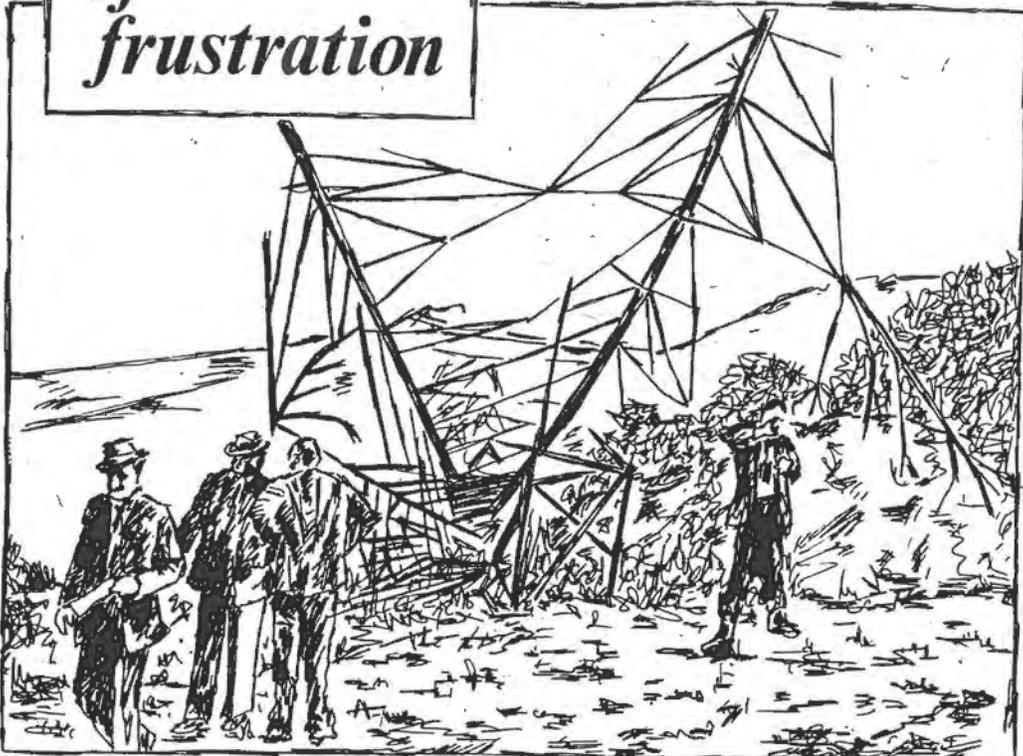


10/5/1965



# acts of frustration



## THE AFRICAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

*"Change is just around the corner"*

The 1960's began particularly traumatically for South Africa. The previous decade of mass mobilization and successful political organization had greatly raised the hopes of democrats. The feeling was that change was not only inevitable, but imminent. At the same time, however, the apartheid State was in the process of unleashing a stunningly vicious attack on those who threatened it. An all-out effort was made to crush political organizations: the ANC and PAC were banned and thousands of political and trade union activists were detained, banned or imprisoned.

AFRICANA

organization, its protest role functions of the organization. test against the repressive and an attempt to keep the "fascist limits of this pressure. Firstly, protesting, however peacefully. might provide a limited degree to the actual power relation-

its advice offices, has developed. Although this involves dealing in therefore be seen as simply as undoubted possibilities for one hand, it allows people to people and initiate activities to onships with groups such as other hand, it has facilitated a — keeping members harshly hest structure — the migrant

**WE REAFFIRM**

**THE RIGHT TO PEACEFUL PROTEST**

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**reaffirm the right to peaceful**

the Black Sash has begun to change. While the tendency nization, it is at this stage no away from the broad demo- The credibility and resources potential to play a particularly be they in the community, f white democrats to provide solidated, and does not dissi- he organization.

It was within this context that the African Resistance Movement (ARM) was formed. Its strategy of utilizing sabotage to shock the white electorate into recognizing the inevitability and desirability of change, was possibly one of the most remarkable responses of whites to the inequalities in South African society. Whilst the short history of the organization does not occupy a substantial place in the general history of the fight for change in South Africa, it undoubtedly provides a dramatic example of the potential dangers of attempts by whites to contribute to this fight.

#### The National Committee for Liberation (NCL)

In 1961, a group of white intellectuals, with histories of involvement in either NUSAS or the Liberal Party, formed the National Committee for Liberation as a political discussion group. They represented a broad spectrum of political opinion ranging from "radical" liberals to "anti-communist" Marxists. They shared a common frustration of working within existant political structures, and were united by a desire for "direct political action". A former member of the NCL described their political affiliations as aligning themselves with the :

- \* official leadership of the PAC
- \* the "non-communist wing" of the ANC
- \* the "left-wing" of the Liberal Party
- \* "more progressive Progressives"

At the time of the NCL's formation, members believed that the apartheid State was crumbling. As a group of intellectuals, however, they felt particularly isolated from the broad mass of the people and urgently sought a means of "getting in on the action". Hugh Lewin was later to write that he actually saw detention without trial as a positive experience, because it gave one the opportunity to "know what it was like to be black".

The NCL always remained relatively exclusive, never growing above 50 members. The two main centres were Johannesburg and Cape Town, although there were small groups in Durban and Port Elizabeth.

Discussion led the NCL to the conclusion that they should form a sabotage organization — later to be known as the African Resistance Movement. They were particularly vague, however, about the exact effect they wished to achieve. Still caught up in the notion that change could only come through parliament, they defined their activity in terms of the white electorate. The immediate aim of sabotage was to shock the white electorate — the the possible intention of forcing them to recognize the reality of the South African situation and the necessity of voting the Nationalist Party out of power.

#### Making plans

Having elected to pursue this course, the NCL set about planning their activities during 1962. First off they needed to acquire the necessary resources for sabotage. Dynamite, fuses etc. were acquired largely within South Africa, for example by burgling coal mines in the Transvaal. An unexpected windfall supplemented this stock. 2 ex-members of the NCL who had emigrated to London sent a telegram



*Sabotaged signal cables at Observatory Station.*

saying that a "present" would be arriving shortly. A few weeks later NCL member Michael Schneider's mother received a shipment of glassware from England — hidden in a false bottom was the largest shipment of plastic explosives ever smuggled into South Africa.

It is difficult to establish the extent of links between the NCL, Umkhonte we sizwe and Pogo (the military wings of the ANC and PAC respectively), but there appears to have been some linkage. An NCL document has been discovered which expressly sets out the basis for co-ordination of activities among the 3 groups. Patrick Duncan

of Liberal Party fame, joined the NCL after fleeing Lesotho, and was later linked to the PAC. There also seems to have been some collaboration in the planning of NCL emergency escape routes. Links may also have been established for financial purposes. The NCL was receiving large amounts from an apparently foreign source, and banking them under the name of Independent Students' Bursary Fund. Besides the acquirement of the necessary logistical material, the NCL also required training in essential skills, particularly in explosives. Robert Watson, a Cape Town member, had been trained as an expert in this field in the British Army, and he trained the NCL on Blouberg and Llandadno beaches.

#### Finding the targets

Sabotage being the method, targets had now to be pinpointed. In this early period the NCL were inexperienced and ambitious, and this is reflected in some of the targets they considered. There was a scheme to blow up the Wemmershoek Dam, thus totally disrupting Cape Town's water supply. An even more ambitious scheme was a plan to destroy the Western Cape wheat and grape harvests with bacteria. A plan was also drawn up to attack the government garage in Buitenkant Street, Cape Town, about 400 metres away from the police station. It would have involved driving a truckload of barrels filled with petrol into the garage and igniting them, while accomplices spread bent nails on the far apron of the nearby fire station. The most ambitious of these ideas, however, was the consideration of a bid to rescue PAC leader, Robert Sobukwe, from Robben Island.

#### Structure

The NCL was controlled by various regional committees. These bodies took overall decisions for each region, while recommendations and practical planning were referred to it by a Planning Committee. Every member had a code name, and often members only knew each other by this name. Activities were often of a cell type, individual cells not being aware of the activities of others. Every operation was meticulously planned: reconnaissance was done, explosive requirements calculated, the acquisition of necessary equipment designated to various people etc. Dark, but not conspicuous clothing was essential, including balaclavas and gloves, socks were worn over shoes to prevent footprints, and any tyre tracks were always erased. While some members would be on a raid, others would be on 'standby', waiting beside telephones with medical aid kits handy.

#### Plans to sabotage

Dams and wheat crops having been overruled by mere practicalities, the ARM set about looking for its first target, something which would be conspicuous as well as effect the public's daily routine. In terms of these needs it was decided to attack the FM radio tower on Constantiaberg in an attempt to disrupt radio programmes and be visible to large sections of Cape Town. The necessary reconnaissance and planning complete, the ARM moved on its first target on the night of 18 August 1963. Charges were set at the base of the tower, using alarm clocks to give the saboteurs time to escape... next morning FM programmes went on as usual and the tower was still intact — the clocks had failed and the dynamite was not detonated!



*Fuses, electrical equipment, alarm clocks, rubber gloves, shape charges and other items which a police witness at the main sabotage trial in Cape Town, claimed to have been found in a garage in Sea Point.*

The failure of the first attack was an obvious source of disillusionment to the group. On top of this, the police discovered the charges and quickly realized that they were dealing with a new organization. Nevertheless, the members of ARM pressed on.

#### Bombs away!

The problem of the first action had been technical – clock failure. The task was therefore to find a target which could avoid the precious mishap. The eventual target was the signal cable parallel to the Cape Southern Suburbs railway line. On the early morning of 3 September 1963, it was blown up in 4 places. The method was to use simple (burning) fuses rather than unreliable clocks. The operation had immediate effect – a trip to Mowbray Station the following morning revealed hundreds of commuters stranded on the platform. The “success” paved the way for continued activity.

Early in 1964, a group within the ARM began to motivate for a discontinuation of sabotage activities on the grounds of their futility, and lack of political effects. Adrian Leftwich and Eddie Daniels travelled to Johannesburg to attend a national meeting to discuss the issue. It was decided to continue with sabotage – with an attack on electricity pylons in both major centres on the same night to give the impression of a far larger, and more co-ordinated organization than actually existed.

On the night of the 18 June 1964 three pylons were bombed in Cape Town, with similar attacks in Johannesburg. The attack was successful – with only one pylon's clock failing (only to be detonated manually on return to the site two days later). This was to be the last “official” action by ARM, except for the infamous petrol bomb attack on Johannesburg Station by peripheral member John Harris. The station attack, which was the only one ever to involve human life, took place 2 weeks after the organization had actually collapsed. Harris was subsequently hanged.

#### The Fourth of July Raids

The 4 July Raids were a sweeping action by the police in order to capture members of Umkonto we sizwe, who had escaped the Rivonia arrests. During the course of these sweeping raids, the security branch visited the flat of ARM member Adrian Leftwich. There they found, with no attempt at concealment, the entire documentary history of ARM, down to every last detail. Lynette van der Riet, who was at Leftwich's flat at the time, was followed and seen going to her flat with 2 heavy suitcases. Later, during questioning, the police demanded to know what she had done with the “documents” inside the suitcase. They learned, to the astonishment, that the suitcases had in fact contained dynamite!

The arrest and trial of ARM members, in both Johannesburg and Cape Town during 1964 and 1965 was a particularly unpleasant experience for those working for change in South Africa. Adrian Leftwich, who had done extensive work on the psychology of detention in order that ARM members could be prepared for such circumstances, lasted for 4 days before breaking and divulging all the details of the organization to his interrogators. Lynette van der Riet lasted only 2 days. Both turned State witness against other ARM members in return for pardons.

There were two separate ARM trials – one in Johannesburg and one in Cape Town. The State charges centred on their attempt to:

“... overthrow the South African Government by means of acts of malicious injury to property, thereby causing inconvenience, confusion and disruption”.

Most of the ARM members who had not escaped the country received relatively light sentences of one to four years. Hugh Lewin, however, spent 8 years in Pretoria Central Prison for his participation. The sole black member, Eddie Daniels, spent the following 15 years of his life on Robben Island.

“... what we did was in itself futile and stupid...”

At his trial, Adrian Leftwich attempted to explain the motivations of those involved in ARM:

“I realized, too, that – I believed that – what we did was in itself futile and stupid, but I don't believe the ideals which underly it and the personal frustration we felt prior to it, are stupid or futile.”

A sense of deep frustration, together with a feeling of guilt, evidently underly the formation of ARM and the adoption of its strategy of sabotage. The failure of this group of white intellectuals to relate to the organizational groundswell of resistance which formed the foundation of the Congress Movement during the 1950's and early 1960's caused them to initiate what, in retrospect, appears as a futile act of desperation. It would be wrong to view this as a logical outcome of the position of democratic whites in South African society. From early in this century groups of whites have not only kept in step, but constructively contributed to the movement for change.

The flaw in the ARM response lay largely in the inadequacy of their analysis of conflict in South African society and the process of change aimed at eradicating that conflict. Although ARM members evidently did not see South African conflict in simple Black/White terms, they failed to recognize the extent to which it is, in the final analysis, a contest between democratic and anti-democratic forces. Although the vast bulk of whites are likely to defend their privilege, this does not exclude certain white groupings from joining the opponents of this system of privilege. The basis of this alliance, however, must not be a feeling of guilt or frustration. It must be a carefully considered decision which takes into account the nature of the movement for change and allows white democrats to utilize their skills and privilege to their greatest capacity within that movement. If it is the mass actions of the majority of South Africans that is to force an end to apartheid, then it is vital that all strategies and actions of democratic groups develop in accordance with that mass action.

Possibly the most frightening aspect of the history of ARM was the naivety of its members. Not only did members fail to recognize the “exposed” nature of white democrats as members of an overwhelmingly undemocratic sector of society, but they totally underestimated the power of the South African State. Although they attempted to develop something of a security-tight structure, much of their behaviour was nothing more than irresponsibly risky. A blatant example of this was the story of the night that members had a party at which dynamite was passed around to everyone to see. Minutes later the police arrived, because people had been making too much noise!