco and dagga, and ate delicacies, all obtained by confiscation or by bribing warders.

Each night they set up their own "state machine". They appointed themselves "chief", "police", "judge" and "lawyer" and amused themselves by arresting and trying newcomers. They were quite realistic. The "police" kicked and beat the accused before taking him before the "judge", who asked if he

wanted a "lawyer", for whom he would have to pay. If possible, it was best to get a lawyer because without one you were sure to get severe punishment, like six karate chops on the side of the neck or being forced to drink 10 mugs of water. To pay the lawyer, you had to agree to sign a chit the next day asking a warder to take some of your money and bring in groceries, sweets or tobacco according to the cell "chief's" preference.

While all this was going on, the warder was watching through the spyhole in the door. He did not intervene because he knew he would benefit from what was extorted from newcomers. Groceries would be shared between him and the brutal prisoners. They were a greedy lot. Some prisoners received food daily from relatives, and thus were better treated than others. The bullies preferred to pressurise recipients, so that food was given voluntarily to the warders and bullies. In return such prisoners might be promoted to join the "state machine". Those reluctant to indulge in the ill treatment of people usually wanted to be lawyers, and really tried to moderate the proposed punishments.

One group likely to escape the arrests and trials were good looking boys or young men. They were selected as "wives" for the chief thugs. They had to be clean and perfumed every evening, ready to submit to their "husbands" later. In return, they were protected from the other violence.

The one enjoyable thing about nights in prison was that despite the terror and violence, there was often mass singing, when bullies and bullied together formed choirs and made music.

Somehow I was not picked on that first night. Perhaps they

knew was a "political" and might be difficult to handle. Perhaps I just looked capable of defending myself. But I watched everything and did not accept it.

Daylight brought new opportunities for bullying. Cell doors were opened and we were counted. We were told to empty and clean the buckets, to shower, and clean the cells. Instructions were in Afrikaans, so some of us found it hard to know what was wanted. just the same, if we did not respond at once we were beaten.

As you entered the shower, you passed a thug with a handful of greasy soap. He smeared a big chunk of it on every head. The clever ones took most of it off before they got in the shower. Those who did not suffered, they were forced to get out of the cold shower before getting rid of the soap and it was left in their eyes.

It was all part of deliberate humiliation. Those who did not move out of the shower quickly enough were forced to crouch in a corner, shivering with cold until called one by one by the warder. They had to stand in front of him, naked, and were given a kick in the balls by this sadist, who had called them specifically for that.

The other prisoners were expected to laugh at the entertainment. After the shower your clothes were thrown at you in a bundle, without warning. As we were all standing by the furrow draining the water away from the showers, most of us finished up with at least some of the clothes soaking wet, as the bundle opened on its way to you and fell in the furrow.

Afterwards it was time to clean the cells: also part of the ill

treatment. Soap was smeared generously on the floor, and newcomers given the task of scrubbing the area with a rolled up blanket as a mop. Most of us slipped and fell, injuring our hands and hitting our heads, which caused further amusement.

Warders supervising these activities used their batons freely to lash out at prisoners. One of them once struck so hard, his baton hit the wall and broke. He just threw it in the bin.

At about 9.00am all newcomers were taken to the hospital section of the prison, to see the "doctor". I do not know if he was a real doctor: he was brutal anyway. Anyone who claimed to be sick was told he was malingering. While there we had to face the wall and never look round. Someone did look around once, and got a slap which echoed through the prison.

The route to the hospital took us past the white prisoners' quarters. They were all charged with or convicted for criminal offences - there was no equivalent of Pass Law offenders there, and it was still very rare then for whites to be arrested for political offences. We could see them sitting comfortably and chatting with warders, with no one harassing them. They had beds and mattresses to sleep on, not just blankets on the floor, like us. The difference between being white and black prisoners was very obvious indeed.

Back at our section the chief warder lined us up and said that the superintendent would come around at 10.00am.and ask if there were any complaints. He said he did not want to hear any complaints mentioned. We should say, in unison and in Afrikaans:

"There is no complaint, sir."

If anyone had a complaint, the chief warder added, they should say so now and he would deal with it. Needless to say, no one said a thing.

I conferred with the comrades who had been arrested with me, and a few others. We decided this prison regime had to be challenged.

Just before 10.00am we were put in rows, with the battered and bruised men at the back where they were less likely to be seen. We were ready for a show down.

The superintendent appeared and asked if there were any complaints. Immediately put my hand up and so did the others. We told him we had been warned we would be punished if we spoke out, but we felt it was our duty to inform him about the brutality of the warders and their thug allies among the prisoners. We pointed out to him the obvious injuries visible on some new prisoners. As further evidence told him to ask a certain warder what happened to his baton. He did, and as the warder mumbled I answered for him:

"He broke it hitting out at people - you will find the broken pieces in the bin."

The pieces were found on his instructions and it was obvious the superintendent was rattled. It was very likely he was aware of what was going on, but once it was out in the open he realised there might be trouble ahead if he did not respond. He knew "politicals" often had access to top lawyers and the press. He ordered us complainers to be removed at once to another wing of the prison for our protection, to stay there until our release. The warders we had accused were transferred away

from that section, and the matter reported to the police.

Speaking out had been a high risk. If the superintendent had decided to bluff it out, we could all have been put in isolation punishment cells. They are bare rooms, with no window or light and not even a blanket, just a bucket. There is barely enough room to lie down. Prisoners stay there for three days with nothing to eat except water in which mealies have been boiled. The toilet buckets are not emptied for three days. On release we would have had to return to face the vengeance of the thugs and warders.

Long after we were discharged, the case came to court. The magistrate threw it out because the only evidence was from black prisoners, some of whom could not be traced by then. How could he uphold such evidence against the word of respected state officers, the warders?

We were supported by other prisoners who admired us for speaking out. They felt safer themselves as a result. The thugs we had named were not pleased, naturally. They said they would kill us when they got out.

But at least for the rest of the time we were on remand in Roeland Street prison we were treated with some respect by thugs and warders alike. Warders from other parts of the prison came to look through the spyhole to see what these troublesome people looked like!

Of course, we were still subject to the ordinary indignities and stupidity of prison life. Prisoners were allowed out of the cells occasionally during the day, if the warder felt like it, but only for short periods, then we were counted and locked up again. Each

time we left our section for any reason we were accompanied by warders, as we passed through one locked door after another. Nevertheless, we were still searched, and had to *tauza* each time we returned. We were locked in continuously from 4.00pm until the following morning.

Prisoners were allowed visitors - another farcical performance. We were taken to a room with a window about half a metre high and some two metres wide. Up to 20 prisoners would all be trying to talk to their relatives through this glass at the same time. There was so much noise it was almost impossible to discuss anything. We enjoyed it ' nevertheless. It was good to see people, to leave the cells and move around the prison.

Our challenge to prison brutality was the usual response of political prisoners, and it resulted in a temporary improvement in conditions.

Sometimes political prisoners were able to persuade even thuggish convicts that it was treacherous to beat your brothers, that they were being used as tools by white warders. Essentially, thuggish convicts liked the warders no more than the rest of us did. The thugs were also reminded that they belonged somewhere, and would one day be released and have to face their own people again in the townships. When a big group of political prisoners were arrested together, conditions became more civilised, and warders too behaved differently towards those who stood together and knew their rights.

Eventually the prison authorities got wise, and isolated political prisoners on arrival. We were kept in a remote part of the prison, and had to exercise and eat alone. We met others

only by accident, such as at the hospital or on visiting days. This was bad. Although life in the general cells could be terrible, we preferred to be with people. And of course we knew that political work could continue, even in prison.

A later experience of mine in prison was when was arrested and charged with murder, along with Gilbert Hani. Apparently a policeman had been killed in the township, although the first I heard of the incident was from the police who arrested me for the crime.

We were detained for 16 days, during which I was held in solitary confinement. It was an anxious time, because I was shocked by the murder charge. I had no faith in the justice system, and the penalty for murder was hanging. I had no doubt the authorities would try hard to fabricate evidence because they would love to be rid of me.

In the end, they could find no way of connecting either Cilbert or me with the murder and we were released.

We often wondered how warders came to be so brutal. Later I realised it had something to do with what could be called the "affirmative action" policy of the National Party government. Every Afrikaans male had to be given a job, no matter how rough, uneducated or even illiterate he was. Being a prison warder was one of the lowest and worst paid jobs reserved for Afrikaners, and it attracted those who really could do nothing else.

Although the salary was poor, the job had its perks. One was the opportunity to boost the ego by exerting brutal power over black prisoners. Another was to enjoy illegal takings, in money

and kind.

A further perk came to my notice once when was standing in prison reception. It was during the state of emergency and I was with Alex La Guma. We saw, sitting under the table at the feet of the warder registering us, a man polishing the warder's boots. We were shocked. Later we found out that each warder had a prisoner who was his virtual slave. His job was to polish boots, belts and buttons, run errands, make tea and do anything and everything the warder wanted.

Men given power like this can easily forget that others are also human.

There were many knock-on effects of the corruptions and brutalities of the South African criminal justice system.

An immediate one was on court proceedings. Once a man was taken from Roeland Street prison to appear in court, his consuming thought was to not go back there at any cost. He would automatically plead guilty, whether he was guilty as charged or not, and pay a fine or even be sold to do forced labour on a farm, as convicted prisoners often were. The alternative, if he pleaded not guilty, would be for the magistrate to set a date for a hearing perhaps for the following week - and he would be remanded back to hell for another week.

The intended pleas were recorded while prisoners waited in cells beneath the court room, and this was followed by a courtroom farce. The magistrate was presented with a list of, say, pass law offenders who pleaded guilty. He read out their names and the fine he was imposing as they filed up through the dock and back to the cells. The huge numbers involved often

meant that some cases had been dealt with and their fine imposed before they even reached the courtroom.

Although South African magistrates and judges must have known how police and prisons treated black people, and at least some of them may have deplored it, the system helped them to cope with their jobs. It was convenient for magistrates to have mostly "guilty" pleas and not to have to try the cases, because they were overloaded and "guilty" pleas reduced the pressure. wonder if they ever stopped to think about what was happening to "justice" in their courts.

Other knock-on effects of the apartheid police state were even more terrible. Thousands and thousands of families were broken up, temporarily or permanently, impoverished, made homeless, hopeless and damaged in so many ways. All family members were affected, not just the person arrested. The physical growth and well being of children was damaged. Less obvious but equally sinister psychological damage was also done.

. Many arrests were made in the course of pass law, political or other raids on homes. Doors were kicked in, mothers pushed roughly aside and fathers dragged out by the scruff of the neck and thrown into the back of police vans. Can you imagine the effect of this on young children who witnessed it? To children, home is a sanctuary you run to in times of trouble and parents are powerful people who protect you from danger. Then your home is rudely violated and your parents humiliated in front of you.

Worse things happened. Adults and sometimes children were beaten or shot and killed in their own homes. Houses were

torched, whole neighbourhoods ravaged. These things happen in wars, but for Africans they happened every week in townships, carried out by the agents of law and order.

Many of our children fought back, as they did in Soweto in 1976, and they contributed much to our liberation. Others, lacking political understanding, reacted differently.

Let me remind you that most people arrested and imprisoned were not charged with anything which would be regarded as a crime in other countries, and our experiences of prison were before we had ever been tried and convicted of anything: we were on remand. was never a convicted prisoner. When Chris, Tycku, Mzonke and myself were sentenced for ANC work we went underground and left the country instead going to prison.

Abuse by police and prisons got dramatically worse after 1963, and many people died in their hands in the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

Yes, we have a big problem of law and order in South Africa and no wonder. It is a gigantic challenge to the government and people of the new South Africa to restore the laws and law enforcement agencies against the background have described, and to change us into a law abiding country.

PART THREE

UMKHONTO WE SIZWE

Chapter 10 - Going out of the country for training
Chapter 11 - The making of a guerrilla army
Chapter 12 - Alliances
Chapter 13 - Difficult times

Chapter 10
Going out of the country for training

In May 1963, after being underground for three months, I left South Africa for military training.

I had not expected to go because of the policy that only single people should be sent. As explained, the ANC regional committee decided to add the four of us to the next group only because we were facing gaol. They thought it better for us to go abroad for a short period and return with knowledge to help the struggle, than to rot indefinitely in prison. They could not know that the "short period" would last longer than 27 years.

The first group had already left. The journey had not been

smooth for our young militants from Cape Town. First they were interrogated by the police in the Orange Free State and then, when they got off the train at Klerksdorp, they were unable to find the contact who was supposed to take them to Johannesburg. They had to call ANC people in Cape Town from a public phone booth, and then phone Johannesburg to send someone to rescue them.

A Johannesburg comrade called Patrick Mthembu was in charge of the operation of transferring people out of the country. He was one of the few who, like MK's commander in chief Raymond Mhlaba, had been militarily trained, in China, and we had had great confidence in him. It was he who should have arranged for the contact to be in Klerksdorp, and we were disappointed by this failure.

The Western Cape regional committee had decided that our second group should not depend on Mthembu alone, and since knew Johannesburg from treason trial days I was sent north first to make some fallback arrangements. I was there to meet the comrades when they arrived at Klerksdorp. This was just as well, because the contact did not turn up, for the second time. Luckily I had been able to arrange accommodation for them in townships, so we moved on to Johannesburg and dispersed.

I went to hunt for Mthernbu, and found him relaxing at home. When told him what had happened he insisted somebody had been sent to the appointed place. When I asked him when we would leave the country, he did not know. I told him that the Cape Town comrades were safe, and I would report to him daily for information about departure arrangements.

I had decided not to tell him where I was and where my comrades were. I had lost all confidence in him.

The day we left, I discovered that the rest of those going had been bundled together in one house. If there had been a police raid, all except those from the Western Cape would have been arrested in one foul swoop. It was, in my opinion, a totally unnecessary risk.

The last of Mthembu's blunders - and the worst - was when he collected two extra people to fill up the combie (minibus). They were obviously not ANC and just curious and adventurous because somebody had told them they would be trained to shoot firearms. This was breaking security on a big scale, amazing for someone who was a senior cadre of the movement.

Mthernbu was arrested while some of us were out of the country and we were told that he broke down under torture. Of course, torture by the police broke many people, but in the case of someone who had committed so many blunders already, we were not surprised.

There were two kombies taking about 40 of us on the first stage of our journey. They drove through the night towards the west until we had almost reached the South African border. Near the border we got out and walked through the bush to an appointed place inside Botswana, where we were met by Comrade Mpho with an open truck, in which we were to be taken to the Zambian (then Northern Rhodesian) border.

Mpho was from Botswana, but while living in South Africa he had become a leader of the ANC. He is now a prominent

member of Botswana's parliament.

In 1963 Botswana was still the British Bechuanaland Protectorate and, although the colonial officials were pro-South African regime, some of the police were not - and did not seem very strict in their policing. We were in Botswana for more than 24 hours without being molested, though suspect they knew we were there.

During those 24 hours we suffered a bit. Days were very hot, but nights were freezing. We wore only light clothing and really froze when the temperature fell.

We reached the Zambezi river in the early morning. The plan was to cross on the first ferry, before the officials started work, but once again there was a contact problem. An ANC comrade called Sam Masemula was supposed to be on the first ferry from the Zambian side, and we were to join him- When the ferry came in he was not there, but we decided to cross anyway and hide in the bushes on the opposite bank until he came.

We hid the whole day. It was hot and we were thirsty. We were very close to an abundance of water in the river, but could not move from the bushes for a drink. Police drove up and down constantly, as they had information that a group of South Africans had crossed en route for military training. We heard this from a friendly young black Southern Rhodesian foot policeman who saw us. He supported what we were doing and had no intention of informing on us.

As the day wore on, we realised something had to be done before nightfall. We decided to sacrifice Mark Shope, sending

him on a bus to Livingstone to look for comrade Sam Masemula, and for transport to pick us up and drive us to the railway. We would not board the train at Livingstone, but would go on to the next station, Zimba. Mark was chosen for several reasons. He was darker than the rest of us, and could more easily pass as a Zambian, but also he was generally experienced and had travelled the route through Zambia before, so he was familiar with Livingstone.

At about 5.00pm the police van came, picked up the friendly policeman guarding the ferry landing stage, and the patrol went off duty for the night. Now at least we could drink from the river while anxiously awaiting Mark's return. If he did not come back, we knew we would have to walk the 50 kilometres to Livingstone in total darkness: there were no lights on that road.

At about 7.00pm comrade Mark arrived with a truck, even though he had not managed to locate Masemula. We were elated with his success and climbed aboard for Zimba station. When we passed Livingstone station we saw it was swarming with uniformed police - our failure to contact comrade Masemula may have saved us, and frustrated the police operation. If the police had caught us, the Welenski regime would have returned us to South Africa.

At Zimba station there were no police to be seen, and we boarded the train with no problems.

The line of rail, as it was called, ran from the Southern Rhodesian border at Livingstone to Lusaka, the capital, and on north to the copperbelt. It was a continuation of the line from Cape Town, through Southern Rhodesia - at one time it was

intended to go from the Cape to Cairo.

It was narrow gauge and the trains were moving slowly. The journey from Livingstone and Zimba to Lusaka took all night. Midway through the journey our optimism began to wane. We discovered that Masemula was on the train, but he would not talk openly to us. He managed to indicate, though, that the police had planted plain clothes officers on the train to look for us.

When the train stopped at Kafue, just south of Lusaka, in the early morning, uniformed police boarded and the plain clothes men were able to point out some of our party, especially those with lighter skin. They were arrested and taken off. Some of us started picking up the babies of Zambian women, making out that we were their fathers, which seemed to work. The police left us alone and the train continued.

It was only a brief respite. We were imprisoned in the train and were supposed to get off at Lusaka, the next station. Language was a problem; we could not ask the Zambians to help us because we could not communicate with them.

At Lusaka the same police were waiting for us at the ticket barrier, and on the other side we could see our comrades inside the police van. It was pointless trying to hide. The police rounded us up, and awaited instructions from their headquarters in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. They were not sure what to do with us.

This confusion gave Masemula time to contact Zambia's liberation movement, the United National Independence Party (UNIP). They immediately sent two leaders to us, lawyer James

Skinner and Sikota Wina. They quickly took charge of the situation, which was a big relief. We did not know what to do in this foreign country, so far from home, where we could not speak any of the local languages. Skinner wanted to know why the police were keeping us there. The answer was that they were waiting for instructions from their headquarters:

"We are detaining them," they said.

Comrade Skinner replied that it was illegal to detain people without charge:

"If you want to detain them you have to arrest them," he said.

That was a trap, as he explained to us later. The police had no right to arrest us but had to give notice that we were entering the Federation without permission and therefore must leave within a certain period. If we failed to leave the country in time, then we could be arrested for failing to comply with the law. He wanted to pressurise the police into falsely arresting us, which they did.

We found it disconcerting that they arrested us by touching us on the shoulder and asking us to get into the van. In South Africa they just pushed you into a van, or beat you in. Policing in the Federation was different. We were actually treated like human beings.

Skinner followed us to the station and briefed us. He said the court would release us the following day but could re-arrest us as we would have been in the Federation for nearly 24 hours by then. He said we were not to worry as they were organising to counteract that eventuality.

The last briefing by the lawyer was that he had applied for the court to sit the following day - this would be a test case. If the first one of us was found not guilty, it meant we were all free, but UNIP would have to come in and whip us out of the Federation as soon as humanly possible. We would have to select one comrade to go to court.

It was my turn to be sacrificed by the group. Sikota Wina and James Skinner briefed me before the court proceedings began. They said UNIP had organised no less than 200 people to be there that morning and, as soon as the judge declared me free, I should disappear into the crowd.

The plan was that the crowd would appear excited by my freedom and move towards the centre of Lusaka, crossing a roundabout opposite the supreme court. There would be a car moving slowly in the opposite direction, a door would be opened and I should jump in. A comrade would identify the vehicle for me.

The plan did not work out quite as planned because two fat policemen followed me, and outside the court presented me with a warrant for my arrest. I threw the paper in their faces but they grabbed me and dragged me towards their car.

I decided not to resist until one let go to open the door. With only one policeman holding me I was able, with one hand free, to punch him in the stomach with all my might.

As he was not expecting this reaction he fell and his colleague, seeing the hard blow I had delivered, did not hurry to get hold of me. I fled into the friendly crowd and eventually reached the car which sped away. Meanwhile the reinforced

police were chasing the crowd, which ran in the opposite direction toward UNIP headquarters, only to find later that I was not among them.

When my car finally stopped at a house in Chilenje I was surprised to find all my comrades there. They had with them the property which had been taken from me in prison, including my watch and belt.

That night UNIP provided five cars with drivers who took us along the main road -entirely a dirt road - to Tunduma, the border post between Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Tanganyika (Tanzania).

About a kilometre before the border we left the cars to walk through the bush across the border, as we had done between South Africa and Botswana. The empty cars continued through the border and picked us up again in no man's land. We crossed into Tanzania openly, and went into the immigration offices to register ourselves and our organisation.

To all South Africans fighting the struggle for freedom, UNIP was a great organisation. International solidarity was a real issue for it and its leaders. They helped us when they were still struggling for independence themselves, and suffered untold damage later because they would not co-operate with the Ian Smith regime in Southern Rhodesia or the South African regime.

Their economy had been geared to integration with the countries to the south, and they crippled themselves economically trying to break free of those links. More than that they suffered bombing and commando raids and shed blood

because they sheltered us. South Africa needs to erect statues to Zambians, especially to UNIP and their great leader Kenneth Kaunda.

We drove on to Mbeya, the first big town in Tanzania, where we boarded a train to Dar-es-Salaam, the capital.

I stayed there for three years, and then on and off for several more years, and found the people wonderful, from government officials to humble villagers.

I never saw any violence. I saw people arguing and excited, but they never hit each other as people in South Africa did. They were very kind to us. They have a popular word in Swahili, their language - *karibu*. It means "welcome", and in any house in Tanzania we were always welcome.

We did not have a chance to enjoy the beautiful country and scenery of Tanzania on that first journey, because we travelled overnight on the train and arrived at Dar-es-Salaam in the morning. What struck us initially was that some women dressed in black from head to toe. Coming from violent South Africa we thought they were in mourning, perhaps there had been massacres. But it was their religion - Islam, which Africans inherited from Arabs.

The ANC had an office in Dar-es-Salaam, which was regarded by the Tanzanian government as an embassy for the oppressed people of South Africa. ANC officials met us at the station and transported us to a huge colonial house on the outskirts of the city, a really beautiful place bordering a forest. There we met the first group who had left South Africa.

We were issued with bedding and each day were provided

with food. Groups took turns to do kitchen duty. Comrades were arriving almost every week in groups of 10 or more, and soon a second house was needed.

The first house was named after Albert Luthuli and the second after Nelson Mandela.

The houses were provided by the Tanzanian government then one of the poorest countries in the world.

The ANC office had an enormous task, organising all this, and they did it very efficiently - we never starved. Comrade OR Tambo ensured that everything ran smoothly, and he kept in contact with us, visiting every morning to see how we were. He had time to give us individual attention, which we needed in a foreign country.

As the number of exiles grew, and offices were opened elsewhere, this sort of attention became impossible. Even so, OR was always ready to listen to problems and to try to help. No one was unimportant to him. Another important characteristic which made him such a great leader was his democratic way of working. He did not issue arbitrary orders: he argued and persuaded. He was part of the struggle at every level, including sharing dangers at the front line.

It was at this time that OR suggested we change our names, to protect those we had left behind, and ourselves. It proved to be a wise suggestion. Some of us chose names we thought would enable our people to guess who we were, if our deaths were reported. I took the name Zola Nqaba, the names of my two sons.

The ANC's external mission office in Dar-es-Salaam was also

efficient in arranging for us to move on for training. By the third week we were put into groups and flown to different countries in Africa - Ethiopia, Egypt, Algeria and Morocco. Most of us moved to one of the socialist countries. The Soviet Union took the greatest number, and I count myself lucky to have been one of the members of the first group to go there.

Chapter 11
The making of a guerrilla army

A party of 40 left Dar-es-Salaam in the early evening on a regular Aeroflot scheduled flight for Moscow. The first stop was Khartoum in the Sudan, where it was strikingly hot when we got out ~ we thought we must be standing in the exhaust of the plane!. Then we flew via Cairo arriving in Moscow at 9.00am. It was June, and warm and sunny - a surprise, as we expected Russia to be freezing.

Moscow Airport was the biggest we had ever seen, and when we remarked on this we were told Aeroflot was the biggest airline in the world. We were treated as VIPs, not having to go through immigration. Officials sorted out the formalities before we boarded a small bus which was waiting for us. Everything was strange and new; even flying had been a first for some of us. Driving into town was also a shock. Cars had the steering wheel in the wrong place, and drove on the right.

We were divided into two groups of 20. I was in the one led by Mark Shope. It included Chris Hani, and a young comrade called Lambert Moloi (Peter Bonyo), from the Transvaal. We

three remained together for most of the next seven years.

We were taken to a gigantic house on the outskirts of Moscow, which we were told had belonged to the Tsar. It had a high wooden fence around it, and inside the accommodation was comfortable, with two people to a large room. Windows were triple glazed and the place centrally heated. Fortunately the windows could be opened.

We were welcomed by a Soviet colonel and a major and told we would follow a six month officer's training course. On the first night there was a welcoming party, at which we were introduced to our instructor. The next day we were issued with warm clothing and sent for medical check ups. We noticed with interest that the doctors and dentists were all women.

We were very well looked after - too well in fact. We were given four cooked meals a day, all with meat. Even we South African meat lovers could not take this, and we had to ask for the meals to be reduced to three.

The teachers were senior army officers. Some of them had been guerrillas in the Patriotic War. The course was intense and thorough, and many of those trained in the Soviet Union became senior cadres in MK. Some, including Lambert Moloi, are now generals in the new South African National Defence Force.

All instruction was in English. We were taught military strategy and tactics, topography, drilling, use of firearms and in guerrilla warfare. We also covered politics, with heavy emphasis on skills needed construction and use of explosives, vehicle maintenance, feeding a mobile army and first aid in the

field: everything necessary for survival under guerrilla conditions.

We were in the classroom for eight or more hours a day, five days a week, and half day on Saturday, for the first two months. Then we started practical work, trying to apply what we learned in the field. We learned to carry with us only what was essential and to pack our loads so they were properly balanced.

We learned a lot from our mistakes. One night we laid an ambush in a wrong place, having miscalculated our position, and terrified local workers by firing at them as they cycled to work, thinking they were our enemy in disguise. The Soviet officers had to go to the village and apologise for us.

Before we finished the course, Mark Shope was called to Prague to represent SACTU at the World Federation of Trade Unions. He replaced Moses Mabhida and Wilton Mkwayi, who were needed at ANC headquarters in Tanzania. After Shope left I became leader of the group.

The Soviet officers thought it important for us to see something of the culture enjoyed by Soviet people and almost every Saturday afternoon we went on excursions to theatres, opera, cinema, the circus, museums and other places. These were completely new experiences for us - we had never seen any of these things before. We came to appreciate them greatly, even ballet and concerts. There were many beautiful theatres and concert halls, all subsidised by the State. Tickets were cheap and so all could afford to go and the audience was largely working class people.

Lambert Moloi has a fine baritone voice, and took to singing in the style of the Soviet opera stars we heard. What we called "bellowing" made us laugh, but he pleased our Soviet comrades.

We also visited factories, where we were told the managers were elected by workers On the walls were pictures of outstanding workers, again chosen by other workers. We saw a democratic culture in factories.

At that time unemployment was unknown in the Soviet Union, and we were told that new technology would lead to shorter working hours for the same wages. Every factory had a creche, and there were good child allowances, to encourage women to have more children without being at a disadvantage.

The buses surprised us. There was a multitude of them, so you never had to wait long, and there was no conductor: you put money in a machine as you got on. The underground was beautiful and clean, with paintings on the walls and very cheap - five kopecs to travel anywhere.

When our six months were up, we were ready to return, but there was an attempted coup in Tanzania and we were delayed for another six months. We spent the extra time revising what we had learned, with more cultural trips and sports, including skiing. And of course, we found other ways to pass our time!

We had been instructed not to learn Russian, but some did, and also found their way to local liquor stores. I did not learn Russian, but even without it I was able to find myself a girlfriend among the staff who worked at our house.

Just before we returned to Tanzania in June 1964 we were

invited to choose between three locations for a holiday. Our group chose to go to Leningrad. We went by train to that beautiful city. We marvelled at the old buildings and were taken to historical sites like the battleship Aurora, and a house used by Lenin near the Finnish border. We were amazed by the light nights: it was only one hour before the sun rose again.

We flew back to Tanzania with warm memories of our Soviet hosts and comrades. It has become fashionable to pretend that everything about the Soviet Union was rotten. No doubt we were taken to some show places, and there was much we did not see. But we were not fools. We saw many things which were good, particularly for working people, and were very impressed by public facilities. We also came to respect the Soviet army, and the internationalism which made the authorities take the side of black people from the other end of the world, and offer care, training and so much material help.

Perhaps they were weak on some aspects of democracy, but they certainly did more for our struggle for a democratic South Africa than any of their "democratic" critics.

Our original two groups were reunited at the airport and we flew back to Dar-es-Salaam. We were met there by Mzimkulu Ambrose Makiwane, a national executive member of the ANC. Some of us knew him already, Chris Hani in particular, for it was Mziinkulu. who had recruited Chris to the ANC when he was a senior and Chris a junior student at the University of Fort Hare.

Makiwane accompanied us to Morogoro and briefed us on our next assignment. He said he had been appointed camp commander of the military camp we were going to establish at

a place called Kongwa, near Dodoma in Central Tanzania.

His deputies were Joseph Jack and myself, the camp commissar was Chris Hani, chief of staff was Mjojo, chief of logistics Isaac Makopo, chief of communications Walter Mavuso, and intelligence chief Albert Moloi. Our duties were to prepare the camp for the return of other groups after training.

We slept in Morogoro and left by truck the following morning for Kongwa. The road was rough and wet, but this time we saw more of Tanzania than we had the first time. We enjoyed the journey, especially seeing lions, zebra, wildebeest, cheetahs and other animals as we travelled.

We noticed that the local people, the Masai, had kraals in which both people and animals slept at night. The reason was to protect stock from lions and other predators.

At Kongwa we found only two deserted buildings. Inside was a kitchen, toilets and showers, all in need of cleaning and repair. It was obvious no one had lived there for years. Much later I found out that the place had been part of the British post-war government's ill fated scheme to grow ground nuts. The mother of Eugenie Cheesmond, one of the South African comrades whom met in Manchester, had worked there as a nurse.

Transport, tents and other requisites which came with us to Kongwa had been supplied through the Organisation for African Unity (OAU). Some came from African states, but most had originated in the Soviet Union or other socialist states, with the OAU acting as distributor. Our international friends

again!

We pitched our tents and they were our homes from then on, two men to a tent. They were pleasant and cool to sleep in. We cooked on open fires, and got organised to set up an army camp.We were divided into three platoons, and work plans were drawn up. Each platoon took turns carrying out duties, so we knew all aspects of camp life. Every third week the duty was catering and cooking, and other duties included erecting more tents, digging latrines, making the buildings usable and repairing the water supplies. Of course we continued with military exercises, laid out training grounds and reconnoitred areas suitable for training manoeuvres.

In one of the buildings we set up a small clinic staffed by a comrade who had been trained as a medical assistant. It was a useful and much appreciated initiative. Comrades preferred to be treated there rather than at a hospital in town.

Later we planted food crops and some of us made our own little gardens. Tanzania is very fertile and everything grows fast, even fruit trees. We soon had paw-paws ripening. Later we were grateful for the food we grew because at times, when the camp was full, supplies were inadequate. We would have been hungry if it were not for our fruit and vegetables, and Russian tins.

Each month the numbers at the camp increased as soldiers returned from training. Some who had been trained in Africa were sent to the Soviet Union to gain more experience, and contribute to training there. Big camps had been set up in Odessa, as well as the Moscow sites, and men were starting to return from them. Among them was Ronnie Kasrils, at the time

of writing deputy minister of defence in South Africa.

He was the first white in our camp. He was just another private soldier, living like us, dressing like us, eating the same as us, and we found it amazing.

Other people may not understand our surprise, but South Africans will. We had never seen whites living on an equal footing with us, let alone accepting orders from black commanders. We all thought highly of Ronnie.

By the end of the year there were 400 or 500 people in Kongwa. The three platoons had swelled to three companies, and the duties we rotated now covered the full range of military and guerrilla training, including underground work, security, adult education, politics and communications, as well as the shooting range, drilling and manoeuvres.

We also rotated responsibilities within the companies, taking turns to command.

There were many lively arguments. Some comrades had received regular military training and others had training in classical guerrilla warfare. Many debates arose about tactics between the two groups. Route marches through the bush, each man taking his own arms and supplies, were necessary to resolve the disputes by experience.

Other arguments kept cropping up between those trained in China and the Soviet Union, reflecting the current political positions of their trainers.

Among the second group to arrive were seven women: Brenda Ndlovu. Olive Ndlovu, Popie Maluleka, Gladys Sibanda, Rachel Mthonyene, Jackie Molife and Daphne Zwane. They had

all been on the course for officers. More women arrived later, directly from home. Caster Mvernve and Ethel Shezi were first, immediately followed by Toko Dlamini, Tozi Kawula and Addie Zuza.

I regarded them as the most important section of the detachment, because the ANC had to learn to apply the policy of non-discrimination in the army as well. Above all, they would be very important in bringing more women into the armed struggle at home. They were pioneers, the first women in a field which had formerly belonged to men.

It had been daunting for African men to leave home for strange and foreign lands, to undergo training and return home underground. How much more daunting for the few women.

They had the additional challenge of joining a crowd of men who may have professed to be progressive politically, but many of whom had backward attitudes towards women. These attitudes showed in the camp. There was, for instance, resentment at being instructed by women when it was their turn to be in command. They mocked the women's high voices when shouting orders, sometimes pretending they could not hear.

Another, more subtle, attitude was the argument that women should be protected from "dirty or dangerous work", and in any case would be hampered on missions if they were menstruating.

But it was the policy of the ANC and the camp that everyone in turn must command, and that all should be treated equally. It was educational for the men to experience this at Kongwa. It

also built the confidence of the women, some of whom went on to fill leading positions in the ANC.

When the women and some men arrived at Kongwa directly from home, we felt we had sufficient knowledge and experience to train them ourselves, without sending them to other countries. We had established a training department and it was a good exercise for us to plan a training programme from scratch. That was what we would have to do when we eventually reached home.

The people from South Africa had arrived by various routes, at a time when communications from the ANC at home had become very difficult. Some of the newcomers were unknown to anyone. The leadership decided to try to screen them, as it was certain the enemy would try to infiltrate agents into our ranks. We now know they did this. It was a difficult task, and so was the question of what to do if we suspected someone was an agent.

We did what we could, and if we had serious doubts about a person's security - or even about their discipline - all we could do was sideline them as far as possible.

One day we had a visit from the leadership to tell us Joe Modise had been appointed MK's commander in chief. Nelson Mandela had been commander in chief until his arrest in 1962, followed by Raymond Mhlaba, who had been among those arrested at Rivonia, and then Wilton Mkwayi.

I do not think Mzirnkulu Makiwane was happy with the new MK structure, and he decided to resign from the army. He had been a good choice as camp commander: he was politically

mature and strong. But he had his weaknesses.

He was fond of going out drinking in town. When he came back drunk at midnight, he would wake us up for an emergency military exercise. He also sjamboked - whipped - soldiers who broke discipline. This was not uncommon in South Africa, many schools did it, but it should have had no place in MK. Probably the rest of us in the leadership were at fault for not taking him up on these weaknesses.

Jack became camp commander for a short time, but was recalled to Morogoro. When he left I replaced him.

By now, the Tanzanian government had decided to relocate other liberation movement camps to the Kongwa area., Frelimo came first, with Samora Machel as camp commander, then SWAPO and later Angola's MPLA. We got to know these comrades very well.

We had problems, of course, which in every respect were made worse because we did not adjust our tactics sufficiently to changing objective circumstances.

Kongwa had been intended as a transit camp for people on their way home. From the outset it should have been obvious that there were likely to be delays infiltrating people into South Africa. The racist regime was tightening security constantly, making it increasingly difficult for people to move about undetected or be hidden underground. The difficulties escalated with the arrest of almost all the internal ANC and MK leadership at Rivonia in 1963.

The arrests seriously damaged the underground structures and co-ordination, upon which the survival of guerrillas

depended. A few people had managed to enter the country since then, but they had been caught. Perhaps they did not appreciate that they were already rather out of touch with life in South Africa or maybe they were unwilling to put themselves in the hands of people remaining in the underground structures, most of whom were inexperienced. Whatever the reason, there was now no established route which would allow hundreds of guerrillas to return home and function inside the country. We were in for a long wait.

In spite of this, we continued to run the camp at Kongwa on a permanent alert, as if we were going into battle at any time. We made no allowances for normal life, and tried to maintain strict discipline - that was our policy.

The soldiers got bored, and inevitably developed hobbies which got them into trouble. Security became difficult as people wanted to get friendly with villagers and socialise with them.

Lack of money also caused havoc, leading to theft and the sale of stolen goods for alcohol. At first, security staff were able to recover stolen goods from the village and get the purchaser to come to morning parade to identify the men who had sold to them.

In the long run, those doing the selling worked out how to counter this. They told the purchaser to identify the person at the head of the parade - usually the chief of staff - as the person who sold to them. The ANC does not choose drinkers as chief of staff, so the whole thing became ridiculous and the parade collapsed in laughter when this happened. That was the

end of identity parades!

We tried to resolve the problem on Monday morning parades. We emphasised the need to stay on good terms with the locals, and to not drink so that we would go mad. I reminded the soldiers that these were fixed rules of behaviour in camp, and anyone who ignored them would be chopped. Because I often said this, I was given the name Zembe - the axe!

Another problem which made me use words like "chop" very often was that every Monday morning many of our comrades had upset stomachs. Whether the local home brew, called Pombe in Swahili, was contaminated, or whether it was just that people drank too much do not know, but I was worried about the health of our soldiers.

The name Zembe has stuck with me, and even now people seem to like it. So did I. Combined with the first name Zola, I became ZZ, which is still widely used. It was a bit of a joke, because I never had to seriously punish anyone when was camp commander. People respected me and I had sympathy with their frustrations.

The worst disciplinary problem was just before left Kongwa. Frustration led to a group of comrades from Natal stealing trucks and heading south, to make their own way home. It was a hopeless proposition, of course, and they were intercepted within 80 kilometres and brought back. The commander of MK, Joe Modise, national commissar Moses Mabhida and met to discuss how to deal with the comrades concerned.

Joe Modise was clear that there would be a formal

commission of enquiry, with charges of desertion and theft. Moses disagreed. He argued that they were going home, so they were not deserting. I had to agree with Joe. I sympathised with their frustrations but this was the army. Whatever their intentions, they had gone without permission and taken camp property - it was desertion and theft according to army regulations.

A commission was appointed, and I am not sure of the outcome because before it reported I left Kongwa. However, Moses Mabida obviously resented the fact that I did not agree with him. I believe this influenced him later to misrepresent a discussion we had, with serious consequences for me.

The reason I left Kongwa after nearly two years was because the political leadership had decided to send me to Cuba to represent the ANC at May Day Celebrations in Havana.

It was an interesting experience. After May Day the international delegation toured the provinces of Cuba. One of the places we visited was the big International School where there were South African children, among others, although the majority were Cuban. They studied international issues, with the objective of being of use to the oppressed people of the world when they finished their school and university studies.

The Cuban children were of all shades, from white to darkest black, and colour seemed to make no difference at all. The same applied to all aspects of life in Cuba, and was impressive to a South African like me. I felt it helped that they all spoke the same language, Spanish.

I was also very interested in Cuba's rural policies. Their aim

was to have the same standard of living in the countryside as in towns, with the same educational, health and entertainment facilities available to country people. They believed this was the only way to reduce the trend of people moving to town. I was sorry I could not speak Spanish and so learn more about this exciting country during my brief visit.

When I flew back to Tanzania I was told that instead of returning to Kongwa I was to see OR Tambo about a new assignment. I was happy to be meeting OR, because I had great respect for him.

It had been he who had travelled around South Africa in 1960, when we knew the ANC was about to be banned, to explain the next phase of the struggle. I remember him saying:

"No surrender, we continue."

These words kept coming back to me during later difficulties. OR explained that the ANC's national executive committee had decided he should let the world know what was happening in South Africa, and that he should arrange political and military training for people whom the leadership would send out. Cape Town was his last meeting. From there he was driven by Ronnie Segal to Botswana and then went on to Tanzania.

His external mission was established, under the control of the home political and military high command until in 1963, when the home leadership was arrested at Rivonia. OR then found himself responsible both for the external structure and for trying to recreate internal structures in South Africa.

The great man took on these tasks and succeeded beyond anyone's hopes. Exile politics is difficult. Cut off from the

masses, many good leaders lose their way, and rivalries and jealousies have split many organisations, such as the PAC. OR Tambo's way of working avoided that. He had time for everyone, and won support by friendly argument and persuasion, not coercion. This often took longer, but it enabled the ANC outside to remain intact through difficult years.

It was a terrible tragedy for our struggle when he had a stroke and passed away. What a comrade, comfort and friend he would have been to Nelson Mandela through the testing years after 1990.

Chapter 12
Alliances

When I met OR Tambo, he said he had called me to discuss the changing military and political situation in Southern Africa and his thoughts on the subject.

South Africa had increased its military strength and border controls and was working with colonial powers in Mozambique and Angola, collaborating with and supporting Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in Southern Rhodesia, and trying to tighten its grip on South West Africa (now Namibia), creating a strong buffer zone around its borders. Botswana - though recently independent - was very weak and remained dependent on South Africa in many ways, so it too was forced to be part of the buffer zone.

At the same time, the liberation movements in Mozambique, Angola, Rhodesia and South West Africa were already fighting

guerrilla wars in their homelands. The ANC had long standing friendly relations with Frelimo in Mozambique, MPLA in Angola, ZAPU in Rhodesia and SWAPO in South West Africa, and OR was thinking of proposing that these be developed.

His reasoning was that we should send units into those countries through which we needed to pass to get home: that is, Mozambique and Rhodesia. I welcomed his ideas, which would give our soldiers exposure in the field and open the possibility of reaching the South African border.

OR explained that there would be few problems in joining with Frelimo, since Tanzania had a common border with Mozambique, but that going through Zambia to Rhodesia might be more difficult. He was intending to work with ZAPU leader Joshua Nkorno, who was close to Kaunda, to get the Zambian president's agreement. Even then operations in Zambia would have to be underground for security reasons: in fact, he thought it would be safer to keep all operations underground, even in Tanzania.

The first steps would be to acquire more arms, and to move them to the potential fronts. He told me he was negotiating for more war materials from some African states, and that Tunisia was waiting for us to send somebody to specify exactly what we wanted. He gave me the assignment of going to Tunis immediately to indicate what we needed, and to report back to him.

I did this, choosing equipment our people knew best, from the Soviet Union. The Tunisian government flew the material to Organisation of African Unity representatives in Tanzania. We nearly did not receive the equipment because someone in

Dar-es-Salaam thought the equipment would be useful for the Tanzanian army, but OR was able to sort that out.

While the leadership were discussing the details of OR's proposals, Moses Kotane, treasurer general of the ANC, gave a job to myself and Erie Mtshali, a former trade union leader and MK man I had worked with since Kongwa opened. Moses asked us to work out for him the logistics, including costs, of one of the next steps: transporting the materials to Zambia. We did this, and OR gave us the go ahead to get moving.

The tasks were quite complicated. Erie took responsibility for smoothing our way through the Tanzanian and Zambian customs and immigration controls at Tunduma. He went to Tunduma and made friends with all the officials, both dining and politicising them. Sometimes he had to bribe as well. The Tanzanians tended to be on our side from the start. They understood more about freedom fighters than the Zambians did at that time. Erie was excellent at persuading them and only once did we have any trouble crossing the borders.

We were joined in the assignment by Lefty Mabula, an MK man and an experienced driver who knew all about big trucks. While Erie kept the frontier officials happy, Lefty and I drove the truck loaded with arms to Lusaka, then drove it back empty.

The road was terrible most of the way, a dirt road with a potholed surface. In Zambia it was known as the Hell Run. It carried a constant procession of big trucks, as it was the main artery from Zambia to the outside world. After Smith declared UDI and set up his racist regime, Zambia decided as far as possible not to use the road or railway going south through

Rhodesia and South Africa.

On the Hell Run you either had to push hard and stay in front where you could see the road or wait until the dust had settled from other vehicles, otherwise you had to drive blind. In the rainy season there was no dust, but you had to drive through a sea of mud. Lefty became very skilled at driving in these awful conditions.

The one time we had a problem was when Zambian officials insisted on searching the truck. Quickly I told Lefty in Xhosa to get ready to turn and drive back to the Tanzanian border post, then I got down from the truck and let the Zambians see that I was carrying a pistol. This diverted their attention away from the vehicle, and while they were arresting me Lefty was able to pull around and go back.

After my arrest I was allowed to phone our office in Lusaka and the ANC representative was able to get me released. He also cleared the way for Lefty to return from Mbeya, where he was waiting, and pass through without interference. I rejoined the truck and we moved on into Zambia.

Each time we reached Lusaka we handed over the vehicle to a group, led by Chris Hani, which was responsible for distributing and hiding the arms in Zambia. It was not our business to know where they were putting them: we just waited in the ANC residence in the suburb of Lilanda. When the truck came back empty we were ready to return to Morogoro. The Hell Run trips with others vehicles continued long after I moved on to my next assignment.

The next stage was when the ANC leadership decided to

open up another two fronts, in addition to the home front. One would be working jointly with Frelimo, led on our side by the chief of staff, Mjojo, and the second would be in alliance with ZAPU, led by the commander himself. I will not say anything about the Mozambique campaigns, as I was not involved at all. I can only describe our campaigns in Rhodesia with ZAPU.

A joint ANC-ZAPU high command was established which operated at two levels: political and military. The political level involved Tambo and Chikerema, the political head of ZAPU in exile. The military level comprised Joe Modise, commander of MK, and Akim Nelhlovu, his ZAPU equivalent, myself as chief of operations and Dumiso Dabengwa from ZAPU. Our chief of staff, Mjojo, and our commissar, Chris Hani, were also involved

We needed to focus on four main areas ~ personnel, reconnaissance, logistics and intelligence, and groups were enlisted to work on each of these.

Personnel discussed how many people were needed and decided to open a camp for joint exercises so that we could learn each other's strengths and weaknesses. The camp was established near Livingstone.

A reconnaissance team was appointed, led from our side by Lambert Moloi. The team was to open another base near Livingstone on the Zambezi River, to familiarise themselves with the river and suitable crossing places. Two experts in swimming and canoes worked with them. They had to learn everything relevant to crossing, including what animals were around and how they reacted to people, which people crossed the river, and every detail about the river and its banks. They had to cross it themselves and find out what lay within the first

eight kilometres or so on the other side. When their report was completed it was submitted to the joint command.

The joint logistics group looked at supplies, including ammunition and food, and transporting them..

The intelligence function - who could be relied on across the river etc ~ was left to ZAPU.

The joint command met weekly to receive reports from the teams and to produce reports for the political leadership. Early reports were of increasing numbers of South African military personnel operating alongside Ian Smith's troops in Rhodesia.

Both Mjojo and myself believed in being in close touch with the front line and we took part in reconnaissance operations, crossing the river. This took me into the Zambezi valley and I kept getting arrested by the Zambian Police.

ZAPU comrades had their own identity documents, were known to the police, and found themselves having to rescue me too many times. Joe Modise suggested they get a British Rhodesian passport for me. This was done and they named me Ntambo - a Zimbabwean Xhosa surname - as a member of a specific family from the Bembesi area. Later, after Zimbabwe became independent, I visited the family with my second wife. I was taken to the local court to be registered as a local son and am still widely known by that name.

The ANC's main objective was to go through Rhodesia to reach South Africa. Of course, it would have been ideal if this could have been done without encountering the Rhodesian army, but it was obviously unlikely and we knew that in any case fighting the Rhodesians was likely to involve fighting

South African troops.

When the guerrilla war was launched in Rhodesia in 1967, there were South Africans fighting on both sides.

Our joint plans involved crossing the Zambezi River at three different points, near Livingstone in the west, near Lake Kariba in the centre, and near Feira in the east. The first crossing was to be near Livingstone.

When the date approached for this crossing, OR Tambo wanted to see for himself what the situation was on the ground. He was worried about the arrangements, anxious that we had invested so much time and money in the project that we had forgotten about the people involved and were exposing them to too great a risk.

He insisted on crossing the river with me to satisfy himself that the reports were correct and the preparations adequate. After crossing, he suggested a rope be put down the sheer rock on the Zambian side and across the gorge where we were to cross, to improve safety for the soldiers.

This recommendation was incorporated into the plans, and a few days later the first group crossed. OR was there on the Zambian side, commanding the operation up to that point.

The group which crossed was joint ZAPU and ANC. ZAPU commander John Dube (Charles Ngwenya) was in command, with Chris Hani as commissar. When they split up later, Chris would take over command of the ANC soldiers.

The crossing went without incident, but was very difficult. We started in the evening, and it was about 5.00am before the last person crossed. Some of the reconnaissance team had to

remain in Rhodesia until darkness fell again before they could return and report that the group was on its way.

Our reconnaissance had shown there was an enemy base near the route the guerrillas intended to follow, so it was expected there would be an early battle. The enemy's reconnaissance had picked up the group's movements, but they were arrogant and used to shooting unarmed people fleeing. They paid for this arrogance with heavy losses in the fight at Wankie and our group moved on. taking a lot of arms and food from them.

After this the group split, the ZAPU guerrillas going further into Rhodesia and most of the ANC going south. heading for a route through Botswana. Part of the group had taken the train and were involved in further skirmishes near Bulawayo, where heavy casualties were again inflicted on the enemy.

The Boers will never forget those battles in west Rhodesia, which showed them - for the first time this century - the determination of our people, and their toughness when properly trained, organised and armed. MK became a frightening prospect to the Boers: a well disciplined, well officered army, under firm political control.

As the joint ANC-ZAPU campaign developed, the MK people remaining in Lusaka were warned to be more vigilant, to disperse or guard their camps and residences more intensely, as it was known that Boer commandos were in Zambia. Worse, Rhodesian aircraft were carrying out sorties over Lusaka, infringing Zambian airspace and attempting to shoot some of our bases outside the city.

When I had first arrived from Tanzania, Chris had introduced me to a British woman who was working hard for the ANC, raising money at the university and trying to organise training in first aid for our military comrades.

Her name was Joyce Leeson and she was a public health doctor living and doing research in Lilanda, near the ANC residence. She was then married to Ronald Frankenberg, a professor at the University of Zambia, and their home, first in Lilanda and later in Matero, was open to ANC people.

Chris, Lambert Moloi and others, including myself, often visited. It was a shared joke that at lunchtime, when a meal was being eaten by the family and the four or five research workers, an ANC Landrover was likely to drive up, just in time for its occupants to join in.

When MK people were instructed to disperse for security reasons, I went to stay with these friends, and used to rest there during lulls in the Zambezi and Wankie campaigns.

Joyce went back to England in 1969, where she received a letter from the South African government informing her that, unlike all other British passport holders, if she wanted to go to South Africa she would have to apply for a visa. She had no intention of going - in fact she was heavily involved in boycott campaigns - but presumably the government knew of the support she gave us, and was trying to punish her.

Joyce and I remained very close, even after she left Africa. Later, when we were both free, we got married.

After the first crossing we went on to open up the other two fronts, at Kariba and near Feira, to scatter the enemy and

reduce their concentration in the west. Both those areas were good for ZAPU to have permanent bases, as there was no one living near the river on either side.

The main forces of the liberation armies crossed at these two points. Bases were established on both sides of the river for logistical purposes. Every evening we took people across, and further forward bases were established by them from which to work with local people.

We found that South African Buccaneer fighter planes were patrolling the Zambezi river valley. This exposed the inadequacies of British government policies in Southern Africa. They had called for sanctions against Smith but continued to allow the supply of arms, including aircraft, to South Africa. The aircraft were then immediately used to support the Smith regime.

The vegetation was dense in the valley and we were confident that the fighters did not see us. In fact, looking back, we probably became a bit too relaxed. I can remember the noise we made when we shot game for food, instead of trapping it. Whether this was the reason, or whether some of the local people ZAPU were working with were informers, we do not know, but somehow the Rhodesian troops became alerted to our presence and started reconnaissance in the area. However, we continued our work, crossing as necessary.

One day I nearly died there, as a result of an accident. A patrol disturbed a nest of hornets which stung me so badly that I lost consciousness. As I collapsed I ordered the others to proceed, which they did, except for the medical assistant who stayed with me. I soon came round but was very weak for

about 30 minutes, after which I was able to move again.

I crossed back into Zambia the same day and set off for Lusaka to deal with some logistical problems, leaving Benson Tsele, senior commissar of the joint armed forces, in charge.

He decided to cross into Rhodesia that evening, without my permission, and was involved in the first battle on this front which the Rhodesian forces launched that night. We suffered casualties, and Tsele was killed.

It was a serious loss as he was an important leader. He was a brave man, unhappy that he was not across the river, and I think he took the opportunity to cross while he could. The excuse was that he wanted to speak to his commissar, but I suspect he intended to stay at the front, and not return.

The transport of ammunition was heavy and slow work, and the commander proposed we use donkeys to carry the loads. Two were acquired and we set about building rafts to take them over the river. Before we had finished, they both disappeared overnight without trace. We could only assume they had been taken by lions, and the "good idea" was abandoned.

During this period I was working very closely with Dumiso Dabengwa, a very capable and a good person to work with, as indeed were all of our ZAPU comrades. He cared a lot for his guerrillas at the front, and was brave, not hesitating to cross the Zambezi in dangerous areas, checking the reports of the reconnaissance team and opening up new routes. He was liked by everybody. His career in post-independence Zimbabwe has been mixed. He did not agree to become an officer in the new

"merged" army and spent some time in prison, but by 1995 had become minister of home affairs.

We had successes and failures. Some comrades died and others were captured. Those taken in Rhodesia were sentenced to death, but the death penalties were never carried out. Some of the first group to cross died at Wankie, others managed to make their way directly to South Africa.

Others went as planned into Botswana, and a number were captured by the Botswana police. They had been instructed not to fight in Botswana so put up no resistance, and were arrested and sentenced. They were given long sentences, but the ANC negotiated and succeeded in getting them released early and deported to Zambia. Chris Hani and Zola Nqose (Wilson) were among this group.

Young white South African conscripts who had been sent to fight with Ian Smith were killed by our guerrillas, but strict censorship stopped this from being reported in the South African press. It was reported to us by civilians that many of them were not happy to be fighting outside their own country. They found the heat and mosquitoes of the Zambezi valley intolerable, morale was at a low ebb, and they did not want to fight.

There were occasions when they allowed the guerrillas to pass without reporting them for three days. As they said, they preferred the Rhodesians to fight and be killed by us. At this stage, many young white men facing conscription into the South African army fled the country rather than fight for apartheid: some of them organised war resistance movements

in Europe.

Chapter 13
Difficult times

Late 1968 was the beginning of a difficult period for the ANC. When the heroes of the Wankie battles were released from prison in Botswana, they were very critical of what they found on their return to Zambia.

The armed struggle seemed to be in a lull, trained MK people were being neglected and a gulf seemed to have developed between most of the leadership and the rank and file. Even Kaunda noticed something was wrong and referred publicly to ANC leaders, who were usually seen in hotel restaurants, as "chicken-in-the-basket freedom fighters".

Chris Hani and his comrades expressed their criticisms loudly, and the leaders could not take this, so they appointed a commission of enquiry. The commission decided to expel Chris and the others.

Chris took this badly. He regarded me as his mentor, and came to discuss his options with me. His thinking was that if the present ANC leadership did not like him and did not want him in the organisation, perhaps he should forget it for a while and get on with his legal studies.

I reminded him that we were fighting for the oppressed people of South Africa, not for exiled leaders, and that some

comrades had already given their lives for that fight, under his command. Chris accepted these arguments, and of course things were soon put right. There was uproar throughout the ANC, because most people agreed with the criticisms made, and Chris and the others were reinstated. The turmoil continued until a national conference was called at Morogoro in April 1969.

We continued to transport war materials as necessary, and eventually this led to disaster. Chief of staff Mjojo and Wilson (Nqose) were transferring supplies from our main base in the east to the western camp. This meant going through Lusaka, and they arrived there late at night. They decided not to continue, as they were likely to be stopped and searched if the foreign registered Landrover was seen in a sensitive area after dark.

Wilson had a key to the room in the servants' quarters behind Ray and jack Simons's house in Roma, which they had given me to use. He knew I would not be there, so that was where they went.

Unfortunately, shortly before this Ray had quarrelled with a neighbour who had dumped some smelly manure close to the Simons's fence. She had gone as far as calling in a council official to complain, and the neighbour had retaliated by complaining of noise from the Simons's, caused by foreign registered Landrovers driving in and out at all hours of the day and night.

The council officer had taken this seriously and informed the police. At the time a Non-Aligned Nations conference was about to be held in Lusaka, and the authorities were sensitive

about security. The Simons's house was close to parliament, the conference venue, and the police put a watch on the house. They were watching when Wilson and Mjojo drove the Landrover in. They followed, searched the vehicle and found the arms, and arrested them at once. They also searched the Simons's house and arrested Jack.

As soon as I heard I tried to get them released, unsuccessfully. Wilson and Mjojo were convicted and spent some months in Lusaka prison, but Jack was soon free.

Up to that point I had always been Ray Simons's "blue eyed boy". The incident changed her attitude entirely. Her complaint was that I had not informed her of what was taking place - of course I had not. I could not reveal military operations to anyone, even if I had known, although in this case I did not.

Jack Simons understood the whole thing, and took his wife to task for her attacks on me, which I was told were often repeated in my absence. I had great respect for Ray, who had done so much for trade unionism and political struggles in South Africa and for me personally, but her attitude and behaviour to me at this time and subsequently really disappointed me.

The operations on the Rhodesian front continued, and as operational chief I was required to write reports for the commander. In Lusaka I had met a couple from Cape Town, the Moltenos, who were working at the University of Zambia.

I had known the man since he was a child, because his father was a staunch opponent of apartheid, and I felt sure I could trust them, so sometimes I asked them to type my confidential

reports for me. Unknown to me Tennyson Makiwane, then ANC chief representative in Zambia, was also using them ~ in his case for home contacts - and unfortunately they told him they were doing work for me.

Tennyson reported to the commander in chief that I was showing confidential material to people who, according to him, I did not know properly. As a result a commission of enquiry was set up consisting of Tennyson, the commander Joe Modise and Duma Nokwe, assistant general secretary of the ANC.

I was not called to discuss the issue or answer questions. After the commission, Joe Modise said it had been decided that I should be suspended as operational chief and sent back to Tanzania for six months for a breach of security.

Now it was my turn to be tested for my commitment to the ANC. Would I be a member until I died, or would I allow myself to be driven out?

I left Zambia at short notice in November 1968 and landed up at Morogoro at the residence where OR Tambo lived. I explained to him what had happened. His response was typical. He urged me to forget about the blow and carry on: he would give me jobs to do. That is exactly what I did.

Later I was told there may have been more to the episode than I realised at the time. Tennyson had had it in for me since the death of Benson Tsele in the Zambezi valley. Tsele was a close relative and he blamed me for the death. Tennyson was also known as a schemer and operator. Tom Nkobi had complained about him in the past. Tennyson later betrayed the ANC and deserted to the Transkei. Probably he continued

scheming there, because later he came to a sticky end.

In Morogoro I enjoyed the work OR gave me. It was a refreshing break from the pressures and anxieties of commanding at the front. I also had some time for gardening and once more planted paw-paws. Best of all, I enjoyed spending time with the great leader, OR.

He used to initiate outings for comrades up to Morogoro Mountain. It was high, and after leaving at 6.00am it would be noon before we reached the peak. As we ascended, we were entertained by the unique black and white monkeys living there.

OR organised these walks because he realised that for people like me and others who were used to being active, it was frustrating sitting in offices all day. They also gave us an opportunity to think and reflect, and we always came back with our morale raised.

There was another good thing too, at the end of 1968. Joyce drove through Morogoro, accompanied by Lefty. She had finished her job in Lusaka and was on her way to put her car on the boat at Dar-es-Salaam. I was able to go down to the sea with her, and we had a few days holiday as she waited for her plane. We saw in the New Year, on the waterfront at Dar-es-Salaam, with the boats in the harbour all lit up, sounding their sirens.

My suspension ended in time for me to participate in the Morogoro conference in May 1969. It was a dramatic event. The delegates removed all the old leaders except Tambo and JB Marks, and determined new strategies for the struggle. The

newly elected NEC reinstated Chris and the others.

After the conference I returned to Lusaka and was soon back in the Zambezi valley, mainly in the east, continuing operations. We were still maintaining supplies for ANC people in Rhodesia, and were crossing and giving support to ZAPU people. We were not crossing any more of our own people at the time: the new leadership was working on alternative routes home.

In 1971 Chris and others were sent to Lesotho, as a new base for contact with home. Shortly after that I was instructed to go to East Germany to join a group on a refresher course, as once again plans were being made for infiltrating people back home.

I had been in Tanzania and Zambia with MK for seven years. It had been a time with ups and downs, but one of the big positives was that I had met and worked with some of the great national leaders of our movement, whom I had seen at the Treason Trial but only really knew by reputation.

I have already written about OR Tambo, but I want to add something about two other giants: JB Marks and Moses Kotane.

JB Marks had been the founder and president of the Mineworkers' Union. He led the strike of 100 000 miners in 1946, facing charges of conspiracy afterwards. He was a Treason Trialist, and devoted his life to the movement. He was an all-rounder, able to speak to everyone in a way they understood. Old people, young people, church people - whoever it was, he always had rapport with them.

Because of his versatility he was always the first to be sent to

the camps when there was trouble. He was like Walter Sisulu in temperament, calm and persuasive. I remember once while I was camp commander, some soldiers had grievances and demanded that leaders went to listen to them.

Uncle JB, as everyone called him, arrived at night and in the morning the soldiers found him washing alongside them, greeting them in *tsotsi taal* - township slang. He did not want formalities: he just lay down in the shade among different groups and soon got to the bottom of their problems. He left them happy.

Sadly he took ill in Morogoro. He was sent to Moscow for treatment but died soon afterwards. What a loss to South Africa.

In Morogoro I also got to know Moses Kotane, national treasurer of the ANC and the first black general secretary of the SACP. He had been involved in the miners' strike and was later charged because of this, but in many ways he was a very different kettle of fish from JB Marks.

I was then taken to Moses by OR to discuss the finances of transporting arms from Morogoro to Zambia. If OR had not taken me I would have had difficulty in seeing him. In fact, we all knew that if you wanted to see him without an appointment, you had to go into Uncle JB's office opposite and tell him your mission. If he was convinced, he would push open Moses' door and push you in, saying "this comrade needs to see you, Mos"

Moses was a strict, disciplined person. The ANC's money was completely safe with him-

Eric and I had worked out what we needed for our mission, to cover petrol and food, and he gave that to us with extra for emergencies. We set off on our first journey with the arms and found, when we returned to Morogoro, that we had not needed all we had taken so we gave back to him what change was left.

Moses was completely amazed and delighted. He said it was the first time ever anyone had handed back money. Everyone else, leaders and all, has finished every penny. We understood then why he was so strict. He warmed to us after that and we discussed many things with him, including Communist Party issues.

His tendency to trust nobody with money led him to work alone and, justified as it may have been, it caused a problem. When he had a stroke, the ANC's finances were a mystery to everyone else. Fortunately he recovered sufficiently for a while before he died to be able to hand over to JB, who became acting treasurer.

Moses Kotane was a great man and his financial strictness was essential in our organisation: people tend to be careless with money.

When I left Africa for East Germany it was agreed it would attract less attention if I went via London, so I was able to see Joyce for a few days.

Once in East Berlin I was driven to a nearby camp where I found an old comrade, Dingo Hashe, in charge. He invited me to share his room, and that same night he confided that morale was low among the comrades. They were complaining about

being sent yet again for retraining. They were repeating the warning which had been given by our old comrade, Gumede, that there was a danger the ANC would continue sharpening the spear until there was no spear left.

The same sorts of things were being said in Africa, and I understood their frustration about delays in returning home. Just the same I thought it was worthwhile to be refreshed, and at Dingo's request I agreed to talk to them. Next morning I told the comrades that the East Germans had offered to help and the ANC had accepted the offer, so whatever we felt, we should put our hearts into the training. If they had problems we should ask one of our leaders to come and listen to them, not complain to German Democratic Republic comrades. They seemed to accept this, and the atmosphere improved.

However, GDR officials had already seen there was something amiss, and were determined to find out what. They organised a party, with plenty of liquor. Dingo and I made speeches, and after a time said people should go to sleep. But the Germans said no, let those who want to, stay and finish up the food and drinks.

We "old men" went to bed, and the following day were told that some of our young comrades, who were drunk, had later made speeches complaining about retraining. The GDR leaders asked for someone senior from the ANC to come to discuss the matter

Moses Mabhida was delegated to come to see the group. Instead of talking to everybody, he called people one by one, presumably to ask each one what his problem was. When it came to me, I reported what had happened and what I had

said since my arrival.

Then I took the opportunity to ask some questions. I said I assumed we were on our way home and I wanted to know if there was machinery ready to receive and control people getting home, at least until they were acclimatised. I was asking this because of frequent reports of people being arrested on return.

His reply was that there was no machinery. He added that some comrades did not want any machinery, they wanted to establish their own.

I had experience of underground work and it seemed to me that this approach was asking for trouble. On arriving back home there should be pre-arranged machinery to hide you, feed you and direct you, at least for an interim period, until you became fully aware of the current situation and could agree with local comrades what your priorities should be and where you should be based.

In my case, I had been away for eight years, during which many changes must have taken place. I was well known at home as a regional leader - to local people and to the police - and if my return were known it would cause excitement which was sure to reach the authorities. I was already a wanted man, with a gaol sentence hanging over me, so I could easily be arrested. Those in touch with me could be arrested too. I told Moses I did not like people returning without a place underground being prepared for them.

Moses did not respond: he was a man who never responded to what people said. The immediate outcome of his visit was

that the retraining was cancelled, and we were informed by the GDR people that the group was to be dispersed.

They told me that since I had a British (Rhodesian) passport they had been told to get me a ticket to London. I was the first to leave. I was to go to the ANC office in London and await further instructions.

I did not really know why I had been sent to London rather than back to Africa. It soon became obvious that the ANC office in London had no assignments for me and my morale began to ebb.

This was another testing period. I was living in a small flat in the Tufnell Park area of London, alone and morose in a strange country which was getting colder and darker as winter approached. I found I had begun talking to myself, so I bought a pipe to hold in my mouth so that I could not talk alone without knowing it.

When I first went to the ANC office I found unacceptable conditions. It was dirty, and young people were using it as a place to drink in the evenings. Reg September, chief representative in London, seemed to find it hard to intervene, perhaps because the people concerned were Africans.

I had no such problem and called them to a meeting. I told them that the office belonged to the oppressed people of South Africa and that their abuse of it showed disrespect for our people. Their behaviour had to stop immediately. It did. In those days even difficult young Africans had respect for their seniors.

I felt some satisfaction, but Reg did not say anything about it.

In fact he did not say much to me at all. It seemed strange that the chief representative did not ask why I was there, or tell me what he wanted me to do in the office. I suppose he may have been told something he did not want to discuss with me. Or perhaps it was just that he was unconcerned about who came to the office as long as they did not ask for money from his budget.

I asked for nothing. I was determined to be independent, and this may have been a mistake. I was able to do this because, when I was really low, I met a South African family who gave me a great deal of help.

They were the Marcuses - Nathan, Molly and their children, Beverley, Jill and Roy. They were running a small business in Knightsbridge preparing sandwiches and selling them to office workers. They invited me to stay with them and I worked in the kitchen from 6.00am until 10.00am every morning before going to work in the ANC office. For this they paid me wages and my insurance stamp, even though I worked such short hours. I was indebted to them, and we became very close, especially Jill and I.

I was not keen to ask for money from the ANC because it had always been my view that as much as possible of what was raised should be sent home, and that people in exile should not eat it up.

But now I think that if I had asked for funds, someone would have been forced to decide what to do with a man who had given his life to the movement, and who had been involved in the armed struggle for eight years. Then I would have known where I stood. But, unusually for me, I did not seek a

confrontation. I just got on with whatever small jobs I could find to do in the office, or spoke at meetings for the organisation.

At weekends I went whenever I could to Manchester to visit Joyce, often staying with comrades of hers, Elsie Booth or Frank Cartwright and Maggie Ohren. Joyce could see I was disillusioned, but encouraged me to stick it out and do what I could.

It was not until later, when I was working for SACTU, that I discovered more about what was behind my being dropped by MK and the ANC. After the events in East Germany, it seems that Moses Mabhida returned to Africa and reported to the NEC that I refused to go home. I do not know why he did this, because I had asked questions and expressed doubts, but I never refused. Perhaps the issues I had raised were embarrassing ones which the leadership had not faced up to. Or perhaps it was just that he still resented my siding with Joe Modise against him all those years ago in Kongwa and was taking the opportunity to discredit me.

It was John Gaetsewe who told me later about Mabhida's report. As soon as I could I went to OR and asked him why I had not been informed of the charges and given an opportunity to answer. He shrugged it off, saying you cannot question the reports of other NEC members. Clearly he did not believe it himself, because he continued to involve me in top level work, like accompanying him to Lesotho.

I was disappointed that I had been a victim of arbitrary and unjust condemnation, particularly as I still think my questions

were important ones.

What hurt especially was that some people at home were told I had deserted. Fortunately some found out that this was not so, when I started meeting people from home in Lesotho, Botswana and Zambia during my work for SACTU. When I got home in 1991 my prestige was high, and I was elected to the ANC leadership in the Western Cape, giving up only because of my health.

I report these events not because of sour grapes, but because I know that many other people who happened to disagree with a leader found themselves sidelined, without being approached and asked for explanations.

In my opinion the strength of organisations depends on members being able to think for themselves and say what they think. I was noted for doing that, to extremes perhaps, but I still think it is preferable to being a "yes" man or woman.

It could be argued that arbitrary judgements were bound to be made in the stressful conditions of exile and armed struggle. But they should have no place in the new South Africa. I write this to encourage the ANC and SACP and other democratic organisations to be open and fair with people who have proved themselves loyal. They should encourage members to take part in important discussions in the people's organisations, as well as in the government of the country.

To return to London in 1971. Sitting there doing some office work made me think deeply.

Through all the difficult years, since leaving home and indeed for many years before, the movement had been my first

priority. My own interests, and those of my family, had come a poor second.

MK people were forbidden to have contact with those at home, and the only news I had heard of my family all this time was second or third hand. Joyce had managed to get in touch with my brother Temba in 1969, and had received letters from him. The information he gave was vague and guarded, although he had said the children were well. He had been harassed by the police ever since I had left the country, and he was rightly concerned about security and avoided saying anything which might arouse police suspicions.

I had also heard some alarming rumours from other sources, and I was becoming desperate for reliable news.

For a year I was given no assignment, and in fact had no communication at all from the MK or ANC leadership. I knew I would always be loyal to the ANC, but since they obviously did not intend to make use of me at that time, I decided to use the opportunity to try to get more information about my family at home.

I knew I should not do that while working in an ANC office, so I took the decision to leave London and go north to Manchester, where Joyce was.

PART FOUR
WORKERS OF THE WORLD

Chapter 14 - Manchester and home news
Chapter 15 - SACTU in London
Chapter 16 - International solidarity 1: The British isles and beyond
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Chapter 18 - SACTU, from beginning to end

Chapter 14
Manchester and home news

By now Joyce had separated from her husband and I was able to stay with her and her family - her mother and her three children, Pat, Bob and Helen - and make my home in Manchester. I have seen Helen grow up from babyhood, and she is like another daughter to me.

Joyce was working, of course, and we decided that I needed to find work too. This was not difficult through Communist Party contacts, as most of the big engineering factories had leading communist shop stewards at the time.

We went to the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) to meet Harry Smith, secretary of Stockport Trades Council, who was convenor of the Joint Shop Stewards' Committee at a place called Oil Well Company (OWECO).

He arranged for me to be interviewed by personnel, who

said they would take me on if the joint shop stewards agreed. I was mystified, but the stewards explained that the factory was a "closed shop", and only employed people who were union members: if I wanted to work there, I would have to join the union.

Of course that was exactly what I wanted to do, so the stewards informed management that they agreed, and I was taken on as a labourer, sweeping the factory. I was very impressed by the strength of the unions!

I should explain there was a joint Shop Stewards' Committee because the workers in the factory were members of many unions - engineering, general, woodworkers, technicians and clericaL "One Industry, One Union" had not, and still has not, reached England.

It was interesting for me to be a shop floor worker once more, this time in a fully unionised factory.

Work started at 7.00am, we had a 30 minute lunch break at 12.30pm and we finished at 4.00pm, Monday to Friday. It was about eight kilometres from where we lived, and I used to cycle to work. Perhaps I should explain for South African readers that for about four months of the year I cycled each way in darkness or near darkness, as well as often in the wet and cold, for winter days are short in England. One morning I skidded on the ice and fell off, but fortunately was not badly hurt.

I was impressed by some of the facilities at the factory. We had drinks machines on the shop floor which we could use at any time, and there was a works canteen. There was a medical

room with a full-time nurse to deal with minor injuries and sickness, and there were strong safety regulations. To make sure that the safety regulations were applied, each part of the factory elected safety representatives, required to inspect and report on what they found.

Over the years, the struggles of organised British workers had led to Acts of Parliament which brought these facilities to workplaces. It seems the Conservative drive to return to 'Victorian values" includes reversing these gains where they can.

Oil Well Company was making drilling equipment for the North Sea oilfields. While I was there the firm was taken over by a big American company and, to my amazement, they started shipping the machines to Texas before delivering them to Scotland.

As a sweeper I moved around the factory, which gave me the chance to talk to other workers and find out what they were thinking, about world affairs, the union and other things. I discovered that ordinary British workers were strong trade unionists, but I thought they were politically backward. They were prepared to defend Britain's invasion of Suez and other imperialist adventures, and lacked solidarity with other workers. Industrially they were strong, but politically they were weak. It seemed to me they were easily taken in by the capitalist press, even when it came to trade union affairs.

Good people lost elections because of newspaper campaigns against them. When the government imposed postal ballots for trade union elections, many were apathetic and I had to

press them to vote in their own elections.

They were big jokers and I was called a shit stirrer. One joke was that the bosses would send me home by boat - a boat with holes drilled in it, so that I would not even reach South Africa!

I found that in some ways workers lived double lives. At the factory there was a rough and tumble of language and behaviour, which was different from how they spoke and behaved at home. I soon learned factory language, but sometimes forgot to leave it at the factory gate! I also found I spoke better English than many of my workmates, who said things like "pass them spanners".

I enjoyed the period of sweeping, talking and joking. It was good for me, as a black South African with my slave mentality and labouring job, to find that I could give a lead to backward white workers, most of them skilled engineers. Everyone was interested in what I had to say: at lunchtime they would ask about South Africa. Some had relatives who had gone to work in South Africa, but had returned disgusted at how black workers were treated.

Occasionally the factory looked for people keen to learn semi-skilled jobs. I put my name down to learn to drive a crane and was taken on. I was taught and supervised by a crane driver for two weeks, and then my skills were tested by the foreman and I passed.

Later I put myself forward to be a "slinger", responsible for placing chains around heavy machinery so that the crane could pick it up and move it. It was regarded as a dangerous and tricky job. The machinery must not swing or millions of pounds

worth of damage could be done and many people injured.

Again, I passed the test, and was then a semi-skilled worker. Soon afterwards I asked to learn to operate a machine, and within two weeks I could pass that test. This lead to a protest - this was a "skilled job", and the skilled workers were not happy that I should be allowed to do it without going to college and serving my time as an apprentice.

The joint shop stewards discussed the matter and decided unanimously that as I was not allowed to be an apprentice when I was younger in South Africa, an exception should be made and I should be allowed to short circuit the usual route. The workers accepted this ruling and I started to do the skilled job.

Overall, it was good to be working at OWECO. The convenor, Harry Smith, and chairman of the joint shop stewards' committee, Charlie Rogers, were very good to me, and I admired and respected their leadership. They had established a strong trade union organisation and a good relationship with the employers.

The only major industrial conflict while I was there was a strike which lasted half a day. It happened when the troublesome old heating boiler finally broke down over one cold weekend in winter. On Monday morning the factory was icy cold and we refused to work on the shop floor - we went to the canteen, which was warm, and had a meeting. The managers came and apologised and reported that temporary heating was being brought in at once and a new boiler would be installed the following weekend. The supervisor in charge of the boiler room was sacked for not reporting previous

difficulties with the boiler.

In other ways, too, my time in Manchester was relatively happy and peaceful. It was the first time ever I had lived a normal life at home and work. We even had some holiday trips, to the sea or walking in the hills. I discovered I was getting a little too old to sleep under canvas, particularly in a cooler climate!

Joyce was active in the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM), which had a branch in Manchester, as it did in most British towns. We often went to marches and meetings together, as well as pickets against the sale of South African goods.

I remember one amazing evening when we were part of an AAM group which gate crashed an event organised by the South African Embassy, with the aim of recruiting workers to go to South Africa. It was held in a posh hotel, and included a film show of the delights of life in South Africa. The film showed the scenery, sunshine, swimming pools and shopping malls - and all the people in the film were white, as if it were a European country. At the very end there was a brief shot of a gold mine, and there were blacks at last! That must be where all the Africans were - underground!

It so happened that not many members of the public were there: most of the audience was AAM, but those present were left in no doubt that the picture they were being shown was very misleading indeed.

Family Affairs

I succeeded in getting more news of my family. The first breakthrough came in early 1973. Two young Manchester

friends, Dave and Merryn Cooke, had accepted teaching post at Madiba Secondary School, at Mahalapye in Botswana. They had taught in Zambia for two years, and were very interested in Africa.

They were active in anti apartheid moves and supported the boycotts, but because I asked them to help me they agreed to see my family in South Africa during their first school holiday. They had an old white Landrover and drove it from Mahalapye down into South Africa and across to the Eastern Cape, to stay with my brother and his wife, where my children were. When they returned to Botswana they sent us photographs and detailed reports of how everyone was. Dave and Merryn helped in other ways later, when I was travelling to Africa for SACTU.

There was further news in 1976 when another anti-apartheid activist, a South African doctor called Eugenie Cheesman, had to break the boycott to visit her ailing mother. She too was able to visit and report on my family.

In 1980 more friends, Debbie Parkin and Mick Pritchard, were in Cape Town. They sought out Oscar Mpetha, who took them to see Priscilla Mngeni and my youngest daughter, Shula. They gave Shula a letter from me, establishing contact between us for the first time.

Some of what I learned from the early contacts was very traumatic, confirming the worst rumours that I had heard.

My dear mother had passed away in my absence. My mother, Maggie Sibeko (Maduna), had been no ordinary woman. She was widowed while still young and had to work

very hard all her life. She was a Christian, had been to school herself, and was determined that all four of her children would get an education.

Maduna was also a leading woman in our village, in the church and in social and welfare matters. She was respected by all, and we always felt we had something to live up to. She was a fighter, with a sharp tongue and quick temper, and she resisted some of the bad old traditions of male domination. She brought us up strictly, and none of us would think of disobeying her. In her family there was to be no drinking, no smoking and no harassing of women. These are rules which have stuck with me.

I was very sad when I heard of her death. She had died not knowing whether I was alive or dead, and I had not been able to say goodbye to her.

The news about my wife Letitia was also upsetting. As I have explained, at first she was reluctant to join me in Cape Town, but when she came she adapted quickly and learned how to survive. She had been religious and non-political: just an ordinary village girl. I had worked on her, because I was sure that if she remained too religious and non-political we could not last long together. In the struggle there were many difficulties and sacrifices which someone not involved would find hard to accept. She responded well, encouraged me and assisted me in times of trouble.

She had found me already mixed up in politics. Whites, coloured and Indians often visited my place and she had to entertain these sophisticated comrades. She did it well.

Sometimes at the end of the month I would arrive home with only a quarter of my supposed wages, all that the impoverished unions could pay, enough to pay the rent only. She was forced to work all the time, even when pregnant, doing washing and ironing for young white people in nearby flats.

If I were arrested she would often be ignorant of my whereabouts for two or three days. Then I was away for nearly a year, in Johannesburg for the Treason Trial, and she had survived that. When I was discharged from the Treason Trial at the end of 1957 I found the children all healthy and Letty employed in a dairy shop as a forelady. She had saved £100, which was a miracle to me because, although I was careful with money -some would even say mean - I had never been able to save a penny.

Letty had become politically involved too. She had joined the ANC, the Women's League and the Women's Federation. She was very active, and was among the women who went to the Union Building in Pretoria to protest against passes for women. In 196I she had joined the Communist Party.

We never had peace together, and she had borne the brunt of rearing our four children. I had regarded her as strong and self reliant, but now I think she must have depended on me more than I realised.

After I left the country she had been harassed and detained, and then expelled from Cape Town. She had gone underground, changed her name and returned. The children remained in the Eastern Cape, as we had agreed, the girls at

her home and the boys with my mother.

After my mother died my brother Temba and his wife Sybil had taken over responsibility for the boys and moved them to Alice. Eventually they had gone to Letitia's family and offered to take the girls too. This was because there were good schools at Lovedale, where Temba lived and worked, and they were concerned that the girls should be educated. Letitia's brothers had agreed with this. Letitia had by then given birth to another child, Spokasi, who was not mine. Temba took her too, so she could go to school.

Letitia had been opposed to these moves, and when she heard that the Sibeko's had taken the three girls she broke off all contact, and never wrote or visited them.

From what Temba had heard, Letty's new partner had died. She had found another and had several more children, most of whom died in infancy. Life must have been tough for her as the apartheid regime tightened its grip, and she seems to have dropped out of politics. My brother eventually traced her in Cape Town and found her running a shebeen - illegal pub - in poor health. She died soon afterwards.

Later, when I got home, no one could tell me how or when she died, nor where she was buried. In spite of searching for records at the municipal office and hunting for the grave, I still do not really know what happened to her.

My elder sister Tsiki had been widowed, and was still living in Kwezana. My younger sister Nombulelo had had a difficult time. Her marriage had broken up and she was teaching, struggling to bring up her three children.

My brother Temba, who had been the administrator of the seminary at Lovedale, had decided to go for further training and had become a minister himself. He and Sybil had four children: Nosipho, Thabo, Nozizwe and Tembakazi. In addition they had taken on Letitia's and my four children, and Spokasi.

Later they also took Shula, my youngest daughter, for a while. You can imagine the financial and practical burdens this must have placed on them. In addition, they were harassed and Temba was arrested because of me, and later because of the political activities of Vuyo and Thabo, both of whom eventually left the country illegally. Temba was also victimised by the police because of his own stands against the corrupt regime of the Ciskei. At one time his church was burned down in suspicious circumstances.

We were able to give some financial help to them over the years. Joyce had been sending money since about 1969, and later we organised some funds through sympathetic non-governmental organisations, including towards rebuilding the church. But we know we can never repay them for the troubles and pressures they suffered by caring for my family.

And what of my children? We could see from the first photos that they were well fed and well cared for, and all at school, which was good news. But gradually we came to realise they had all been deeply affected by the traumas and disruptions experienced in their short lives, at vulnerable stages of their development.

The effects on my children began while I was still at home. The house was often raided and ransacked, with their father roughly carted away by police. They never knew when they

would see me. Sometimes I was away for months. Then they were split up and left by their parents with grandparents, then moved again to their uncle and aunt whom they were told to call father and mother.

For security reasons I was never mentioned in their new home and they never heard from their mother. They must have wondered why they were abandoned. Perhaps they were not even sure who they were.

I know now that they felt the absence of their parents very deeply, and I think this cast a shadow over them. As I will describe later, some problems remain even today.

Our children, as well as ourselves, paid a high price for freedom.

The pull of the trade unions

Although I felt I had been squeezed out of the ANC and MK by some leaders, I could never be anything except ANC, and both Joyce and I knew that being in Manchester was only an interlude. I was an active member of my union, the AEU, and found interest in and support for South African workers among engineering union activists, including Harry Smith in Stockport and Stan Cole in Manchester.

I remember in particular John Broome of the Union of Construction, Allied and Technical Trade (UCATT) and John Forrester of the Technical Administration and Supervisory Section (TASS) of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, and the local trades councils as well. I realised there was a lot of potential for mobilising the support of working people for our liberation struggle.

I kept in touch with some of our people in London, in particular with John Gaetsewe, the general secretary of the South African Congress of Trade Union now based there, and gradually found myself more involved in trade union solidarity work. John started asking me to speak for SACTU all over the north of England, and eventually further afield. It became difficult to combine working in the factory with the growing demands of SACTU, so John asked me to work with him for as long as the ANC did not give me a mission.

I agreed. This brought to an end my normal life in Manchester. After three peaceful years I was back to full-time political work, and this time I was to be a migrant worker too.

Chapter 15
SACTU in London

John Gaetsewe was the last general secretary of the South African Congress of Trade Unions elected at home. After he had been imprisoned for illegally leaving the country on a trade union mission, and later subjected to house arrest to prevent him participating in trade union activities, the movement decided to send him out of the country.

He went to the German Democratic Republic to develop his trade union skills and study trade unionism in socialist countries. While there he made contact with Phyllis Altman, former assistant general secretary of SACTU, who was in London after leaving South Africa because of harassment.

She invited John to England, and they realised that because of the links between Britain and South Africa, there was work

to be done with British trade unions. Phyllis organised funding and John began operating from a small flat, which was both his home and his office.

The work progressed and the demand for speakers grew until he asked me to join him. I travelled to London every Monday morning, at first staying with John and then later having my own small flat, and returned home on Friday evenings - a three hour journey. This was to continue for most of the time until I returned to South Africa in 1990.

Soon the demand for speakers was more than John and I could cope with, and we called for help from other former SACTU activists in England. It was obvious we needed to put things on a more formal footing, especially when SACTU leaders in Africa decided that London should be the operational centre for the western world. We needed to draw together comrades who would speak for SACTU, to discuss and agree what we should be putting forward to the trade union movements.

The group of old SACTU comrades who met up with John and me included Phyllis Altman and Ronnie Press, both SACTU executive members at home, James Phillips, Steven Tobias and others.

There were three important points to be made whenever we spoke for SACTU. The first was that although SACTU was affiliated to the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), which now had most of its members in eastern bloc countries, our association with WFTU dated back to when it was the only world trade union centre. We were not aligned with anyone, communist or anti-communist: we were looking for support

from the whole world labour movement.

Secondly, we were organising solidarity for all South African trade unions which opposed apartheid, whether they were communist, anti-communist or whatever.

The third point was that the exiled SACTU structure was a messenger for our people: in contact with home, and putting forward the policies and demands of workers at home.

Later we felt we needed written material, to enhance the impact of our speakers. We involved young people who had recently arrived from South Africa, Rob Peterson and his wife Paula Ensor, in producing pamphlets. We then became more ambitious and decided to revive the SACTU newspaper, Workers Unity. Everything we produced for international use we also sent home, so that the SACTU line inside and outside could be fully co-ordinated.

Unfortunately the Petersons did not last long, as Rob tried to hijack our paper for extreme left views. We found out he was asking his friend Martin Legassick to rewrite the editorial each time after it had already been approved. This was unacceptable so we asked him to leave. Paula went too, leaving us without administrative support. We were sorry to lose her. Luckily we found another young South African, Ilva Mackay, a student who left South Africa in 1976 and who worked for AAM. She was keen to join us, and remained with SACTU as long as it was in London.

We outgrew John Gaetsewe's flat so we found an office near the Angel tube station. Later, when I had taken over running the office, we moved again, to Archway.

We were able to pay for offices and allowances for people working there because of financial support we were receiving from the Swedish government through SIDA, a Swedish non-government organisation, from International Defence and Aid, and later from a Dutch non-governmental organisation. Because of this backing, we were able to send other money we raised from the trade union movement and from all the other non-governmental organisations back to trade unions in South Africa when they needed it.

The SACTU London office was busy, disciplined and well organised - some of our people were excellent administrators. It was also a happy place, where we all pulled together. At lunchtime we took turns to go out and buy food and prepare it, and as we ate we updated each other on what was happening in the office, what news anyone had from home and so on.

At any one time there were about eight people working there full-time, plus part-timers. We divided the work into sections.

A major function was to address meetings, and Ilva Mackay was responsible for this section at first. Every request for a speaker had to be responded to promptly and an appropriate person sent for that particular meeting. A report back had to be collected from the speaker afterwards. Ilva was followed by Poppie Nokwe.

The finance department was also important. It was headed up by Eddie Ramsdale, an accountant who was totally reliable and strict with money - like Moses Kotane in that respect. He was outspoken and not afraid to confront people, however important, if he disagreed with them. He was a staunch

defender of the independence of the trade union movement, and when he died in London SACTU lost a great comrade. Sikhumbuso Majeke (Xolile) then took over responsibility for the finance department.

Big money went through our accounts. Nearly all the outside funds sent underground to South African unions came from our office, raised by us and sent home under conditions of high security. Our reliability was well known. Donors knew that their instructions would be followed exactly, and every penny accounted for. We never had any complaints about our financial affairs.

We also had an internal department, for contact with home. Our policy was that, if possible, everyone arriving from South Africa should be met at the airport and briefed by us, before they went wherever they were going. We also liked them to spend a few days with us before they returned, so we could keep up to date with developments in South Africa. Mark Sweet was in charge of this section.

Quite a lot of South African trade unionists visited us. Many had been brought to the United Kingdom by the English Trade Union Council (TUC) for seminars at their college, which was near our office at Archway. The TUC never informed us when people were coming, or consulted us on what was needed, but this was not a problem. We had many friends among the college staff and visiting lecturers, so knew what was going on. Some lecturers would come to us beforehand to discuss what they should be saying, and other staff would let us know exactly who was coming and when.

One comrade in particular kept us well informed; George

Cartwright, a former seaman who had helped our struggle in other ways when at sea, who worked on the reception desk. We were able to arrange for all South African unionists who stayed at the college to come to our offices in the evening after their seminars had finished, so we could brief each other.

As our underground contacts at home increased, we felt it would be better for security if the most sensitive aspects of the internal work were known to only a few people. This would only be possible if it took place away from the office and a very good young friend of SACTU, Lyndel Stein, helped us do this.

Lyndel grew up in Britain but was South African by birth and wanted to contribute to the struggle. She let us use her flat in the basement of her father's house, and eventually moved out altogether and left it to us. She and her father, Sylvester Stein, also helped us by compiling an enormous list of progressive South Africans and others scattered all over the world, to whom Lyndel wrote for money for SACTU. This brought in thousands of pounds.

The SACTU education department was responsible for promoting more visits to the United Kingdom by South African trade unions. They persuaded friendly unions to set up seminars in the colleges which most of them have, and to invite and pay for people to take part in them. Tanya Abrahamse led this section.

The last section was propaganda, for home and international use. Ilva took over the portfolio, doing both the administration and writing the material.

When SACTU was well established in all these areas, I was

invited to join an ANC sub-committee concerned with underground work at home, which I later chaired. Other members were Wally Serote, Aziz Pahad and Poloko Nkobi, who was secretary.

Looking back I realise what a lot of good people contributed to the success of the London office. Among others who worked full-time with us were Godfrey Mokate, Molly Marcus, Neo Ntsane, Maria Nobrega, Colin Belton, Carol Trelawny, Nombeko Mafu, Lyn Masetla, Daphne Nqose, Matthew Olifant - now general secretary of the Construction Workers' Union - and Janet Love.

Janet is rather a sore point with us. We lent this excellent woman to the Lusaka SACTU office to help them improve their organisation and from there she was hijacked by MK, who knew a good person when they saw one. We never saw her again. Her SACTU experience, however, stood her in good stead. She became one of the support staff at Codesa and a member of South Africa's first democratically elected Parliament.

Some people went on to study while continuing to help us when they could, as did other students, including my daughter Shula and Sipho Pityana. Ronnie Press joined us full-time in 1987 when he retired from his college teaching job. You could always rely on him to put his views across forcibly, and sometimes we clashed, but he worked staunchly for SACTU.

Daphne Nqose had been Daphne Zwane - one of the first brave women to leave South Africa to join MK - before she married Wilson (Zola Nqose). Later she moved to London to study, and stayed on because of her children. Sadly, she died

young of cancer, before she could go home. Her two children are now back in Cape Town with their father.

With such a strong office we were able to contribute on many fronts.

Our initial remit was "the western world", which meant we had to cover Western Europe first. This we did, sending speakers and representatives all over the British Isles, the rest of Western Europe and Scandinavia. We also created links with trade unions and non-governmental organisations further afield in New Zealand, Australia and North America, the United States and, particularly, Canada. Later SACTU established offices in some of these places, or the ANC did and SACTU was able to work through them.

In addition, our office seemed to be the outside centre as far as South African trade unions were concerned. It was easier for them to communicate with and visit London than Lusaka, even though we were so far away. As a result we were in touch with all the progressive unions at home, and sometimes we even brought together leaders of large unions who were previously unknown to each other. We were respected for our efforts. Lusaka learned a lot from us and later, when travel to Zambia from South Africa became easier, they started to do the same thing.

There was a South African visitor who came to see us regularly, at least every month. He was MB Yengwa. Yengwa had been a close associate of Chief Albert Luthuli, and took over ANC leadership in Natal when Luthuli was banished. He was also harassed and persecuted and eventually left for

Swaziland.

Yengwa shared Luthuli's view that trade unions were important and that the ANC, without union support, would be like a man trying to walk with only one leg. Luthuli encouraged all ANC people to join a union, and always found time to open SACTU conferences.

When we knew Yengwa in London he was already an old man and had suffered a stroke, but his interest and commitment were as great as ever and we were very encouraged by his visits. He is dead now, and we are still waiting for KwaZulu-Natal to produce people of same stature to replace the Luthuli and Yengwa generation.

We had a surprise visit from another South African one day. He was Julian Bahula, a well known musician - still performing in the United Kingdom and South Africa - who offered to raise funds for us. Of course we accepted and he took full responsibility for a successful night at the 100 Club in Oxford Street, London, with all of the takings going to SACTU. Other musicians also raised money for us, including the British group UB40 and Maxi Priest.

A different sort of social event raised more than £1000 for SACTU. When I turned 60 in 1988, Joyce and my friends in Manchester organised a party. Instead of presents, everyone who came was asked to match my years and give £60 - or whatever they could afford - for SACTU funds.

Most of us in the office - except Ilva, who totally refused - spoke at meetings up and down the British Isles, but I probably did more travelling than anyone else. We all had a few

setbacks and many heart warming and encouraging experiences, which perhaps someone else will document in full one day. Here I can relate only a small proportion of my experiences in international trade union solidarity work.

Chapter 16
International solidarity 1: The British Isles and beyond

Although we were based in England, and had a great deal of support from English workers and their unions, the English Trade Union Council tended to be cool to SACTU and never invited us to send fraternal delegates to their annual congresses. We attended them just the same!

The Anti-Apartheid Trade Union Committee always organised fringe meetings where we spoke, and sometimes - particularly in Chris Childs's time - they put money towards our expenses.

In addition various unions, particularly TASS and the Fire Brigades' Union (FBU), used to invite us to join their delegates, providing us with accommodation and food. When they had delegation dinners they would introduce us to delegates and sometimes ask us to say a few words. In this way we were able to lobby effectively, including lobbying fraternal delegates from all over the world.

The reason we were not included among the TUC's fraternal delegates was that they were invited by its international department, notoriously staffed by non-elected officers who seemed to have more in common with the foreign office than with working people.

Their excuse was that we were not affiliated to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) which, as its name suggests, was anti-communist and anti the World Federation of Trade Unions, to which we were affiliated.

Later some of the constituent unions put up good resolutions about SACTU which were carried by congress. They urged the TUC to work with us, but the council officers continued to do little. These resolutions, though, made it easier for progressive unions to join in setting up a British Trade Union-SACTU Liaison Group. Eddie Ramsdale took the lead in this from our side, and the group was able to push forward the work among affiliates.

Partly in response to the blockages set up by the TUC, IMU

and other anti-communist international trade union centres, SACTU developed a policy of pairing unions: for example promoting links between railway unions in Britain and South Africa. This was a very worthwhile policy. We found people understood much more clearly what apartheid meant when they learned about the lives of people like themselves in South Africa.We met many British union leaders at the Irish TUC congress, where we were fraternal delegates, and at the Scottish TUC, and found many of them friendly and helpful. We were often invited to their annual conferences, and they responded whenever they could if we asked for help.

One of the unions we were closest to was TASS, led by Ken Gill. We were always invited to speak at their conferences, and they gave us a lot of financial and other help. Ken was a strong supporter of SACTU policies in TUC debates and was widely respected by most other union leaders. He introduced us to many of his colleagues, always a good start, and all in all TASS was the bedrock of SACTU's work among British trade unions. When TASS merged with another union, the new Managerial, Scientific and Financial Union (MSF) carried on the good work.

The Firebrigades' Union was second only to TASS in supporting us. We were always at their national conferences and often at regional meetings and seminars. They even printed our newspaper, Workers Unity, each month without charge.

I think our first contact with the National Association of Local Government Officers (NALGO, now part of UNISON, the Public Service union) occurred when John Gaetsewe met John McFadden at the Scottish TUC. He invited SACTU to NALGO's

London headquarters to address their international department.

When Gaetsewe and I went we found several leaders of the union in the audience, including Rita Donachy, then vice president and later president, and Ralph Gayton, the European Community Executive Committee member who chaired the international committee. We were warmly welcomed and offered support. This was very fortunate, because their offices were near ours, and they allowed us to use their facilities, including meeting rooms, telephones and fax machines.

NALGO was affiliated to Public Service International (PSI) and their support for SACTU and direct pairing was not liked by PSI. The argument was that if there were to be any relationships with South African unions they should be via PSI, not via SACTU, and certainly not directly union to union. NALGO were loyal members of PSI but would not be moved on this. McFadden and Gayton, both workers who were elected not full-time officers, felt strongly that they wanted to be personally in touch with South African workers.

Later we organised the South African Municipal Workers' Union to invite NALGO to send a delegation to their conference, which they did. John McFadden was one, Ralph Gayton another, together with Jan Stockwell of the international department. They produced a booklet about their visit afterwards. While in South Africa they also carried out other important missions for SACTU. This was the first time progressive trade unionists had done this for us, and other trade unionists followed later. All of them were taking big risks in helping our struggle.

When Jimmy Knapp became general secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), doors were opened to international solidarity with South African railway workers. It was a time when they were desperately in need of support. There was an upsurge in trade union activity on the railways, as elsewhere, and the regime was responding by murdering striking workers, and arresting and sentencing others to death.

We suggested that NUR invite South African Railway and Harbour Workers' Union leaders to Britain, which they did. General secretary Sello Ntai and president justice Langa came at NUR's expense to talk to the leadership and address meetings.

It was agreed that money would be collected from the British union's members for SARHWU, and that NUR centrally would give £2 000 a month for at least six months. SARHWU leaders invited Jimmy Knapp to visit them in return, which he later did. NUR also persuaded the West German Railway Union to help. They paid for a SARHWU delegation to attend an International Railway Conference.

We had little response from Britain's biggest union, the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) until Ron Todd was elected general secretary. Then there was a dramatic change, and TGWU opened up to SACTU.

They invited us to their conferences, national and regional, and gave us financial and political support. Ron Todd himself went to South Africa and met South African trade union leaders, where he promised TGWU's direct support for our struggle, without delays imposed by the TUC or ICFTU. Ron was always available if we needed to see him, and as far as SACTU

was concerned, he was one of the great trade union leaders of Britain.

The National Union of Seamen (NUS) came across SACTU by accident, but once he met us the union's general secretary Jim Slater was very helpful. He let us use NUS meeting rooms, introduced us to other British unions and - perhaps best of all - introduced us to the Danish Seamens' Union, who were wonderful people.Our treasurer, Eddie Ramsdale, was a member of the Association of Scientific, Technology and Managerial Staff (ASTMS), and through his network we got a lot of grassroots support. Large sums of money were raised, and the good work continued after the merger into MSF.

The National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) under Rodney Bickerstaffe supported us both politically and financially. They were particularly active in training and paid for people to attend seminars they organised in Britain. Later they sent officers out to Zambia to lead seminars for people from home.

The General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trade Union (GMBATU), led by John Edmonds, invited us to their conferences and to address seminars at their college, in Manchester. They even paid us to do it!

Ken Gill introduced us to the National Communications Union (NCU) and we immediately suggested they invite the South African Post Office and Telecommunications Workers' Association (POTWA) to send their leaders over for a seminar and to attend their conference. The National Union of Furniture Trade Operatives (NUFTO) similarly agreed to bring their opposite numbers from South Africa for a meeting and

seminars.

We discussed with Anthony D Dubbins of the National Graphical Association (NGA) and his committee the fact that the whites only South African Typographical Union was still a member of the Print International Secretariat (PIS). They immediately decided to put to their conference a call for the union's expulsion, and this was passed and taken to the international body. As a result they were expelled. Later NGA helped us again by providing computer training for some of our comrades.

This roll of honour is incomplete. There were many other unions which supported our struggle: indeed there were few which did not. I have mentioned only some - those with which I worked and found particularly active on behalf of South African working people.

The many good comrades in the British trade union movement made up for the lack of enthusiasm from the TUC. We received enormous amounts of moral and practical support, and more. One of the things I miss in retirement is their friendship.

There is more to the British Isles than England!

Although most English unions cover Scotland too, there is a separate Scottish TUC, and we were invited to address their congress every year. The Scottish leaders, particularly Jimmy Miller and Campbell Christie, gave us every support. They issued a circular to all affiliates asking them to collect money for SACTU and encouraged them to invite us to address their individual conferences, which many did. They also encouraged

their English counterparts to co-operate with us.

Visits to the Scottish TUC were always enjoyable and productive, although at first I had difficulty with some of the accents and felt I needed an interpreter. This never stopped me appreciating their sympathy and understanding for us.

There was a very effective Anti-Apartheid Movement in the Irish Republic which had good links with the trade union movement. Because of their efforts SACTU was invited to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions every year. I was always the one who went, and I stayed with Kadar and Louise Asmal in Dublin. Kadar was dean of the faculty of law at Trinity College, and I am sure it was his and Lousie's efforts which built up the Irish AAM.

The first thing which struck me was that workers from all parts of Ireland, including the six counties that make up Northern Ireland, were present and discussing their common problems. They were way ahead of the politicians in this. They were strongly against apartheid. On one memorable visit I was called to a demonstration in Dublin to support shop workers who had been sacked by their employer, the big supermarket store Dunnes, because they refused to handle and sell South African products.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions also helped our struggle by arranging and supporting training in technical skills in the Republic of Ireland for many of our exiles.

My observation was that where there was a strong anti-apartheid movement, as in Dublin, Glasgow and many other towns, interest in South Africa grew. We found unions and

other organisations such as local authorities taking up our issues and supporting our campaigns for boycotts, sanctions and so on.

We were unhappy with what the British government did to protect and bolster the apartheid regime, with Margaret Thatcher referring to our freedom fighters as terrorists. But at least we were allowed to work from London, which was very valuable to us. We were even given police protection once, when South African activists abroad were being bombed and assassinated by the regime's agents.

Whatever the shortcomings of their government, the people of the British Isles and their organisations gave us tremendous support and, because of their international links, helped us find support elsewhere. We had many true friends in the British Isles in our hour of need.

Our involvement across the English Channel was less than in the British Isles, but we had significant and substantial help from many countries, and I visited a number of them.

For example, SACTU was invited to Italy to take part in their May Day demonstrations, which united all three Italian union centres. I went twice to May Day in Milan, as well as to a trade union seminar by the Italian lakes.

We were also very close to one of the French centres, the Confederation Generale des Travailleurs (CGT). We met each year at the WFTU conference, and they always invited us to their annual conference. Although our communication was handicapped somewhat by language barriers, I felt they supported our struggle unreservedly.

There was one incident which demonstrated their support, which I shall never forget. South African coal had been imported by France in defiance of sanctions and CGT called for action. Oil was poured on the coal dumps and they were set alight. CGT firemen had been advised in advance that there was no need to respond quickly to the calls, and all the coal was burned out. CGT was also a reliable source of financial support.

In Belgium and the Netherlands most of our support came from outside the trade union movement. In fact we never made contact with the Belgian unions, but we did enjoy support from two non-governmental organisations which gave us big money for our underground work at home.

The Anti Apartheid Movement in Holland was very strong and this influenced the Trade Union Centre (FNV) to be friendly to us - until they discovered that SACTU was an affiliate of WFTU. Their trade union structure was very centralised, and once FNV was against we were unable to approach individual unions. Fortunately the AAM had leading trade unionists among its members, who were able to get us invited to some o the unions' conferences. I went to speak to the public sector, dockers, railway and food unions.

In Holland there were also two non-governmental organisations which gave money to both SACTU and the ANC. At their suggestion, 10 percent of the money covered administrative costs and the rest went straight to underground structures at home. There seemed to be no support for their distant relatives, the Afrikaners, among the. Dutch people.

In Scandinavia the response was mixed. We had contact with

some of the Danish unions, in particular the Seamens Union. The Danish government had a strong sanctions policy and the Seamens' Union kept a very close watch on Danish shipping lines to see they observed the sanctions.

When they discovered a company breaking sanctions by transporting South African goods, the unions took them to court. They also checked on South African boats going elsewhere in Europe, and when they found black crew members being paid lower wages than white crew, they contacted dockers in Sweden and England to tell them not to unload until crews were paid, regardless of colour. The ship's owners were forced to pay up before they could offload.

Eventually SACTU opened an office in Denmark at the invitation of the trade unions and at their expense, to make consultation easier.

I visited Finland once, and also found the leaders of trade unions there very warm and supportive to our struggle. They gave us money for underground work back home. While I was in Helsinki I met a number of South Africans living there, working for the World Peace Council.

By contrast, the Swedish Trade Union Centre (LO-TCO) was lukewarm to SACTU. This was surprising because Sweden was generally against apartheid and SIDA, a government funded NGO, gave our movement a lot of money to support organisations in exile. They knew it was essential for us to have strong offices, and were the major source of finance for the SACTU office in London right up until the time it closed.

At one stage the remit of the London office extended beyond

Europe as far as New Zealand and Australia - literally the other side of the world.

We had met people from the New Zealand Seamens' Union (NZSU) at WFTU meetings and later, when their president was visiting his counterpart in London, he said he wanted to see us. This was how we first met Jim Slater of NUS. The New Zealand comrade came to our office, and invited us to send a representative to his union's forthcoming annual conference in Auckland.

John Gaetsewe had been to New Zealand some years before, but this time it was decided I should go. I flew via California and had all the confusion of crossing the dateline but, luckily, long plane journeys do not bother me. When I arrived at Auckland, the NZSU president was there to meet me, together with Ken Douglas, general secretary of the New Zealand Trade Union Congress. They took me to a hotel near to the hall where the NZSU Conference was taking place, and left me to rest before I was collected for dinner and to meet other trade union leaders.

The next day, when I looked out of the hotel window, I noticed that the climate seemed like South Africa's, with a heavy dew which glistened in the morning sun. After breakfast I was taken to the conference to give my fraternal greetings, and then moved on. First I went to the TUC office to pay a courtesy call. It was obvious they needed a broad explanation of what was going on in South Africa, not restricted to trade union affairs. In any case trade union issues cannot be discussed in isolation from broader issues.

The New Zealand TUC had sent a circular to all affiliates

saying I was going to be in the country, and that they should welcome me with open arms. Many affiliates had responded and an itinerary been drawn up for me to go to both islands. Because my time was limited, some unions had organised joint meetings. For example, there was one meeting on the South Island to which all unions were invited.

The Transport Union took responsibility for transporting me, handing me over from region to region. I was carried by the organisers, in their cars, all of which had car phones. When I asked how unions in such a small country could afford this, I was told that almost all workers were required to be trade union members and that subscriptions were collected by stop orders, so that the unions had enough funds.

My job in New Zealand was not difficult. Most New Zealanders seemed to be against apartheid and wanted to know what they could do to help. Subsequently the Trade Union Centre sent SACTU money every year, and their leaders played a big part in the expulsion of the South African government, employers and white unions from the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

While I was moving round New Zealand addressing meetings and enjoying the beauty of the country, the Trade Union Centre I was talking to Australians, suggesting they invite me before I returned to Britain. This was arranged, and after a week in New Zealand I flew to Sydney for three days.

Behind my invitation to go to Australia were the Building, Construction and Engineering Union, led by John Boating, and the Seamens' Union, both affiliates of WFTU. They organised a joint meeting, and I found they knew something about South

Africa from their WFTU experiences. They gave me a very warm welcome, but time was limited and I could do little except talk to my hosts and admire the beautiful city of Sydney.

An outcome of the two visits was that a demand arose for a permanent South African presence in that part of the world. As a result, the ANC later opened an office in Sydney.

We also reached across the Atlantic Ocean to North America. From its foundations in 1954, SACTU had been in contact with the United Electrical Union, which then included both Canadian and American workers. John Gaetsewe and others had been to some of their meetings in Canada.

In 1977 we were invited to send a delegate to their convention, to be held in New York, and it was proposed that I go.

I agreed reluctantly, because we were generally suspicious of America and Americans. We knew how the Central Intelligence Agency had tried to undermine and divide progressive and trade union organisations all over the world, and we had seen some of this in South Africa. It was reported that the first meeting of the people who broke away from the ANC to form the PAC was held in the United, States Information Office.

The convention I attended was held in a posh hotel and lasted a week. I kept thinking it must be costing the union a fortune, and of course they had paid my fare on top of that. Why this amazed me was because in South Africa, we had never dreamed of having a meeting on this scale. We were used to church halls or crummy township halls, with delegates

accommodated by local people. We met only at weekends so delegates did not miss work, or they would lose wages and probably get sacked.

When I got home, of course, I found that South African trade unions had adopted the American way of doing things. Anyway, how they ran their conference was not my business. I had gone to speak to delegates about South Africa, and that was what I did. As I did so, the attitude I had arrived with began to change.

I found some delegates were open communists, and there were black Americans who understood the need for international solidarity with the oppressed people of the world. For most black Americans, in fact, whatever your political opinions, if you are African they support you in calling for independence and opposing American interference in your struggle.

My welcome was very warm, and all the delegates showed that they hated apartheid. What I found as I talked informally with them helped me to reformulate my approach to addressing the conference. My speech went down very well, and the trip turned out to be the first of a number of successful visits to American unions.

After the convention I was invited by different delegates to address their local regions, which I did. I went to California for three days, where I spoke at meetings of the Longshoremen's Union as well as the Electrical Union, and then moved on to Ohio. There I spoke to workers' meetings and was asked to take a class in a local high school to talk about South Africa.

The children were very excited about this.

Next I moved to Chicago, a divided city, one part black and one part white. The national centre, the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO) was having a convention there and somehow it was quickly arranged that I should address that conference, regardless of agenda or standing orders!

This was the work of the Black Coalition and they organised my introduction in style. I walked to the platform accompanied by a guard of honour of 10 black trade unionists, five on each side. plus the chair of the Black Coalition, who introduced me. The introduction was long and flattering, not just of me but also of the struggle of the oppressed people of South Africa. I followed giving short greetings, and again I was very well received.

While in Chicago I was taken around factories, and I saw what seemed like super exploitation - one man in charge of three machines, moving between them all the time. Similarly I saw very long goods trains, with one man driving three engines.

At another factory there was a strike in progress. with pickets at the gate. Scabs arrived in cars. got out and took guns from their pockets and threatened to shoot anyone who tried to stop them going in. I would not have been surprised to see such things in South Africa, but this was supposed to be "the land of the free,"

Before I left Chicago I was invited to a service in Jesse Jackson's church. I was not keen, because I am not a

churchgoer, but when I went I found much more than a church service and enjoyed it. In particular I was pleased by the political addresses and the beautiful singing. I noticed that the ministers who were preparing were women, but that the people in charge were men - the usual thing.

From Chicago I moved back to New York, touching Boston. All the time I had been in the United States I had been guarded, handed on from one group of guards to the next as I moved from state to state. They said this was because once I had appeared on a platform I was a potential target. just like home!

In many ways, the America I saw reminded me of South Africa with its racism and violence. By the end of my two week visit I was convinced that some Americans were very good people, and like the progressive people of South Africa, were fighting a hard battle. Those who declared themselves to be communist were certainly brave.

The assumption that I had arrived with, that all Americans were CIA agents, was clearly wrong.

Probably I was the first South African trade unionist who had visited unions in America, and I was lucky to have met the cream of the trade union movement in the UEU all over the United States, and the unions' Black Caucus. Because of their strength I was able to address the national convention of the AFL-CIO.

It seems I struck a spark, particularly with the black caucuses, and later the ANC was able to set up two offices, in New York and Washington.

The American unions mobilised to exert effective pressure on American companies with interests in South Africa, demanding that they observe codes of practice or disinvest. Some of the economic pressures which weakened the apartheid regime came from American companies under heavy pressure from their own unions and black organisations in the United States.

Later visits I made to American unions confirmed my early views that they included some good allies. I made many friends there and won great support - moral and financial - for SACTU.

Chapter 17
International solidarity 2:
The Canadian connection

The United Electrical Union organised workers in both the United States and Canada. At their convention in New York the Canadian region had pressed me to extend my visit and go up to Canada. I was not able to do that, but I promised I would come later

In 1978, before I was able to fulfil that promise I learned more about what was happening in Canada from two young anti-apartheid activists who visited our London office. They arrived with a letter of introduction from George and Vera Poonen, two old trade unionist friends and comrades who had been forced into exile and had later joined their children in Canada.

The two visitors, Brenda Wall and Ken Luckhardt, were not Canadian by origin. Brenda was an Australian who had gone to Edmonton to do post graduate studies, and Ken was an American by birth. He had left his homeland to become a PhD student in Canada because he was not prepared to fight America's war in Vietnam. They had both been involved in anti-apartheid activity in Edmonton since 1976, when there had

been a big campaign against a visiting South African cricket team. In the course of the campaign several people, including themselves, had spent a night in jail.

After that they linked up on joint ANC-SACTU work across Canada with James Stewart and the Poonens, covering Edmonton and the rest of Alberta. They had been researching Canadian-South African connections, and had decided they wanted to forsake their academic studies and concentrate on South African trade union issues. This was what they had come to talk to us about.

It was agreed that they would work for us, and eventually we asked them to do something John Gaetsewe had been keen on for some time. This was nothing less than writing a history of SACTU.

The two young internationalists were keen to take on the task, but felt they needed an editorial committee comprising SACTU leaders. A sub-committee was set up to do this, including Phyllis Altman, John Gaetsewe, Moses Mabhida and Eli Wienberg. Ronnie Press and I joined the group, and we all looked at the draft material as it was produced.

Phyllis Altman was a key person in making it possible for the history to be written. She had been assistant general secretary of SACTU, responsible for administration, and in effect was the senior full-time officer. General secretary Leshe Masina and president Leon Levy both held full-time jobs in their own unions.

Phyllis had made sure that copies of all important SACTU papers had been sent abroad, so she was the one person who

knew where they were to be found. They had been dispersed all over the world, some to the British TUC, some to America and some to the UEU in Canada.

Of course the major holders of our complete records were the South African police, who had regularly collected all SACTU's papers - but we decided against asking them!

Perhaps now that the police are accountable to the people it might be possible to obtain access to all our papers - if they were not among those destroyed by the authorities in a panic just before the election.

Ken and Brenda worked with us in Africa and in London until 1980, when they finished writing SACTU's history. The book, Organise or Starve, was published the same year. It was a tremendous achievement, but only one of many contributions they made to our struggle. They sacrificed their careers and gave part of their lives to support us, and I hope that our movement will never forget them, and the many others like them. Knowing them was yet another factor strengthening my belief that the non-racial policies of the ANC are correct.

I eventually reached Canada in 1979, at the invitation of the World Council of Labour. There had already been considerable support for SACTU and the ANC in Canada, in Toronto particularly, where the Poonens were active and John Gaetsewe had visited before.

It was my first visit. The conference was in Montreal, and I had a shock soon after arriving. I asked a bystander the way and he ignored me completely. As I looked puzzled someone else said:

"He doesn't understand you at all."

I was astounded. I said:

"Am I lost? Am I not in Canada?"

The answer was:

"No, you are in Quebeq'

At last I understood. However, when I heard Quebecois talking it did not sound like proper French to me, not that I speak French. I remarked on this once, saying their French sounded to me as if it had an American accent, but they did not like that at all. As we were talking a French woman arrived, and when she spoke I said:

"That's it, that's the French I know!"

Everyone laughed and the French women confirmed what I had said: that the Canadian French accent was very different.

Of course, I understand the importance language and culture have for people, so I had every sympathy for the Quebecois. But I have worries about narrow nationalism, which can be very destructive, as Eugene Terreblanche and Buthelezi have shown in South Africa and as is so obvious in parts of Europe today.

If the ANC can realise the vision of a rainbow nation, with a mixture of different people with their own culture enriching one nation, perhaps we can be a model for other parts of the world.

One of the other speakers at the World Council of Labour conference was a man called Andrew Kailembo from the ICFTU Africa Desk. When he spoke of South Africa he made the

mistake of referring to Buthelezi as a "national leader". This did not surprise me, as ICFTU did not really understand the South African situation nor support our struggle, but it did annoy me. When it was my turn to speak I felt I had to reply.

I explained that Buthelezi was born one of the many chiefs of the Zulus. He had been picked by the South African regime to be chief minister of the KwaZulu homeland, and was paid by them. This was not how the people of South Africa acquired "national leaders".

In the past a Zulu chief, Albert Luthuli, had become a national leader. He had resigned from being a chief, and been democratically elected president general of the ANC. The conference understood my point and applauded my speech.

As I wrote earlier, although the ICFTU claimed to be opposed to apartheid, it generally took a hostile attitude to SACTU. It was an organisation dominated by cold war ideas and opposed to any organisation linked with the WFTU.

Unfortunately the ICFTU was influential with a number of national trade union centres and was able to hamper SACTU's work in some respects. I have already mentioned their influence on the international department of the British TUC, and in Holland, and much the same applied in Canada. Like their counterparts in London, some of the officers in the Canadian Labour Council's (CLC's) international department seemed to have a foreign office rather than a trade union point of view.

When Canadian trade unions pressed for support to be given to South African workers, they chose to ignore SACTU and said

they would go directly to individual South African trade unions. Because of this some of the delegations they sent were made to look foolish when they arrived in South Africa, as often the first question they were asked was:

"Do you know SACTU?"

When they admitted they did not, they were not welcome. Some even had to go up to Zambia to SACTU headquarters for their blessing before local unions would talk to them.

In spite of these lessons, the CLC persisted in trying to sideline SACTU in Canada, and to prevent Canadian unions from giving us their support. In particular two CLC men, Paul Purritt - who was once involved in anti-apartheid work - and John Harker, turned out to be very unhelpful.

Purritt alleged that funds collected did not reach South Africa, implying the money was misused by SACTU.

The CLC tried hard to prevent union activists from meeting visiting trade unionists from South Africa, keeping their whereabouts secret and literally never leaving them alone. As in London these efforts usually failed because of "union sabotage" and the keenness of the visitors to meet friends. For years there continued to be rows between CLC officials and SACTU on these issues, in spite of growing evidence that CLC was wrong.

I remember one particular meeting in London, Ontario, when I was appealing for money for the SACTU strike fund. The CLC representative urged that, instead, money should go to the CLC's solidarity fund. I commented that delegates could decide to do that, or then again they could wrap it in a plastic bag and

throw it in the sea. In both cases it might eventually reach South Africa, although perhaps not until after we were free. If they really wanted to help, neither of these ways was good enough.

The meeting decided to give the money through SACTU.

One of the groups able to testify that SACTU money reached South Africa was Development and Peace, a Quebec Catholic non-governmental organisation. On my first visit to Canada I was invited to address a seminar which they had convened because I was in Montreal for the World Council of Labour conference.

The organisation wanted to contribute financially to South African trade unions, particularly to those working underground. I was able to assure them that we had ways of getting money to the underground machinery and that they, as a church group, would be able to send people to sister churches in South Africa and then that money reaching the targets.

They did this later, and went to see our people, who made them very welcome and confirmed that the money had arrived. Madeline Buusquet, one of their leaders who went to South Africa, passed through our London office on the way there and back, and was able to help us by reporting on their experiences in South Africa.

Before leaving Canada I went to Toronto to introduce myself to some of the leaders of Canadian unions, including the Auto Workers', Communication Workers', Post Office Workers', UE and the Public Employees' unions. That was all I had time for

on my first visit.

That visit convinced me that Canadian trade unionists had a great interest in the struggles of South African workers, so SACTU decided that something had to be done to combat the CLC obstruction. We asked Ken and Brenda, who were about to return to Canada, to work on establishing a SACTU office. They agreed and went to Toronto to seek financial and other support from progressive trade unions.

This seemed to us to be a gigantic task, but they made rapid progress. The first success was persuading the post office union to give SACTU two offices and the use of a meeting hall, for nothing.

The next task was to find money for administration. That again was soon solved. Ken and Brenda made agreements with various unions to run seminars for their members on South Africa, South African trade unions and SACTU. In return the unions agreed to pay, and the money agreed upon enabled Ken and Brenda to give up their other jobs and work full-time in the office. To guide the work of the office, a SACTU solidarity committee was set up, chaired by George Poonen. The other members were union representatives, one being Jane Armstrong of the Airline Staffs' Association who was deeply committed to our struggle.

The first responsibility of the Canadian SACTU office had to be to do the education work which the trade unions paid for. The demand for seminars and educational programmes grew until Ken and Brenda had difficulty meeting all the requests. Fortunately at this point they met Ken Traynor, a young man who had just completed a stint with a non-governmental

organisation in Southern Africa, and he agreed to join them. His strength was in research, and he played a major role in producing material for seminars and for the sanctions campaigns.

A valuable source of information for the seminars were the visiting South African trade unionists brought over from home from time to time by the CLC. Because of the SACTU office's close links with the unions, CLC's secrecy usually broke down and a lot was learned from these comrades. As well as using the information for seminars, they also fed it back to the London SACTU office, which was very useful for us.

The solidarity committee did work other than the educational seminars. Through Vancouver dockers they documented the movement of goods and played a role in the North American sanctions campaigns. They were also able to document the move of a multinational firm, SKF, from Canada to Port Elizabeth, drawing the attention of Canadian workers to the threat posed to workers everywhere by apartheid's cheap labour.

The committee called for a week of action against apartheid in 1986, and many unions responded. For example, telephone workers would not connect calls to South Africa, postal workers would not handle letters, dockers would not unload cargoes and shop workers kept South African wine at the back of the shelves.

Most of all, the solidarity committee succeeded in raising large sums of money, mostly from unions, for the strike fund. Some unions undertook to make regular donations. For example, the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union pledged

$5 000 a year for as long as it was needed. Postal workers, with the support of their leader jean Claude Parrot, and auto workers, where we had the support of Bob White and Pat Clancy, were also regular contributors. Overall more than a quarter of a million dollars was raised for our struggle

Many SACTU people were invited to Canada during the 1980s, including John Gaetsewe, Sipho Pityana, Thozamile Makheta, Temba Nxumalo, Khisa Dlamini, Colin Belton and Thozamile Botha. Some, like Botha, had recently come out of South Africa and could describe the uses to which strike fund money had been put, and how valuable it was to South African unions.

From the early 1980s until the 1990s, when SACTU closed down, I was in charge of the London SACTU office and for much of that time we covered North America. I was a frequent visitor to Canada, to the conventions of different unions and sometimes to meet South African trade unionists who had been invited there. Probably the union I visited most was the Auto Workers' Union, and I had the honour of speaking at their founding convention in 1985, when they separated from the American Auto Workers' Union.

On one of my Canadian visits I went to Vancouver, on the west coast. I was amazed to find I had to fly for four hours from Toronto to get there - Canada is a vast country. I arrived at the weekend and was taken to a house at the edge of the forest. The host warned that there may be bears about, but said they were not dangerous except when they had cubs. I did not see any near the house but next morning when we walked in the forest we saw footprints, and then an actual bear. It did

not seem bothered about us.

On Monday we drove north, crossing a large river by pontoon. On the other side were iron mines, which I was told were owned by Harry Oppenheimer. The workers were living in men only compounds in very poor conditions, just as bad as South Africa. The workers, of course, were what I thought of as North American Indians, now known as First Nation Canadians.

There were many occasions in Canada which were memorable for me, and other people still talk about a couple of them. Some were to do with my habit of speaking out frankly, often saying what other people are thinking.

One example was in the early 1980s when I was addressing the Ontario Federation of Labour in the boardroom at their headquarters. It was a very posh place with an enormous table, and people sitting around in pecking order. I was there to receive money they were giving to SACTU. I thanked them and probably should have stopped there, but could not resist adding:

"I am not very comfortable in fancy buildings like this - at home I would have to go in such a place by the back door. And when I look at this table, I can't help thinking you could afford to give us more!"

What I said seemed to delight some of them. Later I learned that the money spent on furnishing the headquarters had attracted considerable criticism from affiliates!

On another occasion I was invited to address a postal workers' May Day event in Ottawa. It was probably not a good idea, because speeches and socials do not mix easily. The hall

was packed, with a busy bar, and people did not want to be quiet and listen. AI Campbell and Madeline Parent from the Confederation of Canadian Unions had spoken first and did not succeed in holding the attention of the hall. After I had been introduced by the chair I took the microphone and said loudly:

"I will not speak until you respect me and our struggle."

I repeated this several times and eventually all was quiet, and I was able to speak.

Always, when I travelled through other parts of the world, my priority was to return to England, which had become my home, as soon as I could. Canada was the only other place in which I felt relaxed, and on one occasion I had a bit of a holiday there. Ken and Brenda took me out into the countryside. We went from Toronto by train on a slow narrow gauge railway, like those in South Africa. We went to the area where forests of maple trees were tapped for their syrup. It was the first time I had seen trees being milked. Tubes ran from every tree in the forest, carrying the syrup to a central point where it was boiled and put in jars for sale.

Later SACTU appointed a North American representative and London's involvement with Canada ended. From then on they, like us, reported directly to headquarters in Lusaka. I understand that things changed considerably after that, but I have no firsthand knowledge of it.

In 1994, after my retirement, Joyce and I visited Toronto to see old friends and to say a personal thank you for all the help we had from Canadians. We had a wonderful time with my old comrades, and were invited to the retirement party of Pat Clancy, national officer of the Canadian Auto Workers, who

had done so much for SACTU. We sat with him at the top table.

Ken and Brenda organised a party in my honour, too, and we were made very welcome everywhere we went. I had many good friends among the leading unionists in Canada, and many of them are still my friends. Some of them are now leaders of CLC, and if SACTU were still there I am sure CLC would be very keen to have close links. I hope COSATU will be able to; build on that.

My experiences of international trade union solidarity work taught me a lot. I learned that it was very worthwhile for the liberation movement to send representatives around the world to explain the justice of our struggle. I was received with interest, sympathy and support almost everywhere I went, all over Europe and Australia, New Zealand and North America.

Trade unionists and other progressive people really acted on the belief that "an injury to one is an injury to all". They behaved like true comrades, like brothers and sisters to the people of South Africa.

Chapter 18
SACTU from beginning to end

The trade union movement has played a very important role in my life, starting from when I first came across the Food and Canning Workers' Union office in Cape Town. I was involved before the South African Congress of Trade Unions was formed and, apart from my years in MK, was active in SACTU throughout its existence.

Books have already been written about SACTU, and I am sure

others will be in the future, as more records become available. I have no records to refer to, but I was there for many of the key events, and the story of my life involves more aspects of SACTU's history as I experienced it than I have described up to this point. I am going to turn to these now.

SACTU came about because of the imposition of apartheid in the trade union movement. When the National Party government passed laws to de-register unions with mixed membership the existing trade union organisation, the Trades and Labour Council, responded willingly.

It expelled Africans from their conference, which was unacceptable to some unions with multiracial membership. The Food and Canning Workers' Union, the Textile Industrial Union, the Laundry and Dyeing Workers' Union, and the Canvas and Rope Workers' Union were among those who walked out, and immediately convened a meeting to prepare a conference of their own.

At the "alternative" conference, which I attended in March 1954, SACTU was formed. Two organisational principles were agreed. One was that SACTU's long term aim would be for one national trade union centre in South Africa. The second was that there should be industrial unions, one union for each industry. This was seen as important because of the difficulties in organising general unions, crossing many industries, which had led to the collapse of Clement Kadalie's Industrial and Commercial Union.

The conference also passed resolutions defying government policy. One committed the unions to organising workers regardless of race, colour or creed. Another expressed

solidarity with all workers of the world. The third important resolution was that SACTU saw no difference between industrial and political struggles, and therefore could ally itself to the congress movement. The conference also demanded a minimum living wage for workers, and this led to the first major organising campaign, the Pound a Day campaign.

These policies were, of course, seen by the government as threatening revolution by challenging the basis of apartheid. The government made it clear that it intended to eliminate African trade unionism and SACTU. The minister of labour said he intended to bleed African unions to death - there would be no recognition, no negotiations and no agreement with them at all.

The government may have succeeded in preventing SACTU from growing into a mass organisation, but they could never destroy it.

The question has often been raised as to whether SACTU's strategy of uncompromising alignment with political organisations was correct, or whether it played into the hands of the regime, giving them a ready made weapon with which to beat the trade union movement. My view, and I think most Africans share this, is that the two struggles - industrial and political - were one and the same. No significant workers' victories could be won while apartheid existed.

The mistake we may have made in the Western Cape was in the way we applied that strategy. All the top trade union leaders were also the top ANC leaders, and many were top SACP leaders too. This made it easy for the authorities to harass and persecute all SACTU leaders, even though SACTU

itself was never banned.

If some people had given priority commitment to trade unions, while still members of other organisations, unions might have been less disrupted when the ANC was banned. Nor would the situation have reached the point it did by the mid-1960s, when virtually all union leadership was underground, in prison or had been sent out of the country by the ANC.

I think there might have been important other benefits too. Discussions about policies and tactics might have been more productive, with more ideas and a wider perspective, if we had not all been peas in one pod.

The problem of conflicts of priorities arose again in exile, as we shall see - and could continue into the new era, I believe, unless union leaders remain close to, but separate from, ANC leadership.

When I left the country, from 1963 until 1971, I was fully involved in MK, but after that I found myself back with SACTU. Others in exile were involved all along. Comrades Wilton Mkwayi and Moses Mabhida had been sent to Prague to work with the World Federation of Trade Unions, followed by Mark Shope. JB Marks, Dan Tloome, Ray, Alexander, Eureka Malika, James Stewart, John Gaetsewe, Phyllis Altman, Vera and George Poonen and others all struggled to keep SACTU alive from whichever part of the world they found themselves.

In the early 1970s, as more of us got together outside, it was obvious we had to set up structures to discuss what approaches we could use in the fight for proper trade unionism

in South Africa. By this time SACTU's internal structure had been forced underground entirely, and the only way its voice could be heard was by setting up an external organisation.

Different groups of congress activists were meeting in Tanzania, Zambia and Botswana, all making contacts at home and trying to take forward their work. It was decided that these efforts should be pulled together and co-ordinated. A meeting was organised in Maputo, with people from all of the groups, including myself, as well as people from home. The main agenda item was the strategy and tactics of the internal and international struggles.

The decisions confirmed the approach to international solidarity work that we had adopted in the Western European office in London. They endorsed our efforts to enlist the moral and practical support of trade unions and other non-governmental organisations in the western world for the struggle of South African workers.

The question of the relationship between SACTU and the liberation movement arose again. The meeting, of course, supported the alliance between SACTU and the ANC, but it was affirmed that the independence of SACTU was very important and that it was not the 1abour wing of ANC".

The meeting boosted morale and increased work levels. John Gaetsewe was confirmed as still being general secretary, the post to which he had been elected at the last SACTU conference in South Africa.

Unfortunately the only leading woman at that meeting, one of the underground delegation, Jabu Nzima, was killed by a

bomb while in Swaziland on the way home. Another comrade, Eric Mtshali, was in the same house at the time but luckily escaped.

In the months following SACTU's Maputo conference, more and more unionists were forced to leave the country, and we decided to hold an annual delegates' conference externally, but including underground activists, to elect officers.

After one of these conferences, in 1982, I stayed on in Maputo to see some other people expected from home. While there OR Tambo arrived, on his way to the funerals of 42 ANC people who had been murdered by commandos in Maseru, Lesotho. He instructed me to accompany him, first taking me to the ANC store to fit me out with a suit - he had found me in jeans as usual.

We boarded a "Lesotho Airliner" which carried about six passengers. It flew low over South Africa, casting a visible shadow on the ground, and it struck me that we could easily have been intercepted and shot down. This plane and route were used often by ANC people - I don't know why the enemy did not take the opportunity to cause an "accident".

In Maseru we saw the carnage the commandos had caused. They had shot up everything, furniture and fittings as well as people, who of course included locals. The Lesotho government had allocated a special place in Sputana graveyard for our martyrs to be buried, and it was said that when South Africa was free, their bodies should be taken to rest in their homeland.

King Moshoeshoe II and prime minister Jonathan Leboa both

spoke at the funeral, as did ANC representatives and others. I spoke on behalf of SACTU.

For me the episode symbolised a closeness between the leaders and people of Lesotho and the South African struggle. I am convinced this was unacceptable to the South African regime, and caused them to instigate the coup which overthrew the Leboa government soon afterwards.

It was the first of several visits I made to Lesotho. The later ones were to meet trade unionists from home and the SACTU committee which was established there. Tony Yengeni and Kingdom (Khaya Myoli) were part of that committee. Among those who came to see us were Zoli Malindi, Thozamile Botha, Denis Nyeli and Mildred Lesiya. Chris Hani and Lambert Moloi were working for the ANC in Lesotho by then, and they arranged places for me to stay on my visits.

In spite of the improvements resulting from holding annual conferences, organisational problems remained. The president, chairman and administrator were working in Dar-es-Salaam, while the general secretary continued to work from London. Eventually we decided that all office bearers must be together in headquarters which would be in Lusaka, where the ANC was then based.

This of course meant that people had to be uprooted. I was elected treasurer and had to go to Zambia for my term of office. A committee comprising other workers ran the London office while I was away.

I was in Lusaka from July 1982 and was away from my home and Joyce. For more than a year I stayed with various people in

Lusaka, including Phil Norushe, who was also working in the SACTU office.

I concentrated on reorganising the finances and bringing aboard young people able to eventually take over responsibility for finances. I also took the opportunity to try to improve contacts with the Western Cape, which seemed to have been receiving little attention and no financial help.

To do this I went down to Gaberone to meet up with some Cape people, including Wilson Sidina, a young trade unionist who was part of the SACTU underground structure.

In Gaberone I stayed with one of the founders of modem trade unionism in South Africa, Dan Tloome. He had been elected vice president at the 1941 founding conference of the Council of Non-European Trade Unions, the predecessor of SACTU. He was an accountant by training, and although an ANC and SACP member, always gave priority to union issues.

When forced to leave South Africa he went only as far as Botswana, and from there kept in contact with unionists at home and facilitated meetings between internal and external SACTU people. He lived to be able to go home in 1990, an unsung hero. He died soon after, happy I am sure, to see that what he had spent his life fighting for was beginning to happen.

John Gaetsewe did not accept that office bearers should be in Zambia. When he left London he went not to Lusaka but to Botswana, where his wife and family were. I went with others to Francistown to try to persuade him to come to headquarters. While we were there he agreed, but he never

came.

Sadly, after a lifetime serving the people he had fallen prey to corruption. His interest was not just in his family. SACTU owned property in Francistown, which was rented out. The rent money was intended to be sent to South Africa to support underground union work. The properties were in the name of Gaetsewe and two others, and apparently he was able to change this with the help of a lawyer, Jama Mbeki, who subsequently disappeared. When John's name alone was there. he started selling off the houses and spending the money.

SACTU made feeble efforts to set this straight and regain control of the money and the remaining property. I was one of those sent to Botswana to try to persuade John to go to headquarters in Lusaka for discussions. He went, but apparently the discussions were fruitless. He was also drinking heavily at the time, and the money was supporting his drinking habit. When he died later, his will left the remaining houses to his wife. After his death SACTU still tried to get something back. A lawyer reached an agreement with John's wife on a compromise settlement, but it was never followed up. She died a few months later and I was sent to try to pursue the matter again with his son. I found John's wife had left everything to her daughter, and it was clear nothing further could be done.

In judging John Gaetsewe's overall contribution we have to remember not only this episode in his old age, but also the importance of his work, particularly during his years in exile. In my view he enabled SACTU to play a credible role internationally because he jealously guarded SACTU's

independence from political structures.

I suspect that what he saw when in Eastern Europe, where trade unions were subservient to the ruling parties, made him aware of the need for independent organisations to defend workers' interests. I know that he refused an offer to be co-opted to the national executive of the ANC, and he refused to let SACTU move into the ANC's offices in London.

Independence was worth the cost of our rent, in John's view. He was a loyal member of the ANC, but he believed it was his duty as general secretary of SACTU to give priority to congress commitments. I remember once he refused an invitation to accompany OR Tambo on a visit to the German Democratic Republic because it conflicted with SACTU commitments.

After John Gaetsewe's refusal to go to Lusaka, John Nkadimeng was elected general secretary. Nkadimeng had a long history of service to the trade union movement in South Africa and was universally liked. His weakness was he could never say no to a political assignment.

He had become SACTU's top leader while also a member of the ANC national executive, and secretary of the revolutionary council as well as a central committee member of the SACP. It was unfair to expect him to do all these jobs, and it must have threatened his health trying to do so much. Obviously he could not do justice to all commitments and it must have been difficult to decide on priorities.

At the time of his election he was working full-time in the ANC office, and he continued there. He never seemed able to reduce the other demands on him so that he could give his full

attention to SACTU, and our organisation suffered because of that.

For example, he postponed SACTU national executive council meetings, which people had flown thousands of miles to attend, if he had a conflicting call from the ANC. Once the national executive committee wrote to Tambo to complain about this. OR replied that it was up to John to decide his own priorities and he, OR, could not do anything about it because John had been elected to the ANC national executive. In practice Nkadimeng gave priority to the ANC. Perhaps he held the view that SACTU was the ANC's labour wing, and so subsidiary to the ANC.

Kay Moonsamy, who had been elected president, apparently took the same view because he too continued to work full-time for the ANC. In my opinion, this was wrong. John Gaetsewe had been right that trade unions should guard their independence. At that crucial time SACTU needed the full commitment of its leaders. I believe SACTU could have given even more to the union movement in its last few years if it had been the number one commitment of its leaders.

At about this time negotiations were underway in South Africa between different groupings of trade unions. The negotiations involved the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) and a number of individual unions. Among these were the South African Allied Workers' Union, the African Food and Canning Workers' Union and the Food and Canning Workers' Union - both represented by Jan Theron - the General and Allied Workers' Union, the Motor Assemblers and Component

Workers' Union, the National Union of Mineworkers and the General Workers' Union.

An upsurge of militancy made it seem the right time to try to re-establish, above ground, one national trade union centre. SACTU was involved in these negotiations right from the start, both abroad and underground at home. We organised many meetings, some in Western Europe and some in Lusaka, inviting people from the different unions and groups operating above ground, and from SACTU underground structures, separately and together, to facilitate progress.

There was a lot of suspicion about "take overs" by big brother federations, and many of the different leaders did not even know each other, let alone trust one another. When SACTU brought people together we were able to help break down suspicions and encourage persistence in the difficult task.

I remember one general secretary whom we invited to London for discussions. He was getting impatient at the slow progress, but we persuaded him that South African workers had been disjointed for 300 years, so two or three years of negotiations was not that long if they reached the objective of one national trade union centre. We suggested it might help if he and his colleagues tried to get to know the other negotiators outside meetings, inviting them home and so on, to try to build better trust and understanding. He went back much happier than when he arrived.

Sometimes SACTU helped twist the arms of comrades who were hung up about names or office bearers, and in the end the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was

formed in 1985.

The only group which could not be persuaded to join in was a rump of CUSA, which became the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU), which was taking its orders from outside - from the ICFTU. Some of their former affiliates, particularly the National Union of Mineworkers under Cyril Ramaphosa's leadership, had left them and come into COSATU.

When COSATU was formed, the liberation movement - ANC, SACTU and SACP -invited the leadership to Lusaka for a meeting. They went to SACTU headquarters first to discuss union issues.

We had two main points to make. The first was that SACTU welcomed the establishment of COSATU and wanted to ensure we had a common approach to the other organisations and to the international community.

The second point was to suggest that whenever COSATU or any affiliate were involved in dealings with unions or centres overseas, it would be useful to consult SACTU's external people. We knew the overseas organisations and could point out problems, potential allies and so on.

COSATU agreed with the points, and our London office had floods of people streaming in for discussions when they started visiting Europe and North America. Many also went north with me to spend a weekend relaxing and having discussions at my home. They included Marcel Golding, assistant general secretary of NUM, Jay Naidoo, then general secretary of COSATU, Justice Langa and Selo Ntai, president and general secretary of SARHWU. Tommy Oliphant, general secretary of

the Metal and Electrical Workers' Union, a NACTU affiliate, also came.

So SACTU still had more work to do. In addition to passing on our international experience, the external structures were able to use influence with friendly British trade unions and the Commonwealth TUC to fund and set up seminars in London, Zambia and Zimbabwe, tailor made for particular industries.

They usually involved three groups, SACTU people from outside, COSATU people, and people from SACTU underground structures in South Africa. They therefore brought together, sometimes for the first time, workers and union leaders who would need to work together in the new South Africa. This was a contribution to the implementation of SACTUs "one industry, one union" policy, which COSATU had adopted. On returning home SACTU underground members, deeply respected by workers for their commitment and discipline, played a big part in persuading workers to agree to the necessary mergers.

Although we were still busy we all understood that SACTU's tasks were coming to an end. We had a meeting with the leadership of COSATU and the general secretaries of all the unions, to jointly plan the way forward. Since some of us were still having difficulty entering South Africa, we invited them to SACTU headquarters in Lusaka for a two day meeting.

At the meeting some expressed the view that SACTU should be dissolved immediately, with COSATU taking everything over there and then. But that was rejected. Most people felt we should carry on making plans for the future of SACTU personnel, SACTU property and SACTU money, but that external members should return home and call a meeting for

those who had been part of the underground internal structure before the organisation was formerly dissolved.

COSATU said that they wanted all the experienced personnel they could get: that there would be posts there for everyone, either in COSATU itself, or in the affiliates.

SACTU property would be disposed of, and the proceeds would go to COSATU. At that time we were still hoping to recover funds from the Botswana properties, to raise enough money to endow something permanent which would bear SACTU's name, such as a workers' college. In the end we got nothing from Botswana, and had less money to hand over than we hoped.

As far as the rest of the funds were concerned, we agreed that after all outstanding commitments had been met, including the costs of the remaining seminars which had already been planned, the proceeds would go to COSATU.

A joint SACTU-COSATU facilitating committee was formed to take forward these decisions, and I was appointed chair.

Before the comrades left for home, they ransacked SACTU headquarters, stripping it of books and pieces of literature about working class history and struggles. They had never had access to material like this in South Africa. In addition, some of the general secretaries started negotiating with individuals, trying to persuade them to work in their unions.

After the meeting, my facilitating committee called together SACTU people in Lusaka, to report back to them. After the report, we talked about plans to go home, and asked them to think about which part of the country they wanted to go to and

with which union they would prefer to work.

The last thing we asked was if anyone wanted academic training before going home, so that SACTU could help find sponsors. We undertook to produce a form so there would be a record of people's preferences.

At the same time we asked the treasury how much SACTU could afford to give members to help them start life at home.

While people were deciding what they wanted, we arranged for the education department to run a series of seminars, so people could polish up all they had learned. We also faxed letters, covering the same topics, to all SACTU offices across the world, asking the comrades to reply urgently with their views and wishes.

The national executive met to discuss how to minimise frictions which were bound to occur when people from outside returned. Our first decision concerned recommendations for older comrades. We decided that all who were 60 or older should not put themselves forward for jobs. There were not many of us in that category - Mark Shope, John Nkadimeng, Stephen DhIamini, Kay Moonsamy and myself.

Secondly, even if people had high academic qualifications we urged them to work for a union first, not to accept other offers. Because of this Dr Vanguard Mkosana, for example, who was offered a post at Fort Hare, refused to take it and went to work for SARHWU instead.

The third point was that members should not push to start in high positions. SACTU people needed to familiarise themselves with what was going on first, and then if they were doing a

good job, the union might want to offer them a more senior position later.

At the meeting we approved the treasury's proposals to give R2 000 to returnees, with more when they took up jobs. We also agreed to run down all SACTU regional offices, and close them as soon as possible.

After the meeting the general secretary, John Nkadimeng, disappeared back to South Africa and we neither saw him nor heard from him until we found him in the ANC offices in Johannesburg. He played no part at all in the work of SACTU in these closing stages of its existence.

We had expected COSATU to send a circular to its affiliates reporting on our meeting, but this did not happen, so I delegated some of the committee members to go to Johannesburg to find out what was happening. They reported that everyone was busy with their own unions and could not arrange meetings. They had to visit individual unions one by one, covering as many as they could on their short visit.

They discovered there were financial problems in some of the unions, where they desperately needed SACTU people but could not pay, while in others the problems were nothing but bureaucratic procedures. I phoned and told them to contact our underground activists to take on the job of pushing the unions to act on decisions taken. People in Lusaka were anxious to go home and it seemed to me that their expertise was needed badly by the unions.

It turned out there was another bottleneck. The government was still trying to screen people returning, and the ANC had to

battle against this. We were supposed to submit a list of those due to arrive and somehow the list sent had never been submitted.

Another copy was faxed, but this still did not work and I had to rush there myself, to intervene with the ANC department responsible and ask them to give priority to the names, as members had jobs to start in unions. My stay was brief and I then returned to Lusaka, where most of our comrades were still waiting.

Eventually all delays were ironed out, the ANC provided air tickets, and people started leaving for South Africa. Before long most SACTU members had left Lusaka, and with that part of my task completed, I too was able to go home - nearly 27 years after my underground departure.

I am sad to say that the meeting the national executive committee had decided should be held at home to formally close down SACTU, never happened. It appears some Johannesburg based comrades, all busy with other things, just decided to hand over the remaining money to COSATU without any ceremony, the rest of the national executive committee not even knowing that SACTU had gone.

I still think SACTU deserved a more dignified end than that.

PART FIVE

THE 1990s

Chapter 19 - Home at last
Chapter 20 - It was not to be

Chapter 19
Home at last

We had a poster on our wall in Manchester with the slogan "Freedom in our Lifetime", but deep down I expected the struggle to take longer. Joyce and I never discussed what we would do if I were free to go home, and we were unprepared when it all began to happen in 1990.

When Nelson Mandela was released after 27 years in prison, and the ANC, SACP and other organisations were unbanned, my first thoughts were that I would soon be able to see my family and friends. I also had the duty of working on the future of SACTU people, and for both reasons I hurried down to Lusaka at once.

It turned out that things would not be as easy as all that. There were delays before other political prisoners were released, and minor officials did not seem convinced that change was really taking place. Some people who attempted

to go home were refused admission. I was one of them. On my first attempt I got no further than Jan Smuts Airport now Johannesburg International - before being returned to Zambia.

While waiting for clearance to go home I contacted Christmas Tinto, an old Cape Town comrade whom I had recruited into the ANC in the 1950s. He was then president of the United Democratic Front in the Western Cape. Apart from catching up with news from him, I wanted to discuss preparations for people who would soon be coming home. He agreed to travel to Lusaka to meet me, and we talked the whole weekend.

I took him to see Reggie September, and we found Trevor Manuel in Reggie's flat. Christmas and Trevor worked together in Cape Town, but neither knew the other was going to Zambia. I found that funny.

I also met some women who had travelled from Cape Town for an ANC Women's Conference. Among them were Hilda Ndude, later a provincial MP, Nomaindia Mfeketo, later chair of the Cape Metropolitan Transitional Council, and Dorothy Zihlangu, chair of the United Women's Congress. I was very impressed with some of these women, who seemed of better quality than most of the men going to Lusaka at that time.

The most exciting event of all was when Nelson Mandela spoke at a giant meeting at Lusaka Airport. He talked for two hours without notes and made a huge impression on the heads of states and ambassadors who were there to hear him, as well as on ordinary people. There had never

been anything like it in Lusaka.

Although I did not have a chance to speak to Mandela on this occasion, it was great for me to see him again. My respect for him went back to when I had first met him, and had been reinforced during the Treason Trial, when many of us who were younger spent months close to Mandela and other national executive leaders and learned so much from them. His steadfastness throughout imprisonment and his amazing skills in the new situation after his release had deepened my respect even further.

I have another personal bond with Nelson Mandela. When he was in prison I was one of the people who received a letter from him, urging me to take up the flag of the freedom struggle, and this I have tried to do. just think how difficult and risky it must have been for him to write such a letter and smuggle it out of prison. Of course it had to be destroyed for security reasons, but how I wish I still had it.

My second attempt to enter South Africa was successful, although it seemed touch and go when the immigration officer called up on his screen the information that I had skipped bail in 1963. He had to consult one of his seniors, who just shook his head and waved me through. It was a very brief visit, to try to unblock the bottleneck preventing SACTU people returning to jobs waiting for them in the unions, and I was soon back in Lusaka.

When the SACTU people had all got clearance and left for home, I was able to go for the third time. This time there were no problems. I went straight through to the leadership of SARHWU, who were waiting to welcome me. I had been

involved with this union and its leaders more than any other. I knew the general secretary, Martin Sebakwane, from the days when he was studying for a degree in England. I was the one who developed his interest in union work.

They took me straight to the SARHWU office for briefing about general matters and their forthcoming conference. I stayed in Johannesburg for a few days for further discussions, lodging with Vanguard Mkosana, a former SACTU executive colleague who had been at headquarters in Zambia. I then proceeded to Cape Town.

Once there, I felt I had really come home. I stayed with a young couple, Rod and Xoliswa Sibeko and their family. Xoliswa had got in touch with me some time before, passing through London.

She thought I must be a relative of her husband because of the surname, and had invited me to stay with them when I was in Cape Town. Even when it turned out we could not trace any relationship, they repeated their invitation and welcomed me into their home in Lansdowne. They took me around to seek out people I wanted to see.

In Nyanga East the ANC branch, led by my old comrades Moffat Putego and Melford Stuurman and others, put on a big party to welcome me home. This was not my own branch, which was Nyanga West, and I was a bit disappointed that no one from there made any effort to mark my return.

Before long, SARHWU called me back to Johannesburg

and asked me to travel the regions addressing members. It was a wonderful opportunity to see parts of my country which I had never seen before. I went to Natal first, and then on to East London where I found, to my embarrassment, that my Xhosa was rusty when it came to addressing meetings! From there I went to Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and Kimberley. Everywhere hundreds of railway workers turned out to hear me and I was given a really warm welcome.

While in Durban I got involved in a meeting between union representatives and employers. It was immediately obvious that neither side had any idea about how to negotiate - all they knew was confrontation. When I said they all needed seminars on labour relations, otherwise there would always be unnecessary fights and strikes, the senior railways official wanted me to stay and run seminars for him. I was unable to do that, but all my subsequent experience in the railway industry confirmed this impression, and I suspect it applies to other industries too.

In the new South Africa bosses have to learn to listen to and take seriously what workers' representatives are saying, and shop stewards have to develop effective negotiating skills.

This tour reached a climax when I returned to Johannesburg Airport. I was met by SARHWU president Justice Langa, who works there, and all the shop stewards. They invited me to address mass meetings in every department, and each department came to a standstill when I went in. I was amazed, and expected to be arrested

at any time, but nothing of that sort happened.

After the tour came the SARHWU conference, which was good. There were the usual elections for officers, and I was pleasantly surprised to be informed I had been elected honorary president for life. It was a great honour to me to find that, after being away for so many years, people still had love and respect for me.

I assured them that as long as I lived I would try to be helpful to SARHWU However, being honorary president immediately presented problems. I was living in Cape Town, and negotiating to buy a small house there, but found I was called to Johannesburg whenever there was a SARHWU meeting or demonstration. So I was always yo-yoing up and down the country.

I had not yet got involved with ANC politics in Cape Town. I had visited old friends, but most friends of my generation seemed active in leading civic associations rather than the ANC. I was not living in a township where most ANC activities take place. My mind was focussed on SARHWU and its many problems, and I was spending a lot of time with them in Johannesburg.

One day while in Johannesburg I received a call from the ANC in Cape Town saying I had been nominated by three branches for the post of regional chairman. I made no comment at first, but Xoliswa later phoned and persuaded me to take it seriously and to return for the ANC regional conference.

The conference was opened by Nelson Mandela. One of

the things he said surprised us. He urged that, since he thought coloureds were in the majority in the region, they should lead the ANC.

I think our great leader had been wrongly advised to bring that up. It may have been a correct policy, but it was said at the wrong time. Headquarters should have asked for the issue to be discussed by branches before the conference. Delegates had already been given mandates for the elections, and now they had to go back during the conference and get a new mandate.

After the branches had been consulted as far as possible, Allan Boesak was elected chair.

There had been an unpleasant incident before the elections when some young people, who did not know me, stood up and argued that I should not be elected to the leadership because I had deserted MK. I was told that Tony Yengeni, a young man I had known and worked with in exile, had put them up to it. Apparently he wanted to be elected chair.

Fortunately I did not need to answer the accusation. There were many in the hall who had been involved with me outside while they were underground, and were quick to defend me.

In spite of those insinuations I was elected vice chairperson - which again was an honour for me - this time from my own people in the Western Cape. From then on I was involved again in the ANC at regional level.

Tony Yengeni was elected secretary, and since we would

have to work together I confronted him about his stories. I told him in detail what happened with Moses Mabhida, and how it had led to my being squeezed out of MK, and reminded him of my subsequent contributions to the struggle, which he already knew.

I also told him something he did not know. At one time in Lusaka I had intervened on his behalf. He was working for SACTU in Maseru, and someone had reported him as a spy. The intention had been to recall him to Lusaka for arrest, but I had managed to put a stop to that. I did not accept that the ANC had the right to do such a thing to SACTU comrades without consulting its leadership, and somehow the matter had been dropped.

Tony could only say he was sorry, and he cried when he said it.

It soon became apparent that Boesak was not the right person to lead the ANC in the Western Cape. This was nothing to do with the later accusations about financial scandals: it was his way of working.

He had no experience of leading a mass organisation like the ANC, and had never been involved in ANC work. His practice was to drop into the regional office only to chair formal meetings - he gave no leadership in day to day work. This was at a time when we badly needed to inject massive effort into building the ANC for the future, and when there were many difficult issues crying out for ANC intervention.

I tried to set up a meeting with Boesak to discuss these matters. To do this I had to approach his personal secretary,

whom he sometimes sent to the office. I had no response to my request, and this worried me. I felt it spelt disaster.

One of the serious issues which wanted tackling was the state of war between the two rival Cape Town taxi groups, Lagunya and Webta. Both were competing for the monopoly of the most lucrative routes, and were physically fighting each other with guns. Customers were dying. I believed enemies of the people were using the taxi groups to destabilise the townships and was very concerned. In the absence of an effective chair it fell to me to get involved.

One day I went into the ANC office in Athlone. I found a group of people discussing what to do about a taxi battle which had just broken out at the Nyanga East terminal. They were looking for volunteers to intervene.

By the time I arrived only one person had volunteered: a young man called Vincent Diba. I said I would accompany him. I was curious to see who was there and what was going on. Another comrade offered to drop us off.

Somehow this comrade managed to stop in the middle of the terminal. We got out and as the car drove away found ourselves alone, in the no-man's land between two armed groups. One of the groups included armed police and TV cameras, and we decided to head for them and ask what was going on.

The officer in charge said they had intervened when people were fighting, and that the situation was really dangerous. He wanted to know who we were. We replied that. we were ANC, and reminded him that the ANC had a

commitment to the Peace Accord which had been signed, so felt responsible for trying to get people together to talk whenever there were quarrels.

The police seemed to listen, but some taxi people reacted with hostility to the mention of the ANC. They got excited and shouted out that we were the people who were shooting at them, with our AK guns. They were pointing at Diba, whom they seemed to know. I took advantage of this and said:

"You don't know me, I have just come from abroad."

Meanwhile I indicated to Diba that he should escape into one of the police cars and negotiate with the police on how we were to leave the area, while I tried to pacify the people and convince them that the ANC was sincere about peace. I invited them to come to our regional office to discuss their taxi problems.

A black policeman, concerned about my safety, told me these people were mad and that I should leave them alone and get out. I was called to join Diba in a black, unmarked car which drove us quickly out of the terminal. Obviously it was a police bullet-proof car, and I thought it was possible we were being kidnapped. But they dropped us away from the conflict area and we walked to the house of some comrades.

That evening I had phone calls from people who had seen me on television. They complained, wanting to know who had sent me on such a dangerous mission before I knew my way around. I explained that I had volunteered, I was not

sent by anyone, and that I had not expected to find myself in the middle of a battleground.

When the regional executive met we gave our report, and moved a motion that the ANC should intervene properly in the taxi war, by meeting the leaders of the rival groups.

At the first meeting there was a lot of aggro but they began to listen to what I was saying from the chair. I convinced them that no one benefited from their fighting except the apartheid regime and big bus companies, and persuaded them to work together towards merging the two organisations, and setting up an office.

I told them that if they had problems or disputes they should turn to the ANC for help. This could include organising pressure on banks if they were refusing loans to buy new taxis.

At that time the negotiating forum between the liberation movement and the government was in session, and had been called the Convention for a Democratic South Africa, CODESA. I suggested that the unified taxi organisation should copy this, and be called CODETA - Congress of the Democratic Taxi Association. The leaders agreed to take my proposals back to their members.

Peace prevailed up to the time Weft Cape Town and on returning I was pleased to see taxis labelled CODETA.

However, there has been more trouble since then and in my opinion this complex problem will be with us for a long time. It will be solved only when all taxis are registered and controlled as part of a comprehensive transport structure.

While involved in the taxi dispute, I had started visiting branches, but before I had reached many SARHWU called on me again.

The first vice president, Tshabadira Moshoeshoe, asked me go to Johannesburg - a major crisis had arisen.

Shop stewards from the Southern Transvaal, SARHWU's biggest region, had occupied headquarters, and would not allow in any staff or officers, including the general secretary. Their reason was that headquarters had signed an agreement with employers without consulting the membership. They did not accept that.

When I reached Johannesburg I looked for the general secretary, Sebakwane in vain he had gone underground. I wanted to talk to him, and find out what had happened before I went to the offices, but I could not. So I went to the offices to see the shop stewards who were occupying them. People were there and I asked them why, but they said they were delegated by the shop stewards' committee and could not answer me.

It seemed to me that this was a situation calling for COSATU's intervention/ but this was impossible. General secretary jay Naidoo, assistant general secretary Sidney Mafumadi and other leaders had been charged with murder, and at that moment the case was being heard in court.

The cases followed dramatic events in 1987. COSATU House had been partly destroyed by a bomb, and in the wave of anger which followed some workers had beaten up

a fellow worker suspected of being a police spy. The man had died. Police had arrested several workers from a crowd of demonstrators and accused them of murder, but later had decided to add the names of COSATU leaders to the list of the accused. The cases had just reached the courts.

I decided that at least I would seek the advice of a senior COSATU person, so I went to court and was able to get hold of Chris Dlamini, the first vice president, to discuss the SARHWU problems with him. He agreed to intervene that evening but he too could get nowhere. Eventually a meeting was arranged between the shop stewards and COSATU leaders. The stewards said they had no confidence in the leadership of SARHWU, and wanted to remove them all.

Of course the other regions of SARHWU did not agree that one region could sack the national leadership, which had been elected by a national conference, and COSATU shared that view. The national and regional leaders agreed that I should temporarily take charge of SARHWU, and that the occupation should end at once.

The Southern Transvaal Region accepted that I should take charge, but still refused to get out until their grievance was solved.

It happened that headquarters was about to move to new premises, so we left and I went to start work in the new office. My first mission was to call a conference, but there was no money to do this. I had to think about raising funds, which took time. I approached the International Transport Federation (ITF), the African American Labour Council

(AALC), and the Commonwealth TUC.

I knew that ITF would want to know if the labour centre supported us, so I went to see Sam Shilowa, then assistant general secretary of COSATU. He was very helpful and wrote a letter of support on the spot. I was able to produce it when the ITF's question arose. In the end ITF gave us R75 000 and the AALC R27 000 - enough for an extended national executive committee to be called.

Meanwhile I had been trying to put right the deep financial and administrative problems I found at headquarters. I had to exert almost dictatorial powers to control the financial crisis and to clamp down on spending both in the regions and at the centre. It was a matter of trying to sort out administrative chaos, a very painful process, but one which was understood and accepted in the end.

The extended national executive committee meeting, in Bloemfontein, approved my report and endorsed the drastic measures I had introduced. They also took decisions about the occupation and the dispute which led to it. They decided that the occupation must end at once, or those involved would face expulsion. All the national executive were suspended, as were the officers of the Southern Transvaal region.

A commission of enquiry was set up, composed of representatives of COSATU, the ANC and the SACP. There were delays in getting the three organisations to nominate people, but I kept pushing and eventually the commission was established with Jeremy Baskin from COSATU, Siphiwo

Nyanda from the ANC (later chief of staff in the South African National Defence Force), and Jabu Moeketsi from the SACP (later minister for the economy for Gauteng - formerly Transvaal - province).

I was grateful to these three comrades, who worked very quickly and after hearing all the evidence produced a report within a few weeks.

The national executive committee had also asked me to continue running union affairs until the commission reported and circumstances returned to normal. I was worried because all this time I was absent from my duties in the Western Cape ANC, but felt I had no option but to try to help SARHWU through this difficult period.

I have to say that throughout COSATU leaders were very supportive, which made my tasks easier.

The report of the commission of enquiry recommended that the national executive committee elect new national office bearers to cover until the next congress, the former general secretary and another senior officer being ineligible, and that the Southern Transvaal officers be reinstated. Further, they said agreements should not be reached with employers without a mandate, and that urgent measures be taken to establish efficient administrative and financial control of the union, and to re-establish unity in the organisation.

I had to call another extended national executive committee meeting to receive and approve the commissioners' report. It was chaired by comrade Godfrey

Oliphant, vice chair of COSATU, and the commissioners' report was presented by Jay Naidoo, general secretary. It was a difficult meeting, but the two did skilful jobs and in the end the report was accepted. A new interim national executive committee was elected, and my caretaker task was over. I was released to return to Cape Town.

It had been painful for me to see SARHWU, the union so close to my heart, going through such a difficult period, although really it was no surprise. There were bound to be difficulties in building above ground organisations after the years in which our people had been suppressed.My analysis was that most if not all that went wrong was through inexperience. Railway workers are very militant, and had no experience at all of negotiating. As I had noted in Durban, everything for them was fight or surrender. Membership had grown, very quickly - more quickly than the educational structures could cope with - and people' had been elected as shop stewards and to other positions without any proper idea of what was required of them.

This was a time which called for strong and experienced leadership capable of welding the membership into a disciplined and united force. I am confident that in future members will be able to elect experienced leaders at all levels and be able to trust them.

Full-time officers must be accountable, but be entitled to have their say and use their initiative. If they go wrong, they can be replaced at the next conference. Whatever happens, I will honour the pledge I gave when they elected me honorary president. I will always be ready to give guidance

and help to SARHWU in any way I can, but probably my most valuable role is to try to give a longer term strategic view, on shaping transport policy, and moving towards "one industry, one union" for the transport industry.

I hope I will never again be asked to be caretaker, because I would not be able to do it now. It was a very stressful experience. It was made worse because I was still trying to get used to the changed South Africa which I had found on my return, but also I did not feel comfortable working alone in Johannesburg. In addition to the pressures of running SARHWU, I had felt bad neglecting my duties and comrades in Cape Town.

When I returned after completing my tasks for SARHWU, I plunged straight into my ANC vice chair duties.

I decided my priorities would be to resume my visits around the branches, and work on bringing civic associations and their leaders closer to the ANC.

As I have said, most of my generation who were still around were activists in the Civics, not in the ANC. My analysis was that this was not because of disagreements over ANC policy, but perhaps because they felt that their past and present contributions were not valued by the local leadership, none of whom had been in the struggle as long. They had suffered torture and imprisonment and sacrificed a lot.

I did not think it would be difficult to put this right. My plan was to suggest that some of the old timers always be invited to sit on the platform when the ANC had a big

meeting. This would show them the respect which they deserved, and would cement the relationship between the Civics and the ANC.

Of course there are often conflicts between generations, but I felt that in the last stages of our struggle for freedom they should not be allowed to stand in the way of the fight for a new democratic South Africa.

Chapter 20

It was not to be

Unfortunately I did not get far with my plans.

Since the happy day I had returned to my country I had been like a fire brigade, rushing up and down in response to crises. This took its toll.

After a short time in Cape Town I became ill one night, losing my balance and finding speech difficult. As soon as Joyce heard she urged me to fly back to England, and SARHWU comrades put me on the plane.

She had arranged for me to see doctors and the specialists diagnosed a stroke. They said I would recover completely, but if I wanted to live longer I should retire from my heavy involvement in politics and take medication for the rest of my life.

I had always sincerely believed that at a certain age

people should make way for the younger generation. This does not apply to everyone, of course. Some people have special talents and special duties to perform for as long as they live - I mean men like Mandela and Tambo.

I had intended to retire soon after 65, but my illness brought this forward a little.

I wrote to Tony Yengeni, secretary of the ANC for the Western Cape, explaining what had happened, asking to be relieved of the post of vice chair. He wrote back on behalf of the regional executive accepting my resignation and thanking me for what I had done.

While I was convalescing in Manchester and receiving physiotherapy, my wife got worried that she was working long hours while I was at home alone. She decided that she too should retire early.

I am now fully recovered from the stroke, but because of the specialists' warning, she tries to ensure I have a quiet life, which those who know me will realise is no easy task. Perhaps if it were not for her I would not be alive now.

We travel to South Africa as often as we can to see my family and keep in touch with SARHWU. My brother and sisters are all still alive and reasonably well, and my children are settling down. I had eventually managed to see all of them before I was free to go home. The first time I had seen one of my children since fleeing the country was in 1975, when I was travelling up and down to Africa for SACTU. On one trip I heard that my second son Nqaba, now called by his other name Vuyo, was active in student protests and had

had to flee the country. I saw him briefly in Gaberone before he and his group were taken by the ANC to Tanzania and then to Moscow for further education.

Like many of his generation he could be troublesome, and when he got into trouble in Moscow he was thrown out and returned to Tanzania. At Tom Nkobi's suggestion he joined us in Manchester. He stayed with us at first and started college, but dropped out.

We wanted to encourage him to stand on his own feet and got him a flat. Then he moved in with a young woman, Karen, with whom he had a child - our granddaughter Kielle -and later moved in with another woman, Melanie, who gave him a great deal of support.

Uprooted from his culture in his teens, he found it hard to mature, and was in trouble on and off until he went home in 1994. Happily he is now holding down a job in Cape Town, and we hope he is recovering from the damage apartheid inflicted on him.

The next landmark was in 1979, when Dave and Merryn Cooke invited Temba and Sybil to Mahalapye in Botswana while I was there. They arrived with three of their children and my two girls, Nomonde and Yolisa. This was wonderful - the first time I had seen them for 16 long years. The babies I had left behind were now beautifil young women, and shy of me.

I did not see my elder son, Zofa Siphiwo, until December 1980, or my youngest daughter, Shula, until December 1981. On those two occasions Sybil and Temba took the

family to Gaberone for Christmas at a cousin's house, and Joyce and I went down to join them. The second time we had Bob and Helen, Joyce's two younger children, with us.

Siphiwo, although the eldest, was and is always very quiet. When I fell ill in Cape Town he looked after me, but generally he is elusive, not staying long in one place. Often no one can tell us where he is. He seems to have taken a personal stand against apartheid by refusing to co-operate in any way with anything official. He never had a pass or any other government papers and refused to apply for a driving licence. He never had a regular job, although he is very skilled with his hands, be it plumbing, electrical work, car engines or whatever. He has a daughter, our granddaughter Mandy, but his lifestyle makes it impossible for him to look after her and she is with my niece's family in Dimbaza.

My eldest daughter, Nomonde, is also very quiet. She followed me to train in agriculture at Fort Cox, and married a fellow student, Calvin Suping. They live in Mafikeng with their three children, Lesego, Thato and Dumisani, and she works as an agricultural officer. Their family suffered harassment and financial damage from the Bantustan regime of Lucas Mangope, and they are still feeling the aftermath.

Yolisa, my second daughter, was something of a rebel at school and college and eventually came to London to study in 1986. She was here for nine years but unfortunately was seriously ill most of the time, requiring neurosurgery several times. She returned to Cape Town in 1995, much better but without the qualifications she hoped for.

After I made contact with my youngest daughter, Shula, in 1980, I asked Sybil and Temba to help her to get a better education and she started at Pandulwazi boarding school in the Tyume Valley.

Eventually she returned to Cape Town to finish her schooling and then came to University in London, bringing her son Bonisani. She completed her studies successfully and returned to a research job in parliament. She is now married and has another child, Sivile.

My hope now is that as we move forward into a new democratic South Africa, all of my children who were damaged by the traumas apartheid inflicted on them and other problems that they have had, will build themselves secure and happy lives at last.

Almost all of South Africa's black children suffered from the pernicious effects of apartheid. My children, in addition, suffered because their father dedicated his life to fighting against oppression and discrimination for all our children. Because of that I could not give them a father's care and attention, which hurt me as well as them.

On our visits we have been to Parliament to see my former juniors, who are back home now as MPs and ministers. Of course I sometimes wish I was there with them, reminding them of the lessons we learned in the struggle. But that is not to be. I am satisfied that I have lived to see the victory for which so many people paid such a high price.

I had written some notes about my life over the last few

years, and we decided to use our retirement to work on this account of my experiences from childhood and through the years of struggle inside and outside South Africa. Joyce has written it as we discussed it.

The story covers a wide canvas, and as I wrote at the outset, my intention has been both to entertain and inform.

I hope people do not feel I have tried to present myself as perfect. That is far from the case. I am short tempered, often not tactful and indeed sometimes intolerant, although I do not bear grudges. I like to boast, proudly, that as a result of my mother's training I do not smoke or drink. This often provokes people to ask:

"What about women?"

I have no answer to that. Women have been my weakness and a cause of troubles. I can say I know I am not the only one, but that is not a good excuse.

In politics my experience has been that only people who do nothing never make mistakes. No one can say I have done nothing. I have worked very hard throughout the years, so have made many mistakes. I hope my readers will look at my life in that light. Some of the things I have said about other people's mistakes should be seen in that context too.

My wish is that what I have said will precipitate discussion, that other organisations as well as the ANC may learn from some of our experiences in the past. For example, it is better not to overload people with too many responsibilities, particularly people in more than one

organisation. Also, it is damaging not to be open with committed members.

I have dropped out of the main battles, but we had a saying:

"When one leader falls, another 10 spring up, and the struggle continues."

We fought for, and won, our freedom in South Africa. But it is obvious that freedom will be safe only when it is accompanied by justice. This applies all over the world: freedom has not yet been won in many places, and where it has, it still needs to be protected and extended. Those tasks I have to leave to you.

Postscript 1,.. Election day

In April 1994 I was well enough to be in South Africa and to act as a returning officer in Nyanga East. April 27 was an incredible day. At 4.00am the queues outside the polling station already stretched far out of sight, winding around the township.

Voting should have started at 7.00am, but no voting papers had arrived by then. Whether this was because of incompetence or sabotage I do not know. In fact the papers did not arrive until the afternoon, but people just sat down and waited patiently. What were a few more hours, after waiting 300 years? I was amazed and impressed. People knew what they wanted to do, and they would stay there until they had done it.

There was no trouble or fighting in Nyanga East or most other places in South Africa that day. Another aspect of the

voting I will never forget was the many people who came from their sick beds, even their death beds. Some were wheeled in wheelbarrows, determined to make that cross on the voting paper even if it was literally the last thing they did.

The enormity of the change taking place in South Africa really hit me in the afternoon. A white policeman came up to me and asked: "When can we vote, Sir?" The slogan "Freedom in our Lifetime" became a reality to me with that question.

Postscript 2: In the spirit of reconciliation

One day, when I was travelling alone by train up to Johannesburg, I had an extraordinary encounter.

I found myself sharing a compartment with two white men, one of whom, in his 40s, turned out to be a recently retired policeman. He told me he had joined the police in 1967 and had been sent almost at once on "border duty". He had been at all the scenes of South Africa's nefarious interventions in neighbouring states, including Rhodesia. There he had hunted "terrorists" at Wankie.

I accused him of being a murderer and a torturer but he denied it strongly. He also asserted he had never been afraid. I told him I had been commanding in Rhodesia, and that I knew what the South African forces had done. I also assured him that I had been afraid many times, for myself and for my men. He stuck to his story, he had killed no-one and never been afraid.

We had friendly discussions in spite of this, and all went to

eat together (the other man was English and had little to say). Then we got into our bunks and I fell asleep. I was soon roused by a terrible screaming from my police companion on the top bunk. He said he had been dreaming that he was being chased. We settled down again, and this man - our former enemy - uttered his terrible screams at least five times more before morning.

Later he disclosed that his wife had left him and he was now alone in the world. I could not help feeling sorry for him.

While those who sent him to hunt and kill his fellow countrymen were still enjoying themselves in Parliament and other affluent positions, he was haunted and doomed by his part in our country's bitter history.

I realised that healing is needed by some of our oppressors too, not just by black victims of apartheid. I advised him to seek professional help and suggested that he needed to purge himself of his past, and that the best way to do that would be to go to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

I do not think he was ready to do that, but perhaps he will come eventually to see the wisdom of it.

Appendix

The struggle throws up many great heroes

Looking back, I now have time to reflect on the comrades with whom I had worked in the course of our struggles in Cape Town, in particular on those who stood out as leaders. The Western Cape produced many such people in the 1950s

and 1960s, some of them also national heroes.

Most of those active in our movement suffered for their commitment. Their lives and those of their families were distorted, often wrecked, but they stood firm. All were harassed and arrested, and later many were tortured. Some were forced into exile, many spent the best years of their lives in gaol, and others died for the freedom we now enjoy.

Many of these men and women, Africans and others, inspired and encouraged me as a young man. I owe much to them. Some of them appear elsewhere in my story, but I think our country owes all of them a debt, so I am going to record something about others I knew in my Cape Town years. Where I can, I will also add details about what happened to them later. This is my homage to them. I hope it will help ensure that they are never forgotten.

In the early 1950s, ANC branches could be found all over the Peninsula. Later, as the apartheid regime implemented its Group Areas Act, residential areas were segregated according to race, and many people were forcibly removed from their homes and dumped in townships.

They took their organisation - the ANC - with them, and an unintended result of the regime's policy was that the ANC's influence and organising capacity was concentrated and greatly strengthened by the moves. I will consider the branches in turn.

Kensington and Nyanga West Branches

They were my branches. I have already mentioned Sidinile, chairperson of Kensington branch when I arrived.

Another influential leader at that time was Aron Gaika, the herbalist. After we moved to Nyanga West new leaders emerged. They included comrades Joseph Mtyekisane and Matthew Ntaba, who later served long sentences on Robben Island, both dying after their release.

Two other leaders - comrade Joseph Ndabezitha, a Zulu man who helped organise the Youth League, and comrade Mrs Nomalizo Mkonto - also died prematurely, perhaps hastened by the harassment and torture they suffered. The same fate befell Letty Sibeko, my wife, and Priscilla Mngeni. Mtyekisani's wife, comrade Mrs Gertrude Mtyekisane, was very activeAn the Women's Federation as well as the ANC. I believe she is still alive.

Throughout, Looksmart Ngudle was one of our leaders. He was a great organiser, patient but persistent and very popular. He was one of seven members of the regional committee in the Western Cape structure and took over as chair of that group, in addition to having responsibility for MK when I was instructed to leave the country.

He paid for this with his life. In 1963 he was the first of the ANC martyrs to be tortured to death by police in Pretoria.

The second martyr from Nyanga West was Elijah Loza. A steadfast, brave and defiant man, he came from Alice and in Cape Town worked as a baker, later working full-time for the Bakers' Union. At first he lived in hostels in Langa, but when his wife joined him he moved to Nyanga West.

It was he who organised the township to ensure that none of the so-called urban councillors - government appointed

stooges - dared show their faces in Nyanga West.

He was the regional executive member with responsibility for the youth league and he was like the Pied Piper to young people: they would follow him anywhere. He was arrested and tortured but returned, continuing his underground work. Later he was re-arrested and when the police could not make him betray his comrades, they killed him.

Elsies River and Nyanga East Branches

Many of the Elsies River ANC leaders were widely known. John Mtini was their chair, and also an active communist and chair of the Railway Union in the Western Cape. It was he who persuaded me to work full-time for the union. Sadly he did not live to see freedom dawn.

Joe MtIhuela, another leader of the branch, was a communist too and an ANC leader at Peninsula level. Once he was smuggled on to a Russian ship to go to Moscow for political training. He succeeded in getting back into the country and continued to organise. He was Sothu speaking and was deported to Lesotho in the early 1960s. Simon Makheta was another Sothu speaking activist who was also deported to Lesotho.

Another man, still young, who was active in those days was jack Masiane, while Mildred Lesia was one of the Elsies River old timers whom I met when I returned in 1991. She is a Women's League leader who continued the struggle underground, and is still active today.

When Africans were evicted from Elsies River many were sent to Nyanga East. Among them were Ben Stuurman,

Molfat Putego, Oscar Mpetha and Mildred Halo, who became leaders of the new Nyanga East branch. Stuurman is a preacher, which may have protected him from attacks the regime made on the others. He is solid ANC right up to today. Putego had no protection. He was arrested and tortured, but survived and I found him active in the civics when I got home. Mildred Milo, active in the Women's Federation as well as the ANC, was still there too in 1991.

Oscar Mpetha, as I have reported, was one of the first people I met when looking for a job in Cape Town. He was secretary of the African Food and Canning Workers' Union as well as an ANC and community activist. He remained active underground throughout and later became president of the United Democratic Front (UDF). He suffered a stroke, and after some years.of disability died in 1994. He at least has a memorial, the Oscar Mpetha High School in Nyanga East.

Kraalfontein Branch

Kraaifontein was a part of Bellville where many Africans lived. They were removed and most were relocated in the middle of Nyanga, between East and West. The ANC branch decided to maintain its identity and continue to call itself Kraaifontein.

In the upheaval two leaders went elsewhere. The late Charles Makholliso, also a Builders' Union activist, was living alone so he moved to the hostels in Langa. The chair, Comrade Elias Matinya, also an active trade unionist, decided to go to Stellenbosch to join his friend, Chris Hani's uncle Kayamandi Tshemyane Hani. Matinya was a Sothu, Ad

better educated than most of us. He taught us a lot.Some of the later leaders of Kraainfontein were also trade unionists: Bernard Huna of the Garage Workers' and Reverend Sikolakhe Marawu of Transport and General. Marawu often presided over ANC funerals. He may have been protected from torture by his dog collar. Huna was tortured, and so was comrade Mountain Qumbela, who had responsibility for the Youth League. Both were arrested and taken to Pretoria. After torture they served sentences on Robben Island.

Christina Mlamleli was another very active ANC person in this branch. She was also a Women's Federation leader. She did not live to see freedom.

Langa Branch

Langa was, at first, the only "African location" in Cape Town. All the single sex compounds were there, as well as some family housing, and of course it produced many leaders.

One whom I knew well was Gilbert Hani, Chris's father. He concentrated on organising migratory workers in compounds. As well as strengthening our work in Cape Town, this helped the ANC to grow in rural areas when people went back home.

When Chris finished his degree at Fort Hare and moved to Cape Town to complete his legal training, Gilbert asked me to involve him more in the movement, which I did, both with students and other young people, and with trade union work. Later police harassment forced Gilbert to leave Cape

Town, and he went to Lesotho. There he was able to help Chris, who by then was hard at work forming underground links with home. Cilbert lived to return to a free South Africa, only to see his son murdered and to die himself the following year.

Another Langa leader was a powerful women called Anny Silinga, who just could not be intimidated. She was deported many a time to the Transkei, but always eluded the authorities, often returning on the very same train on which she had been sent out!

Johnson Ngwevela was chairperson of the Langa Branch and also a Communist Party leader. He worked in the office of Sam Kahn, the progressive lawyer who defended so many of our people. Ngwevela was often a key link with those arrested. He died before 1990.

Comrade Simon Xamlashe was another staunch Langa leader, and so were Comrades Lucas Kukulela, (also chairman of the Hospital Workers), James Mphemba, Elliot Ndziba, David Mgugunyeka, and Mrs Mrntshawe Mafanya. Mrs Mafanya is still involved today. Her former husband Comrade Mafanya and his friend Comrade Vuyisile Mase were small businessmen in Langa who were part of the ANC leadership. Last of the Langa leaders was Charles Makholiso. Many people will remember his powerful baritone voice with which he led the singing of Nkosi Sikelela IAfrica in the days when we had big crowds but no microphones.

Windermere Branch

The chairperson of Windermere Branch was George

Ngqunge, but the people I knew best were James Tyeku and Faldon Mzonke. They were arrested and tried together with Chris and me in 1963, and we left the country together. Tyeku, known in exile as Dala

Boy, was a skilled motor mechanic, one of a small group of invaluable comrades who kept MK vehicles on the move. Mrs Pascalina Tyekti was and still is in charge of catering for funerals, meetings and emergency soup kitchens. Mzonke was a remarkable man. He was obviously.very intelligent, but had never been to school and it was not until he joined the ANC that he learned to read and write. Before that he had worked as a boiler attendant, and soon mastered all there was to know about boilers. His bosses recognised this, and left this illiterate, "unskilled" man with the sole responsibility of running and maintaining their boilers.

Mzonke was effective in our sabotage operations because he understood the power systems in factories. In MK he was one of the heroes who fought under the ANC-ZAPU joint high command in what was then Rhodesia, and he laid down his life for freedom in the Zambezi valley.

Crawford Branch

One of Crawford's ANC leaders was my old friend Zoli Malindi. He was a man involved in all aspects of the struggle, working for the Garage Workers' Union, and the SACP, as well as being one of the seven ANC regional committee members. He was frequently harassed and arrested and he too was tortured by the police in Pretoria. They did not break him and he continued his work underground. He travelled to Lesotho secretly from time to

time for meetings with me and other external people.

He succeeded Oscar Mpetha as chair of the UDF, and in spite of poor health is still active today in the civics. He is supported by his wife, Lottie, a former Black Sash worker. Comrade Eric Lusaseni was the branch secretary and he too was tortured. Greenwood Ngotyana was another Crawford leader, coming from the same part of the Transkei as Zoli. He was parliamentary election agent for Len Lee Warden, one time Native Representative in the Cape Parliament. Nellie Jibiliza was another prominent Crawford comrade at the forefront of the Women's Federation.

Rylands Branch

This branch was led by a husband and wife team, Comrade James Booysen and his wife Comrade Maggie, who were chairman and secretary. Both have already passed away. Comrade Booysen once had the distinction of being thrown out of a branch meeting by Nelson Mandela. Booysen was out relaxing over a drink one weekend when Nelson, then underground, arrived unexpectedly at Rylands. A branch meeting was hastily called in a local hall and was already underway when the chairperson heard about it. He hurried to the hall and coming in at the back saw a young stranger taking the chair. In response to his loud query, "Who is that boy in my chair?" Nelson came down from the platform, took him by the collar and ejected him

Retreat Branch

This was a branch I worked closely with while organising local woodworkers and railwaymen. Two women were the

leaders. Dora Tamane, also a unionist, was chairperson and Evelyn Nqose was secretary. Her eldest son was a woodworker and later became a full-timer for the Woodworkers' Union. A younger son, Zolile, organised the African municipal workers and later was my comrade in MK, where he was known as Wilson. He was a hero of Wankie, and served prison sentences in Botswana and Zambia for his part in the armed struggle. Since returning home he has been involved in community projects, the latest being a local environmental centre in Langa but he is now a brigadier in the South African National Defence Force.

Cape Town Central Branch

This branch had two notable leaders who both happened to be of Tswana origin. Joe Morolong was one, and also a full-time trade union officer, for the Commercial and Catering Union. The other was Thomas Esetang, the branch secretary. Thomas Ngwenya was in this branch. He was unusual in that he also belonged to the Liberal Party. I believe all these comrades died quite young.

Other Branches

There were branches outside Cape Town too, which produced notable leaders. I have already mentioned Comrade Hani in Stellenbosch, the brother of Gilbert and uncle of Chris. Chris took after him in one way at least for his uncle was one of the most articulate leaders we had. His speaking usually silenced us because he had said all there was to be said.

Worcester had the big Hex River Textile Mills and many of

the ANC leaders there were active unionists in the Textile union. I knew the two Treason Trialists from Worcester, Joseph Mpoza, who later became chair of the branch, and Julius Busa, Busa being a trade unionist. Comrade Mpinda Mpilo, Joe Ngulube and Ben Baartman, chairperson, were also Textile Union men. Ben became my friend as well as my comrade. For reasons unknown this Xhosa man was banished for life to a remote part of Zululand, where he had no connections. Of course he did not accept this, and he made his way to Swaziland, eventually to Zambia, where he worked in the exile headquarters of SACTU. We invited him to the London SACTU office once, and I was reminded of the rich fruit orchards of Worcester when he stayed with me in my flat. I made him a meal, and then made my mistake. I put a bowl of fruit in front of him, enough for the whole week, and went out to the kitchen. When I came back I found him eating his way through the lot. I had to explain to him that in London, unlike in Worcester, fruit does not grow on trees, and so we eat only one or two fruits a day.

When Ben returned home to Worcester he was elected chair of the ANC branch once again.

Paarl was also a branch with some notable leaders, including Joe Ndamoyi and Lydia Kazi. The comrade I knew best was Elizabeth Mafekeng. She was a Women's League leader, but I knew her because she was president of the African Food and Canning Workers' Union. She too was banished, sent in exile to Lesotho, but I am told she is now back in Paarl.

During this period I am writing about, the 50's and 60's,

the ANC had no office and no full-time officers. Everything depended on people who had other jobs. Some of us who worked for unions saw no distinction between politics and trade union interests, so we readily put our energy and resources to work for the ANC when needed, but most of what we did was on top of full-time commitment elsewhere, the same as for other workers. The only real resource we had was the office of the parliamentary native representative, staffed by Greenwood Ngotyana and other comrades. The "native representative" was elected by Africans, to represent African interests - but of course he or she was white. There were some hot debates about participation in this government pantomime, but pragmatic arguments won. We needed platforms, we needed every opportunity to explain to our people what was going on, and we needed the resources.

Although the extreme left and the black nationalists shouted "Collaborators" at us, we had no illusions about what we were doing. It was not an exercise in democracy, it was just a small extra opportunity to politicise our people. There was an illustrious list of "native representatives". Perhaps Sam Kahn raised the most fury in the Nationalists as he was so skilled in whipping them with his tongue. Others were Brian Bunting and Fred Carneson - all were hated for being communist. Ray Alexander stood for election but by that time they were able to disqualify her for being a communist. After that Len Lee Warden, a Congress of Democrats' activist was elected and he sat until the government wiped out this tiny indirect African representation in their parliament, and then we lost that

useful office.

The white comrades I have just mentioned were not, at that time, eligible for ANC membership, and neither were coloured or Indian comrades, but they and many others made significant contributions to the struggle. They could have lived safe comfortable and probably affluent lives, but they chose to throw in their lot with the oppressed. They had a lot to lose and little to gain except the goal of a more just society.

They often suffered hostility from and rejection by their own communities and even families, as well as prison and exile but their sacrifices helped the ANC to remain non-racialist. I want to mention more of them.

The Congress Alliance brought the Coloured People's Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the Congress of Democrats and the South African Congress of Trade Unions into alliance with the ANC, all united behind the Freedom Charter. All the people I am talking about belonged to one or more of these organisations, and a substantial number belonged to another organisation too, the South African Communist Party.

Perhaps now is the time to discuss the Nationalist regime's accusation that communists were behind the whole liberation movement in South Africa. They seemed to believe that black people would have accepted second class or no citizenship for ever, were it not for communists. Of course that is absurd; people do not need communists to tell them when they are being exploited, and most of us were agitators, activists and revolutionaries long before we

heard of communism, let alone joined the Communist Party.

What was true, though, was that the Communist Party enabled us to understand better what was going~6'n in the world, and to develop strategies and alliances to take forward our own struggle. Most of all it turned us into a more disciplined force. Many of our leaders were communists, because workers and ANC members chose to elect the most committed and disciplined people into leadership positions, and people with these characteristics were often communionists.

Ordinary Africans could not be anti-communist. They may or may not know that the SACP, from soon after its establishment, had been the only political party which unreservedly advocated freedom and equality for all the people of South Africa but they did not need to know that. The apartheid regime put down all opposition to its oppression as "communist inspired" and this was enough for them to feel friendly to the Communist Party. I think it will be a long time before that changes.

The whites I came across first were in the Unions. I have already mentioned the great Ray Alexander and Becky Lan in Food and Canning, and Ben Turok in the Metal Workers and SACTU, and Mary Turok who took over from Ben when he was detained in the Treason Trial. I met up with the Turoks again in Tanzania and London, and once more at home. Ben and Mary are both ANC national MPs.

There was also Pietre Beyleveld from the Textile Workers, the first president of SACTU, and Nancy Dick, also of the Textile Workers, one of the first trade unionists to be

banned. Leon Levy was secretary of the Laundry and Dyeing Workers, and first treasurer of SACTU, later succeeding Beyleveld as president. Leon is now in London involved in trade union education.

There were also a lot of progressive coloured trade union activists. Liz Abrahams followed Becky Lan in Food and Canning after Becky was banned (Liz was also my minder during the last part of my time underground). Others were Ben January (Laundry Workers), Norman Daniels (Textile Workers), Edgar Dean (Furniture Workers), Petersen (Garment Workers) and Lynon (Fisherman and Line Union), all full-time union officers. Reg September was active in the Tannery and Leather Workers' Union whilst general secretary of the Coloured People's Congress (CPC). In exile he was ANC chief representative in London for some years, including while I was there. He is now back in Cape Town, an ANC MP. Barney Desai was president of CPC, and went abroad as one of those young men sent for military training. While training in Moscow he decided he wanted to leave, and is now a PAC leader.

African activists led very insecure lives. We never knew when we would be arrested; even when we were not arrested, those who worked for the unions were never sure they would get their pay at month end. There were always worries about basic survival, whether there would be enough money to feed and clothe our families and ourselves. There were certainly no spare resources for treatment if anyone were sick, or for lawyers when we were in court. In the Western Cape we were fortunate we had comrades who recognised these problems and did

something about them.

Bernard and Ruth Gosschalk were such comrades. Bernard was an architect and a committed activist, sincere but without political ambition. He stepped down from the SACP regional committee to make room for up-and-coming young black activists. He introduced us to his employer, a wealthy well established architect and persuaded this man to give us money on a regular basis. In fact some of us depended on his donations for most of our monthly wages. Ruth, too, was one of those who gave a lot of practical support.

I first met her at a picnic near Kornmetjie. This was one of several events organised by the Women's Federation, of which she was a leading member. These were wonderful events arranged from time to time, at which our families had a day out in the countryside, with a picnic, combined with a series of political lectures. Bernard was later arrested, tortured and imprisoned and eventually the family left the country, settling in Manchester, England. Just after Ruth died Bernard-was invited by Mandela, as I was, to a party for "old stalwarts" in Pretoria.

Another reliable source of financial and other help was Jack Tarshish, a garment factory owner, who risked hiding Chris Hani and me just before we left the country.

The Goldbergs, Esme and Denis, paid as high a price for their commitment to the struggle as any whites in Cape Town. Denis, who had trained MK men in sabotage was underground when he was arrested at Rivonia. He served more than 20 years in prison. Esme was also arrested and when she was released Denis persuaded her to take their

children and his mother to England, where she had to survive and care for them as best she could on her own. As soon as he was released Denis got involved in ANC work again, overseas.

The Women's Federation was a multiracial political pressure group, but also a source of practical help for women and children in the townships. As well as Ruth Gosschalk there were a number of other outstanding white women involved, including Sonia Bunting, Esme Goldberg, Amy Thornton and Mary Turok.

In Kensington no ANC family needed to worry about paying for medical treatment. Dr Krishna Moodley was in general practice there, and treated us all for nothing. He and his wife were real friends, inviting us to their home for rare opportunities to relax in comfort and eat delicious food. Krishna was detained when the state of emergency was imposed, and so harassed after his release that the family left for London, where they are still.

In the same way, we knew we could get good legal defence without paying a penny. Our lawyers were powerful people. I remember occasions when I was arrested and claimed the right to contact my lawyer. When I mentioned the name Sam. Kahn, police would became very unhappy and tell me to clear off from the police station as they had decided not to charge me this time. The truth was they were frightened of being made fools of yet again by that brilliant attorney.

When our cases went to a higher court, Sam handed them on to advocate Lionel Forman, equally brilliant. After his

premature death, Albie Sachs took over his office, books, and cases, and carried on the excellent work. As people may know, Albie was severely injured by a car bomb when he was in exile in Mozambique, and lost his right arm. This did not diminish his commitment. He is now one of the 11 judges of the highest court in the land, the Constitutional Court. At his induction, he raised the stump of his right arm to affirm his allegiance to the new South Africa. My wife and I met him not long after his appointment, walking down Adderley Street in Cape Town. He was full of energy and looked very happy, happier than I had ever seen him before. He said he could hardly believe that he was, in Cape Town, walking along and thinking like a judge! He was very optimistic saying, "We are building the new South Africa!"I should mention another lawyer, an academic, Professor Jack Simons. He used his legal knowledge of the constitution for our defence in the Treason Trial, as well as for lesser things he advised us about. He was also a practical man, keen to help build a pondoki. He helped me again when he and Ray lent me a cottage behind their house and a car for when I was in Lusaka on MK missions. He defended me (including from Ray) when police discovered arms in the cottage, even though the police detained him because of it. He did more than this for MK. When quite old he went to our camps in Angola to give a series of lectures analysing the situation in South Africa. While there he shared the hardships of the soldiers' lives. I was proud to speak in his honour at a memorial gathering for him in London in 1995.

I have written about Western Cape people whom I knew, worked with and admired, but this homage would be

incomplete without reference to two other people. They were and are national leaders, but both had a direct and personal influence on me when I was young. They are Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki.

Walter Sisulu was general secretary of ANC when I became a leader in the Western Cape and he held the position until the banning of the ANC. His letters to us were always appreciative and encouraging even though the Western Cape, with a relatively small African population, was probably the region with the smallest membership.

When I met him for the first time I expected a huge, impressive man. I was surprised to see an ordinary-looking person, hardly bigger than myself. He showed interest in listening to what everyone had to say, not at all what I expected of a great man. Now I know it was a sign of his true greatness. I believe he played a major role in building up most of the important leaders of ANC, including Mandela himself.

Govan Mbeki was a shining example to me and everyone who knew him. He was senior leader of the Cape, as well as of his own region, the Eastern Cape. The Eastern Cape had probably the best organised ANC structure in the country and this was largely due to him. He was not politically ambitious and never neglected his home area.

If we had any problems in the Western Cape Govan would always help solve them. He advised us when we had trouble with the PAC, and was always ready to speak at the university when an articulate debater was needed. We had

no intellectuals of our own in the ANC in the Western Cape.

Govan saw the importance of trade unions, and was a valued adviser on economic and other issues. He wrote training manuals, memoranda and leaflets for various unions, in terms ordinary workers could understand. When he spoke, he spoke quietly and with dignity. It was obvious he knew what he was talking about, and he had no need to shout as he was very persuasive. Govan is an intellectual who remains a man of the people.

Apartheid deprived our nation of the services of these two great men, who would have been first class statesmen if we had achieved democracy while they were still young.