

DC 12011/9/11/6



17th September, 1962

Dear John,

I have just had a visit from Thomas Ngwenya, and it is as a result of my conversation with him that I am writing to you.

You will probably not know this yet, but the African Horizon Insurance Co, of which he was Cape Town Manager, has folded up. It is in liquidation, following the discovery of a number of irregularities on the part of the new proprietors (who bought it from the defunct Heller Organisation). The major cause of the collapse was the fact that nearly all of its funds were invested with the Heller Org.

The result of this is that Thomas is likely to be without a job very soon; he has got one with some other Ins. Co., but is not happy with it and does not think he will remain with them very long.

My father will be able to provide you with a more detailed biography of him than I am able to give. He is, strangely, Rhodesian born though he has been living here for 22 years. Politically, he was (until about 1946 or '47) Cape Western Regional Chairman of the ANC; fought with the whites, who campaigned against him pretty heavily and finally succeeded in removing him from his position. A number of branches remained loyal to him, however, and in 1957 he stood for the ANC National Congress in Durban, where he ran for the executive but was defeated (along with Mother) largely as a result of the machinations of Govan Mbeki.

After an interval of about a year, he ~~gradually~~ returned from ANC politics in any active way, but was detained for the full period in 1960. Partly because of his personal strength, and partly because he was unopposed as between ANC and PAC, he was appointed spokesman for all the detainees (white, black) while in prison.

In 1961 he formed the African General Workers Union, to which he has given considerable publicity. It is small, and not very effective (see p. 68; Mariel Lorrell's 'South African Trade Unions'), but it exists.

He would be prepared to go to the UNHCR school at Exeter, though he is a little uncertain as to what this would mean in terms of returning. He might be forced to go to Rhodesia, or to set up headquarters elsewhere. Do you think you could make inquiries on his behalf? And let me know as soon as possible whether anything can be done for him.

I hope the trip to the Hague was a success.

Regards,