

The Alan Paton Centre
& Struggle Archives



RECORDING THE ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLE IN
KWAZULU-NATAL

Oral History Project of the Alan Paton Centre,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Second and third interviews
with Dr "Chota" Motala
conducted by Ruth Lundie
on 26 & 27 November 2001
at his home in Pietermaritzburg

The interviewee has agreed to open access for use by researchers,
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KWAZULU-NATAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**SECOND AND THIRD INTERVIEW WITH DR MOTALA,
CONDUCTED BY RUTH LUNDIE ON 26 & 27 NOVEMBER 2001
AT THE HOME OF DR MOTALA
IN PIETERMARITZBURG**

(‘L’ SHALL SIGNIFY THE INTERVIEWER AND ‘M’ THE INTERVIEWEE).

L: This is a recording of an interview with Dr Motala in Pietermaritzburg on the 26th of November 2001. Thank you, Dr Motala.

M: Shall I carry on?

L: Yes.

M: Ever since the Union was established in 1910, and even prior to that, the politics of White rulers of South Africa revolved around the problem of finding an answer to the question ‘How best to solve the ‘native’ problem?’ The solution sought would be one which satisfied White agriculture and mining interests in their quest for a continual supply of cheap labour. The Louis Bothas, Smuts, Hertzogs had all been committed to the same aim to satisfy their own constituencies. But now the advent of the Nationalist Government of Malan in 1948, also committed to the same aims, brought with it striking new dimensions both in doctrine and in practice. Their code on the ultra-rightist fascist movement in Europe in the 1930s and early 40s were now resonating in the corridors of power in Pretoria. The repression of Non-European majority was bound to assume the brutality that was naked. It wouldn’t be called, but following upon the three doctors Pact in 1947, the ANC and the SAIC, South African Indian Congress, had jointly resolved to work in close cooperation to achieve active basic human rights for all Non-Europeans in South Africa. The NIC President, Dr GM Naicker’s 1947 Call for a United Front of All Non-Whites to fight White majority, sorry, White minority domination was the first such call yet made. The early 1950s there was a quickening of NIC activity in Pietermaritzburg - my territory. It was decided to inject some

1 new blood into the existing Natal Indian Congress Branch in Pietermaritzburg. The
2 determined struggle had to be waged. Smut's 'Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian
3 Representation Act' had now taken a new and sinister form in the hands of the Nationalist
4 Government. In 1950, an annual general meeting of the Pietermaritzburg branch of Natal
5 Indian Congress filled the Regent Cinema to capacity with hundreds present outside. An
6 update on the Group Areas Act and Government's expressed attitude concerning Indian
7 Citizens was presented together with implications of the law on the meager land rights of
8 Indians and other Non-Whites. There were many contributions from the floor condemning
9 the Nationalist Government attitude, these from the greatly agitated gallery with the
10 appellation of the ? with the implications of the Group Areas Act on the land rights of all
11 Non-Whites. It was unanimously resolved to fight the new legislation to the bitter end. An
12 election ensued for office bearers. Those elected were: M.M. Motala (Chairperson), Vice
13 Chair: Dr Maurice Peters. Others elected were: D.M. Pather, R.C. Pillay, S.O. Pandey, S.B.
14 Maharaj and the Committee consisted of: Narend Gela, E.M. Haffajee, A.S. Chetty. There
15 were a few names: S.B.Mongal, Bobby Chetty, Guram Musoo??? who were a few
16 individuals, with the names I've mentioned who were not elected. They were prevented
17 under the Suppression of Communism Act from taking any post in political organisations.
18 Parallel to these officials and the committee that was elected, beginning in 1949 and
19 operating since then was a multi-racial study group based at 433 Boom Street,
20 Pietermaritzburg. Matters usually discussed at this study group were: (1) politics of White
21 South Africa, how the policies and measures adopted by government impacted on Non-
22 Whites, on the Non-White population, especially the social and especially the social and
23 economic matters; (2) a study of available material on Sub-Saharan African culture and
24 civilizations that had evolved prior to the arrival of the White man on the Sub-Saharan sea,
25 and thirdly, whether China? - this was an examination of the politics that ensued after the
26 defeat of Chiang Ka-Shek, the Nationalist Chinese leader, and the advent of Mao-Tse Tsung.
27 The NIC and TIC Branches - apart from political activities - catered also for a variety of
28 needs of the community. The most important of these revolved around the dire shortage of
29 education facilities for Indian children. In Natal alone, thirty thousand Indian children had

1 never had any sort of schooling. Counter that 1950, in Pietermaritzburg, there were at least
2 twenty schools serving Indian children, and of these only two had been built by the State.
3 The remainder had been built by the community - that is three or four barnitions ? over a
4 dozen are Hindu and Muslim community organisations and a couple built on the money
5 donated by generous individuals. Other ? by ? were rate payers of residents organisations
6 and cultural work - especially ? receiving access to high quality music and other facilities for
7 Indians, imported from abroad. During 1949, and '50, Pmburg?, NIC Branch worked closely
8 with Mr AB Majola, of the ANC, who ran a small business in town. But his small ANC
9 branch lacked human and material resources. Nevertheless, he never failed to work in
10 cooperation with the NIC Branch. Public meetings would be held in the name of all ? and
11 NIC and ANC Branches, to protest against government policies in the ? Non-Whites -
12 example - legislation tabled in parliament namely Separate Amenities Act. During the latter
13 part of 1950, Mr Archie Gumede joined the liberation movement in Pietermaritzburg. He
14 was introduced by Dr Zami Ntokoquo?, Treasurer-General of the Natal ANC. Mr Gumede
15 was well respected, worked with Mr Majola and soon assumed the Chair of the
16 Pietermaritzburg ANC Branch. With this congress movement in Pietermaritzburg, anti-
17 violence? began to grow rapidly. Attendances at public meetings increased with a fully
18 functioning ANC Branch now, notice of joint meetings reached a wider public. Such
19 meetings often opened - attracted Africans, Indians, some Coloured people...both Zulu and
20 English languages were used by speakers - translation of a speech in English to Zulu and
21 vice-versa was possible with Gumede and now Moses Mabida present. Meetings would be
22 presided by the Chairperson of either the NIC or the ANC. People from suburbs now
23 requested branches to be launched in their suburb - Raisethorpe - no put it this way - NIC
24 branches were launched in Raisethorpe, Pentridge and Plessislaer. ANC Branches also
25 proliferated - with Edendale, Dambuza and Ashdown branches established. The four NIC
26 branches continued at a sizeable number of delegates to a provincial NIC Annual
27 Conference, held in Durban, in September, the exact date being the 30th of September 1950.
28 Visits? were held soon after the Group Areas Bill was presented in parliament - introducing
29 this Bill. The Interior Minister, Dr PJ Donges stated that government's policy was to

1 expatriate Indians of Indian origin and that in the Group Areas Act Government had - quote
 2 ' had the instrument' - unquote, which would make this possible. Both delegates from
 3 conference, at the conferences, were ? by this announcement by the Interior Minister. At
 4 conference Dr J Naicker went into the NIC urging them to resist the implementation of the
 5 Act adding that (and I quote) 'Indians were not alone in the struggle against apartheid,
 6 Africans and Coloured people stood united with Indians, as did a number of European
 7 democrats who supported the struggle against apartheid.' (Unquote).

8 L: Do you want to stop?

9 M: No, no. Sponsors, ? Asian,? Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act had been
 10 apprehensive, but the Group Areas Act of the Nats far outstripped its predecessor and the
 11 damage it would cause to Indian, Coloured and African social and economic aspirations, let
 12 alone the whole polarisation of South African society that it would cause. That would confer
 13 on government the right to legalise the problem under the Act there would be enforced
 14 physical separation of the races which was now on board to become a key element of
 15 apartheid. Apart from the NIC conference already mentioned there had been also a national
 16 South African Indian Congress Conference - also during September, in Johannesburg. This
 17 conference had been opened by Dr J.S. Moroko, President-General of the African National
 18 Congress and Pmb, Natal Indian Congress delegates had also been present at this conference
 19 with other delegates from Indian Congresses in Natal and Transvaal. President Moroko had
 20 been severe in his condemnation of Mr Danhauser's? Threat of expatriation of South African
 21 Indians - he thought South Africans of Indian origin ?. Dr Moroko went on to add (and I
 22 quote) 'Any insinuations of the nature are the desperate efforts of desperate minds to further
 23 their own ends and not in the interests of Africans.' (Unquote). (There is rustling and he
 24 mentions 'more papers'.) The election of Chief A.J. Luthuli as president of the Natal ANC
 25 was a significant milestone in the annals of liberation politics in Natal. With the Chief at the
 26 helm of affairs in the province there would now be regular contact with branches province
 27 wide and with the Natal leadership. Luthuli, a man of wisdom and immense dignity was to
 28 provide leadership which would soon endure him to people of all races. His commitment
 29 to the cause and the struggle helped, ?? The first instance bring hope to all who were with

1 him. He reiterated again, in 1952, to the position of National President - the National
2 President-General of the ANC. His words? would inspire the whole Congress Movement and
3 masses of people who were to hear his message. The PMB chapter of Congress Movement
4 worked closely with the president, visiting him at Groutville for advice on important matters.
5 I recall an occasion when a ? ? Congress required urgent attention from high up. This was
6 resolved after a lengthy discussion and very ? needed advice received from the President by
7 ? at past midnight. The call was made late at night on the suggestion of the President himself
8 - he insisted that a full discussion was only possible when the lion was completely free late
9 at night. The passive resistance movement campaigns led by the NIC and TIC during '46,
10 '47 and '48 had been discussed in a previous session and I'll record that. The ANC leaders
11 of the 40's - such as Mr Mandela and Mr Walter Sisulu had knowledge of these campaigns,
12 President Luthuli had knowledge of the role of Dr Naicker in these campaigns. The
13 Transvaal ANC Leaders mentioned had been close to TIC (Transvaal Indian Congress) leader
14 - Dr Dadu - he was in Pretoria in IC ? Now in the face of the Nat onslaught through
15 legislation on the civil and economic rights of Non-European people - especially the African
16 majority, and the thrust of authoritarianism on the national regime - the congress - that is
17 NIC, felt that the ANC, NIC and TIC decided in 1952 to join hands in a defiance of 'Unjust
18 Laws Campaign' in which volunteers from all oppressed people would breach certain laws
19 and court imprisonment. The unjust laws chosen were protest against were one 'Group
20 Areas Act', two 'Law to re-establish tribal authority', three 'Laws to remove Coloured
21 people from the common voters' roll', and four 'Law to "Suppress" (in inverted commas)
22 comments'. An appeal for volunteers made by the Congresses yielded an overwhelming
23 response. During the campaign, or during this campaign it was admitted then that some
24 democratic Whites, however small in number were prepared to go to imprisonment. The
25 campaign kicked off on the 26th of June, 1952, with Chief Luthuli and Dr J.M. Naidoo,
26 "unlawfully" (again in inverted commas) occupying a public facility reserved for law for
27 Europeans only. In the days and months to follow thousands of volunteers - largely African,
28 Indian men and women and some Coloureds breached laws and got an imprisonment. There
29 were more or less nine thousand volunteers defying - the campaign was a huge success.

1 These ? of race discrimination and apartheid already internationalized and on the agenda of
 2 the United Nations General Assembly for several years, once again forcefully drew attention
 3 of people worldwide. The campaign also cemented the alliance between the ANC and the
 4 South African Indian Congress. Luthuli, addressing an annual conference - the Natal Indian
 5 Congress on the 21st of February 1953, described the alliance as (I quote) 'A ? homage?'
 6 (Close quote). My quote again 'In concluding this observation on our formidable alliance,
 7 I must state that ours is not a marriage of convenience, but is a political alliance, based on
 8 a common general regard for true democracy - resulting in a growing in spirit of friendship
 9 between our respective communities also.' (Unquote).

10
 11 The tape is switched off for a while.

12
 13 L: Today is the 27th of November and we are resuming where Dr Motlala left off yesterday.

14 M: 1952 and thereafter..Despite the resistance of the people to policies pursued by the Nats and
 15 the overtures made by the ANC and a number of influential persons to the government to call
 16 a convention of representatives from all races, government, with utter indifference, continued
 17 repression - even more brutally. This period saw, and I quote, 'Enactment of punitive
 18 legislation with seriously increased penalties, including whipping for advocacy of or
 19 participation in, any future campaigns of protest.' - unquote. Faced with this situation, the
 20 congresses, ANC, SAIC, SAPO? - that's the Coloured people's organisation: COD (that's
 21 the Congress of Democrats) and SACTU (the South African Congress of Trade Unions) -
 22 with support from other representative organisations resolved to call upon the Congress of
 23 the People - that such a meeting of delegates, representing the disfranchised from all over the
 24 country, having consulted the people, and listened to their grievances would then gather their
 25 demands. These would be placed before the Congress of the People so that the Conference
 26 could draft a document which would enshrine the rights of all the people of South Africa.
 27 Notice of this was given - was conveyed to provincial structures of the ANC and the South
 28 African Indian Congress, which in turn notified branches in each province. Throughout the
 29 last quarter of 1953, Pietermaritzburg branches of ANC and NIC were informed and made

1 aware of the presence of the Congress of Democrats, the South African Coloured Peoples'
2 Organisation and South African Congress of Trade Unions. in the plan to assemble the
3 COP.(Pause, please.)

4 L: Okay.

5 M: Correction of demands - Peri-Urban Settlements. Pause please. Right. The COP - we
6 continue - A joint meeting of all the NIC branches, Pietermaritzburg and environs was called.
7 The COP project discussed in great length. The joint meeting noted - one - the Congress of
8 the People project would entail a mammoth organisational task, two, the Natal Midlands, or
9 Natal Midlands, would be taken as the terrain for canvassing. Number three, a substantial
10 body of volunteers would have to be recruited. Number four: coordination, apart from ANC,
11 also with other democratic organisations, or democratic elements, for example, Trade
12 Unions, Womens' Organisations would be necessary, and finally a formal structure of the
13 Congress of the People at Natal Midlands level would have to be constructed with African
14 National Congress and other democratic elements taking part. Okay. Such a formal structure
15 was duly established in style - the Natal Regional Committee of the Congress of the People -
16 Officials were - Chairperson: Archie Gumede, M M Motala, Vice-Chair, Dr Omar Isaac,
17 Secretary not named, other officials not named, some of the officials not named. Those were
18 the people committee - comprised all Chairpersons - no - the COP Committee comprised of
19 Chairpersons of all the ANC and NIC branches in the Pietermaritzburg area. Branch
20 Committee members of all the existing ANC and NIC branches offered themselves as
21 volunteers. Within a month of its establishment, the Midlands Regional Committee of the
22 COP had mobilised a hundred volunteers from city and townships. Moses Mabhida, now
23 with Trade Unions, was always available for organising public meetings and other major
24 tasks. Continuing...From the Congress of the People, 1953, '54. Pmburg City: Street
25 Committees were set up in six of the most popular streets; talks and approaching people,
26 explaining the objectives of COP, the listing grievances and collecting demands from people
27 were held with every NIC and ANC Branch Committee, with a view to equip the volunteers
28 working in the city.

29 End of first side.

1 Second Side:

2

3 M:Okay, coming back to the little bit about the divisions, in the most basic employment of
4 the community? ?? We are saying that the legalised robbery had not to await the ? attack, it
5 ? This robbery had already occurred many years ago - 1930 - and thereafter, with the
6 legislations - with the legislative measures of 1924 and 1936. That's that...Collecting
7 demands elsewhere: In consultation with Northern Natal leaders, Saviour of Ladysmith,
8 Nyembesi ? It was decided that the Midlands terrain - ? field he canvassing was to end at
9 Estcourt for the moment? and Camperdown, Cato Ridge to the south. Distribution of COP
10 Midlands message - printed message - fanned out also to Howick, Lions River and
11 Nottingham Road, Mooi River and Estcourt. Vonville? Richmond were also covered. And
12 a significant number of responses were received from these areas. Ah..COP representatives
13 also addressed a meeting arranged by Mr Peter Brown, with White farmers in the Nottingham
14 Road and adjoining areas. The representatives of the Congress of the People addressed the
15 farmers on the COP project. They listened intently, but were non-committal; no comment
16 was forthcoming, it was on time?? So instead of abandoning the meeting, we raised the
17 question of labourers - Black labourers working on White farms and their grievances. We
18 pointed out that the ticky per hour wage for Black labourers, they were outraged, they
19 disputed the ticky, which we had researched very well, we mentioned it again. They were
20 outraged, brought in food rations that they supplied and other amenities that labourers were
21 given. We realised that there would never be any conversion of thinking on this matter.
22 They were, however, without doubt somewhat curious about the COP project. They
23 remained cordial most of the time - the meeting ended. Go on to the last bit now (There is
24 talking in the background, inaudible).

25 L: Let me just..

26 M: Farewell to Durban delegates off to COP, Cape Town, Johannesburg - the date: June 1955.
27 A week prior to the COP meeting in Johannesburg it was requested by President Luthuli,
28 then indisposed, to deliver the keynote address at a farewell reception, or a send-off to
29 Durban delegates going to the COP. The meeting was held at the Bantu Social Centre, in

1 Petrus Street, Durban. The hall was very large. Packed with an exuberant crowd, outside
 2 hundreds of people milling around, shouting slogans, singing songs. The speech, translated
 3 into Zulu by Moses, by, by Comrade Moses Mabit^hla - always excellent at the job. Shouts
 4 of 'Africa Mayibuye' rose from the audience again and again and punctuated the whole
 5 speech. Other speakers also did their bit and there was much singing - the mood was
 6 exhilarating - a very jolly send-off was bid to the delegates and it seemed that the delegates
 7 themselves were most happy with the send-off. That finished - Moses and I departed -
 8 happily also, for home. Now, sitting at the preparatory hearing of the Treason Trial, at the
 9 Drill Hall in Johannesburg, during 1957, I heard the same speech over again. It was being
 10 presented by the Prosecutor-General as evidence against the one hundred and fifty-six people
 11 accused for high treason. It was given there - it was given there...

12 L: Dr Motala is going to give us a remnant of some of the songs the freedom songs of those
 13 days which nowadays seem to have disappeared completely.

14 M: Well I can only supply a little fragment here and there - there was one - Sosete yebo, yebo
 15 Chief Luthuli (he is singing) Nawo, Dr Naicker - sikelela - that seems to have disappeared.
 16 And then the other one (he sings again) Dte Nyama - Ndodi Nyama. Mbota Nyama, nanzi
 17 dodi nyamo, ndodi nyamo, ndodi nyamo, passop for Strydom. Nanzi Ndodi Nyama, (he
 18 clicks his fingers at the end).

19
 20 Okay... Right. We will resume again, starting with the Cape Town Conference itself and
 21 thereafter the question of the Freedom Charter and the popularising of the Freedom Charter,
 22 its acceptance by the various political organisations and from there go on to 1956, the
 23 Treason Trial and possibly go on further up to 1960.

24
 25 The tape is switched off; there is nothing more on this side.

26
 27 (Unfortunately Dr Motala had a stroke after this, and this series of interviews was never completed.)