

## SOUTH AFRICA: THE VIOLENT ALTERNATIVE

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CHIEF Lutuli in 1952 :

"I have embraced the non-Violent Passive Resistance technique in fighting for freedom because I am convinced it is the only **non-revolutionary**, legitimate and humane way that could be used by people denied, as we **are**, effective constitutional means to further aspirations."

And in 1962 :

"It is a tragedy that the great majority of South African whites **are** determined to **permit** no peaceful evolution. **They** have for so long refused to adapt themselves, and insisted that all adaptation shall come from us, that they seem incapable now of anything but rigidity. It is this, I think, which rules **out** the possibility of bargaining and compromise. Each new challenge leads to a further hardening of the heart."

From Lutuli, Albert. *Let My People Go*, Collins, 1962. Pp. 238 and 209.

In the 1950s when the South African liberation movement headed by the African National Congress conducted a series of mass protest campaigns against White domination the movement won **large-scale** support within the country. This vital struggle also gained considerable recognition internationally and world sympathy and support for the Black victims of apartheid was very great. Yet the campaigns of the fifties failed to dislodge White power and few would argue that the methods of struggle of those days would be effective today. Instead there is a growing acceptance that the situation has deteriorated to the point where violence is endemic in the system and that some form of race war is inevitable. The use of armed force by the liberation movement seems to be a natural consequence of the system of total repression that the government has set up.

This article sets out to investigate the political moments that led,

in the first instance, to the use of non-violent mass action by the liberation movement, to assess their effectiveness and to trace the transfer to violence as a means to revolution. It concentrates on the political conditions that led to this form of confrontation between the White power structure and the extra-parliamentary opposition, and gives an account of the shifts in policy within the liberation movement as it changed its position in relation to the government and ultimately to the system as a whole.

It will be seen that the particular struggle methods used by the liberation movement at various stages were the product of particular choices made by the movement in response to new forms of repression. But there was an interaction between government and oppressed not only at the level of action, but also in the postures each took up in relation to the other. It is with this aspect, the outlook and perspectives that dominated the liberation movement, that much of this article is concerned since it is ultimately there that the explanation for changes in strategy and tactics can be found.

### *Concepts of Democracy*

Fundamental transformation of society inevitably involves a fundamental change in the character of the governmental apparatus. In Russia the Soviets grew up as an alternative to the previous parliament; in China a wholly new governmental machine was created as Red Power established itself; in Cuba, Castro swept aside the whole rotten structure of the previous régime, and now, even in Chile, where change has come through parliamentary means, Allende is struggling not only to change the character of the ruling assembly but of much of the state apparatus too.

There are, moreover, numerous instances, particularly in Africa and Asia where the desire for fundamental change has been frustrated by the inability or unwillingness to develop new political institutions outside the old framework or to transform the existing ones meaningfully. The result is stagnation or retrogression. Those who seek to bring about fundamental change must examine critically the nature of the political structures they are challenging and be ready to reject them. Failure to do so may so hypnotize the movement as to tie it psychologically to a narrow sphere of policies and actions which take place within the framework of the old institutions. This issue is particularly important in the South African context where the political structure is undemocratic and the possibilities of political pressure by the mass of the people are blocked by rigid discriminatory barriers. A White minority imposes its rule on a disenfranchised and exploited Black majority in a context of capitalist relations and the horizontal stratification of power, privilege and wealth is overwhelming.

The system was not an invention of the present Nationalist Government. It arose historically through the process of white colonization which was carried out with the same devastating effects as elsewhere. However in South Africa we find an additional dimension in that a White settler community established itself in the territory with every intention of remaining there permanently; and the indigenous Black peoples were not incorporated in the evolving political superstructure. Although various minor openings were made for Black participation they were at no stage allowed to play an effective part in the system of government. Indeed their efforts to exert communal pressure only led to greater repression.

Nevertheless, despite White exclusivism, the aspirations of the disenfranchised people have for half a century taken the form of a demand for a non-racial democratic system. But the form of the desired democracy has been expressed in different ways. On the one hand there has been what I shall call *Conventional Democracy* which is based on a belief in the need to extend the existing parliamentary structure to embrace the Black people. On the other hand there is a conception of *Revolutionary Democracy* which envisages a seizure of power by the oppressed and the creation of a new state structure with a wholly new popular power base and which will give expression to the democratic will of the people as a whole and particularly its Black majority.

The Conventional Democratic model accepted the structure of white power as a starting point but demanded the extension of rights to the Black national groups. Conventional Democracy saw parliament as the focal point for its demands though it also made resort to extra-parliamentary protests.

By contrast Revolutionary Democracy focuses not on a White minority Parliament but on the various existing discriminatory and oppressive institutions and it sets its hopes on the generation of sufficient popular strength to set up an alternative and wholly different political structure. It hopes to seize power, probably by insurrection, as a result of a direct confrontation with the White manned state. *In the ideology of the South African liberation movement there has been a transfer from the Conventional Democratic model to the Revolutionary Democratic model and this has been accompanied by a transfer from non-violent to violent action as a means of gaining political power.* The roots of this transfer lay in the nature of the policies and decisions taken in the rough period 1945-52. This discussion will be largely concerned with that period since those were the crucial years determining the later transfer to violence; although the first violent actions were actually taken only in 1961.

The first elaboration of the policies of the African National Con-

gress in the modern period took place in 1945. The re-examination of the A.N.C.'s position was stimulated in part by the new mood which manifested itself after the war when the continent of Africa joined in the widespread demand by subject peoples for national independence and freedom. Furthermore, a significant change had taken place within South Africa itself in that the self-reliance forced on South Africa by the German threat to shipping boosted domestic industry, increasing the importance of African labour.

Since many skilled White workers joined the armed forces, Africans moved into semi-skilled jobs so that the African labour force became more important both qualitatively and quantitatively.<sup>1</sup> In some industries Africans were allowed to join the registered unions even though they were legally barred from doing so, and the various organs of the labour conciliation machinery could be used to take up industrial complaints by Africans. The combination of these factors led to the growth of the urban African population both in numbers and in its self-consciousness as a force to be reckoned with.

It was therefore natural that the African National Congress should seek to formulate new policies to accord with these developments. In 1945 a special committee of the A.N.C. drew up a Bill of Rights based on the provisions of the Atlantic Charter and which came to be known as "African Claims". In the preface, Dr. A. B. Xuma, the President General, said that they were pressing "our undisputed claim to full citizenship" and that "a just and permanent peace will be possible only if the claims of all classes, colours and races for sharing and for full participation in the educational, political and economic activities are granted and recognized".<sup>2</sup> Dr. Xuma distinguished between two classes of self-determination. "In certain parts of Africa it should be possible to accord Africans sovereign rights and to establish administrations of their own choosing. But in other parts of Africa where there are the peculiar circumstances of a politically entrenched European minority ruling a majority non-European population the demands of the African for full citizenship rights and direct participation in all the councils of the state should be recognized. This is most urgent in the Union of South Africa."

The recognition by the A.N.C. of the existence of a permanent white community in South Africa as making it a special case needs to be underlined. This acceptance greatly influenced the nature of the demands made by the A.N.C. In the section called "Bill of Rights", the document calls for the "extension" to all adults of the democratic freedoms set out in the Atlantic Charter and it was formulated in terms of what I have called Conventional Democracy." But it is important to note that the Atlantic Charter freedoms were modified to suit South African conditions and particular stress was given to

the abolition of all acts of discrimination on grounds of race and colour. There was much emphasis on the abolition of segregation which "is designed to keep the African in a state of perpetual tutelage and militates against his normal **development**".

The men who drew up African claims were mostly professionals, clerics and lecturers, Africans who had somehow risen above the mass and who were then the natural leaders of a nationalist movement. They were mostly men of moderation who two years earlier had been derided by E. T. Mafutsanyana, Secretary for Labour in the A.N.C. Executive: "It will be seen that from its inception, Congress thus was wedded to a timid and reformist conception of the status of the African people. Lacking any clearly formulated long-term policy, Congress limited itself to immediate partial struggles against one or other aspect of discrimination. But it did so with vigour and **militancy**."<sup>4</sup> African Claims was meant to bring greater coherence into A.N.C. policy and it did indeed establish the basic principles that were to guide policy for a long time.

On the face of it, these principles could be read as **bourgeois** democratic demands and they have been interpreted by many writers on South African history in this way. For instance the first full-scale history of the A.N.C. says this of its policy.

"Freedom involved neither national independence nor a socialist revolution, but freedom for individual achievement and a **non-European** contribution to the wider society." And adds, "At its core this involved a belief in non-racialist principles and envisaged a future South African society characterized and enriched by the growing interdependence and cooperation of its various population groups within one economic and political **order**."<sup>5</sup>

This interpretation is a little too **naïve**. African demands for the right to enter freely into the economic system could not, in the context of South African conditions, be described in these terms. Since the **colour bar** was, and is, functional in maintaining white privilege and wealth, the demand for its abolition was necessarily far-reaching. Yet it is also true to say that the full implications of these demands were not worked out. Sampson is probably right when he says that the A.N.C. adopted what was in effect a minimum programme which satisfied the aspirations of all sections of its membership leaving it open to differing **interpretations**.<sup>6</sup>

My point however, is that these demands, however radical in their long term implications, were nevertheless articulated as "extensions" of the freedoms enjoyed by Whites. In this limited sense, I call them Conventional Democratic demands.

### *The Programme of Action*

At the very time that African Claims was under discussion, a group of young nationalist-minded intellectuals was being formed within the A.N.C. They were led by Anton Lembede, Mda, Tambo, Sisulu and Mandela (the last three later became leaders of the A.N.C.). Lembede propounded a policy of fighting for African independence, freedom from domination by other national groups and the establishment of an African nation. An important dimension to their outlook was the insistence that the mother-body should cease merely making representations to a stubborn white government and engage in more serious action. As Sampson has put it: "For thousands of politically-minded Africans 1946 was the year in which they ceased to have serious hopes of a change of heart among Whites, the year in which the Youth League won its point over the Old Guard of Congress."<sup>7</sup>

The policy of the A.N.C.Y.L was that the acceptance of the White minority in South Africa was conditional. "But we insist that a condition for inter-racial peace and progress is the abandonment of white domination and that the basic structure of South African society should be such that those relations that breed exploitation and human misery disappear."<sup>8</sup> Walshe says: "Whereas African Claims had set out the aspirations of congressmen in terms of the non-racial and inherent right of individuals, the policy statements of the C.Y.L. went one step further. They accepted the goal of eradicating racial discrimination as the means to untrammelled African progress, but went on to declare the African political intention and urgent need as being the assertion of his numerical majority. This was to be used for restructuring society at the dictates of an African nationalism intent on the exercise of power, even if it was prepared to tolerate permanent racial minorities."<sup>9</sup>

The A.N.C. was considered too tame by the Youth Leaguers. They rejected the notion expressed in the A.N.C. constitution of 1943 of the need "to educate parliament . . . (and) other bodies and the general public regarding the requirements and aspirations of the Native people" and "enlist the support" of sympathetic "European societies, leagues or unions" who might be "willing to espouse the cause of right and fair treatment of Coloured races".<sup>10</sup>

The Youth League argued that this was the language of supplication and of the devaluation of the national image of the African people. They wanted to give prominence to African nationalism as a specific ideology and they urged that it be used to build up the organized strength of the mass of Africans as the base from which to press for political rights.

The constitution of the A.N.C.Y.L. declared as its aims (a) "To

arouse and encourage national consciousness and unity among African youth", and (b) "To assist, support and reinforce the African National Congress, in its struggle for the National Liberation of the African people."<sup>11</sup> No mention was made of the "united democratic South Africa" which was one of the main points in the 1944 constitution of the mother body.<sup>12</sup>

However the Youth Leaguers had some way to go before they could consolidate their position. They operated as a faction within the A.N.C. and had the full weight of the conservatism of that body to overcome. Most of them were students or recent graduates and their activities were limited by the absence of anything like a mass base in the main cities.

The situation changed, however, when the Nationalist Party came to power in 1948. In the midst of the tensions surrounding this unexpected event, the Youth Leaguers emerged as leaders within the A.N.C. National Executive though they were working under the leadership of Dr. Moroka, the President General, who was a well known professional man and not known as a militant. But this has been the A.N.C. style. A man of exceptional public standing has taken the helm of the organization so that it is seen to speak in the name of the broadest sweep of African opinion as a national movement. At the same time the militants have been able to take a prominent place on the executive committee and press the pace.

The change of leadership was coincident with an alteration in policy. In 1949, the famous *Programme of Action* was adopted which set out the demand for national freedom:

"... freedom from White domination and the attainment of political independence. This implies the rejection of the conception of segregation, Apartheid, trusteeship or White leadership which are all in one way or another motivated by the idea of White domination or domination of the Whites over the Blacks. Like all other people the African people claim their right of self-determination."<sup>13</sup>

The phrase "attainment of political independence" was ambivalent in that it expressed a desire for freedom but still within the single South African body politic. (It demanded "the right of direct representation in all the governing bodies of the country".) A possible explanation is that the purpose of the phrase was to give expression to the growing recognition that the Whites would not simply hand over power to the Black majority and that Africans would have to exercise some form of *coercion* to get their way. At the same time there was little clarity about the way the coercion could be brought to bear and this problem was not worked out clearly for another decade. Furthermore, how there could be a transfer of power to enable Africans to

attain their freedom was to bedevil A.N.C. policy in its future campaigns. African Nationalism, even the African Revolution, did not wme to mean the seizure of power nor the overthrow of White authority. Its militant formulation was still within the framework of Conventional Democracy.

This can be seen from the terms of the Programme itself. Para 3 states :

"Appointment of a council of action whose function should be to **carry** into effect, vigorously and with the utmost determination the programme of action. It should be competent for the council of action to implement our resolve to work for: (a) the abolition of all differential political institutions the boycotting of which we accept and to undertake a campaign to educate our people in this issue and, in addition, to employ the following weapons: immediate and active boycott, strike, civil disobedience, non-cooperation and such other means as may bring about the accomplishment and realization of our aspirations. (b) Preparations and making plans for a national stoppage of work for one day as a **mark** of protest against the reactionary policy of the **Government.**"<sup>14</sup>

The document therefore raised sharply the need for militant mass action even to the point of civil disobedience and **political** general strike. It also broke new ground in calling for non-collaboration on a mass scale. But, even though it raised the issue of the attainment of political rights and therefore political power by Africans, it did not pose the idea of revolution. Throughout the succeeding decade, even when mass action and political consciousness and commitment was at its height, the conditions within which a transfer of power from a white minority régime could be **effected** were not articulated.<sup>15</sup>

The explanation for this is **difficult** to pin down though this weakness came to hamper the development of the actions proposed in the Programme of Action. Part of the explanation must lie in the character of the leadership of the A.N.C. which had not yet shed its moderates. In part it was also due to the inhibiting effect of the prohibitions in the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 which defined Communism widely as the advocacy of "social and political change". But there were other factors too which will emerge later in this paper.

The **immediate** purpose of the proposed militant mass action was clear enough. It was meant to

- (a) Generate a spirit of resistance to oppression;
- (b) Develop political consciousness;
- (c) Create new **organizational** structures;
- (d) Bring into sharp focus discriminatory laws and harsh measures i.e. **expose** how the colour bar worked in practice.

- (e) Bring the oppression in South Africa to the attention of the world.

Bold as the Programme of Action was, it was not **immediately** brought into effect. The struggle within the A.N.C. for a more **militant** line had taken up a great deal of its energy and factional activity reduced the **effectiveness** of the organization nationally. Some observers considered that the organization was tearing itself apart over leadership claims while the mass work envisaged by the Youth League in the mid-forties **was** not being attended to sufficiently. Yet the pressures were building up as the Nationalist Government set out to fulfil its election promises of tackling the "agitators" and implementing its policy of apartheid. When the **time** for action came the A.N.C. was to find itself in harness with the Communist Party which had been pressing forward on its own account, but whose path converged increasingly with that of the A.N.C. as government repression mounted.

The South African Communist Party had been extremely influential in the militant struggles of the opposition forces since its foundation in 1921. Founded by militant, mainly white, **socialists**, many of whom were active in the white trade union movement, it switched its focus to African liberation in the 1930s when it adopted the Black Republic slogan. While this policy corrected an excessive preoccupation with white trade union politics and brought up sharply the question of African liberation, the policy was brought into effect in a high-handed manner which led to tremendous internal struggle. Just when the party was recovering its equilibrium it was thrown off course once more by the approach of the Second World War.

Many senior White communists joined the army to fight against fascism and the party as a whole gave much attention to the worldwide anti-fascist struggle. After the war, when the party might have once more turned its main attention to the problems of African liberation and the class struggle, the emergence of a strong fascist movement under the umbrella of Afrikaner nationalism constituted a fresh challenge at home. Two contradictory strands emerged in C.P. policy. One sought to give the main thrust of its energy to the struggle of the Black people, and the other gave primacy to the mobilization of a broad united front against the Afrikaner fascist threat.

The ambivalence of the C.P.'s position is best shown in the resolutions adopted at a Special Conference in 1949. In the section headed "Race Oppression and the Class Struggle" it stated: "The outstanding feature of the Nationalist Party is not its racialism and its class character but its marked leanings towards a dictatorship of a Fascist kind." Yet, under the heading "Non-European Resistance Movement" we find: "The reactionary, Fascist character of the Nationalist Govern-

ment is to be recognized, in the first place, in its attitude to the **Non-European people.**"<sup>16</sup>

This resolution, like much of the earlier comment in the C.P. paper, the *Guardian*, shows why its activities on the anti-fascist front led it to be drawn either into seemingly defending existing parliamentary institutions against Nationalist Party attacks, or into creating illusions about the possibility of "extending" the degree of existing democracy to the Black people.

It seems that the Party was importing the idea of the United Front from Europe, where it had been used to rally opposition to the fascist forces among a people which was homogeneous in a parliamentary sense, to a wholly different situation in South Africa. In South Africa there could not possibly have emerged a United Front of White **anti-Nationalists** in alliance with the Black people. The movement failed to draw the line of demarcation in the correct place, and this failure led to seeking alliances which were illusory.

At the same time it is evident that the tendency to give excessive attention to the parliamentary scene was not limited to the C.P. alone. It continued throughout the fifties and White parliamentary rivalries continued to absorb the whole movement and feed illusions about peaceful change for a considerable time.

But the C.P. was by no means wholly involved in parliamentary and constitutional **policies**. Some of its best cadres and leaders were in fact extremely active in the extra-parliamentary mass movement usually in close association with grass roots A.N.C. branches, and the history of the late forties is filled with the story of events of considerable moment. These can be dealt with only **very** sketchily here.

C.P. activists, for example, were deeply involved in trade union work and this led to significant all-round growth and militancy. There were 304 strikes officially recorded during 1939-45 with Africans participating in many of them. In 1944 thousands of African squatters occupied vacant land around Johannesburg, refusing to move until the City Council built houses for them. Their battles with the authorities and police became legendary and the Black belt to the West of Johannesburg continued to be the best recruiting ground for the political movement for a long time. In 1944-5 there was a widespread A.N.C.-C.P. anti-pass campaign which did much to arouse mass feelings on this the most oppressive of South Africa's race laws. In June 1946, the Smuts government passed an anti-Indian measure (the Ghetto Act) which brought 2,000 Indian volunteers into action in breach of the law. The campaign was led by the S.A. Indian Congress.

In 1946 the African miners' union called a strike which was supported by 70,000 workers despite intense repression in the mining compounds where they were forced to live. Armed police attacked

the strikers, opened fire and charged them with bayonets. After the strike the leaders of the Union were arrested, together with a number of leading members of the Communist Party, and charged first with bringing Africans out on an illegal strike and then with sedition.

With the election of the Nationalist Party in 1948 a new list of repressive measures was placed on the Statute Book and political tension rose throughout the country.

Some local struggles were fought over train apartheid in Cape Town, a bus boycott was carried out in Moroka township, Johannesburg, and police raids for passes led to clashes between Africans and police at Newclare, Johannesburg. On 16 February 1950 the *Guardian* reported: "Five times in the last six months bloody clashes between Africans and police have taken place on the Rand. Many Africans have lost their lives and many police have been injured in these clashes which have at times developed into running gun fights in which whole communities [including white civilians, B.T.] have been involved."

In all these events Communists played a significant part and as a result of intense activity at grass root level the Party established close links with rank and file members of the trade unions and the A.N.C. Even when relations were somewhat strained between the C.P. and the A.N.C. leadership the C.P. was still influential at the lower levels.

Political currents were now flowing swiftly and all the parties and movements were being caught up in the tensions gripping the country. The government was pressing on with its measures to ban the Communist Party and a national conference of the Party called for a positive campaign both "inside and outside parliament".<sup>17</sup>

The conference resolution struck an exceptionally clear note. "Recognizing the struggle for national liberation of the oppressed peoples of S.A. is bound up with the struggle for socialism, the C.P. will continue as it has done in the past to resist all forms of racial and national oppression. The national liberation organizations of the Non-European people of S.A. as well as the C.P. and the whole working class have a vital part to play in the struggle for equality and justice. We pledge ourselves to support them and join them in this struggle."<sup>18</sup>

In taking this stand on the question of national liberation and by encouraging its cadres to work among the mass of the Black people on local issues, the C.P. was laying the basis for an alliance with the A.N.C. which it had previously regarded as a reformist, petty-bourgeois led movement more given to internal wrangling than fighting the enemy. In fact, events were pushing both organizations towards unity and towards confronting the oppressive state, though in retro-

**spect it** is remarkable how long it took to cement this alliance in **practice**.

At the level of policy, the crucial determinant of combined militant mass action was the adoption by the A.N.C. of the Programme of Action. This 1949 Programme of Action transformed the A.N.C. from a cautious body into a dynamic mass **movement**.<sup>19</sup> It urged **non-collaboration** and refusal to cooperate in oppressive measures. But non-collaboration was not thought of negatively, as mere withdrawal, it was a positive attitude involving coercion **of the government**.<sup>20</sup> The 1949 A.N.C. conference linked "uncompromising non-collaboration" with boycotting all bodies set up by **the government** to represent Africans and decided to stage a one day general strike at some date to be **set**.<sup>21</sup> The government certainly interpreted this policy as coercive in intention and raised the **alarm** among the white population.

The C.P. was at first dubious about the concept of "**non-collaboration**". It had used its odd "African Representatives" in parliament and the Cape Provincial Council as effective propagandists, and many African Advisory Boards and Residential Associations in Townships had been useful in mobilizing the masses. **Furthermore**, Communists had spent a lifetime working in trade unions and they were fully conversant with the use of limited institutions for organizing purposes. In addition, the C.P. had for long been engaged in a battle with the sterile Unity Movement in the Cape which engaged in furious polemics about **the** principle of boycott and "non-collaboration" but avoided political action. The C.P. had argued that boycott was a tactic and not a principle and was **only** to be used where it led to specific gains.

A conference resolution of early 1950 stated their position :

"Conference notes that the A.N.C. and A.A.C. (All African Convention) have decided to use the weapon of 'non-collaboration'. If this means nothing more than the resignation of individuals from public bodies it will in fact be a retreat and a screen for inactivity. It will play into the hands of the Government. Like all other political tactics 'non-collaboration' is a weapon to be used at appropriate times and in favourable circumstances. Backed by organized mass action 'non-collaboration' as a weapon will be the means of arousing the people to a more intensive and higher form of struggle. But the emphasis must be placed at all times on mass **struggle**."<sup>22</sup>

Despite continuing disagreements between the A.N.C. and C.P., the A.N.C. President General Dr. Moroka, acting in his individual capacity, met with leaders of the Indian Congress and the C.P. to sink their differences and unite against the **government** by calling mass protests on May Day and 26 June (Freedom Day) in 1950.

In the May Day protest 18 Africans were killed by police fire at Newclare, Johannesburg.

As a reaction to this brutality, a Joint Planning Council was set up consisting of three Africans and two Indians, and which included Dr. Moroka and Dr. Dadoo (who was a leader of the Indian Congress and a leading member of the C.P.). The protests mounted and there were a number of clashes between protestors and the police involving a loss of lives. Police brutality was strongly condemned by the Council at the same time as they also disassociated themselves from violence as a political means.

The 26 June 1950 strike was called a "Unique demonstration of unity" by the National Day of Protest Coordinating Committee which said it was a "first step towards our liberation". Dr. Moroka thanked the supporters of the action and said :

**"The step we took was taken after all other possible avenues of coming to some understanding with the SA. Government had been fruitlessly explored. It is the only language we think the Government can understand. Our respect for law and order is not something we put on on occasions. It is part and parcel of our nature. But there can be no lawlessness where the laws are such that they cannot be obeyed!" (emphasis added)**

It was in these terms that Dr. Moroka presaged the defiance of unjust laws which was to bring the liberation movement into direct conflict with the state machine throughout the country.

### *The Defiance Campaign*

The Nationalist Government, now well established in office, set about exploiting to the full its election cry of "Swart Gevaar" (Black Danger) and "Communist menace". Having promised the electorate that it would take strong action against all forms of "subversion" it passed the Suppression of Communism Act which made it possible to outlaw the Communist Party. The C.P.S.A. accordingly dissolved itself by decision of the Central Committee though it later criticized itself severely for not taking the organization underground. It was lost sight of for ten years though it actually regrouped secretly from about 1953.

The implications of the Suppression of Communism Act were not lost on the A.N.C. They knew that the Communist Party was merely the first victim in a process of proscription of public organizations (it was itself banned in 1960) and that the Act could be used to ban individuals who were not Communists. The government was in fact bringing into a common stream some of the various extra-parliamentary opposition movements by virtue of its oppressive measures.

For its part, the *Guardian*, now the only public spokesman of the

remnants of the Communist Party, gave greater stress to the "‘non-Europeans’ as the centre of gravity of the forces of change". It said on 12 July 1951 :

"The only force capable of bringing about a radical change in the S.A. political scene is the Non-Europeans . . . The time has come for a S.A. chartist movement. For too long has the white man ruled without consideration for the needs of the black man. But if the white man has been callous, it is equally true that he has been aided in his self-indulgence by the inability of the Non-European people to speak with a voice of power . . ."

The emphasis on the Non-Europeans and the demand for the vote was bound to appeal to those elements in the A.N.C. who had previously been hesitant about an alliance with the C.P. The views of the rising new leadership within the A.N.C. were summed up by Nelson Mandela at the December 1951 A.N.C. Conference.

"Addressing the conference on methods of political struggle, Mr. N. Mandela opposed the conception of a Non-European front with the immediate aim of halting the growth of fascism. Fascism was being smuggled in by a back door behind a screen of fear of supposed black risings and of 'Communism'. The conditions favouring fascism could not be removed so long as the African was kept in subjection. The Africans, because of the numbers should be the spearhead of an organized political struggle to demand full democratic rights . . . Apartheid had to be disorganized and made unworkable."<sup>24</sup>

Close cooperation within the liberation movement was given further impetus by a meeting convened by the A.N.C. in August 1951 of the joint executives of the A.N.C., S.A. Indian Congress and Franchise action Council (a Cape, largely Coloured organization). The C.P. had already been dissolved, but important Communists were there. The meeting established a Joint Planning Council which was to plan and set in motion a mass campaign against six oppressive laws: the Pass Laws, stock limitation, the Group Areas Act, the Separate Representation of Voters Act, the Suppression of Communism Act and the Bantu Authorities Act.

The most significant aspect of the plan evolved by this Joint Planning Council was that although it was based on "non-cooperation" it was in fact defiance of unjust laws that was intended. And though the focus was on six laws, the hope was, as Mandela's speech indicated, that the campaign would develop a mass character which would somehow "disorganize" the government. Highly significant too, was the first date chosen for the commencement of what became the Defiance Campaign. It was the 6th of April, the tercentenary of Jan van Riebeck's arrival at the Cape. It marked "the advent of European settlers in the country, followed by colonial and imperialist

exploitation which has degraded, humiliated and kept in bondage the vast masses of the non-white people".<sup>25</sup>

The Plan of Action proposed the defiance of unjust laws in three stages :

- (1) Selected personnel to go into action in various centres.
- (2) The number of volunteer corps to be increased as well as the number of centres of operation;
- (3) The stage of mass action where the countrywide struggle assumes a general mass character involving both urban and rural people.

Industrial action was considered to be the "best and most important weapon" but it was too early to be used at that stage.

The setting of the scene for the Defiance Campaign is of considerable importance since it shows the political perspectives of the liberation leadership. But it must be remembered that they were working within the shadow of the Suppression of Communism Act which prohibited the advocacy of social, political and economic change. There were other wide-ranging laws which limited what could be said publicly. Nevertheless, the vast quantity of material available on this period, and the persistence of certain elements of policy make judgements on some aspects possible. Even if there were other private policies and thoughts, one could argue that these were not put out for general consumption and they cannot have therefore been influential in determining the course of events. In the end, we are left with the material which is to hand but with the reservation on caution mentioned above. Many observers have noted the controlled language in which the Defiance Campaign was put to the people. Great stress was given to the non-violent aspect of the proposed action.

Attention has also been drawn to the fact that the liberation movement went through an elaborate ritual of writing to the Prime Minister warning him of their intentions and demanding the "restitution" of democratic liberties to the oppressed people. In his speech at the A.N.C. Conference in December 1951, Dr. Moroka said : "We are South Africans and we ask for the political status of South Africans. Yet we are regarded as enemies. From the government of South Africa we ask for nothing that is revolutionary."<sup>26</sup> But the government did not see the matter in this light. In his reply the Secretary to the Prime Minister said that : "This is not a genuine offer of cooperation; but an attempt to embark on the first steps towards supplanting European rule in the course of time."<sup>27</sup>

We see then that at the start of the campaign, the A.N.C. was proposing a controlled operation of defiance of certain laws for the abolition of those laws in a context of the achievement of African freedom. It was put forward as a mass campaign, even open-ended in

its perspectives as in stage 3, but nevertheless non-violent and orderly, with a clear invitation to the government to meet the demands of the people in a reasonable manner. The note of grievance was combined with an air of legitimacy.

Yet ~~some~~ of the speeches and statements are puzzling. The Guardian, a major paper of the liberation movement at this stage, continued to give much space to the parliamentary battle over the representation of the Coloured people. It expressed great anxiety for the "defence of the law". The same paper spoke about the danger of a *coup d'etat* by means of forcing through the High Court of Parliament Bill (Guardian 8.5.52), and Kotane, Secretary of the former C.P. wrote: "unless the combined opposition of the people is able now to defeat the first steps to dictatorship the government, fearing the outcome of a straight election, will use its sweeping powers to frustrate the people's will."

Some of the statements of the day indicate that **even** while the liberation movement was being geared to serious mass struggle, its leaders were to some extent hypnotized by constitutionalism and **legalism**.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the masses **had** not as yet responded as vigorously as expected to the spate of repressive measures brought in by the new government and in the absence of mass militancy the leaders were carrying on the political battle at the same level as before. Perhaps **they** were themselves unable to adapt to the new semi-legal conditions. Perhaps it was due to the still considerable protection **afforded** by the courts which had not yet been infiltrated by Nationalist appointees and which still maintained a semblance of legal integrity, though the law itself was of course an instrument of colourbar rule and repression even then.

The liberation movement did indeed **score** considerable successes in the courts. Not only were many individual prosecutions defeated by skilled legal argument but even major legislative battles were won by resort to the courts. For instance, apartheid on trains was defeated by a court ruling that facilities which were separate must also be equal. All these victories led to illusions that government inroads on popular rights could be **rebuffed** by legal action. Nevertheless despite the extensive courtroom sparring the long awaited Defiance Campaign began, rapidly gaining momentum.

The Defence Campaign was a major landmark in the history of the liberation movement. Batches of resisters went into action by deliberately breaking racial prohibitions on certain facilities. Volunteers openly and deliberately broke rules on where Black and White could sit, travel or queue. They infringed movement restrictions, squatted in places reserved for White occupation and transgressed many of the numerous rules that constitute the system of race **segre-**

gation. Many leaders broke their banning orders. They were arrested and other "defiers", as they were called, followed on. The campaign spread to all the cities and many small towns throughout the country. Over 8,000 activists were arrested for "defying", while a vast number of people took part in the meetings and protests which accompanied it. Political activity was at a peak throughout the five months of its duration.

The end of the campaign coincided with a government proclamation prohibiting incitement of Africans to resist and contravene any law and banning meetings. This proclamation was subsequently reinforced by the Public Safety Act and Criminal Amendment Act which imposed very severe penalties for incitement to break the law by way of protest.

But some commentators have argued that it was the violence that broke out in October and November, five months after the commencement of the campaign, which brought it to a halt. Individual acts of violence which set off riots occurred at Port Elizabeth on 18 October, Denver Johannesburg on 3 November, Kimberley on 8 November, East London on 11 November, and Langa (arson) in December. Kuper, who has made the most thorough study of the Defiance Campaign, has said: "Though the immediate causes of the riots are obscure, their effects were to damp down the spirit of resistance. It is, of course, conceivable that the campaign had reached its peak prior to the rioting and was, in any event, in process of decline."<sup>29</sup>

A welter of explanations has been offered on the significance of the Defiance Campaign and it is considered to be an important model of non-violent mass action with considerable relevance to other situations. But much confusion remains on this campaign. For instance Kuper said in 1953:

"No immediate claim is made for direct political representation and for full democratic rights, which are held out as a goal for the future. The time element is thus conceived in the spirit of liberalism. It is evolutionary, but with a perspective within the span of perception—'within our lifetime'—as the leaders of the resistance movement phrase it."<sup>30</sup>

Much later, however, in 1970 Kuper revised his analysis:

"What the Congresses in fact planned was not simply a civil disobedience campaign but a social, economic and political revolution by graded steps . . . The graded steps by no means implied a process of evolutionary change. On the contrary, the abolition of unjust laws was merely a sort of trailer for the main piece, a revolution to achieve racial equality; and this revolutionary goal was made quite explicit in the notices of intention communicated by the Congresses to the Government. But even if the Congresses had announced only quite modest reforms, their goal would still have been a revolution for racial equality."<sup>31</sup>

This remarkable change in perspective is symptomatic of the difficulties the Defiance Campaign has presented for those who want to interpret it strategically in a historical context. The problem might be of purely academic interest except that in 1960 the A.N.C. was once again setting out on a Defiance Campaign, this time with "no defence", "no fines" and "no bail". (It was pre-empted by the P.A.C. who got wind of the plan.) In 1972 members of the Coloured Labour Party once again broached a campaign of non-violent resistance and, judging by the way the national convention movement is unfolding at present, it is not unlikely that a similar campaign may develop in the near future. The point is, that where laws and practices are overtly discriminatory and where some scope for open-organization exists, non-violent mass resistance campaigns are bound to arise.

The first aim of the Defiance Campaign was to bring into the sharpest focus the oppressive character of the discriminatory laws in South Africa. Such acts as sitting on post office benches which were reserved for Whites were meant to bring race discrimination out in the sharpest form, while the breach of other regulations was intended to show up the oppressive nature of these laws. The technique was used as a propaganda weapon to highlight for the country as a whole, and not least for the Non-Whites themselves, that the system of discrimination was unjust and oppressive.

The Congresses sought to maintain a posture of legitimacy throughout the campaign and gained widespread support from previously uncommitted Black South Africans. The campaign also helped to jolt the conscience of White democrats and liberals<sup>22</sup> though it failed to move the bulk of Whites. Instead, as the campaign progressed White opposition and unity hardened against the resisters.<sup>23</sup>

The second aim of the campaign was to bring pressure to bear on the government by way of open resistance to official policy, even though the resistance was passive. The intention was to increase this pressure as the campaign matured by throwing in greater numbers to the point where it would cause serious embarrassment to the authorities who would have difficulty in coping with so many breaches of the law. It was hoped that the campaign would somehow disrupt the administration and force the government to concede that the particular laws could no longer be implemented.<sup>24</sup> Some spokesmen seemed to believe that the government might be forced to suspend all discriminatory legislation. Most importantly, the campaign was intended to overcome fear of authority, build an oppositionist attitude among the Black people and raise political consciousness to a higher level. Efforts were made to show that separate aspects of colour discrimination were part of a system of White domination and that freedom from these restrictions necessitated a struggle for nation liberation.

Individual acts of defiance were often placed in a **context** of non-cooperation with the system as a whole which was condemned as repressive and exploitative. However, the notion of breaking the system by means of non-cooperation was raised largely by implication (since the law prohibited overt references). Violence was condemned as unnecessarily provocative and as necessarily leading to polarization of the races, and to civil war.

At the same time, the Defiance Campaign was shown to be the consequence of the closing of all legal channels of protest and means of redress of just grievances. The campaign was presented as an extreme measure of last resort which would somehow force the government to relent.

History shows that the campaign succeeded in some of its objectives, the subjective ones, but failed on the main **count**.<sup>26</sup> Instead of bringing relief, repression intensified. And the Whites were driven into a **coalition** united by the fear of losing their privileged **positions**.<sup>27</sup> We also know that the tough counter measures taken by the government caught the liberation movement off guard and that it had not prepared a line of retreat from the point of view of struggle tactics. It had not prepared for a new arena of struggle in the event of the repression that might have been foreseen. Furthermore, the syndrome of protest-repression continued throughout the fifties without the development of new struggle strategies. No matter how high the mood of resistance rose, it was repeatedly beaten back by the government when it came to open confrontation.

But it would be wrong to focus on the immediate issues taken up by the A.N.C. or on the methods of struggle and organization for an explanation of the failure of what has been called the politics of **protest**.<sup>27</sup> The essential weakness lay rather in the woolly thinking on the nature of the structure of the system and the illusions this led to in the aims of these campaigns. Granted that the organization and politicization of the masses was a legitimate goal, in so harsh an environment as South Africa, it was also incumbent on the leaders to think **strategically**.<sup>28</sup> There was always a reasonable expectation that matters would come to a head but there was lacking a concept of the actual transfer of power to guide the struggle in its more critical phases. Without such a concept mass militancy broke its spirit against the wall of the armed power of the state. It can be argued further, that the conception of Conventional Democracy as held by the liberation movement was crippling for the advancement of the struggle. As long as the gaining of democratic rights was seen as an extension within the existing system, illusions were bound to flourish, and the struggle methods would remain inadequate. Only the concept of Revolutionary Democracy, with its emphasis on popular power and alternative power

structures, could **lead** on to a more developed struggle form. In the **South African case** it would have inevitably led to a violent, that is armed, liberation struggle.

But, in the last resort, the failure of non-violence in South Africa was due to the system itself. White supremacy is based upon privilege and that privilege is given expression in a set of values which justifies the most cruel repression of those who challenge the system<sup>sg</sup> and enables the rulers to turn to using ever greater legal powers and finally open violence against the protestors without incurring substantial criticism from within the White group **itself**.<sup>40</sup>

As Kuper has pointed out, polarization is based on opposed interests and antithetical values. "The subject peoples deny legitimacy to the social order and the rulers respond with increasing repression . . . There is no neutral ground of detachment from the struggle, which drives all strata into opposing camps." The consequence is clear. "If the society is polarized, then it may be reasonable to infer that **political** change will be abrupt, revolutionary, and presumably **violent**."<sup>41</sup>

The benefit of hindsight enables us to come to the conclusion that the liberation movement did not draw the necessary inference from their experience that they should prepare for a struggle that would necessarily be revolutionary in every sense.

### *On the Problem of Power*

After the Defiance Campaign the liberation movement continued strenuously with campaign after campaign to build a mass base for **political** pressure on the **government**. These **campaigns** were non-violent as before, but they were nevertheless meant to arouse the militancy of the mass of Black people and to strengthen grass roots organization.

Conditions were far from easy for this kind of work which was mainly in the open, and those who argue for "openness" in **principle**<sup>42</sup> would have been persuaded otherwise in the South African setting. **The** period under review saw congress exploit every conceivable opportunity for public campaigning. Thousands of meetings were held throughout the **country**, there were demonstrations, mass lobbies involving tens of thousands of people. There was the Treason Trial in 1956-60 with all the surrounding campaigns "in defence of the leaders". There was the famous Alexandra bus boycott when the population of one of the largest African townships in Johannesburg walked 9 miles to work daily in a successful protest against a penny increase in fares. Yet, despite many mass demonstrations fundamentally nothing changed. Mass protest ran its full course till it was out of breath. The Nationalist Party government and its machine of

repression clamped down ever more firmly and there was no sign **that** any substantial body of White opinion wanted it otherwise. South Africa was moving inexorably, albeit reluctantly, towards violence.

In this section four aspects will be discussed which bear **directly** on the subsequent transfer to violent action by the liberation movement. Two of these aspects are political: the polarization of White and Black, and the consolidation of White power; and two are tactical: the waning possibilities of "open" activity, and the development of the "underground" alternative.

Apart from the Black Republic period of the C.P. in the thirties and the momentary **exclusivist** African Nationalism of the A.N.C.Y.L. in the mid-forties, these two sectors of the liberation movement staunchly stuck to non-racialism as the ultimate policy over a period of at least thirty years. This policy was embodied in all major political documents, not least in the Freedom Charter which opens with the statement "South Africa belongs to all who live in it Black and White".

Non-racialist democracy has not meant a loss of African identity however. During the whole of this period the A.N.C. remained an exclusively African organization and cooperation with **Coloureds** (mixed race), Indians and Whites was carried out as between their respective organizations. By the mid-fifties five organizations, representing the national groups and the trade unions, were working together in the Congress Alliance led by the A.N.C. The C.P. had not yet reappeared on the scene though its members were active within these five organizations.

The non-racial democratic policy of the A.N.C. must be seen in its proper light. It was an expression of political goals, a framework within which African liberation would be fought for, and it was clearly and unambiguously against conceptions like an independent African state, African separatism, or even African domination. All nationalities were assumed to have equal rights though, being the largest group and the most oppressed, it was understood that the African people would constitute the most important **section**.

It will be seen therefore that the non-racial perspective of the A.N.C. leadership was an important matter of **principle**.<sup>48</sup> Having suffered race discrimination themselves they wanted no part in policies of African exclusivism. Some held this view from the position of a general democratic **outlook**, others, who held to a Marxist analysis of society, because they feared that an anti-White policy would distort the struggle into a cleavage based on **colour** instead of class, resulting in a society where white capitalists were replaced by black. The Marxists felt that Black Nationalism in an extreme form of **anti-Whiteism** would divert the struggle from a positive wide-ranging democratic movement involving people of all races (especially the

Indian and Coloured minorities which are substantial, but also white revolutionaries) into a sectarian purely African movement encouraging race hatred. Both groups feared that the adoption of a purely racial posture would lead to a bloodbath.

The influence of White liberals was also important in holding down African Nationalism by engaging African leaders in a constant dialogue which seemed to hold a promise of significant political support, though this in fact never materialized. Another factor undercutting Black exclusivism was the undoubted desire on the part of some African leaders to be accepted by Whites as people who understood and accepted so-called civilized Western values. These tendencies were enhanced by the continuing process of economic integration of Black people into the White dominated economy and the consequent increasing contacts across the colour line.

Of considerable importance, too, were the persistent efforts of the liberation movement to drive a wedge into the white camp to prevent White consolidation. It considered that a united White community would be a very formidable enemy indeed. Every effort was made by African leaders to meet with and persuade influential Whites to make public gestures rejecting apartheid and oppose the Nationalist government. The white congress of democrats was set up to organize White opposition. The government on the other hand was well aware of the dangers of such tendencies and exerted tremendous pressure on liberal Whites to hamper their activities and prevent the breakaway of a significant section of White opinion. In the long run intimidation won out and even those Whites who would have preferred a less rigid system and whose minds were still open were driven into acquiescence or silence.

That the non-racial policies of the A.N.C. failed to impress the majority of White South Africa is not after all surprising. And the acquiescence in the repression of the liberation movement cannot be merely ascribed to irrational fears of a bloodbath. It seems that White South Africa was far more careful with its arithmetic than has often been suggested<sup>4\*</sup>

Looked at coldly the propositions of the A.N.C. were not at all in the immediate short term interests of White South Africa. The proposal of "one man, one vote" would have resulted in an immediate African majority in Parliament. The demand for the removal of the economic barriers would have led to an influx of petty African traders into the White areas who would have undercut small White businessmen. Relaxation in job restrictions would have meant the rapid displacement of expensive White labour by cheap, semi-skilled but keen Black labour. Removals of the Pass Laws would have led to the massive influx of the rural African poor into the cities where White

privilege of every kind would have been under attack. In short, the bastion of White privilege and supremacy in every sphere was in issue, and this was not going to be surrendered easily.

From the viewpoint of the Black people, the demand for **equal** rights was the minimum. It was the only way to break the monopoly of White privilege and power. For this reason the lines were very clearly drawn and hopes of splitting the Whites on an issue of fundamental principle was unrealistic.

Many Liberal writers on South Africa have suggested that the A.N.C. was putting forward a liberal programme while others have used the terms "bourgeois democracy".<sup>46</sup> Yet in the most systematic presentation of the programme of the movement in the '50s, Moses Kotane spoke of a People's Democracy and this was the term used in various lectures distributed at the time of the Congress of the People (1956) when the Freedom Charter was launched.

We can adopt one of two positions. Either the demands for equality etc. were so broad that they would be interpreted in any way members of Congress wished—and there was certainly a wide range of ideological positions held within Congress. Or, the demands of the movement did in fact represent a coherent programmatic position. Some have suggested that since the removal of the colour bar was so fundamental it would set in motion such a social upheaval that the purely political aspect, in terms of votes, majorities, etc., would inevitably be accompanied or followed by far more fundamental changes in the base, namely in the relations of production. They also argued that since the petty bourgeois section of the African people is relatively small, the shock troops of change would be workers and peasants who would not stop the process at a point where a Black bourgeoisie would replace the White. On this analysis it is not necessary and is needlessly divisive for the A.N.C. to articulate its ideology more specifically. The truth is that these questions have not been hammered out in the A.N.C. and the issues **are** still wide open.

The point that needs emphasis is that even though the demands for equality made in the 1943 A.N.C. constitution were far reaching and potentially revolutionary, these demands were at first presented as though they could be won (even gradually) within the existing institutional framework. Only later, when the concept of People's Democracy was raised, and later still, when the struggle assumed the sharpest form, was the programme of the A.N.C. seen as a basis for a new state form, however vague its outline.

This means that when it is suggested that there was a reformist element present, the reference is primarily to the posture and perspectives of the movement and only secondarily to the programmatic formulation of principles. It could be argued conclusively that any

demand for equal rights was revolutionary in South Africa but this would not **prove** that the movement was revolutionary. Its demands would have to be concretized in a perspective of revolutionary praxis. This was soon to develop.

The shootings at **Sharpsville** marked the turning point. Not only did it highlight the wanton violence of the oppressors but it removed finally any belief in the **possibility** of making a dent in the system by means of protest politics alone. Following so quickly after the crushing of the Pondo Revolt by purely military action, the **Sharpsville** and Langa shooting-broke the belief that a non-violent solution was **possible**.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the mass arrests and detentions that followed the declaration of a state of emergency, and the holding of thousands of people without trial, destroyed any hope that the legal system could be used to halt police repression. It was evident that the long chain of legal victories in the **courts** had now been broken and that the government had finally managed to impose a rule by direct police terror, brooking no hindrance from legal obstacles. It was also clear that the previous decade had been used effectively by the Nationalist Party to remove its White critics from the army, police and administration and had consolidated its hold **on** all the organs of power. The pockets of opposition among the Whites were rendered inactive, although the opposition press was still allowed some room for criticism beneath the heavy blanket of censorship.

To the leaders of the liberation movement it was now obvious that the state had been geared to maximum repression and that White public opinion supported it fully in this role. When Nelson Mandela left the country illicitly from his underground hiding place, he sought not only **political** support in Africa but also a commitment for military assistance with the training of military personnel and the supply of arms. The transfer from non-violence to armed struggle was in progress.

Gene Sharp has argued that it is wrong to think that because all conventional political efforts and non-violent action has been forbidden, violence should now be used.

**"Increasing government repression now makes it much more difficult to organise non-violent resistance-especially openly—than it was in 1952. But it is no easier to organise violent resistance."**<sup>47</sup>

Sharp is missing the point. The reasons for the abandonment of non-violent action including strike action was the qualitatively different character assumed by the state apparatus. Not only was it not conceivably open to conversion, but coercion had to be maximized if there was even to be a possibility of success. The transfer to violence

was not due to impatience or petulance. A new stage had been reached in confrontation and this meant raising the level of attack to a much sharper form. This necessity was grasped intellectually at the higher levels of the liberation movement but it was also understood at the base from sheer practical experience.

Any kind of mass action or protest was becoming increasingly difficult to organize whether openly or for that matter covertly. Public meetings were always attended by police with tape recorders and the smallest legal transgression resulted in prosecution. Worse, speakers were arrested even where there were no legal grounds, and the crowd turned upon by baton-wielding police. Protest meetings which met with violence from the authorities seemed to lose all point: the imperviousness to complaint indicated very clearly that action of a more drastic nature was needed.

In addition, organization was made increasingly difficult. **Even** branch meetings were invaded by the police, and when the A.N.C. was banned in 1960, the government went all out to make this effective. The A.N.C. however, decided that it would not, as a matter of principle, accept the banning and would not wind up its organization. It was important, they felt, to maintain a defiant posture so that there would be no demoralization among the masses. But the problem of maintaining an "open" form of activity in conditions of illegality was no small matter.

Top level meetings were difficult to organize and the documents of the organization were constantly being seized. It became more and more difficult to maintain a national network working in concert and keeping proper regular contact. New organizational forms had to be found.

Most serious of all perhaps was that in the general strike called by Mandela in May 1961, organization and picketing was practically impossible because of police arrests. Since the form of the **strike** was a stay at home (an industrial strike at work place is far more difficult to organize and picket in South Africa) the people awaited instructions from the A.N.C. activists. But they had been arrested or chased off the streets by the police. With the government radio and the "liberal" press announcing total failure on the morning of the strike, people were confused and a gradual drift to work took place. These were some of the considerations that led to the recognition that peaceful protests of any kind were no longer possible. While no one would have said that only violence was to be used in future, it was certainly recognized that action would have to be primarily violent and organized in secret.

The harassment of the A.N.C. even in its **legal** days had been intense. There were numerous arrests of banned people who broke their

restrictions, of activists who were engaged in what was technically legal but which was considered subversive and dangerous by the police. The disruption of organization was persistent and damaging. Yet somehow the work went on, and even flourished since the political climate was so favourable. But after the banning of the A.N.C., police surveillance became so tight that work in the open was well-nigh impossible. It was the state of emergency that forced the movement underground, thereby revealing a new range of possibilities. Prior to 1960, activists in the liberation movement, of whom a large number were banned, operated on two levels, the open and covert. They sat in offices behind desks and produced legal publications, but they also met other banned personnel in private. While this system made it possible to combine legal and illegal work effectively, it also gave leads to the police. After the declaration of a state of emergency this system was changed. The centre of operations was now moved underground and it proved to be not only possible but more efficient, since underground personnel were in hiding and more free from police surveillance. The underground proved in many ways to be safer than the semi-legal system, though it also presented many problems.

The importance of the underground was particularly appreciated when sabotage was intended. For the purposes of the manufacture of explosives and training personnel an underground system was indispensable. But it was vital that there be the least possible contact between the underground and the above-ground sector of the liberation movement. Mistakes were made for which the penalties were extremely high.

What needs to be emphasized here, however, is that a movement which sets up an underground apparatus has moved very far indeed from the position it held formerly. It requires a total reorientation in political outlook. The underground activist is a social outcast isolated in his network of close associates. He must shed his remaining illusions of political participation as an ordinary citizen. For the moment, going underground implies the total rejection of the existing political system. It is wholly subversive in its intention and cannot conceal this fact. Contact between ruler and ruled is broken and the activists are consequently subjected to even more extreme forms of repression, including torture and detention, to enable the police to break into the underground network. The underground is also the *sine qua non* of violent struggle while it also creates the basis of revolutionary power as an alternative to the existing power structure. The underground symbolizes the transfer from the concept of Conventional Democracy to that of Revolutionary Democracy. It enables the creation of a new army of militants who live in isolation from the ordinary political pressures of the rest of the population, and who can

therefore adopt a posture which is as **different** from the conventional as is the guerrilla from the politician.

The transfer from open, legal or semi-legal protest politics to the underground struggle was not an easy one in South Africa. It required a fundamental revision of thinking, posture and life-style for the leaders and activists in the liberation movement which was **difficult** to make; and inevitably there were some who never made it. When the underground started acts of sabotage in 1961, it caught the Black population by surprise. They welcomed the actions but showed little willingness to undertake similar acts spontaneously when called on to do so. This is hard to explain but it may be that the techniques used were too strange and **difficult**. But it is also likely that they had not been shown how isolated acts of sabotage were relevant to bringing about the downfall of the government. They had not been won for the new policy of revolutionary struggle which necessarily involved new techniques and new centres of mobilization.

#### CONCLUSION

In his outstanding book on Vietnam, Wilfred Burchett makes some important points relevant *to* our theme.

He notes that prior to 1959 the political line of the liberation movement was non-violent. But this policy crumbled before the unprovoked violence of the enemy as the peasants hit back spontaneously. The political movement then had to act in order not to lose prestige and the line was changed from non-violence to "violence for self-defence!". This immediately posed the problem of weapons which were initially very primitive, being mostly home-made. Furthermore, "violence for **self-defence**" was not easy to implement. In some areas the people accepted this policy readily enough, while it was necessary to stimulate it in other areas in order to spread the strain throughout the region, and to show that it could be done even against heavy odds. "Our main motive in the beginning was to win the support of the **population**, raise their morale." But in some areas the people at first trusted no one and it was sometimes impossible to make contact with them. In these cases it fell to the **movement** itself to hit at the enemy troops, showing what could be done—whereupon it was possible to sink deep roots among the peasants at the same time as breaking their fear of the enemy.

To a certain extent these considerations **also** apply to South Africa **though** the **armed** struggle has not yet begun in earnest. **As I** have attempted to show, the link between authority and the mass has been broken so that they stand in hostile opposition. Furthermore, the liber-

**ation** movement has changed the form of its propaganda so that, instead of claiming the mantle of legitimacy for its demands for inclusion in the existing state institutions, it now claims legitimacy for the use of violence against those very institutions. This change is essential for gaining mass support.<sup>41</sup>

The next step of actually organizing the masses in a framework which is geared for active resistance to the state is a difficult one.

The problems of creating structures for self-defence is linked with that of getting rid of informers and enemy agents. The need for comparatively safe bases within the country is paramount, particularly since there are no friendly borders available for easy infiltration and **return**. It is necessary to create conditions for armed struggle at various levels which are self-sustaining and capable of growth.

But the principal problem in South Africa is to find the correct means to maximize the "release of popular energies" (Le Duan) and this need not, in fact almost certainly will not, be by armed struggle alone. Once the overall strategy of armed struggle is accepted and implemented it becomes even more necessary, as in Vietnam, to encourage local protest actions and struggles to strengthen the popular will. In the complex conditions of South Africa armed struggle will not be the single method of struggle. Just as town is integrated with the countryside, so non-violent actions will find their place under the overall strategy of armed confrontation, though it is clear that this kind of non-violent action is bound to be very different to that practised in the days of illusions in the fifties. Furthenmore, it is also likely, since disaffection is so great, that a heightened mood of non-cooperation will lead the African people in particular to deny necessary resources and collaboration to the enemy. But this again will be a far cry from the **non-collaboration** that was proposed by the A.N.C.Y.L. and others in the days of purely non-violent struggle.

The point is that a new setting for confrontation is being created. And in a society as polarized as South Africa the confrontation can only be within a framework of an armed struggle for power.

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#### NOTES

1. The number of African workers in industry rose from 156,000 in 1939 to 245,500 in 1945. In Johannesburg the African population increased by 57 per cent between 1936 and 1946. Lerumo, A., *Fifty Fighting Years*, p. 81, Inkululeko Publications, London.

2. *African Claims*, Preface. Mimeo 1945, publisher not specified.
3. Self-determination for Africans has long been interpreted in the context of a non-racial state. Clause (d) of the 1943 A.N.C. constitution states: "To strive for the attainment of universal adult suffrage and the creation of a United democratic South Africa. Mimeo, 16 December, 1943.
4. Mafutsanyana was also a member of the Communist Party. Quoted from *Freedom*, Oct./Nov. 1943, Vol. 3, No. 4.
5. Walshe, Peter, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa, The African National Congress 1912-1952*, pp. 12 and 13, C. Hurst & Co., London, 1970.
6. Sampson, Anthony, *The Treason Cage: The Opposition on Trial in South Africa*. Heineman, 1958.
7. *op. cit.*, p. 78.
8. C.Y.L. Basic Policy. A statement quoted in Walshe, *op. cit.*, p. 357.
9. Walshe, *op. cit.*, p. 353.
10. Quoted by Mafutsanyana in *Freedom*, *op. cit.*
11. A.N.C. Youth League Constitution, Mimeo, c. 1944. S.A. Institute of Race Relations.
12. *op. cit.*
13. 1949 Programme of Action. Quoted in Joseph, Helen, *If This Be Treason*, Andre Deutsch. 1963.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Writing in 1958 Gwendolyn Carter says: "The dilemma of Non-European leaders in the Union lies precisely in the fact that their aims are not revolution, though European South Africans seldom seem to recognise this fact . . . In South Africa, in contrast, Non-European political organisations seek changes within the existing system, not its overthrow. They want a share in political power, not to oust the Europeans . . .", Carter, Gwendolyn M., *The Politics of Inequality*, p. 378, Thames and Hudson, London, 1958. (Third Edition, 1962.)
16. *Freedom*, Vol. I, No. 8. Special 1949 Conference Issue, Pioneer Press, Cape Town.
17. *Guardian*, 12 January 1950.
18. *Ibid.*
19. See "Excerpts from Policy and Programme" issued by the A.N.C. (External Mission) **Dar-es-Salaam**. Undated.
20. Gene Sharp stresses that non-violent action includes acts of omission and commission and that it is action and *not* inaction. Roberts, Adam (ed.), *Civilian Resistance as a National Defence*, Pelican, 1969, p. 109.
21. *Guardian*, 22 December, 1949.
22. *Guardian*, 21 January, 1950.
23. *Guardian*, 6 July, 1950.
24. *Guardian*, 27 December, 1951.
25. The document sets out the following fundamental principle: "All people, irrespective of the national groups they may belong to and irrespective of the colour of their skin, are entitled to live a full and free life on the basis of the fullest equality. Full democratic rights with a direct say in the affairs of the government are the inalienable rights of every man—a right which in South Africa must, be realised **now** if the country is to be saved from social chaos and **tryanny** and from the evils arising out of the existing denial of franchise to vast masses of the population on grounds of race and colour. The struggle which the national organisations of the non-European people are conducting is not directed against any race or national group, but against the unjust laws which keep in perpetual **sub-**

- jection and misery vast sections of the population. It is for the creation of conditions which will restore human dignity, equality and freedom to every South African." Report of the Joint Planning Council of the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress, 8 November, 1951. Appendix C, in Kuper, Leo, *Passive Resistance in S.A.*, Jonathan Cape, 1956.
26. *Guardian*, 20 December, 1951.
27. Quoted in Kuper, *op. cit.*, p. 233.
28. Explaining the dissolution of the C.P. in 1950 the official history of the C.P. says: "A certain tendency towards legalistic illusions had penetrated the Party and sections of its leadership." A. Lerumo, *Fifty Fighting Years, The South African Communist Party 1921-71*. Inkululeko Publications, London, p. 91.
29. Kuper, *op. cit.*, p. 140 and Carter says: "Even before these measures became law, the resistance campaign was dying down, partly through lack of funds, partly because the stock of volunteers was running low, partly because of the growth of European antagonism, and of tension among the Non-Europeans." Carter, *op. cit.*, p. 375.
30. Kuper, *op. cit.*, 1956, p. 42.
31. Kuper, Leo, "Non-violence Revisited". Published in *Protest and Power in Black Africa*. R. I. Rotberg and Ali A. Mazuri, O.U.P., New York, 1970, p. 793.
32. Kuper said in 1953: "The defiance acts themselves were so planned, and for the most part so executed, as to give the minimum offence to the sentiments of the whites. The hope for cooperation is expressed in the appeal to Government for the repeal of its own discriminatory laws, in the ready assumption that large sections of the white population are opposed to apartheid, and in the repeated invitations to whites for support in order to prevent the antagonistic separation of the races." Kuper, *Passive Resistance etc.*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
33. Nehru has also commented on the polarization effect even of non-violent action. He says that previously indifferent people become enthusiasts while opponents become even more hostile. Nehru, Jawaharlal, *An Autobiography*, John Lane, The Bodley Head, June, 1942, p. 545.
34. De Crespigny says that a government must act to assert its authority. "It is in the process of asserting its authority against political law-breakers that a government may find itself in difficulties. For, in enforcing the law against a large number of resisters, the machinery of law-enforcement is likely to become, so to speak, clogged up with human bodies." These, says de Crespigny, will consume much judicial time, strain police resources and prisons. The government may resort to counter measures but these may in turn intensify opposition. de Crespigny, Anthony, *The Nature and Methods of Non-Violent Coercion*. Political Studies (London), Vol. XII, No. 2, June 1964, p. 263.
35. There is an obvious parallel in the case of India. Nehru said in 1936: "In a political sense the non-violent movement has not succeeded so far, for India is still held in the vice-like grip of Imperialism. In a social sense it has not even envisaged a radical change. And yet anyone with the slightest penetration can see that it has marked a remarkable change in India's millions . . . It has brought about that quickening process in the masses that precedes revolutionary change." Nehru, *op. cit.*, p. 538.
36. Mandela warned in an interview (People's World, 20 February 1951): "I hope that Europeans will not form a united front against the Non-

- Europeans as a result of the Defiance Campaign. To do so would be digging their own grave. The **campaign** is a non-racial movement with the aim of securing democracy for all. The formation of a European front would turn the whole movement into a racial front with disastrous consequences for all." The problem was that the united White front was already in existence.
37. Some commentators, e.g., Feit and Walsh blame the failure on organizational weaknesses in the A.N.C. This is to beg the question of why it was badly organized if this was the case. The C.Y.L. had argued that the prosecution of a militant campaign would build organization and they were proved right and Dr. Xuma wrong.
  38. That concentrating on the technique is sterile is evident in Sharp's article in *Peace News*, 25 October, 1963. Sharp argues that if an action fails it is not good enough to blame the technique but that the **actionists** may have failed to apply it efficiently. This is reducing politics to a mechanistic level. IF people fail to apply a technique properly, and I would dispute that this was the case in South Africa, then one must surely seek the **political** answer on why they failed to do so. Violence was not finally resorted to as a "quick answer". It came very reluctantly, and after an excessive delay, for the reason that the liberation movement had not worked out the reasons for earlier frustration nor the character of the political system which made such failure inevitable as long as one worked within its framework.
  39. Liddel Hart has said that non-violent action has had considerable success but mainly against opponents whose code of morality was fundamentally similar, and whose ruthlessness was thereby restrained. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 240.
  40. Kuper poses "What social conditions indicate the feasibility of fundamental political change by non-violent means, and shall discuss three such conditions: the interdependence of the antagonists, the possibility of some point of reconciliation in the conflict of values and goals, and the mediating role of a third party!" Kuper, *Nan-Violence*, *op. cit.*, p. 799.
  41. Kuper, Leo, "Some Aspects of Violence and Non-Violent Political Changes in Plural Societies" a paper in *Pluralism in Africa*, edit. Leo Kuper and M. G. Smith, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969, p. 160.
  42. For a general discussion on "openness" see Ebert, T., in Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 305.
  43. Lutuli made an interesting statement on this question. "The emergence of cooperation between people of different races [in the movement—B.T.] is one of the most hopeful advances of the last twelve years, not merely because it increases the impact of resistance, but because it is the beginning of a non-racial South Africa . . . Tactically, the drawing in of our horns and the concentration of our forces may have some advantages, but in the long run it will obstruct the way to a South Africa which embraces all her citizens." Lutuli, Albert. *Let My People Go*. Collins, 1962, p. 186.
  44. Perhaps they had an instinctive understanding of sociology! Kuper has suggested that the demand for democracy by Africans was couched in terms upheld by White society. "Yet the realization of these values throughout the society would be subversive of the existing social structure, since the effect would be to liberate the non-whites from domination." Kuper, Leo, *The Background to Passive Resistance* (South Africa, 1952). *The British Journal of Sociology*, Sept. 1953. Vol. IV. No. 3. p. 243.
  45. In the former category are:

Gwendolyn Carter in *The Politics of Inequality*, *op. cit.*, and Robertson, Janet, *Liberalism in South Africa 1948-1963*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971. Joe Matthews is quoted as holding the latter position in Robertson, J., *op. cit.*, p. 173.

46. Schelling has hit the nail on the head: "The case for pure non-violence is stronger if the object is protest rather than defence. If one is trying to reach accommodation with a tyrant, resort to violence may spoil a non-violent bargaining campaign; but if one is trying to make a tyrant retreat or withdraw, it is not clear that non-violence by itself is up to the job, at least within the time span that the word 'defence' suggests." Roberts, *op. cit.*; p. 354.
47. *Peace News*, 5 July, 1963.
48. The point is well made in Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 163. A change in the form of legitimacy is necessary in the propaganda of the liberation movement. In Norway for instance: "Certainly the idea that it was legitimate to use violence against the unprovoked violence of the occupation was basic to the resistance."