

“This side
of eternity”

An appeal to
the United Nations
Special Committee
on Apartheid on behalf
of Mangaliso Robert
Sobukwe

A. B. NGCOBO

THE STORY OF MY COUNTRY is a story of grief, a story of want, a story of hunger, homelessness, a story of torture, and a story of endless persecution.

There is yet another aspect to it. Its glorious side is the great story of resistance, the story of heroes, past and present—the story of service, of sacrifice, of suffering.

Our struggle against foreign domination started on the very day the white man landed on the shores of South Africa, appropriating to himself vast tracts of land.

The first African victims were the Khoikhoi and the Bathwa people who were renamed Hottentots and Bushmen. They fought heroically until they were overpowered. Then came the Bantu-speaking Africans who, for over a hundred years, fought heroically in defence of shrines of their gods and the ashes of their fathers. They fought on the hills, they fought in the valleys, they fought in forests and on the plains. Yes, they fought everywhere.

This chapter of our history constitutes a glorious episode and affords one mental and psychological relief. Epics have yet to be written about it. When we look back into the corridors of history and see these heroes, we feel proud to have come out of their loins. We are the heirs of that great tradition. How can we not feel proud that we are heirs of great historical figures like Tshaka, Hintsa and Moshoeshoe? What of Cetshwayo, Sekhukhune and Mgungunyane. They stood and faced fearful odds and in true tradition, they chose to die on their feet than to live on their knees. In this galaxy of names, you find the names of Dingane, Mzilikazi and Makhandla. In the great book of history, the pages that print their accounts shall be read with great relish by the generations that follow, for the names of these men have vindicated our very existence and have inspired men to action.

It is not out of romanticism that I have mentioned these great names. I have done so to bring to your notice another name with as great a potential.

I speak of Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe—President of the Pan-Africanist Congress and national leader of our people. He is confined to Robben Island prison under clause 4 of the General Law Amendment Act of 1963. After completing his three year sentence, he was further imprisoned on this notorious island.

He had been earlier found guilty by the mock courts of South Africa of having organised and marshalled the nation into a positive campaign against the Pass Laws—when more than 700,000 people responded. It is the same campaign that led the Broederbond-indoctrinated police to open fire at unarmed people in Sharpeville and Langa, where there were brutal massacres. This is now part of universally known history.

Sobukwe is the only man who has been held and imprisoned without trial under this obnoxious clause. According to the settler Minister of Justice he is held till “this side of eternity”.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, my petition is that this man must be set free.

MANGALISO SOBURWE was born in the Cape Province at the small

A. B. NGCOBO, treasurer-general of the Pan-Africanist congress (South Africa), addressed the U.N. Special Committee on Apartheid on 19th April, 1965. His statement has been curtailed and slightly adapted here.

town of Graaff Reinet on 5th December 1924 of very poor parents. He was the last born in a family of boys.

During his childhood days, he realised and felt the pangs of oppression, exploitation and degradation. He has vivid memories of the days of his youth. He remembers well, his parents waking up hours before dawn and returning long after dusk from heavy tasks they had to undertake to ensure one meal a day for the family. “The only time I used to see my parents in broad daylight was on Sundays” he used to state afterwards. He himself was put to onerous duties during the day. He grew up to be a tough man—a man who could take it. Although he never enjoyed perfect health during his childhood days, upon entering school, he became a very good sportsman. In 1943-4, he held the lawn tennis championship (African) for the whole of South Africa.

His parents could hardly afford to keep him long in school. He took the post-primary teacher's diploma. Before he could complete it, he was down for the greater part of the year with a chest ailment. But when he eventually wrote his examinations, he secured a first place in the first class. This was the beginning of his many firsts in life.

Because of his outstanding achievement, he was offered a scholarship to proceed to high school. He matriculated in the first class and proceeded to Fort Hare University College on another scholarship. His ability and personality quickly earned him the leadership of the Youth League on the campus and presidency of the Students Representative Council.

In 1948, he was acclaimed throughout the country for an end-of-term speech he delivered in his capacity as President of the Students Council. He vividly analysed the situation and as early as that, he urged that positive action be implemented. This speech cost him his scholarship.

As a Youth Leaguer, he had by now become a household name. In December 1949, he piloted the 1949 “Programme of Action” through the Annual Conference of the African National Congress. This programme was militant and for a time generated dynamism within Congress. That year he was elected Secretary-General of the A.N.C. Youth League and became an *ex officio* member of the National Executive of the A.N.C.

In 1952, he participated in the Defiance Campaign—this cost him his teaching job. He could not get employment for a long time—until he was recommended to take up a lectureship in African linguistics at the University of the Witwatersrand.

After the Defiance Campaign, he and many others felt that the militant Programme of 1949 was being sacrificed and compromised on ideological grounds.

At this stage of his life, he wrote prolifically in a newsletter he edited, *The Africanist*. He emerged as the chief protagonist of African nationalism as the only vehicle to a nonracial Africanist democracy on a continental basis. He wrote, “All people who have made Africa their home must adjust themselves to an extent where ‘Africa for the Africans’ suggests no menace to them. Failure to do this would mean that they have not yet accepted Africa as their home.”

Some of his fellow African nationalists with whom he had campaigned at school fell by the wayside. He held his head up and went on.

"We Swallow Pallid Grief and Gape at Black"

LEOPOLDVILLE, CONGO

*We swallow pallid grief and gape at black,
tyrannise the torturers, newly singing
of the terror and the poisoned blood;*

*gather the armies caked hard with blood
where they pulled down the rage of black;
command the children now done singing,*

*to take pistols and tears, squeeze the singing
bullets through the air to hustle blood
from peace, from wounds once only black.*

PAUL THEROUX

The Hindoo Crematorium

MOMBASA, KENYA

*The huge roof on posts crouched
over pits and patient stone, groined
arches stained with soot and greasy
smoke; the assistants squatting*

*on the steps, passing a thin cigarette;
and lush below the fire-pits, arches,
flowers, grass, even trees receiving
the ashes supposedly flushed to the ocean*

*The only movement: me following two
children; whole fistfuls of ribs
they gave me, burned teeth, innocent
gifts, the chalky lumps of jaws;*

*the three of us scooping the cusped
skull-scrap caught in heaps near
the sea on the bunches of flowers;
crunching through the ashes, going among
the bones.*

PAUL THEROUX

At the inaugural Conference of the Pan-Africanist Congress, where he was unanimously elected President, he postulated the basic policy of the P.A.C.

"Politically we stand for government of the Africans, by the Africans and for the Africans, with all those who owe their only loyalty to Africa and accept democratic rule of an African majority being regarded as Africans."

In the same vein, he continued,

"We guarantee no minority rights because we are fighting precisely that group exclusiveness which those who plead for minority rights would like to perpetuate."

He continued,

"It is our view that if we guaranteed individual liberties, we have given the highest guarantee necessary and possible."

This is the sort of man the South African settler authorities incarcerate and hold in prison without trial.

YOUR PETITIONER HAS THE HONOUR to be the last person outside prison to have been with Sobukwe. My sojourn with him in Pretoria Prison for the greater part of two years was a period of learning, which I shall never regret.

To work with him is a pleasure and to serve him is an honour. His presence in prison animated us and boosted our morale.

A humble and unassuming man. Although whilst a lecturer at Witwatersrand University, he could have had a life of comfort, he did not. He led a simple life—travelling third class by train every day.

When he was arraigned before the courts in 1960, he refused to enter a plea, thus refusing to recognise its authority over him. "The law I am charged under is a law made by the white man and administered by him." He refused to associate himself with white man's dirty work. "If the white man wishes to do his dirty work, let him do so, but he must expect no co-operation from me—my hands must be clean of it," he protested.

He was taken from Pretoria to Robben Island and when asked what he felt about it he said stoically, "If you want freedom, you must be prepared to suffer for it".

This man is the conscience of my country—without him we are a people whose conscience is wanting.

It is over five years that he has been in prison. Since 21st March 1960, he has been behind prison bars. He has been in prison the longest period to date for any politico in South Africa.

He has a family—a young courageous wife, Veronica Zodwa, and four children. One girl Thoko (Joy) 12, a boy, Dinilesizwe (sacrifice for the nation) 10—what a prophetic name. Then there are the twins, 8, Dedanizizwe (give us a breather ye nations) and Dalindyabo (creator of plenty).

This is his family and if they were here, they would associate themselves with the prayer of your petitioner that Sobukwe must be released.

The South African Government suspended the "90-day" clause but left clause 4, which affects Sobukwe.

Some people thought the suspension of the "90-day" clause was a sincere manifestation of good will on the part of the South African Government. Why then did they not release Sobukwe—a man who like the "90-day" detainees has never been brought to trial?

How long, O Lord, holy and kind?