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VOICES FROM THE DOCK



**South African
political trials: 1976-1979**

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INTRODUCTION

These "voices" from the dock are those of South Africans charged with various offences under "public security" and other laws, who made statements at the end of their trials. The statements have been taken from a book *The Wheels Turn - South African Political Trials: 1976-1979* by Glenn Moss. This book was first published in South Africa and is to be reprinted by the Southern African Information Programme of the International University Exchange Fund.

Details of the charges laid against each of those whose statements are reprinted in this booklet, of the events that led to the trials and of the trials themselves can be found in *The Wheels Turn*.

The statements are being reprinted by themselves because they provide a vivid insight into why ever increasing numbers of black South Africans are joining the military wing of the struggle for liberation in that country. Each of them spells out their rejection of the detested system of apartheid and gives a vivid, personal aspect to the oppression of today's South Africa. Together, the statements are an unassailable argument why change must come to South Africa and why militant struggle is the only way to bring about that change.

The statements also, however, provide ground for hope - not hope that a violent, bitter struggle can be avoided, but hope for what will come after the struggle has been won. Even though they have been driven to the extremity of using force, these South Africans leave their listeners in no doubt about what they are fighting for - a future in South Africa in which all South Africans will live without repression or exploitation of any group by another. Their voices are sometimes bitter - but this bitterness has not distorted their vision of what they are fighting for, which is extraordinary in view of what the society and now the society's system of "justice" has meted out to them.

There is finally, no regret or remorse to be heard in these voices; there is rather heroic acceptance of the role they are playing in the struggle even though the personal cost has been so high.

For after the statements had been made, each of the accused was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. The sentences were (as effective sentences):

Mosima Sexwale	18 years	Isaac Dontry Seko	12 years
Naledi Tsiki	14 years	Stanley Nkosi	10 years
Martin Ramokgadi	7 years	Petrus Mothlanthe	10 years

(The ages of each of the accused, given after their names, are their ages at the times of their trials).

Copies of *The Wheels Turn - South African Political Trials: 1976-1979* by Glenn Moss and further copies of *Voices from the Dock* can be obtained from:

The International University Exchange Fund
P.O. Box 108 1211 Geneva 24 Switzerland or Parnell House 25 Wilton Road London SW1

MOSIMA SEXWALE

Age 25

Sentence 18 years

It is more than a year since I was first brought to court to stand trial on the charges which have been brought against me. I have until now said nothing for I was not prepared to deny that I was a member of the ANC nor was I prepared to answer questions in court about the ANC or about comrades who have not been arrested. What I admitted during the trial was in fact the truth and what I denied was in fact false. I have not tried to escape responsibility for anything that I did; but now that I have been convicted — and I knew from the beginning that I would be convicted — I want to explain my actions so that you, who must sentence me, should understand why I chose to join the struggle for the freedom of my people.

It is necessary that I should begin by explaining to you my background and the circumstances in which I grew up for that more than anything else accounts for my presence in court today. I was born in Soweto on 5th March, 1953, the third child in a family of six children. During most of my childhood, the sole breadwinner in our family was my father. He had fought for his country and his ideals, during World War II, and when the peace returned he was employed as a clerk in the Non-European Section of the Johannesburg General Hospital. He has continued in this position up to this day.

My mother was willing and able to work and indeed needed to work in order to supplement my father's meagre income. However, she had been born in Pietersburg and had come to live in the "prescribed area" of Johannesburg only after she had married my father. As a result, she was not able to obtain the required permission from the authorities to work in Johannesburg, and for about 15 years she was unable to take up employment.

At about the time when I joined my two elder brothers at High School, my uncle passed away and my father had to take over his family responsibility. This meant another six children in the family, and a doubling of the family's financial problems. At about this time, my mother finally received permission to work in Johannesburg, and this relieved the desperate situation to some extent.

I do not intend to suggest by what I have said that I had a childhood which was deprived in relation to those with whom I grew up. On the contrary, I found that my childhood friends were in much the same sort of situation as I was. We all lived in poverty and we were all subjected to the humiliations which the Whites imposed upon the Blacks. We lived in the same typical "matchbox" houses; we were continually aware that there was not enough

money available to meet our needs for food, clothing and education; and when we went into town and saw the relative luxury in which White people lived, this made an indelible impression on our young minds. In fact, there was one respect in which, in comparison with some of my friends, I was privileged; my parents laid great store by education and made considerable sacrifices so that their children could receive a proper schooling. They did this despite the financial problems involved — and there were real financial problems because wages were low and schooling for Black children was not free, and school uniforms and books added a further financial burden.

My school years were important and I would like to talk about them. After the years of elementary schooling, I started my primary school education at a Catholic school in Phomolong. The school was the direct responsibility of the Roman Catholic Mission, and had its own syllabus and curriculum which was different from that of the unpopular Bantu Education Department. The education was of the best, and here I studied from Standard I to the end of primary education in Standard VI.

Looking back, I now see that it was during my primary school years that the bare facts concerning the realities of South African society and its discrepancies began to unfold before me. I remember clearly having to go to school without breakfast because my family could not afford it. The meal of the day was in the evening, and that meal was usually all I had to eat until the next morning. I remember, too, a period in the early 1960's when there was a great deal of political tension, and we often used to encounter armed police in Soweto. We saw slogans painted on walls — I remember particularly vividly a slogan reading "Release Nelson Mandela and Others" painted on the walls of a building I passed each day on my way to school. I remember the humiliation to which my parents were subjected by Whites in shops and in other places where we encountered them and I remember the poverty.

All these things had their influence on my young mind then, and by the time I went to Orlando West High School I was already beginning to question the injustice of the society in which we lived, and to ask why nothing was being done to change it. In this too, I was not unusual. Throughout the universities and high schools of South Africa, the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) and its subsequent high school equivalent, the South African Students' Movement (SASM), were very active in conducting meetings to preach the philosophy of Black

consciousness. The preaching fell on fertile ground; very many of us felt the need for Blacks to have a sense of pride in themselves, to abandon old feelings of inferiority, and to stand together. This is really what SASO and SASM stood for, and I became an active participant in preaching this philosophy and selling the publications which promoted it.

Like other members, I attended discussions, participated in meetings and cultural activities, read books with others, and investigated, examined and discussed the situation in South Africa. We passed resolutions, issued statements, and took decisions about peaceful action for improving the position of the Black man in South Africa.

I rapidly appreciated, however, that this activity was all very well, but these were only student organisations. Our efforts were small and ineffective and had no influence on Government policy. I realised that it was only political organisations which would hope to play a part in changing the situation. But these had been banned and silenced. Existing organisations were tolerated either because they operated within the restrictive limits of the unacceptable "Bantustan policy", or because they had little popular support. It was clear to me that as an organisation like the Black Peoples' Convention grew, so it would be increasingly harassed, until it would be finally closed down by the Government — as indeed happened in the recent Black October situation.

The oldest and largest political organisation was the African National Congress. There were many former members living in the townships and the ANC was a common topic of discussion. I talked to former members, read whatever literature I could lay my hands on, and generally informed myself about its ideals and activities. The ideals appealed to me as authentic, rational and highly democratic.

I learnt, too, of the history of the ANC and its associated organisations. I learnt of its formation in 1912 as an organisation working for a peaceful solution to the problems of the African people via parliamentary channels. I learnt how these channels had been progressively closed, with the result that the ANC turned to other peaceful methods such as strikes, boycotts and stayaways, all linked with proposals and invitations that the Government meet ANC leaders to discuss the problems and demands of the Black people. I learnt that these proposals for talks had been summarily rejected out of hand; that the ANC escalated its efforts; and that the Government replied to these further peaceful efforts with violence and by banning the Organisation. I learnt that this, in turn, led to the end of the ANC's non-violent policy and to the decision in 1961 to turn to the use of force. I sympathised with this decision: I felt that the Black people could not simply sit back and fold their hands — and that one could not meet the Government's machine guns with empty hands. It seemed to me that the ANC had been forced into the situation where it had no alternative.

And so, when I left high school to go to the Swaziland campus of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, I was already a passive but firm supporter of the African National Congress. I believed that the methods it had chosen could not be questioned, because there was no alternative: the non-violent struggle seemed to me a relic of the past, a myth which was suicidal in the 1960's and 1970's. And I supported the policy as set out in the Freedom Charter: a democratic South Africa, belonging to all its people, Black and White — a society in which all, and not just the select few, participated in deciding how the country was to be run.

While I was a student in Swaziland, I met exiled members of the ANC and my views were confirmed. I observed the ever increasing unemployment amongst Blacks in South Africa; the poverty and degradation in which they lived and the refusal of the Whites who ruled us, to allow Blacks a fair share in the wealth of the country. I saw how immigrants were welcomed and given jobs from which we as Blacks were excluded and I saw and witnessed the suffering of my people. And so it was that I decided to join the ANC, and offer it my services.

I did this not for the hope of personal gain or glory, or in a casual manner without thinking about the consequences. I was, and am, essentially a peaceful person — but I felt myself driven to this position, feeling that to counter the violence meted out against us, we were forced to defend ourselves: there was no option.

Your Lordship has heard much of the history of what followed my decision, and I do not intend to elaborate on that. However, I do wish to correct certain false impressions which may have been created by some witnesses.

It is true that I was trained in the use of weapons and explosives. The basis of my training was in sabotage, which was to be aimed at institutions and not people. I did not wish to add unnecessarily to the grievous loss of human life that had already been incurred. In addition, it was necessary for us to be trained in order that we could defend ourselves if attacked. And finally, we wished to build up a core of trained men who would be able to lead others should guerilla warfare commence.

It has been suggested that our aim was to annihilate the White people of this country. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is, I believe, precisely this sort of racial thinking that has led our country into its present disastrous position of racial disharmony and hatred. It is precisely this kind of racial thinking that I wished to fight. The ANC — in association with the alliance it has formed with people from all walks of life and representing all sections of the population — is a national liberation movement committed to the liberation of all the people of South Africa, Black and White, from racial fear, hatred and oppression. The Freedom Charter, which after more than twenty years is still the fundamental policy document of the ANC, puts forward the ideal of a democratic South Africa, for all its people. We believe, and I believe, that the Black people cannot be passive onlookers in their own country. We want to be active participants in shaping the face and course of direction of South Africa.

My Lord, these are the reasons why I find myself in the dock today. When I joined the ANC I realised that the struggle for freedom would be difficult and would involve sacrifices. I was and I am willing to make those sacrifices. I am married and have one child, and would like nothing more than to have more children, and to live with my wife and children with all the people in this country. One day that may be possible, if not for me, then at least for my brothers.

I appreciate the seriousness of my actions and accept whatever sentence may be imposed on me. That is the sacrifice which I must make and am willing to make for my ideals. There is no doubt in my mind, that these ideals will triumph: the tragedy is that it seems possible that there will be continued conflict and resultant bitterness, before those ideals are achieved. As I look back, I cannot honestly say that I believe the decisions I took, which led me to this position, were wrong: what I regret most, was that it was necessary and inevitable that those decisions had to be taken.

NALEDI TSIKI

Age 22

Sentence 14 years

My Lord, I also want to explain why I am in the position in which I find myself today. I am 22 years old, having been born in Johannesburg on the 11th December 1955.

I lived with my parents until I was about six years old when I left for Lesotho, where I lived with my grandparents. My grandparents were basically peasants. They relied mainly on the food they produced from the fields. My father would also send us money when he was able to do so. Poverty was a permanent way of my childhood. I would spend my school holidays with my parents in Soweto.

From 1971 to 1973 I did my junior secondary schooling at St Agnes High School in Lesotho. I had previously just known that my life as a black person in South Africa was far from comfortable, but it was during this period that my political outlook really developed. I had contact with various groups of people, some of whom were white. They did not have the same attitude towards me as the white people I came across in South Africa.

It was during that stage that I read more about the struggle our people had waged against oppression in South Africa. I read about the activities of the ANC from its formation in 1912 up to the time it was banned in 1961. I read and heard about the activities of one of the outstanding leaders of the ANC, Chief Albert Luthuli. I also read the book he had written, "Let My People Go".

Without enumerating all the material which I had read, I simply want to tell the court that from the information I got: The African National Congress for years fought for the freedom of the black people, without the use of any type of violence. Deputations, delegations, and peaceful demonstrations were the order of the day. That is to say, My Lord, our people used passive resistance to release themselves from the yoke of oppression. But most unfortunately, My Lord, this meekness was met in most cases with overwhelming shows of strength and violence by the powers that be. Despite these factors, our people led by the ANC kept on waging a non-violent struggle. Indeed, the ANC spent most of its life-time engaged in the strategy of non-violence, until it was forcibly sent underground by those who have the power to do so.

It was with this history in mind that in 1974 I went to attend school at Morris Isaacson High School in Soweto. The school like other schools for blacks in South Africa, had very poor facilities. The dilapidated building hardly had any doors or window panes, not to speak of the

inadequate classrooms. In a school as big as that, there were absolutely no laboratories for science students, of whom I was one, and neither was there what could be called a library in the true sense of the word. That made it very difficult for most students to study and pass their exams, coupled with the fact that we had to buy our own textbooks which most could hardly afford.

My Lord, one needs only travel to the nearest white school from Soweto to see the adequate studying facilities, not to mention the almost luxurious recreational facilities which are but a mere dream to a black student.

As a young man, I would have liked to advance myself so that I could secure myself a desirable future. But the question I had to ask myself was what were the prospects? This is the question that brings about frustration bordering on desperation to a great majority of young blacks. That was so in my case because I knew that I could not be what I really wanted to be if in the opinion of the powers that be, such an occupation was unfit for blacks. That is to say if I wanted to be a pilot, having the necessary intelligence and ability, I still needed a further feature before I could qualify. That is, My Lord, that in order to be a pilot I would have to be a white man. I could not be a manager of a firm which employed whites, and neither could I be in charge of a hospital regardless of my qualifications. Like Sgt Khoza, who told the Court that he had to take instructions from Const Brits, my colour imposed a ceiling on my progress. And, My Lord, without wishing to be offensive to the Court, I should frankly say that I know of no black judge in South Africa. I could not hold any of those positions, for the sole reason of the colour of my skin.

To put it in a nutshell, there were hardly any meaningful opportunities for a young black man in this country, although the chances are there or could be created.

My Lord, I should also let the Court know that economic and social conditions of the blacks in this country are such that no normal person or right thinking person could tolerate them. In Soweto where I lived, I have seen suffering caused by hunger and starvation. I have seen children die because of malnutrition. I have seen my people slaughter one another so as to get bread in order to survive. In my own family I have seen my brothers and uncles going endlessly to town in a fruitless search for work. I have seen my own father struggle to bring us up. In as far as housing is concerned, one need only look at Alexandra Township, crime ridden, foul smelling with the long forgotten walks

being used for sanitary purposes. It hardly compares with the posh white suburb, Kew, just 300 metres away. These things have not passed unobserved in my mind.

My Lord, it is a well known fact that South Africa is a very wealthy country. I came to realise that the blacks were to produce the wealth of this country, not for their own benefit, but primarily for the benefit of the white people. The vast plantations of fruit in this country are planted and tended by the black people and yet it is the white people who enjoy it while blacks cannot afford to buy it. The gold that has made this country is mined by us, and yet it is the white people who pocket the cash. The towering buildings that make the beautiful cities have been built by our hands, yet we may not live in them. We blacks have been reduced to hewers of wood and drawers of water. All the luxuries are destined for the whites. This situation has directly affected me as a black man.

Eventually, My Lord, I came to believe that the hardships we suffered were caused by the system of apartheid. I found it to be a system which ensures the security of the white people by oppressing the black people. A system which makes an inferior being and a servant of one man, and a master of another man, simply because one is black and the other is white. A system which makes it punishable by law for two people of different skin pigments to be lovers, least the inferior defiles the superior.

I found it vital as a young black man to relieve my people of apartheid.

The question that became prime in my mind was how to bring about change such as would ensure the social, economic and political security of both blacks and whites in this country. That is, how could genuine democracy be achieved in South Africa?

During my school days I knew that there were organisations like SASO, SASM, BPC, and others. I knew that they were merely doing what the ANC had done before it was banned. They would one day suffer the same fate of banning, which indeed did happen. It also became clear to me that whoever stood and publicly opposed the government policies from a position not created by the government itself, would be detained, banned, jailed, or forced into exile. This was certainly not going to change the situation in this country. So I found it worthless to join any of those organisations — I did not want to go to jail for merely talking.

It was after a great deal of personal experience, observation, reading, and thought that it seemed to me that one could not work for meaningful change in this country through legal non-violent means.

At this stage I knew what I wanted. I had read the wording of the Freedom Charter of the ANC. I found that the sentiments expressed therein were in complete harmony with my own feelings. The type of limited violence the ANC had decided to embark on seemed to me the only way out of that political impasse.

I subsequently joined the ANC in December 1975 when I left the country. I should also mention that at the time I left, there was a great need for a sense of discipline and responsibility so as to control the bursting anger of the black youth and to avoid terrorism in the true sense of the word.

I was therefore trained to be in a position to defend the unarmed should the need arise, and to train others to be in

a position to defend themselves. I was taught methods of sabotage against installations, and I was trained to be competent in waging warfare should the need to fight arise. One thing was paramount in what I was taught: that the lives of innocent civilians, of whatever colour, should not be placed in jeopardy.

At this stage, My Lord, I would like to explain the incident which occurred at Dikgale. The incident was firstly intended to show specifically the police and the army how far we could penetrate if we were forced to do so and what our capabilities were. The Court has already heard of how the railway was damaged and how trains passed over the damage. To a person who lacks the necessary technical know-how this may seem to have been the result of a miscalculation, but this is not so. In the two instances in which explosions occurred, the charges were placed in such a way that no substantial damage should result. What determines the effectiveness of the charge is not just the quantity and quality of the charge itself, but also the manner in which the charge is placed in relation to the target. I should tell the Court that 400 grams of TNT explosive charge are enough to cut the rail and cause derailment if the charge is placed on the rail itself, ie. on the side of the rail. But if the same charge is placed directly under the rail it would hardly have any effect on the rail itself, but would just dig a crater. In this case the charge used was stronger than ordinary TNT, but it was not only placed under the rail but was in fact dug into the ground, hardly touching the rail itself. In the other instance, the sleeper was damaged, but as your Lordship has heard, this created no problems for passing trains.

The other charge did not explode because the contact switch was deliberately insulated. In addition, it was deliberately not placed on the rail. It did not fall off the rail by chance and was not knocked off the rail as the colonel speculated might have been the case.

Despite what has been done to my people at Sharpeville, Soweto, and several other places, my reaction has not been that of emotionalism. It would be unacceptable to me to go out and shoot children and their unsuspecting parents simply because they are white. That would be sheer terrorism, to which both I and the organisations to which I belong are opposed.

The question of armed struggle seemed to me to be unavoidable and regrettably the only way out as far as I was concerned. That was so because of the uncompromising attitude of the people who governed us. I will never cease to admire the courage of those South Africans who were prepared to take up arms to rid themselves of unwanted British imperialism.

In conclusion, My Lord, I should like to emphasise that I would have loved to live with my people and my family. I now leave a young wife, my ailing mother, my struggling father and my beloved brothers and sisters. This is not because I so chose, but because I had a duty towards my people.

Last, but not least, I wish to make clear to the Court that what I did, I did with my eyes open. By so doing, I was merely trying to make my contribution towards a free and democratic South Africa, free of racism, humiliation and exploitation, a South Africa belonging to all who live in it, regardless of race, colour or creed. To this ideal I have given myself and whatever the consequences I accept them.

MARTIN RAMOKGADI

Age 67

Sentence 7 years

My Lord, I wish to make my views quite clear. Firstly I must tell Your Lordship that I shall not blame you for the sentence which you are about to impose upon me, for I know that you are innocent and you must merely apply the law as instructed by the lawmaker. I also do not blame those unfortunate people who gave evidence against me. I know how they suffer under Section 6 detention. There is no-one who has undergone that detention and who has not told lies as a result. I do not wish to describe the conditions but I can only say that there is no hell worse than that.

I myself told lies against innocent people in the statement that I made to the police while under Section 6 detention. Some of the charges against me were falsely framed and some of the evidence far-fetched and untrue.

Politically I have many grievances against the Nationalist Government but not against the Whites as such. The Nationalist Government has made it clear that no Black man shall enjoy the White man's green pastures. The Government has stripped the Black man of all his possessions, and introduced a reign of terror against him.

I was once a landlord but my property was taken and my business was shattered when . . . (inaudible), for Black people was abolished. We have been forced to move to the wilderness called Bantustans where there are no industries. People starve and malnutrition is part of life. In the townships people are arrested daily for passes. Doors are kicked open in the middle of the night and generally the police show no respect for family life. Education is inferior and wages are low. It is in fact a sin to be a Black man in South Africa. The Afrikaner were once oppressed by the British and they rightly through armed struggle liberated themselves from British imperialism. In 1933 Mr C.R. Swart said in Parliament one day the wheel will turn in our favour. Indeed in 1948 it turned in favour of the Afrikaner, and I say before Your Lordship that one day the wheel will turn in favour of the Black man. I am a Christian and my Christian conviction is one of love towards my fellow brethren irrespective of race, colour or creed. As I am totally opposed to oppression I have no reason not to support the liberation movements in South Africa. Right shall prevail.

ISAAC DONTRY SEKO

Age 27

Sentence 12 years

"Up to the time of the commencement of the unrest in Soweto in June last year (1976), I had never been a member or supporter of any political organisation. I had taken no direct or indirect interest in Black or White politics

I don't wish to belabour unnecessarily the impact which the Soweto unrest made upon me As I saw the situation with my own eyes, the police attacked, shot, killed, wounded and seriously injured many scores of young Black people, mainly school children who were involved in nothing more than peaceful protests This is how the unrest began. After the children were dealt with by the police in this brutal fashion, there was a wave of bitterness and hatred which spread through Soweto like wildfire against the police and the persons on whose instructions they were acting In fact, war broke out in Soweto.

There were calls and demands made upon me to join and help the students by taking part in attacks on buildings, premises and the like. I can truthfully say that I tried to resist these calls. I had every sympathy for the students and I had a complete loathing for the police

I became more and more depressed and I decided that the best way out for me was to speak to Mr Craig and to ask him to transfer me to a place outside Johannesburg. There was nothing sinister in my asking for a transfer. It was the way in which I could save my face and relieve me from the heavy mental burden which I had to carry every day. M'Lord, you don't know what it is like to know and believe that you should be taking part in actions to help your people and yet to know and believe that in doing so every odd is against you. I tried to take the easy way out, that was to get a transfer but it did not work.

During September and October 1976, I was still working at De Beers. I was becoming more and more depressed with life in general and life in Soweto in particular. It was like living in a prison which was a battle ground. It was a relief to get away from it during the day to go to work and it was hell to go back there at night.

The last straw, as far as I was concerned happened on

the 24th October 1976. I attended a mass funeral which was being held for a young black man who had died whilst in detention by the security police. His name was Jacob Mashobane. Hundreds had gathered around the grave-side where his coffin had been laid and even as the gravel and soil was filling it up amidst the singing of a hymn, several cars drove up, the vigilantes of the maintenance of law and order again, I have no doubt, acting under the instructions from their "bosses" alighted from these cars and triggers were pulled. People scattered, running for dear life whilst others were brought down lifeless, some dead, some wounded. Those who managed to scale the cemetery fence were gunned down by a contingent that had stationed itself outside the cemetery.

When the crowd had scattered, myself and a few remaining ones were forced at gunpoint to carry the dead and injured into cars and vans that were nearby. I remember carrying a badly wounded young boy of about 15 years old. I asked him for his name and address so that I could get in touch with his parents to tell them about his predicament. All he could say was that he was thirsty. I never heard his name or address as he spoke no more. The funeral happened on the 24th October. This really was the last straw.

After this funeral I went to work on the Monday. I left work that morning and never returned. I decided to commit myself fully to the cause of the Black people

I have placed all these facts before this court honestly so as to enable this court to sentence me properly. If I were to say that I am ashamed of what I have done I would not be telling the truth. If I were to be asked whether I would do this again, I would not know how to answer that statement truthfully today. I have been in detention for a long time, I have suffered the shock and anguish of losing a limb

There are literally millions of young Black people who today are being driven to believe that the only basis of bargaining with the authorities is on the basis of an eye for an eye. Unless the outside attitude of White people changes, these millions will continue to believe this"

STANLEY NKOSI

Age 28

Sentence 10 years

Nkosi pointed out that because he had wanted to live the life of a full man, with rights and duties to both himself and humanity, he now stood on the threshold of prison. Tracing the events that led up to his active support of the ANC, Nkosi told the court that his father "struggled making a living as a tailor to provide for seven of us and to see us through school. Thus when I matriculated in 1967 I was forced to seek employment, both to ease the burden shouldered by my father and to provide for myself to further my studies. After four years working I enrolled with Unizul in 1972 and obtained a B. Proc in 1975.

I grew up in the belief in law and justice. I qualified myself to work within the framework of the law, I read about justice and the law.

Unfortunately the fine words and sentiments about law and justice did not coincide with reality. It is not necessary for me to set out the vast body of laws and regulations which control and restrict the life of the Black man. I was daily aware of the "indignities" imposed on my by these laws and those entrusted with their execution. It is interesting to note that even as a lawyer I was expected to lead a different life from other lawyers. Just at the front entrance of this very court, which is supposed to be for all there is a sign that that entrance is for "whites only".

By birth I'm a citizen of this country, but today I'm expected to owe allegiance to some other "country" within this country; a country I've never seen. I once believed that I had a place to call home. My grandfather had a small farm, but that farm was taken away from him by government decree and he was resettled in a township.

This is an abject state of existence of the Black man and I cannot escape. The "white" ruling regime systematically pursues policies of apartheid, separation and discrimination based on colour for the sole purposes of keeping the black people in a perpetual state of subjugation. Armed with an octopus of brutal, racial laws to exclude the black people from freely and meaningfully participating in the economic, political and social activities of this country. Such a society is UNJUST, IMMORAL, UNDEMOCRATIC; only in a free and just society can I hope to see my ideal of living realised.

I then searched the history of the black people in their attempt to effect meaningful change, to establish a just society. In my search I discovered the ANC and was struck by its honest and sincere committal towards

peaceful change even at times when it became obvious that the white regime was determined to see that change never took place. Even at moments of despair as echoed by the words of the late Chief Albert Luthuli when he said "that for more than 30 years we have been knocking at this door to no avail" (sic), the ANC held steadfast to its committal of effecting peaceful change. It was only when the ANC had had been expressly by law banned from peacefully realising their objective that they painfully as a last available means reconciled themselves to armed struggle.

The ANC had reached that painful decision in the 60's and here was I in the 70's still faced with the problem of what to do to improve my lot and that of the black people as a whole. I however still believed that the doors for peaceful change had not finally closed. It is no wonder that I became a member of the SASO which was part of the black movement peacefully engaged in legal political activity with the object of effecting meaningful change — to establish a just free society; a society that knows no colour. The reaction unleashed by the present white regime in response to that peaceful, legal political activity left me in no doubt of the unwillingness and determination of the white regime to see that meaningful change never took place.

It is only then that I also reached that painful realisation that the only means now available was armed struggle. The employment of violence is used as a shock method to draw the attention of the whites of this country to the ghastly alternative to peaceful change. By this, I mean the employment of violence more as a psychological means, not aimed at the destruction of human life.

Lastly, I honestly and sincerely believe in legality. As long as the laws have as their primary purport the protection and the promotion of the well being of the people they serve such laws are just and legal; they have my sanction and I shall for ever abide by them. But when laws have as their prime aim, the protection and promotion of the interest of the few — the whites, to the detriment of the majority — the blacks, they are unjust and I can never abide nor sanction them. I shall for ever work towards the destruction of these laws until justice prevails.

I was always aware of the prospect of imprisonment, but as others before me I had no alternative except to live as a man and in dignity."

PETRUS MOTHLANTHE

Age 27

Sentence 10 years

Petrus Mothlanthe then rose to give the court

“some idea of what it means to be a black man in South Africa, how the laws of this country have affected me and why I became involved in the struggle.

My father worked as a messenger at the AAC for a meagre salary which he used to feed and educate three children. My mother became a washerwoman in order to augment the family's means of survival. Using hindsight I marvel at how they managed to see me and my two younger brothers through matriculation and still managed to purchase a coalstove to warm our single room in Alexandra. In 1959 my family was up-rooted from Alexandra and resettled in Meadowlands where we rented a four-roomed house. I had no right to live with my parents in their house — I had to obtain a lodger's permit. I left school in 1968, to take up employment with the Johannesburg City Council so as to improve my position and that of my family. The work-seeker's permit in my pass read as follows: “Permitted to be in the prescribed area of Johannesburg, whilst employed by the JCC”. In effect this meant that I was a migratory worker who is allowed to be in Johannesburg for as long as his labour is needed. This, in spite of the fact that I've lived in Johannesburg all my life. All my hopes of living decently were shattered by this stamp. My self respect and dignity was attacked every time I was arrested for a technical pass law offence or residential permit offence.

Where I could go, the ability to own my own home in the area of my choosing — all these were denied me. I was subjected to rudeness by officials whose duty it was to serve. Insults from whites were a standard part of my life. I could not hope nor expect to have a say in the laws or government which ruled me. My own son who was born

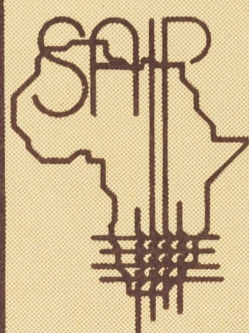
here in Johannesburg was classified as a citizen of Lebowa — a place he has never seen. Like me, he is denied citizenship in the land of his birth. I did not want and do not want my son to be subject to the same laws, discrimination and humiliation which I have experienced. I wanted a better life for my wife, son and for all my people. I questioned for long hours what I could do.

I considered the approach of my father's generation. I saw how the ANC for decades had struggled peacefully for change. The futility of its efforts culminated in its banning. It was only after this banning that it adopted a policy of violence.

When SASO, BPC and TRAYO were weakened by arrests, raids and detentions it became clear that there is no room for blacks to participate peacefully and meaningfully in the shaping of the circumstances which effect and govern their lives. All these organisations were violently dealt with, despite their non-violent nature, by the Government.

The decision to resort to arms was a painful one, which I reached after months of soul-searching and consideration as I am essentially a non-violent person. My dearest wish is to co-exist peacefully with all other citizens of South Africa. I came to the belief that by embarking on a course of violence on a moderate scale white South Africans could be brought to a realisation of the ghastliness of real violence, which must follow if meaningful change does not come about in South Africa so that Blacks can lead a full life.

The most important thing to me is not how long I live but how I live. Those of us who love life as much as we love this country shall never cease to make efforts for the attainment of liberty and equality regardless of creed, race or colour. I am not the first and shall not be the last to be convicted for this just cause.”



Southern African
Information Programme

of the International University
Exchange Fund

P.O. Box 108
1211 Geneva 24
Switzerland

or

Parnell House
25 Wilton Road
London SW1