

# **A SOUTH AFRICAN REVOLUTION**



**Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe**

(1924 - 1978)

Last year (1985), at the height of his spectacular success as the maker of a mental revolution amongst the Black people of South Africa, Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe was posthumously awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws by the University of Ahmadu Bello, Nigeria, which thus acknowledged his unique role in the Azanian liberation struggle. His own verdict on the Azanian Revolution was to be his last major pronouncement, handed down in the wake of the 1976-77 Soweto Uprising, less than two years before his death on February 27th, 1978.

This pronouncement was made in an interview given to Mats Holmberg, correspondent of Dagens Nyheter, the Swedish daily newspaper. Sobukwe said:

"At Sharpeville we overcame fear of the consequences of disobeying colonial laws... It became respectable for us to go to jail and emerge as what Kwame Nkrumah called 'Prison Graduates'. We thus stripped the White man of that particular weapon against us. Now the White man, in Soweto, had to fall back on his ultimate weapon, the gun. Soweto has been a lesson in overcoming fear of the gun. And now that he relies on the gun, and we too can get the gun, confrontation is inevitable."

When he assumed leadership of the Pan Africanist Congress in 1959, having been closely associated with the leadership of its forerunner, the Africanist Movement, Sobukwe knew that his new onerous responsibilities would involve great sacrifices, the least of which would be abandonment of his secure and prestigious post as lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand, one of the country's most influential institutions of learning.

Although he was too humble a man to proclaim the fact, what Sobukwe talked about to Holmberg was really the crowning moment of his political career, the consummation of a Mental Revolution. As he saw it from the onset, it was the supreme task of the South African liberation movement to overcome a massive inferiority complex amongst the African people, known as 'slave mentality'. To overcome this enemy within, no sacrifice was considered too high, not even the prospect of being mown down with rifles and machine-guns, as in the resultant Sharpeville Massacre of March 1960.

Indeed, Sobukwe and his followers deliberately set out to defy the so-called Whipping Act, a draconian law which had snuffed out the ANC's 1952 "Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign", an all embracing measure under which incitement to break a law, even a traffic law, by way of political protest could be punished with ten strokes of the lash, in addition to three years' imprisonment. For this courageous action, taken in the Positive Action Campaign of 1960, Sobukwe became known as "Defier of the Unde-fiable."

This is how Sobukwe described the coming Mental Revolution in his famous "State of the Nation" speech, delivered at a PAC rally in August, 1959:

"Now for over three hundred years, the White foreign ruling minority has used its power to inculcate in the African a feeling of inferiority. This group has educated the African to accept the status quo of White supremacy and Black inferiority as normal. It is our task to exorcise this slave mentality, and to impart to the African masses that sense of self-reliance that will make them choose 'to starve in freedom rather than have plenty in bondage,' the self-reliance that will make them prefer self-government to the good government preferred by the A.N.C.'s leader."

Apart from the 1960 Positive Action Campaign, and the resultant Sharpeville Massacre, in its various phases the Mental Revolution touched off the massive student demonstrations of the early Seventies, inspired by the advent of the PAC-related Black Consciousness Movement; ignited wave upon wave of Black workers' strikes in the mid-Seventies; and launched both the 1976-77 Soweto Uprising and the present revolutionary upheavals in South Africa. In the past 25 years that revolution has cost the lives of not less than 3,000 fallen patriots; more than 1,000 in the last fifteen months alone, mown down by the police all too often in cold blood.

Sobukwe had foreseen it all, as when he said on the eve of Sharpeville:

"This is not a game. The White rulers are going to be extremely ruthless. But we must meet their hysterical brutality with calm, iron determination. We are fighting for the noblest cause on earth, the liberation of mankind. They are fighting to entrench an outworn, anachronistic and vile system of oppression. We represent progress; they represent decadence. We represent the fresh fragrance of flowers in bloom; they

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# MANGALISO SOBUKWE

## SPEAKERS

\*PAN AFRICANIST CONGRESS  
OF AZANIA

\*BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS  
MOVEMENT OF AZANIA

\*PALESTINIAN LIBERATION  
ORGANISATION.

\*MARCH 21st COMMITTEE

\*FBR OF EL SALVADOR

\*SOLIDARITY MESSAGES  
WELCOME.

## Commemoration

27 February, 1986 at 7.30 p.m.



AFRICA CENTRE  
38 King Street  
London WC2

Tube:Covent Garden, Leicester Sq.

represent the rancid smell of decaying vegetation... We have history on our side. We shall win ! "

The PAC had arrived, and so did, eventually, the numerous allied organisations of the Black Consciousness Movement. As early as 1963, at its inception, the Organisation of African Unity granted recognition to the PAC as a significant African Liberation Movement; subsequently the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement followed suit. Despite a prolonged conspiracy of silence maintained by the White South African correspondents of the liberal international press, details indicating the PAC origins of the current struggles in South Africa have begun to emerge through at least two major court cases.

In Britain a total blackout was maintained on the death sentences imposed by the Supreme Court in Pretoria on six Azanian patriots, including a girl, who were found guilty at a trial connected with the killing of a collaborator in Sebokeng township, Sharpeville. The collaborator, described as the deputy mayor of Sharpeville, was the very first casualty from the enemy camp in the current unrest when it broke out in September, 1984, in the Vaal Triangle, a well known PAC Transvaal stronghold.

No voice of protest was raised here when the six death sentences were imposed on December 12, 1985, partly because the international press had ignored the trial itself. But the African Group at the United Nations issued a statement strongly condemning the sentences, and appealed "to the international community and people of conscience to denounce (them) most vehemently." On the same day, by an uncanny coincidence, five other Azanian patriots were convicted by a Benoni court in connection with the continuing unrest. The statement by the United Nations African Group went on:

Also on December 12th, 1985, a racist court in Benoni sentenced five alleged members of the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania to a total of 33 years for 'furthering the aims and objectives of the PAC and supplying weapons and equipment to the people'. Two of those sentenced are critically ill due to injuries inflicted upon them by the regime's security police. Jan Shoba, due to the torture, has developed a blood clot and was actually sentenced in absentia. Michael Gqamana has two broken ribs and other internal injuries."

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system in South Africa, a system condemned by the United Nations as a crime against humanity, became common place since the Sixties. By 1977, those who had gone to the gallows numbered 68 PAC activists, three ANC patriots and a White liberal active protester; and of course there have been others on Death Row since then. The six Azanian patriots sentenced to death on December 12, 1985, were Mojalefa Reginald Sefatsa, Oupa Moses Diniso, Reid Malebo Mokoena, Theresa Ramashamula, Duma Joshua Khumalo and Francis Don Mokgesi.

Two others involved in the same trial were sentenced to eight years each. They were Motseki Motsiri and Gideon Mokone. Also sentenced to eight years imprisonment, in the Benoni trial, was Jan Shoba, the man with the blood clot who was tried in absentia. His compatriots, Mlandeni Ketye, Elby July and Bonise Nkabinde, were sentenced to seven years each. The fifth man, Michael Gqamana, who suffered two broken ribs and other internal injuries, was sentenced to three-and-half years. All of them had been tortured by the police while held incommunicado in indefinite detention.

Referring to the six Azanian patriots sentenced to death on the same day, the statement issued by the United Nations African Group (an OAU Press Release), commented:

"The alleged offence took place at the start of the current unrest in apartheid South Africa which began in the Vaal Triangle following the imposition by the racist regime of the so-called new constitution, which has been declared 'null and void' by the United Nations Security Council. The eight patriots, arrested in September 1984, were held for 15 months without bail, and were subjected to severe torture. Since September 1984, the racist regime has killed more than 1,000 Africans."

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The two trials were of course a sequel to the Eighties Uprising, the first such cases to be heard in the courts. At the time of the outbreak in the Sharpeville area early in September, 1984, Allister Sparks prepared an end-of-the-week report for The Observer, London, dated September 9. In an otherwise predictably biased account which falsely gave credit to the African National Congress for the 1960 Positive Action Campaign, the liberal reporter wrote of the September 1984 confrontation:

"A crowd of more than 1,000 black residents confronted a task force of police in five Caspir armoured cars across a 200 yd stretch of litter-strewn no-man's land at the entrance to Sharpeville. For a time, it looked like an action replay of that scene in 1960 when, after confronting one another like that for several hours, the police in two Saracen armoured cars suddenly panicked and opened fire.

The tension was broken as a priest stepped forward from the crowd bearing a white flag and walked slowly towards the big Caspirs. He brought a message that the people of the ravaged township wanted to negotiate on the issue of rent increases, which had been the match to set off the powder-keg of black resentment. Some parleying took place between White officials and a committee elected by the crowd. No agreement was reached, but it was enough to defuse the situation and the crowd dispersed.

Next day four Cabinet Ministers visited Sharpeville and the other riot-torn townships. They did not meet the committee elected by the Sharpeville crowd or the leaders of any other protest groups. Instead they had lengthy talks with a body called Lekoa Town Council, whose members are held in open contempt by the residents and who were the chief targets of their anger during the rioting. The council's chairman (also known as mayor), Esau Mahlatsi, fled for his life and was only found two days later. His deputy, Sam Dlamini, was hacked to death on his front doorstep. The mob shove his body into a car and set it alight."

Sobukwe had warned about such a development, too. Recording the warning in retrospect, one of our historians wrote in the March 1965 issue of Africa and the World, with reference to the Fifties: "It was a decade of decision, capable of producing big men with big ideas. As Dicken might have put it, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us. It was for men with a sense of history and a burning sense of mission to make the most of it. 'We say to waverers and fence-sitters choose now, tomorrow may be too late,' Sobukwe was wont to say. 'Choose now, because very soon we shall be saying with biblical simplicity that he who is not with us is against us.'"

Executions of political offenders against the oppressive

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## NON-COLLABORATION —IN A NUTSHELL

While no liberation movement can rightly claim control over the struggles being waged so fiercely by the oppressed people in Azania today, the Pan-Africanist Congress together with allied organisations of the Black Consciousness Movement can take special pride in the overwhelming triumph of their steadfast policy of non-collaboration with — and enforced boycott of — the institutions of apartheid.

PAC was the first mass organisation to brand and castigate as collaborators all Africans serving in what it denounced as "Dummy Institutions". From its inception in 1959, having broken away in 1958 from the African National Congress for this reason, the PAC embarked upon a course of strict and consistent implementation of the famous 1949 Programme of Action, which demanded "the right of direct representation in all the governing bodies of the country", and called for "the abolition of all differential bodies specially created for Africans".

This Programme of Action was conceived and sponsored at the 1949 ANC annual conference by the Africanists (future founders of the PAC), then operating within the ANC, first through the ANC Youth League and finally through the Africanist Movement. In tones of emerging militant African Nationalism, its preamble declared that the programme was inspired by a desire on the part of the African people to achieve national freedom, and went on:

"By National Freedom we mean freedom from White domination and the attainment of political independence. This implies the rejection of the conception of segregation, apartheid, trusteeship, or White leadership, which are all in one way or another motivated by the idea of White domination or domination of the Whites over the Blacks. Like all other people, the African people claim the right of self-determination".

Today it is unquestionably the philosophy of non-collaborationism which informs and dominates all the struggles of the people in Azania. The programme was first actively launched by PAC in 1960, in a campaign which resulted in the notorious Sharpeville Massacre. It was subsequently pursued relentlessly by BCM organisations from 1968 onwards. In its various phases it touched off the massive student demonstrations of the early Seventies, ignited wave upon wave of workers' strikes in the mid-Seventies, and launched both the 1976-77 Soweto Uprising and the present revolutionary upheavals, accelerating since late 1984.

The struggle continues.

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