

# The academic fight for freedom

BRIAN TRENCH reports from Tanzania where the ANC's Freedom College is teaching future leaders of South Africa

THE commemorations of the tenth anniversary of the Soweto uprising last month had a particular emotional significance for the 1,500 people who live in the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in Tanzania. For the college, which is also a village, a refugee camp and a farm, was set up by the African National Congress in the wake of the Soweto revolt to cater for young people who had to leave South Africa.

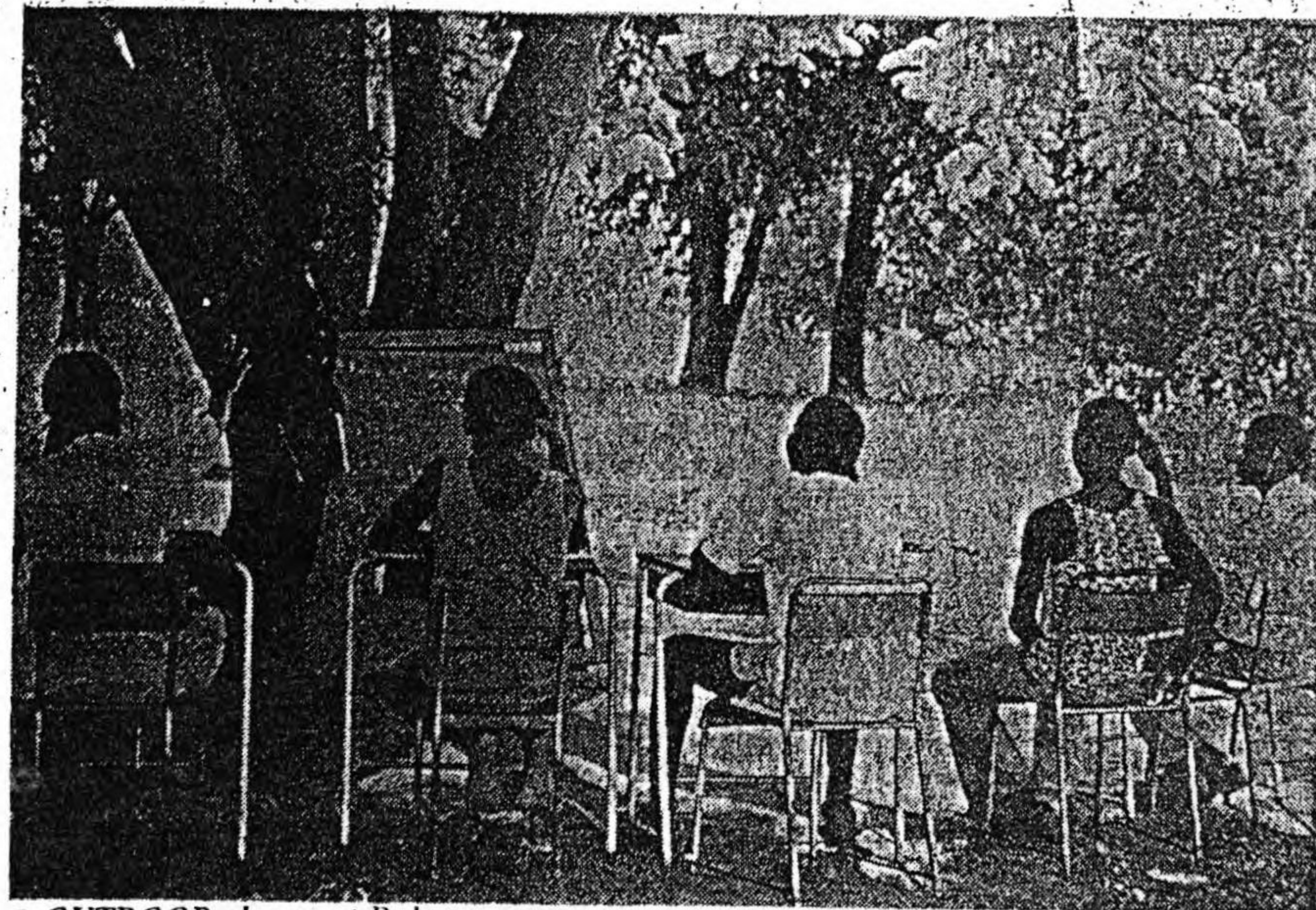
"We presented shows demonstrating how people died in Soweto," said Zoleka Dillmeni, a 19-year-old student at the college. "But we were also celebrating our achievements since 1976," added Wantu Zenzile, a former president of the Congress of South African Students.

## • LIBERATE

Ms Dillmeni left South Africa in 1982, arriving in Tanzania, after a first stop in Lesotho, as a nervous, taciturn 15-year-old. For four years she has had no direct contact with her family in South Africa but she has developed a new confidence. "I will return to South Africa when we have liberated the country," she said.

Mr Zenzile faced massive obstacles in continuing his student political activities after 1976 but he did so, despite being jailed ten times, until 1982. In that year, he left his native Port Elizabeth after his life was threatened. When he met the ANC representatives over the border they offered him the choice of military training or education.

He chose the latter and now, ten years after his



• OUTDOOR classes at Dakawa

studies were interrupted, he is at last finishing school.

Equipped with the help of European governments and aid organisations, staffed by foreign volunteers and professionals as well as exiled South Africans and assisted by the Tanzanians, the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFECO), aims to train the leaders of a new South Africa. Its very existence is resented by the government in Pretoria and the college has been cited in South African Broadcasting Corporation as a 'terrorist centre'.

Any military training done by the ANC in Tanzania is done elsewhere but every

possible precaution is taken to protect the students, teachers and families at SOMAFECO. The college and camp are located at Mazimbu in the centre of Tanzania's own defence network, 150 miles west of the capital, Dar-es-Salaam.

Civilian aircraft are barred from entering the airspace above that area. Surface-to-air missiles are at the ready on the hills around Mazimbu.

Since the South African raids on ANC centres in three 'front-lines' states last May, nobody apart from approved ANC and Tanzanian government and security personnel has been allowed into SOMAFECO.

In this political hot-house, contact is maintained with events in South Africa through constant monitoring of radio broadcasts as well as through the ANC network. Each evening at 9 pm when they have completed their two hours of private studies, the students assemble for 'Newstime', when the information picked up from the radio is presented to them.

## • ACADEMIC

The college itself is said to be better equipped than any Tanzanian school and to have higher academic levels than South African schools. When



• OFF to school

Wantu Zenzile resumed school in Mazimbu after years of full-time political activity in South Africa he started a class below the one he had last attended at home in Cape Province. He hopes to study economics — "from the perspective of both East and West".

SOMAFECO students have been given scholarships to do university courses in both western and eastern Europe. The ANC hopes that the returned graduates will eventually be able to take over the running of the centre without needing outside assistance.

Among those from outside who are currently working in

the centre is a Dublin social worker. The Irish agency, APSO, is also paying the salary of South-African-born Marius Schoon, now an Irish citizen, who is a senior member of the staff at SOMAFECO and of ANC.

Over 1,000 acres of the land given to the ANC by the Tanzanian government is being farmed, producing a surplus of grain for sale on the local market. The partly Dutch-financed hospital provides a service for the population of the surrounding area of Morogoro as well as for the centre's own inhabitants.

A second ANC centre in the same region, 60 kilometres

away at Dakawa, has been serving as an orientation centre for the new arrivals from South Africa. Now it is being expanded with the establishment of a trades school, a farm, and some small industries. It will cater for a population up to 2,000.

Even at a couple of thousand miles from their homes and at several removes from the crisis which has gripped South Africa for over a year, the young people in SOMAFECO are certain about their purpose.

"Our country will need the skills we are acquiring. When we go back to our country we have to be very clear what direction we are going," said Mr Zenzile.

## • DIVIDED

The students are certain, too, that some recent events in South Africa have been widely misunderstood. "The confrontations between the older 'fathers' and younger 'comrades' is not black versus black violence; it is being promoted by the state," insisted Wantu Zenzile.

The generations are not generally divided on the lines those clashes suggested, added Zoleka Dillmeni. "Parents have been victimised for the activities of their children. They have seen their children die. Now they are learning from their sons and daughters."

Black people are affected in their attitudes by apartheid too, said Mr Zenzile. "What we have to do is regenerate normal attitudes. In Mazimbu we have the monumental task of transforming people from one state of mind to another."