

INTERVIEW

RIXAKA Interview with Comrade RUTH MOMPATI, member of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress.

Q. What are your impressions about the arts among our people and in the ranks of our movement?

A. The people of South Africa have always used art as a form of expression. Their joys and sorrows and their aspirations have been expressed through the arts. In a way, art has been used as a vehicle of education. It has given our people an extra weapon to use not only in analysing the problems of our people but in also combatting these problems. So that art has been used in struggle. Art has been used in the condemnation of the racist regime; it has been used to give the ideals and aspirations of our people, what the people are fighting for. Even in the olden days this is how it was used. It was through cultural activity that men were called out to war. It is through this, then, that we are informing the world today of our struggle, of the support we need from the world and what we hope to achieve for our people.

Q. What about in the ranks of the movement?

A. Here in exile, we use art to educate the people about the struggle. We have our Amandla Cultural Ensemble which has done work in a shorter time than we did in informing people through meetings, seminars and conferences. This is just one of the many such activities in the movement.



COMRADE RUTH MOMPATI: "People must isolate the racists."

Q. What do you think of the preoccupation of some of our artists inside the country with going to perform in western countries? What do you think should be the role of the cultural worker at this point of our struggle?

A. We want to bring about a new South Africa. And we are involved in a struggle for liberation. In trying to bring about a new South Africa, we get support from the people of the world whom we have asked to boycott South Africa, not to go to South Africa, to boycott those artists from South Africa who go out to entertain the world, falsely showing the world that South Africa is a "democratic state", as they say. We have asked for a boycott of South Africa as a whole, that people must isolate the racists. Looking at our artists against this background, we say that they have to be part of the sanctions against South Africa because we can't call upon the world to boycott South Africa and be seen to be going against the very call we're making.

That is why we say the artists have to look at the battle of boycott — the battle of sanctions against the regime — as a very important battle in which they have weapons to use against the regime for the seizure of power. We hope that in the Cultural Workers Conference which will take place this year, our cultural workers are going to look at this question so that they can come out with one unified position for the total isolation of apartheid South Africa.

Q. Do you think there's an emerging South African culture which transcends linguistic and racial obstacles? How does our cultural work fit into this?

A. Naturally, our country and everything about it is developing. We in the ANC have been involved in the struggle not only to change the life of the people, not only to institute a new social order — better health, education, working conditions, etc — but in order also to usher in a new

South African culture that will bring our people together. When the South African regime brought about the process of dividing our people into ethnic groups we who were in the struggle at the time felt that it was too late. It was a century too late. These laws came when our people were already one. Our artists have come together not as ethnic groups but as people who are writers, poets, graphic artists, etc. They have come together also to try and set out what the South Africa of tomorrow should address itself to. It is true that there is a new South Africa on the horizon, but not the type that spawns tribal culture. It heralds a culture that will bring together all the people.

Q. Children raised in exile are a reality of our liberation struggle. How do we educate and socialise them in the richness and diversity of our own South African culture?

A. The children of the movement have always been part of the programme of liberation. This has been done through the organisation of Masupatsela (Pioneers) and through the teachings of the ANC. It is very important for our children to be exposed to the arts of our people. It has been easy to do this now that we have a school, SOMAFCO. When the school first opened most of the arts were not taught as such. The school organised a number of clubs — graphic arts, dance, theatre, music clubs, and so on. It was very interesting to see that after dinner students would rest for about an hour and then they would go to their respective clubs where they would be on their own.

This can also be seen in the work of the creches where culture is a form of education and recreation. This also pertains to the cultural programmes of our students internationally. They perform for the peoples of the countries of the world. Through culture there is this vibrant exchange.

Q. The Freedom Charter says: "All people shall have equal rights to use their own languages and to develop their own folk cultures and customs." The architects of the bantustans have unscrupulously used this expression that Zulus,

be given a different content so that the teaching of our languages should revolutionise the people rather than allow them to fall into backward tribal traps. Languages should be wrested from the forked-tongue bantustan teachers and shaped in such a way that they inform and teach the people about the struggle, and the people's role in this struggle.

Q. There is a growing anti-apartheid activity among artists in Europe and in other countries of the world. What can the ANC Department of Arts and Culture do to co-ordinate all these



Xhosas, Tswanas, Vendas, etc, differ culturally and that each ethnic group has a right to self-determination. What is your opinion?

A. In the ANC we're very clear about the programme of the racist regime. The very creation of the bantustans was to divide our people into ethnic groups with different languages. This also aimed at creating hostility among us. But there was no way they could succeed. Apartheid and exploitation are part of the content of the teachings under the bantustan structures. People should speak their own languages. But the ANC has through the years encouraged that the languages

efforts for a maximum blow against apartheid?

A. Our cultural workers and our cultural department have a very important job to do. Fortunately the department has an ongoing contact with anti-apartheid activists the world over. We feel that the cultural workers and the cultural department should intensify the struggle by taking it to the world in the form of culture. In this way we can capture different audiences: youth, women, artists, poets, singers. We'll be speaking to them in a language they understand. This would be one way of mobilising them and organising them into a strong movement of anti-

apartheid supporters of the struggle for freedom in our country.

Q. What is the role of the artist in the armed struggle. Where is his true point of combat?

A. The role of the artist in the armed struggle is no different from the role of all other activists. But I think the artist has always had a special place. I remember very clearly in 1956 when 156 leaders of the ANC were arrested. It was there where the role of the artist was demonstrated. Every morning when we arrived to take our leaders breakfast, we were met by song by these comrades who were supposed to be in prison, who were living under these terrible conditions. The message of the artists came out saying, "The struggle is my life" and that everybody must join the struggle and fight for a new South Africa. The message warned the regime and said, "Strydom, be careful, you're facing a power that is the people's organisation." This was the message that we brought. Our people, through their art, were able to speak to hundreds of prisoners who were in the Fort, a lot of whom were not politically aware. In that way, a lot of people became sensitised to their role and what they could contribute. We have in mind here great men like Vuyisile Mini, who was murdered in prison.

We have our own artists playing the role of people's historians. In the olden days it was through poets, painters and writers that the heroism of our people was preserved.

This is not only in South Africa. A great cultural worker such as Victor Jara who spoke to and led his

people through his art and kept up their courage in the face of torture and fascism. We have great artists who have left an indelible mark. Benjamin Moloise, a poet, was hanged not so long ago. Thami Mnyele who was one of the victims of the Gaborone Massacre; we have people like Dikobe wa Mogale who is a poet and graphic artist — he is serving ten years on Robben Island for furthering the aims of the ANC. These cultural workers have identified themselves with the struggle of the people. It is significant that the South African regime has recognised art as a weapon of war. After the Gaborone Massacre of

**Dictator
President**



June 14, where Thami Mnyele was one of those murdered in cold blood, Craig Williamson, the regime's policeman who's such a rabid anti-ANC running dog, who thinks he can destroy the organisation, showed as captured "weapons of war" posters depicting the struggle of our people, sufferings of our people, depicting the role that our people are playing in the struggle; paintings of men, women and children. Williamson showed these, these were on exhibition as captured "weapons of war". It is also important to note that in South Africa many of our artists have been

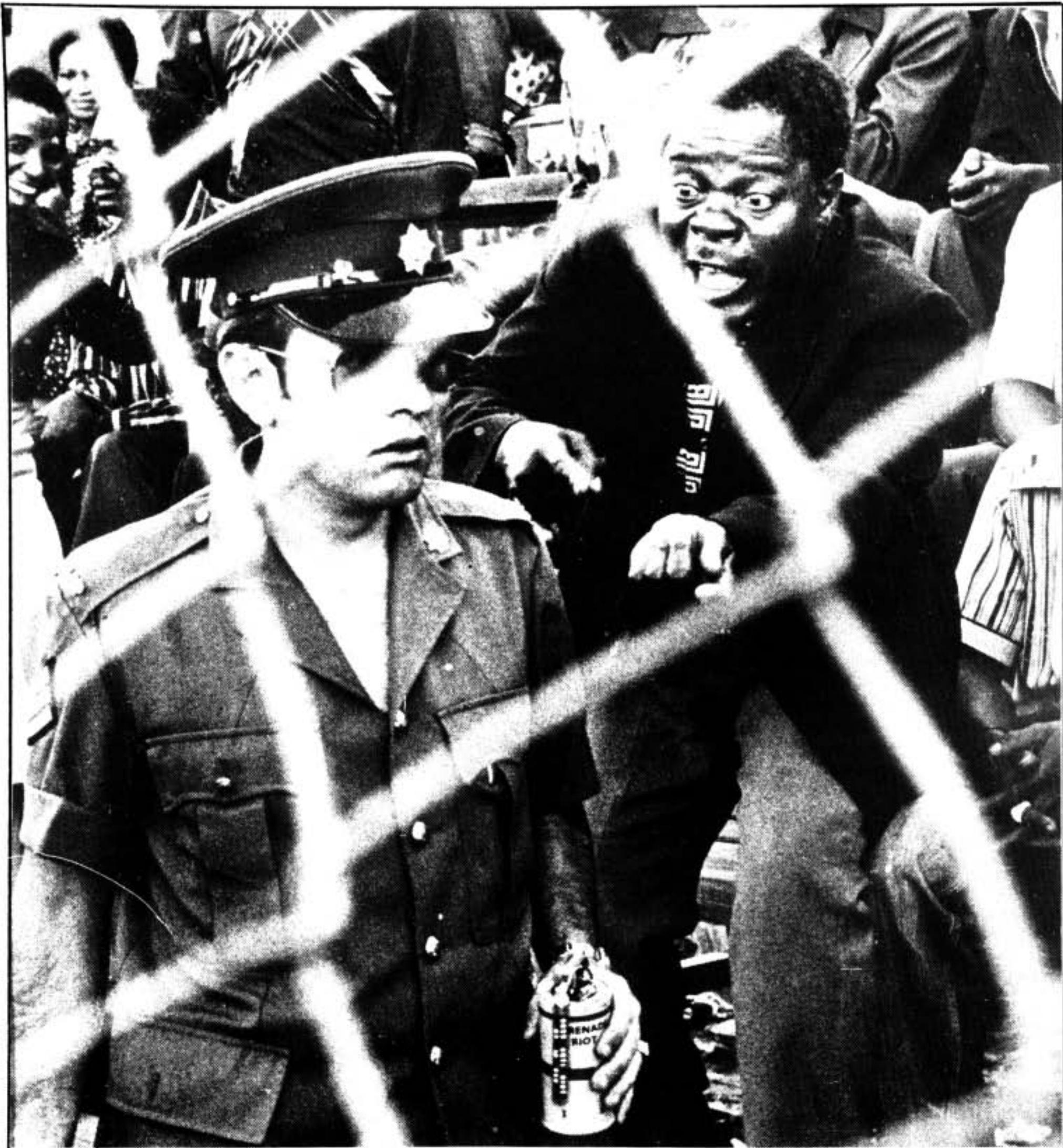
arrested not because they've committed any crimes but because of the socio-political content of their art. People playing Amandla tapes have been sent to prison; people have been arrested for painting on mugs or plates images depicting our struggle and the conditions of our people.

Q. What is your message to the artists inside and outside South Africa about the present situation in our country?

A. My message is very simple. I'd like to commend them first for their role in the struggle. During the past year, we've all seen our struggle moving from height to height.

Our people have been moving forward in force to engage the enemy in the face of death. We say to our artists, Yours is a weapon of war recognised by our people and recognised by the enemy. We say during this present turmoil, we need you to inform the people through your art, firstly, about what is happening and, secondly, what should be done. You know our ideals and expectations. To you I say this is the time to really go to battle with your pens, your books, paints, music — with your everything.

I'd also like to say that this year is of very great significance. Firstly, it is the 25th Anniversary of Umkhonto we Sizwe; the 10th Anniversary of Soweto. It is the 100th Anniversary of May Day. All these are occasions of struggle. It is MK which broke from peaceful struggle to armed struggle. It is Soweto that showed the world that our children were the future nation of South Africa and that they are the fighting force to bring about that future. May Day —



it is our workers who are the backbone of the struggle for freedom.

Therefore, we call upon all our artists through their instruments of war to see to it that these anniversaries are marked in such a way that there can be no doubt. Which means that it is through their art, at home and abroad, that we will read what MK does,

what MK is going to do, what is expected of all South Africans, young and old, in the struggle for freedom. It is through their instruments of war that

the 10th Anniversary of Soweto will be given a fitting commemoration — a commemoration that will put the name of the youth on the map. It is through

their instruments of war that the workers' Centenary will be given the place in our history, the dignity and interpretation which is expected by our people. Lastly, the place of our artists is in the ranks of MK; it is in the ranks of Soweto martyrs; it is in the ranks of martyrs of May Day not only in our country but the world over.