

14 THEN WHO IS OUR ENEMY?

The rise of Black Consciousness did not mean the decline of non-racialism. Even during the height of the Black Consciousness era, ANC underground structures were slowly being rebuilt, and those involved in this clandestine process were both black and white.

“The time that I was working was a very important period and we still need to understand it, because it was the period where the movement reconstructed, and of course, in a renewal like that things change. The movement had new content to it, new people. Young people were coming in and the movement had to adapt to it, and they had to adapt to the movement, you know. There were all those challenges, but I think that the seeds of the thing were there. They were there before Rivonia, when the movement sat down and said, ‘We are going to have to continue illegally and we are going to have to undertake armed struggle.’ So that in a certain sense there was a thread. People think the thread snapped — I’m trying to say it may have looked very thin, but it was there, and it was unbreakable.

In 1972, I was expelled from a SASO meeting because my newspaper used the term ‘non-white’ instead of the term ‘black’. In fact, a whole crisis had been going on: SASO had written a letter complaining about the use of the term ‘non-white’ in the paper. I thought that it was time for a change, and I wrote a long memo to the editor, Allister Sparks, about it.

The next day I went back and was expelled from the conference because the newspaper was wavering. I went on with the fight and Allister changed the policy of the paper. The Rand Daily Mail had been the first newspaper to use the term ‘African’ instead of ‘native’, so then the RDM started referring to people as ‘black’, and I actually pride myself that I helped to persuade them to do it. I remember writing a story about it, what it felt like being ostracized by these black students.”

TONY HOLIDAY, reporter on Johannesburg’s *Rand Daily Mail* who clandestinely produced ANC literature in the early to mid-1970s

Spending a day at the conference of the South African Students Organization was instructive. It was informative and stimulating to watch young people of colour — African, Indian and coloured — trying to come to grips with the gut-problems of racial discrimination in South Africa. But what really taught me something was the brief experience of being the actual object of that discrimination, and the feeling of utter loneliness and resentment that goes with it.

The delegates, with a few exceptions, made it quite plain that they did not want a white reporter covering their conference, and that whites were permitted only under special conditions and under heavy sufferance. What sharpened the edge of the feeling of rejection was the uncomfortable awareness that the experience one was going through was part of the daily lot of people of colour throughout South Africa.

‘A Lesson in Discrimination’, TONY HOLIDAY, *Rand Daily Mail*, 10 July 1972

So that's where I come from, that - so one half of the family was some kind of Anglo-Afrikaaner at one stage aristocracy - they spent the rest of their lives hankering after past glories - really makes me sick - but it was on that side of the family really that the patriotism thing was strongest. My mother still feels - I mean she is terribly confused by what's happening now, but she - all she knows is basically that either I'm being attacked or South Africa's being attacked, and all this has been very, very confusing for them, you know, extremely confusing - my father just didn't understand what the hell was happening.

So that's where I come from, and because my grandfather, although there was English ancestry there too, had been so outraged by the British behaviour during the war. There was actually a streak of anti-English feeling which - which came through in my mother, and I always think that it's amazing that my mother and father married one another considering that there was a good deal of anti-Afrikaaner feeling in my father, real racist stuff, you know.

And well in the '70's it was a period of black consciousness movement but I personally did not I would say get into contact with the black consciousness movement as such, apart from as an individual so to say.

I completely accepted what I was reading in some of the books. And so somehow or other I got myself more and more involved now, becoming more and more involved.

But what the really thing.. I would say the turning point really was at the last place, not actually the last place.. in one of the places that I worked for a workers security police.. actually not a security police but its a security corps. It's this municipality police. Ya, its a Port Natal (?) police.

The reconstruction of the ANC's underground concentrated less on black intellectuals — the focus of the Black Consciousness movement — than on the working class communities that BC had bypassed.

“Well, in the '70s it was a period of Black Consciousness, but I personally did not get into contact with the Black Consciousness Movement as such. Their meetings used to concentrate on people who were in the universities. Hey, you found those people actually conversing in English — and really big English, you know. We could not just understand. Because of the level, I think there was a communication breakdown, so to say, between these organizations and the normal person. I remember at one stage I went to their offices, but even then I didn't know what to say, so I just was around and then I left.

But BC was all right: somehow people had to be revived and the Black Consciousness really contributed towards that, because after BC there was no longer that tranquility period like the '60s and '70s, where there was completely a lull, when some people were saying, look these people, they ran away' — referring to Tambo — 'the Mandelas, they got themselves arrested' and things like that.

I would say the turning point was really at one of the places that I worked, this municipality police — they are popularly called the 'blackjacks' and they are really brutal, those people. Actually, even the captain who was the head, he asked me, 'But why do you want to be a security cop? Your friends will despise you.' I said, 'Oh well, that's true, but at the same time I have to live.' So I worked there for five years, at the same time collecting in my mind evidence of what actually we are doing, and linking this up with the general condition, the oppression of the African people. Then I came to the conclusion that by being part of the whole machinery, actually I am directly suppressing and oppressing our own people.

There was something developing in me. By then I was very good in reading. I could simply close myself there in the bedroom and read the whole damn day, not going out: history, political books. There was one actually by an American, on Black Consciousness. Who is this chap, man? Malcolm X.¹ I just looked at reality and saw that what this chap is talking about are things that are actually happening right now. Whom to blame? I know it's whites. It was just like that.

Did you also go beyond Black Consciousness, had you heard of the ANC or the PAC?

No, unfortunately about the PAC, here in Natal it has never been actually known or popular. So as a result, you find that if you discuss with old people, they will tell you about the ANC. So I actually never even knew about the existence of PAC until I got it from the books very, very late. Then it was just a dead thing, something far removed from me. By then I had read enough, I had known that there was an ANC, there was a Freedom Charter, and my sympathies personally were now with the ANC. That was through material, reading books and getting this and that from the ANC. Some had to be used in very clandestine ways, otherwise you get yourself in trouble.

I left my job with the municipal police in 1975, and then I became a seaman. We used to travel all over Africa and Latin America. That's when the contact with the ANC was made, during that period, through one friend of ours in Chesterville [Durban African township] who actually went out for about a year or so and then came back about '72. Then he worked in a factory up until '77. Through him I was able to actively be involved in the struggle.

Was your motivation one of wanting to fight the whites?

No, actually, the person who really grounded me about the ANC made it clear to me about the racial question. He used to make examples, like saying, 'Okay, if you say whites are wrong, they should be killed, what do you say about Slovo?'² The only white person in the struggle that I knew at the time was Slovo, because he used to refer to him: he was an advocate, he could be making money and living well, but he chose to forego all that and decided to live as he's living now. So I was very clear in my mind and there was no longer any problem with whites.

When you were doing underground work, were you involved only with Africans, or did you also come into contact with ANC members of other race groups?

There was that contact between all the different races, we used to work together on some issues. But the Indians were more of a surprise than the whites. Initially I was really puzzled, because there was the feeling that Indians, man, are sell-outs. On the factory floor level you will find that as far as Indians are concerned - I'm saying this with no ill feeling, because actually right now I regard Indians, coloureds and everything as my comrades - you'll find that it's them who will harass, rather than the white foreman or supervisor. At least with the whites, I had heard about this Joe Slovo. Now, Indians was something that came very late, when I started to have certain contact with them while working.”

“ BC emerged very strongly whilst I was in prison, so by the time I came out we were fully aware of the BC’s presence, and we had done our own analysis about the BC at the time. We viewed it as an important development, and we were clear that there was new, serious political activity that would take place in South Africa, and we saw our influence as being clear.

Though the BC movement said there was a lull, there had been political happenings — I don’t think there was any stretch of two to three years that there was no ANC trial. I think some of these things need to be put into proper perspective, so that people shouldn’t think that there were then people who just emerged out of no influence at all. After all, you had a lot of ANC people who were not arrested or sent to prison, who were lying low —many of them were the fathers of these comrades who were emerging, who had been whispering and talking to them about the good old days.³ So when the BC movement emerged, in so far as our analysis was concerned, it could not escape the influence of the deep rooting of the ANC.

As a person who came out of prison, I immediately made contact with the other comrades and said, ‘A luta continua’ [The struggle continues] and were grouped and started operating again, and they actually received us with enthusiasm. They wanted to help politically. Some of them began to belong to the ANC underground inside South Africa whilst they were in the BCM —they were actually in ANC units inside the country. And some had to leave the country because the police were looking for them, because they’d come to find out that they were, in actual fact, ANC people. It is an open secret now that in some meetings of the BCM some of the people actually produced the Freedom Charter and said, ‘Here are the solutions of this country.’

In 1975 we actually, as an underground ANC structure inside, analyzed the situation and realized that there was a political explosion coming, and our thinking was that it will come from the workers’ front. To me, by the time the KwaThema bus boycott took place, in early ’76 in the Transvaal, it was proving our analysis, because people were just ready to challenge the enemy. And it moved to the students — then it burst out. I must say, we did not think the explosion will occur on the student front — we missed just the sector where it was going to occur in the end. But I think we were almost on the ball.

That’s the reason why, in fact, it is not a correct assertion to say 1976 just happened on its own, and that you could exclude the ANC from 1976. Certainly the students were demonstrating, but the students had had contact, and they always went back to the ANC to say, ‘What do we do?’ The ANC people, people like Joe Gqabi⁴ at the time, were actually playing a key role in that struggle.”

.JACOB ZUMA, a former ANC Youth League member from Natal who spent 1963 -73 on Robben Island for his Umkhonto we Sizwe activities

The explosion in South Africa’s largest black township of Soweto on 16 June 1976 was sparked by a range of factors, from mandatory instruction in Afrikaans to the advent of majority rule in neighboring Mozambique and Angola. As the unrest spread throughout the country over the next few months, seasoned ANC members offered advice and support to the inexperienced student activists.⁵



WHITE STUDENTS FROM JOHANNESBURG’S UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND DEMONSTRATED AGAINST THE KILLING OF SOWETO STUDENTS BY POLICE IN JUNE 1976, CARRYING BANNERS WITH ‘KRAAG’, THE AFRIKAANS WORD FOR POWER, REPLACED BY THE ZULU OR XHOSA ‘AMANDLA’. BLACK WORKERS JOINED IN THE PROTEST WHILE WHITE WORKERS ATTACKED THE DEMONSTRATORS.

(PHOTOGRAPHER: UNKNOWN. SOURCE: UWC – ROBBERN ISLAND MUSEUM MAYIBUYE ARCHIVES)

“That was when we started knowing ANC stalwarts, during the events of June 16th. Before I left South Africa I already had serious contacts with people of the ANC. Somewhere around September I met a friend — he was a long-time friend of mine, but I was not aware that he was an ANC activist. We used to share ideas, we were together in the SSRC, but he never mentioned anything about his outside connection until the day when he decided to reveal some of his secrets. Then, well, he gave me some small duties to carry out for the ANC. During that period I was active, but not like before — I was somehow operating a little bit underground until I left the country.

When you were first exposed to the ANC point of view, was the issue of non-racialism ever raised?

I think within the ANC I learned that non-racialism should be a concept in the revolution. If I remember well, they never sat down and said, 'Now we are discussing non-racialism,' but while we discussed ANC politics you find that you are always talking about non-racialism. We used to have very serious debates about this issue. The point was, okay, if you are saying South Africa belongs to both black and white, people used to ask the question, 'Then who is our enemy?' That was when experienced ANC stalwarts would come up and explain exactly what we mean in the ANC by non-racialism.

There were those who believed that the ANC was too liberal: why do we accept whites in our ranks? But everything was explained, that we had people like Ruth First [Slovo] — she believed in non-racialism, she was our comrade. The explanation which we got from the ANC was that the ANC, it's a movement of all genuine freedom fighters, black or white. Those who are opposed to racial discrimination and the apartheid system are welcome to participate in the ANC. ”

SACKY MADI, a member of the Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC) who was involved in the uprising

That was the theory, but in practice, those few whites who tried to get politically involved often found that the racially polarized mood of the 1970s made it hard for them to believe that they were really welcome.

In the course of the early '70s I became increasingly aware of the need to link up with the underground organizations, and slowly, slowly, there were beginning to be pamphlets circulating which were produced inside the country by the ANC which made one aware of their existence underground — but in a very tenuous way, at that stage. I still remember going through the pamphlets and always being helluva relieved to find that down on the sort of third-to-last paragraph there would normally be a sentence or two saying that whites also have a role in the struggle. So in a sense, one did have a place in the struggle, one believed in it, but it was something of an abstract belief.

I found myself being in quite a lot of sympathy with Black Consciousness ideology, because at least some of what SASO was saying corresponded with my view that NUSAS was often rather liberal, rather patronizing, rather forgetful of the fact that the struggle was going to have to be led largely by black people — and thus the need to mobilize black people. But the Black Consciousness leaders were often conflating liberalism with socialism and communism and 'foreign ideologies' or whatever, and that seemed to rule us whites out.

When you first made contact with the ANC, was race an issue?

Knocking in my head was certainly that kind of motivation: to put myself on side with the broad majority of South Africans, and to throw myself in, shoulder to shoulder with them in their struggle. I think that the first thing I picked up in making the approaches that I did when I was overseas was that the ANC people were very keen to sort out and be clear that my motivations weren't primarily of that kind, that they were political motivations. They were very insistent that my task was to go back and be effective — not go back and be caught. That happened a bit in the '60s with some people, probably considerably with ARM people. There was a bit of a martyr thing: throw ourselves into the jaws of the monster, get caught, never mind, it'll show that white people are prepared to suffer and sacrifice.

Now that symbolic dimension is important, clearly, and figures like Bram Fisher and Denis Goldberg had that kind of symbolic impact on people: that whites, too, were in jail and were prepared to die, if necessary. But my major task was to be politically effective, to take the struggle forward in small ways, in so far as I was able to do it, and not to get caught and not to be a symbol.

I was instructed not to have any contact with black people — which was terrible, because I hadn't really had that possibility before hand, and now I was being told not to do it. Now, with the development of non-racial mass organizations, contacts between blacks and whites on the left are frequent and daily, but at that stage they weren't, and to be going into townships or whatever would have marked one out and could have led to one's detection and capture. It was quite a lonely experience. Underground operatives do have the temptation of getting caught, because then all the mysteries can be revealed: friends that you've annoyed or hurt will understand all those uncomfortable kinds of psychological dynamics.

What was the reaction of the Security Police to you when you were arrested?

One of the first questions they asked me was: was I Jewish? Because that would have explained things to them. And I had quite a lot of fun evading the question, keeping them guessing and refusing to see the importance of it. And a second question they asked me, which obviously related to the first, was: was I born a communist? Because, I presume, if you're a racist the biological explains everything to you — in some way or other you must have somehow genetically inherited the predisposition. It's all rather difficult to work out if you're white. So obviously this was a question which bothered them, this business of were you born a communist. Quite how one gets to be born that, I don't know. I certainly wasn't. I was born in Durban in a naval base.

Then they were quite anxious to turn it into a bit of a show trial and to demonstrate that there were white communists behind the June 16th uprisings, the old story that blacks are contented until whites come along — white politicians with their own motivations who stir up an otherwise contented black grouping. Particularly in the Afrikaans press, there was an aura surrounding the trial that here are the arch-white fiends behind the thing, the white agitators, 'opstokers' [instigators], Moscow's agents and that sort of thing. ”

JEREMY CRONIN, an ANC activist who worked underground producing ANC literature in Cape Town from 1974 – 1976

So, you know, first thing, you know, he uses our history as our guide, like going back to 19 – to 1692 – is it 1652 when these – was it 1652 when these Dutch people came here, right, and then he said: Go throughout Africa and find out when the whites arrived in certain parts of Africa – you'll find out those whites from Holland who came to South Africa at this point in time have nowhere to go – we have got to face that reality, right – where do we want them to go – do you want to chase them to the sea – and then he said secondly: Look South Africa, compare it with other African countries – it is well developed – if we get rid of these people, who's going to man the infrastructure of this country – are we not going to go to square one – are we not going to destroy what has been produced by black – both black and white?

Our freedom struggle is being waged on many fronts — one of the most important is in the field of propaganda. Propaganda counters the lies of the enemy, it develops political awareness, it inspires our people to greater efforts and it shows by concrete example that the fascist police can be outwitted in their own backyard. Each of us can play a role in distributing and making propaganda. You can help distribute by showing the revolutionary pamphlets you receive to your trusted friends. You can also leave these pamphlets in public places where others will find and read them.

Slogans are a simple but highly effective way of making propaganda. A well-placed slogan can reach hundreds of people. Slogans can be spray-painted or chalked onto walls in places where people come together — in subways and bus shelters, in trains, factories and school rooms. If you use spray paint, wipe the can clean of your fingerprints afterwards and throw it away, but not near to the place where you've used it.

[Jimmy] Kruger, the Minister of Police, is alarmed at the growth of our underground movement. He has boasted, like others before him that he will root out every freedom fighter. With each slogan and sticker, with each act of propaganda, you will make Kruger's boast ring more hollow!

Vukani—Awake 'Published in Support of the National Liberation Movement',
ANC PAMPHLET distributed inside South Africa, July 1976

“ I remember some of them at Mowbray bus stop. They used to refer to them as 'bucket bombs', pamphlets that were just blown during the pick-up hour, right in the heart of town, in the main streets. They did a good work, I must say it — they really worked. There was also a heavy publicity on it, press and the like, and blacks again discover, look, the ANC's alive. And the method which was used was really sophisticated — as a result, it was said these are well-trained people. People said, 'Ah, our boys have come back,' because we were told that there are some people who went outside to train and they'll be back one day.

I had no political direction then, I just had hatred for the white man — until I met this old man, one of the greatest trade unionists of our times in that part of the world, the late Elijah Loza.⁶ That hatred needed some kind of a guidance, and it was through him that the right politics were instilled in me. And then I got direction — I became a fully-fledged ANC member.

After that I stopped hating the white man just because he happened to be white. Loza taught me that that is a starting point — it's a process. You must hate, and then out of that hatred you'll build something out of it. You'll hate the system, the apartheid system — but not the man, just because he happens to be white. Being anti-white is a stage which I feel each and every individual should go through, but it's not an end in itself. We have to overcome it.

Loza used our history as our guide. He said, 'You'll find those whites from Holland who came to South Africa have nowhere to go — we have got to face that reality. Do you want to chase them to the sea?' And then he said, secondly, 'Look at South Africa, compare it with other African countries. It is well-developed. If we get rid of these people, who's going to man the infrastructure of this country? Are we not going to destroy what has been produced by both black and white?' That's why ultimately I realized that these people really belong to our country and we have to learn to live side by side with them.

When you were with Loza, did he ever use the word 'non-racialism'?

You know, Loza was a worker, he never used such terms. He would just tell you straight, 'Look, the country we are fighting for is the country where black and white will live side by side' — simple language, not this academic language.

Had you not heard much of the ANC before you met Loza?

No, there was talk about the ANC, but it was a secret for the few during that lull. Everything was crushed; it was dangerous to talk about the ANC. Even those who were involved were very suspicious of anybody. They were not prepared to dish out their political knowledge. But later, certain individuals within those cells started to reach out, and fortunately people like Loza reached out to people like us.

Did you debate political issues with friends who supported Black Consciousness?

We discussed with them, but the problem with BC people was they had no alternative. They took it as if this is an end in itself, which was not the case. The problem with the BC was that they had no programme of action. Unlike the ANC: we had the programme of action. ”

as Black people - I mean we know all, you know, that was said about that - and from there, as I'm saying, you then have to - because BC we never had any programme, I mean political programme or, you know, plans - what we would do, how we'd, you know, work out things in the future, and I thought that I mean once we had reached that point of cementing the unity, making black people, you know, more positive, that from there we would have to move, and I think that's how a lot of people saw it as well, which is why there was no contradiction for people to join ANC, you know, from the BC organisations - I mean when people left from the BC there wasn't a contradiction in joining the ANC because we thought like it's a very natural step -

“ I did realize that there was something more to the struggle. BC never had any political programme for how we'd work out things in the future. And I thought that once we had reached that point of cementing the unity, making black people more positive, from there we would have to move. And I think that's how a lot of people saw it as well — which is why there was no contradiction for people to join ANC from the BC organizations, because we thought it was a very natural step. I mean, here was an organization that does have a programme, and it is carrying out armed struggle.

Then at the beginning of '77 I received these ANC leaflets through the post that they were sending from inside the country. They were speaking about armed struggle, calling on people to join the people's army. My friend and I just decided, right, by the end of this year we are going to leave the country and we are going to join MK — I mean, as a direct response to what we had been receiving through the mail.”

ILVA MACKAY, a SASO activist at the University of the Western Cape who received some of the pamphlets that internal ANC units were disseminating in the mid-1970s

By the late 1970s, popular support for the ANC was growing to such a degree that Black Consciousness leaders began investigating the potential for forging more tangible links with the movement. The catalyst for the arrest of Steve Biko by the Security Police in 1977 — and his subsequent torture and death — was the government's fear of this impending rapprochement with the ANC.⁷

“ It was obvious by 1976 that many members of the BC — who by then were beginning to say, 'Where is this BC taking us to?' — had rightly felt that when they left the country they would become members of MK or ANC. Already as long ago as 1972, that's when for the first time chaps from SASO left the country and joined ANC. And so the moves that Steve Biko and I and others were making in 1977 towards ANC were really the beginnings of a wider process of seeding alliances between the ongoing struggle at home and how the resources and the expertise and the infiltration from overseas were to work with that.

What actually caused this move in the first place was the fact that many of our chaps who left the country in '75, '76 didn't join PAC — at that stage they went to join ANC. So that within ANC there were many people in BC who were beginning to find a different way of working, with a commitment to coming back home. There was a link there. But the second thing is that ANC was demonstrably, visibly, the more viable of the two organizations. It seemed to be the one anyone who was serious about liberation would talk to.

In fact, in 1976 guys were sent to Robben Island⁸ and in large measure the evidence against them was actually drawn from this ongoing debate. That's where the system appears to have got the idea that they were preparing to be engaged in subversive activity, and that the *Viva Frelimo* rallies were the first step in this major campaign that was about to be launched. As it happened, that was premature, because actually it was just an internal debate at that time. I don't think there were any big plans.

After you left South Africa, why did you then get involved with an external BC grouping?

In the early '80s, the BCM was calling together all the people who were abroad who were actively engaged in and committed to the BC movement and ideals. This was really working towards a major conference, which I was involved in planning for, which would help articulate where these BC people abroad saw their future and how they saw BC proceeding. Some of us had had a meeting with ANC in December 1979 in Lusaka, and we were hoping to proceed to Lesotho and brief people about possible moves and discussions that had taken place with ANC.

I wasn't pro-BCM because I had rejected ANC. I desired that we find away, a vision of enabling BC people to work with ANC. At this time, BCM was not an organization as such — we were just working out certain lines for the future. So we had what I thought was an excellent meeting with ANC. We were extremely well received and ANC outlined very clearly what their position was towards BCM. But going back to report this to the BC people, I felt an amazing and unacceptable level of hostility to ANC as such — which I felt was totally unacceptable, because it seemed to me it was totally irrational. And it seemed to me that several people who called themselves BCM had moved, and now had political ideals that I wasn't part of any more. So that's when I left BCM and said I wouldn't have any more to do with it. I felt it was unacceptable to be opposed to the ANC just for the sake of it.

And then did you join ANC?

I didn't join ANC because I felt I never un-joined ANC. From the time I was in Lesotho [after fleeing South Africa], I'd always been in touch and contact and participating in the work of ANC. I don't think ANC — and to their credit — ever wanted to badger everybody to become ANC, but they wanted to find a working relationship.”

?Do you want to be named as Yusuf Ebrahim or Joe - what's your preference?

YE: It doesn't matter to me. I mean, everyone knows me as Joe Ebrahim, so it's quite in order.

Of the Black Consciousness activists who remained politically active after leaving South Africa, most eventually joined the ANC. Others maintained their BC ideology and identity without any further alignment, and a small minority linked up with the PAC.

CDE ANTON MUZIWAKHE LEMBEDE

"Africans had to throw off their 'worship and idolisation of white men' and rediscover their identity as Africans. Only Africans could lead Africans to freedom, because no foreigner could ever truly and genuinely represent the African spirit."

**ONE SETTLER
ONE BULLET!**

**AZANIA IS NOT
A PROSTITUTE...
IT IS THE LAND
OF THE AZANIANS**



"Let us make whites bury their own dead."

the Africans, But the highly
the wan- by the
Israel Smidt a fairly familiar in Texas, USA. to "rescue" his defected from the and had been arrested in Zambia for a false West German Passport.
ys, he had recently established an plant for his company, Rhodes Elec- HB to manufacture electronic stun or licence from the American The Stun guns which operate on a imilar to that employed for shock mental institutions but with greatly o udtagge have the ability to in- victims. This product had already o American police for the arrest of pects, but allegations have recent- l in American press concerning its orture instrument. Smidt proudly out his products capabilities and of ly received from the South African rces. — NEW AFRICA. ISSUE No. 985.

EXCERPTS FROM PAC PUBLICATIONS.
(SOURCE: FREDERIKSE, JULIE. THE UNBREAKABLE THREAD: NON-RACIALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA. RAVAN PRESS, 1990)

Well, that was prior to the Group Areas Act, so that it was really a very, very mixed community - there were people who, you know, classified as white, Indians, Coloureds, so-called Africans, and for - well, for two particular reasons, you know, race at that particular time was totally unimportant - my own - (my own family ranges across all the racial classifications in South Africa in the sense that my maternal grandmother was an Afrikaner, my maternal grandmother was Zulu, my paternal grandmother was Coloured, my paternal grandmother Coloured, my father's sisters married Indians, so that in the South African sense I have relatives from all the racial groups.



“The BC movement, in a sense, revived the PAC. We in the BC movement were critical of the ANC, mainly because the organization had been in existence for so long, but had failed to effect any meaningful change in South Africa. We appreciated the difficulties under which they operated, but our major criticism was that the leadership of the ANC had restrained the membership, and throughout the history of the ANC, as we interpreted it, the leadership was really afraid of preparing or mobilizing the masses for confrontation with the system. For this reason, I think that amongst very many of the early activists within the BC movement there was greater sympathy for the PAC, which within a short period of its existence had precipitated a confrontation which resulted in the Sharpeville massacre.

This did not mean that we blindly supported the PAC or accepted very many of its basic premises. For one, we were aware of the black racism of the PAC and the fact that in so far as the PAC was concerned, it regarded so-called coloureds, Asians, and whites as foreign minorities, despite whatever occasional rhetoric there might be from one or two individual leaders within the PAC.

The major criticism of the PAC was the fact that it provoked a confrontation without sufficient political preparation having been done, so that after the detention of the major leadership and the proscription of the organization, it in fact ceased to exist. But I think that the major attraction that the PAC offered at the time was the whole emphasis of black leadership in the liberation struggle, and the need to free blacks psychologically from the feelings of inferiority.

Was your analysis of ANC versus PAC influenced by a rejection of white involvement?

Yes, the whole question of white involvement in the struggle did play a major role in our thinking at that particular time. The perception we had of the ANC was of white leadership and behind-the-scenes influence far out of proportion to the small number of whites who were actually involved in the struggle. I think it was exaggerated — I'd be the first to admit that.

By then we all recognized the fact that the PAC was weak, but then we had this mistaken belief that if the PAC could be injected with young blood and talent from the BC movement, the organization might be revived, so that it would once more become a viable factor in the liberation struggle. When I met the de facto representative of the PAC in Swaziland, where he was working for Coca Cola, he told me, 'Oh, we have about 20,000 men in training right now.' I was immediately skeptical, but I genuinely believed that the PAC had a sizeable number of people, waiting for the opportunity to return.

I think the PAC tried very hard at that particular time to recruit BCM people, because they saw in the ideas that were being propagated by BCM people an ideological affinity with what they were themselves saying. But then later on they began to argue that the BCM was really a continuation of the work that they had started — which was again both historically and academically untrue.

Well, I continued in the leadership of the PAC for several years, and I became very, very much aware of the fact that the organization existed purely as a small number of people in exile who had no connection whatsoever to what was going on inside the country and that there was no programme for the execution of armed struggle, despite the rhetoric. One legacy of the PAC's short history within the country was the fact that it had failed to develop any organizational structures in the country or in exile. It existed basically as a conglomerate of individuals, and I think that that largely explains the perennial problems within the PAC, and also its ineffectiveness.

What I underestimated was the capacity of an organization that had existed for so long in that state of confusion to resist any change, particularly by older leaders who had no means of support but the continued existence of the organization. They resisted any effort, particularly by the younger members, to bring about any changes that would threaten their positions.”

HENRY ISAACS, a SASO leader who left South Africa in 1974 and studied in New Zealand, then joined the PAC in 1976, becoming its Foreign Affairs representative in the US from 1978 until his resignation in 1982

The majority of Black Consciousness supporters who remained in South Africa after the 1977 crackdown eventually moved beyond BC to embrace non-racialism. The transformation was most profound for those arrested, tried and sentenced to serve time on Robben Island,⁹ for there they encountered the imprisoned ANC leadership.

“The authorities decided to separate them from us, the ANC — we were expected to have a bad influence on them — but the warders couldn't handle these young boys, you see, so they decided then to mix them with us. They were fascinating, they had very sharp minds, were very keen to learn, but they had adopted an outspoken non-historical approach to the struggle. We had to clarify their ideas on a number of issues: on the nature of our struggle, on national liberation, liberation of other groups, and so on. Most of them did not know the history of the Congress movement — they had just been caught up in these uprisings. Many of them were able to pick up very fast the revolutionary thinking and the historical background of the struggle.

When they left prison they became the leaders of the struggle today. So what was the purpose of this imprisonment? It was not a deterrent — it became a school of revolution. It hardened you, it made you more conscious, it matured you. People came in with a lot of funny ideas, but when they left prison they were in a position to give leadership and direction to the struggle. As more and more people returned from the Island, the whole struggle was strengthened.”

EBRAHIM EBRAHIM, who spent from 1964 to 1979 on Robben Island for Umkhonto we Sizwe activities, recalled the political debates that ensued when new prisoners came in following the 1976 uprising

“I regard my days in SASO as my formative years, politically. We saw the struggle strictly in terms of one race versus another race. We were deprived of the wealth of the heritage of struggle which others who had gone before us had already amassed. We moved into this as virgins, completely. We were bound, therefore, to commit mistakes, in terms of judgment.

So how did your views change such that you now support non-racialism?

That began to happen, in particular, in the period of my arrest. We were arrested with men who were blacks like ourselves, men with whom we had shared platforms and campaigned together against apartheid. But it was precisely from among those men that some of them took the witness stand, side by side with the South African Security Police, and condemned us and sent us to jail. And then there was also the case of Anthony Holiday, who happened to have been arrested at the same time we were on trial in '76, with a black man. The irony of that case is that Holiday, a white man, stuck to his opposition to apartheid to the end, and the black man abandoned him, joined sides with the Security Police, and testified against him.

And then there were men like Bram Fischer, who at the time was serving a life sentence. And he died a prisoner for opposing apartheid because he did not approve of what his own people were doing to us. There was Beyers Naude, himself an outstanding Afrikaner, a man who had reached very high positions within the NGK [Dutch Reformed Church] and then the Broederbond. He had been ostracized by his own people — they had actually banned and restricted him.

Now I felt it was high time that one really reflected carefully as to whether the struggle for justice in this country can be pursued only by people of dark skin colour, or whether, in fact, this was a struggle of those who were committed to justice — never mind the colour of their skin — and those who were committed to injustice. And then later on I was to come across a statement which Mandela read to the Rivonia trial in '64, in which he made it quite clear that he was committed to a struggle against white domination and black domination. That was quite intriguing.

Was your acceptance of non-racialism also related to your adoption of a class analysis of the South African situation?

Oh yes, quite definitely. It is true that the majority of capitalists in our country would come from the white grouping, just as it is true that the majority of the working class will come from the African section of the population of our country — but it is also true that within the African grouping itself there are people who are middle-class elements.

Every one of the racial groupings in our country actually has a number of classes, and within those classes you'll find stratification. Capital in our country has won to its side a number of people from within the working class, and even from amongst our own people, who would make common cause with capitalism. One would be unrealistic to imagine that all white people are capitalists and all black people are workers — it's a distortion of the reality that is in front of us.

Fortunately for me, I was sentenced, and that gave me an opportunity in the period I spent on Robben Island to meet Mandela and to question him a little bit more deeply. It was from discussions with the freedom fighters of our people, who are committed to a free, non-racial and democratic South Africa, that I broadened my understanding of the issues involved.

All of us who embrace the non-racial line do so not because there are some white people participating in the struggle — we embrace the non-racial line, first and foremost, because we consider it to be right. So that even if there were not white people participating in the struggle, even if there were no Bram Fischers, we would still say it is wrong to judge any man by the colour of his skin. The participation of white democrats in the struggle in our country is only evidence of the correctness of our non-racial approach — not that the correctness of non-racialism is predicated upon them participating.”

PATRICK LEKOTA, a SASO founder member who was sentenced in 1976, alongwith eight other Black Consciousness leaders, to six years on Robben Island

NOTES:

¹A leader of the Nation of Islam and the US Black Power movement who was assassinated in 1964.

²Joe Slovo, exiled leader of high rank in the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe and SACP, a member of the liberation movement from the 1950s to the present.

³For example, SASO leader Diliza Mji's father (of the same name) had been president of the Transvaal ANC Youth League.

⁴An ANC activist from the 1950s who immediately got involved with the Soweto students when he was released from Robben Island, Gqabi was tried for his alleged role in the 1976 uprising, acquitted, and fled into exile. In 1981 he was assassinated in Zimbabwe, where he was the ANC's chief representative.

⁵The Soweto student leadership also comprised elements not aligned with the ANC: a press release issued by SSRC leader Khotso Seatsholo, 29 October 1976, describes whites as 'sadists who derive satisfaction in the shedding of human blood — they are worse than communists'.

⁶A former Western Cape SACTU leader who died in Security Police custody in 1977.

⁷ANC President Tambo's NEC report to the ANC's 1985 Consultative Conference cited Biko's contact with the ANC as a contributing factor to his detention and death. In an interview with Wits Student, April 1987, exposed Security Police spy Craig Williamson admitted that his tip-off to the authorities about a planned meeting between Biko and the ANC (which Williamson was involved in organizing) probably prompted Biko's arrest. Williamson said he regretted the 'debacle' of Biko's detention and death because it 'was something that closed doors earlier than they should have been closed'.

⁸The nine key SASO and BPC leaders arrested with the banning of the 1974 pro-Frelimo rallies and convicted under the Terrorism Act for 'creating and fostering feelings of racial hatred, hostility and antipathy by the blacks toward the white population group of the Republic' were: Patrick Lekota, Pandelani Nefolovhodwe (both interviewed in this book), Saths Cooper, Zithulele Cindi, Aubrey Mokoape, Strini Moodley, Muntu Myeza, Nkwenke Nkomo and Kaborane Sedibe.

⁹In addition to the older BC leaders, who were mainly university students, many young blacks, largely secondary school students with only tenuous political affiliations, were jailed for several years for 'public violence' during the 1976 unrest.