

• LiM/027/0004/16

ENCLOSURE

7

11.03.1979



African National Congress

(South Africa)

REPORT ON MEMORIAL MEETING ON THE DEATH OF VERA PONNEN

Box 302,
Adelaide Postal Station,
Toronto, Ont. M5C 2J4

Provisional H.Q.
Box 1791,
Lusaka, Zambia

On March 1st, 1979, Vera Ponnen passed away, at the home of one of her daughters in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Her untimely death was marked by a memorial meeting held in the ANC office in Toronto, on Sunday March 1st. It was attended by about 30 people.

The memorial meeting began with the singing of the National Anthem, Nkosi Sikelel' i Afrika. The meeting was chaired by the RPC chairman, Peter Bunting. The meeting was addressed by the following: Fatima Bhyat of the ANC Women's Section

Enver Domingo of SACTU

Mehroom of the South African Youth and Students
Association of Canada (SAYSAC)

John Bizzell of the Communist Party of Canada
and Yusuf Saloojee, Chief Representative in Canada of ANC.

In addition, three poems were read out by Don Mooljee of the ANC, and messages of condolence were read out, from the ANC office in New York, from the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians, and from TCLSAC.

Representation from several organisations was evident at the memorial meeting, including the Association of Concerned Guyanese, Canadians Concerned about Southern Africa, Canadian Peace Congress, Communist Party of Canada, Congress of Canadian Women, Forum Club (a group of South Africans), and Toronto Association for Peace.

Comrade Saloojee, during the main oration, mentioned that Vera Poonen had been given full military honours as a member of Umkhonto we Siswe. He also read out an account of Comrade Vera's life, and of her participation in the struggle for freedom in South Africa, as written by her husband and comrade, George Ponnen. (See attached).

The meeting was concluded by observing a minute's silence, in honour both of comrade Vera, and also of all the other fallen comrades. This silence ended with the singing of "Hamba Kahle, Umkhonto".

Chairman's Remarks at Vera Ponnien Memorial

Comrades and Friends:

We are gathered here to pay our last respects to a long-standing, militant member of the African National Congress of South Africa, comrade Vera Ponnien.

Vera's involvement in the struggle for the liberation of South Africa exemplifies several aspects of that struggle. She was involved not only in the ANC, but also in the trade union movement, tirelessly working for the objectives of the South African Congress of Trade Unions. Being a woman, she showed the great part played by the women in our struggle.

Today, there are people who will pay tribute to her outstanding contribution in all three areas:
Comrade Fatima Bhyat for the Women's Section of ANC;
Comrade Enver Domingo for SACTU;
Comrade Yusuf Saloojee, Chief Representative, ANC.

Many of us have known comrade Vera both politically and personally. I met her only when she came to Canada. She was already in poor health and had little physical strength, finding it difficult to travel about the city. Yet she contributed in spirit, always, offering advice and guidance whenever it was requested - and sometimes when it wasn't. For Vera was not one to beat about the bush. If she felt strongly about something, she spoke her mind. And on all major issues relating to the ANC and the liberation of South Africa, she felt strongly.

Comrades and friends, Vera Ponnien is no more; but her contribution remains with us forever.

Statement by the A.N.C. Women's Section at the memorial service for
Comrade Vera Ponnen, Sunday, March 11, 1979.

Comrades and Friends,

Comrade Vera Ponnen is no more. No more in body but forever in spirit. We meet today to pay tribute and homage to Comrade Vera Ponnen who very unfortunately was not personally well known to many here today. However, Comrade Vera, like other comrades who have fallen in struggle, has left us stronger, more determined, more directed and with a greater will to continue the struggle against racist reaction and imperialism, for which Comrade Vera dedicated her life.

We, in the Women's Section of the A.N.C. and the women of South Africa in particular pay tribute to Comrade Vera for her tremendous contribution to the freedom struggle and the concrete participation and contribution of women in revolutionary struggle.

Comrade Vera was one of our mothers, sisters and comrades and it is from their efforts that the youth take inspiration and gather strength and wisdom in politics. For the short period during which we were able to know our mother, she was always keen to listen to us, to talk to us and to laugh with us. Despite her seniority in age and experience, she never once imposed herself on the younger comrades, indeed she always insisted on letting the youth take responsibility.

Vera, you have left us in body but your spirit lives on in the hearts and minds of the countless women of South Africa who will see freedom in our lifetime - thanks to the efforts of our mothers.

Hamba Kashle Comrade Vera.

Statement by the A.N.C. at the memorial service for Comrade Vera Ponnen
Sunday, March 11, 1979

Vera Gwendoline Ponnen was born in London, England on September 5, 1915. She was the second youngest in the family of seven children. Her mother died when she was five years old. The father, a match maker, Mr. A. Albert, brought up the children. Vera went to school up to Standard IV and started working at the age of 13 to supplement the family's income. During her working life in London, she joined the Y.C.L. and was active in this movement.

Vera came to South Africa in 1938, getting a job as a governess to some children who were bound for South Africa. She settled in South Africa and stayed in Cape Town working for a jewellery firm.

In 1939 she went to Johannesburg and there faced difficulties in getting a job and accommodation for some time. While in Johannesburg Vera met some members of the Communist Party and later joined the Party and carried out activities.

In 1940 Vera came to Durban. She was the first representative of the newspaper Guardian - a working class weekly. She worked hard to establish the news collection and distribution of the paper. It was during this period that Vera became friendly with George Ponnen who helped to get her work done in a new city. Vera and George became very attached and were married in 1942. Vera's salary was £8.00 per month and George Ponnen earned the sum of £5 per month as a trade unionist. They shared a room with a comrade and lived happily and continued with their work. Later when things improved in the trade unions, George was able to earn a wage to acquire their own flat. 20 Wills Court, Durban will be remembered by many comrades throughout the country. The late Chief Luthuli, Moses Kotane, Dumwa Nokwe, Dr. Naicker and Ahmed Kathrada, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Stephen Dlamini and Billy Hair to mention a few frequented the flat to have discussions. The last conference of SACTU was completed at this flat in 1961 - when the conference was banned in public halls. During the Second World War this was a meeting place for many comrades from overseas.

As the movement continued to work, Vera became involved in many spheres of work. She was outspoken within the Party - and outside, and nothing would stop her until the correct point of view was established.

Vera worked in many Party committees. She worked in Housewives League, the South African Federation of Democratic Women, of which she was Vice-President until she left South Africa. She was one of the founders of the Non-European Soldiers Dependents League during the Second World War. She was an Executive Member of the Congress of Democrats - an organization of whites who supported the Liberation struggle and carried out work among the white population.

Vera did outstanding and courageous work during the 1949 Indian-African riots. She left the two children with friends and was three weeks away working in the refugee camps. She did outstanding work during the 1960 Emergency. When thousands of Africans marched from Cato Manor District to the Central Jail to demand the release of the detainees, Vera, together with Dr. Meidlinger, carried the people shot by the police to the hospitals. The blood stains on her clothing terrified the children when she got home.

Vera worked with the organization of the great march of women to Pretoria to protest against the Pass Laws being extended to African women. She was active in the Passive Resistance Campaign led by the South African Indian Congress and the Defiance Campaign against unjust laws led by the Congress Movement - alliance of the African, Indian and Coloured Peoples' Congresses.

Vera was involved in many strikes of black workers fighting for better wages and conditions and against unjust laws. She stood side by side with George in carrying out strike activities. She was the pay master in the prolonged 13 weeks laundry and dry cleaners' strike whilst carrying Marsha, her last daughter. One evening she had to leave the picket line to go to the hospital to give birth to Marsha.

Vera was secretary of the Brewery and Mineral Water Workers Union composed of African, Indian and Coloured workers. Some times, when one of the children were ill, she had the Executive Meetings at the flat.

Vera was the first woman to be banned in the Province of Natal under the Communism Act. She was banned for 5 years and renewed for another 5 years after the expiry of the first one. This time she was put under house arrest.

George Ponnen, her husband, was the first man to be banned for 5 years in Natal in 1950. He was removed from his position as Secretary/Organizer from a number of Unions. His means of livelihood was completely cut off.

George started dressmaking and Vera helped in this to make a living and continued to carry out political work underground.

With the help of a friend George started a small clothing factory in Durban - the Liberty Wear. Vera worked in this project. The partnership did not work out and George left, handing Liberty Wear to his friend at the end of one year.

Within a month, George and Vera were helped by another two friends to start a factory - The Limaco Modes (Pty.) Ltd., which is in operation even up to this day - of course, without George and Vera. Vera worked day and night with George to build up the factory until she was forbidden to enter factories by the banning orders.

In 1964 George was detained under the 90 Days Detention Law. He was in solitary confinement for 120 days. After his release, on advice given by the Movement, he fled South Africa and sought political refuge in Zambia. From 1964 to 1967 Vera was continually harrassed by the Security Police. Vera left South Africa on an exit permit to join George in Zambia in 1967.

During the nearly 10 years in Zambia, Vera continued with her work - vital work of the ANC.

In November 1975 Vera and George came to Canada to join their children (Indira, Marsha, Dickie, Barry and 4 grandchildren).

Vera has been ill for a long time. Vera and George visited the Soviet Union in 1974 and had medical check-ups. Vera was not in good condition then. Throughout her stay in Canada her health deteriorated. She was hospitalized in Edmonton and breathed her last on the 1st of March, 1979 at the age of 64.

Comrade Vera was a kind and courageous person, a great internationalist. People loved her when she spoke at mass meetings, people loved her in her day to day work.

Comrade Vera was a brave fighter for freedom, a loyal wife and a great mother.

VETERAN MEMBER OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS(SOUTH AFRICA)
AND A MEMBER OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS
DIES IN EDMONTON.

Mrs. Vera Ponnen who together with her husband emigrated to Canada to join their children three years ago, died at the University OF Alberta Hospital on the 1st March 1979 after a lengthy illness.

The late Mrs. Ponnen was born in London England, on the 5th Sept., 1915. She came to South Africa in 1938. Since 1939, she was associated with the National Liberation struggle led by the African National Congress, (South Africa) and in the organisation of black workers into Trade Unions. She worked in many fields fighting for the rights of the oppressed masses. In the Housewives League, the Non European Dependents League during the 2nd World War, the South African Federation of Democratic Women of which she was vice President up to the time she left South Africa in 1967. She took active part in many strikes of black workers fighting for better wages and conditions of work and against oppressive unjust industrial laws.

The late Mrs. Vera Ponnen was the first woman to be banned for 5 years under the Communism Act in the Province of Natal. After the expiry of the 5 years the ban was re-newed for a further 5 years and she was also under house arrest. She was not permitted to speak to her husband because the law states that a banned person cannot communicate with another banned person. Mr. George Ponnen was the first man to be banned in the Province of Natal, South Africa. The late Mrs. Ponnen wrote to the Minister of Justice and told him that he is making a laughing stock of the marriage laws of the country and that she will not abide by this clause in the banning order. The minister wrote back to say that he has decided to allow her to speak to her husband.

The late Mrs. Ponnen who is well known as a courageous fighter for freedom in South Africa left South Africa in 1967 on an exit permit to join her husband, a political refugee in Zambia. While in Zambia, for nearly 10 years, Mrs. Ponnen continued to carry out the work for the liberation of South Africa from racist oppression. Her whole life has been devoted to see that South Africa is made to be a democratic country in which all people are considered as human beings, In which all people are equal and

/.....

1-
enjoy human rights.

The late Mrs. Ponnen is survived by her husband George Ponnen, a veteran Trade Unionist of South Africa, two daughters, Indira and Masha and thier families.

Message of condolence from TCLSAC.

TODAY WE JOIN OUR ANC COMRADES IN MOURNING THE DEATH OF
VERA POOMEN, A LONGSTANDING MEMBER OF THE ANC. WE
SALUTE HER EFFORTS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN STRUGGLE AND WE
EXPRESS OUR SYMPATHY WITH THE ANC AT THEIR LOSS.

TORONTO COMMITTEE FOR THE LIBERATION ~~XX~~
OF SOUTHERN AFRICAN COLONIES.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Association of United

Товариство Об'єднаних



Ukrainian Canadians

Українських Канадців

42 RONCESVALLES AVENUE

TORONTO ONTARIO M6R 2K3

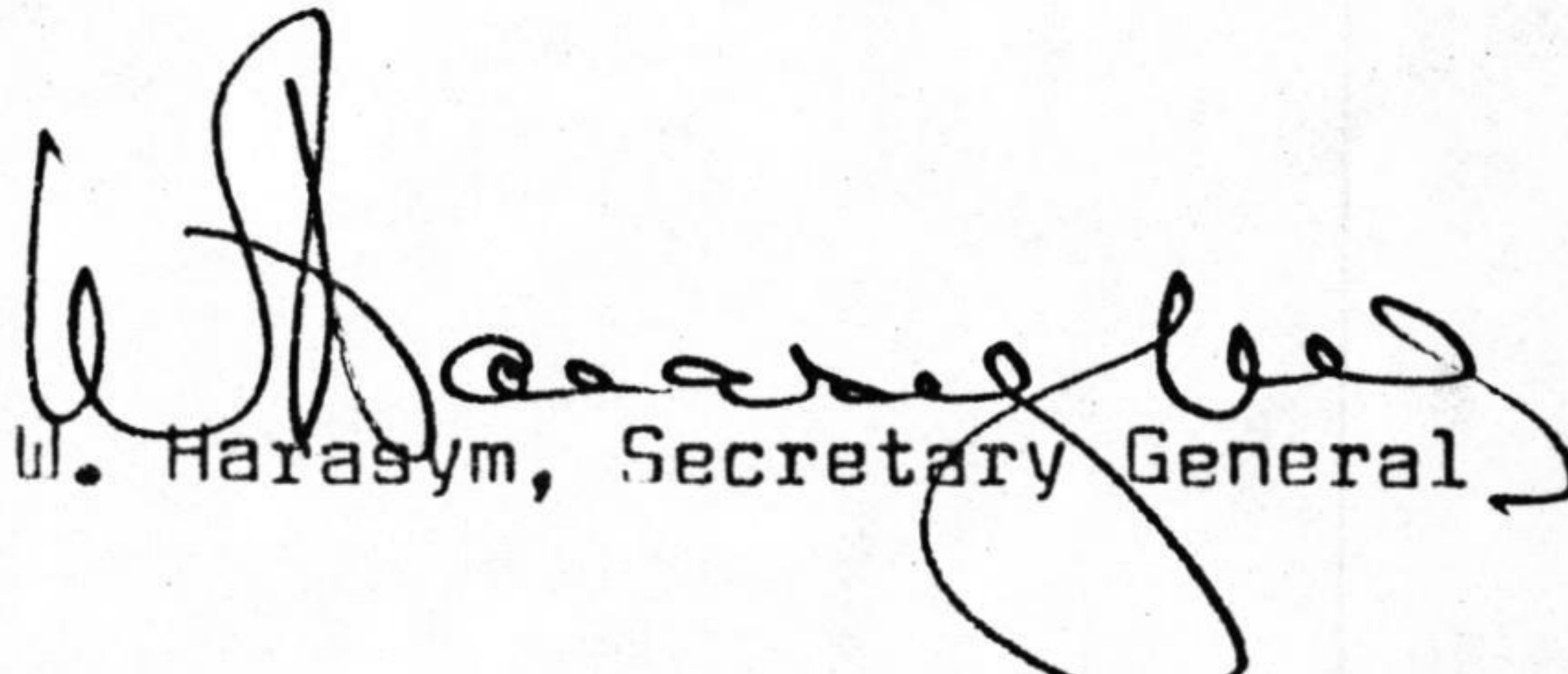


TELEPHONE (416) 535-1063


The African National Congress
Room 405
86 Parliament Street
T o r o n t o

Dear Friends;

We join with you in heartfelt and solemn tribute in respectful memory of VERA POONEN, your outstanding activist and leader for her people's just and long due unfettered economic and cultural rights and opportunities. We salute her immeasurable contribution to the final victory of true and uncompromised freedom with full human dignity!


W. Harasym, Secretary General

09/03/1979



Canadians Concerned about Southern Africa
Box 545, Adelaide Street Station
Toronto, Ontario
M5C 2J6



On behalf of CCSA, and its 17 affiliates across Canada, we extend our condolences to the family of the late Vera Ponnen. The death of Vera Ponnen is not only a deep personal loss to her family it is also a loss to the liberation movement fighting for the freedom of the peoples of South Africa.

She dedicated her life to the work of the ANC and SACTU, working unceasingly in good and poor health to achieve a free and democratic South Africa.

Her life's work and indomitable spirit is an example for us all, an example to inspire us to intensify our efforts to rid South Africa of the scourge of the apartheid regime.

444-5763
Refer 361-0193

CNCP
Télécommunications

04B923

04B924(051637)

CTE347

CWA266(1634)(4-059741E064) PD 03/05/79 1634

ICS IPMMTZZ CSP

2124903487 NL TDMT NEW YORK NY 50 03-05 0434P EST

PMS GEORGE POONEN, AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

PO BOX 302 ADELAIDE POSTAL STATION

TORONTO ON CAN M5C 2J4

TEL NO.

TO Y5

CALLS LEFT

ATTEMPTS

FILE

MAIL

527P

aw/15

BT

ANC REPRESENTATION AND MYSELF JOIN THE POONEN FAMILY IN MOURNING THE
UNTIMELY PASSING AWAY OF OUR CONRAD AND MY SPIRITUAL MOTHER VERAH.
HER TIRELESS CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRUGGLE AND THE MATERNAL CARE SHE
ALWAYS MANIFESTED TOWARDS COUNTLESS ACTIVISTS WILL ALWAYS BE

Apartheid battler Vera Ponnen dies

Vera Ponnen, 63, of 206 Georgia Way, Sherwood Park, well-known champion of freedom in South Africa, died March 1 at the University Hospital.

She was a veteran member of the African National Congress of South Africa and the South African Congress of Trade Unions.

Born in London, England, she was a daughter of the late Albert and Sarah Albert.

Mrs. Ponnen moved to South Africa in 1938. Since 1939, she was associated with the national liberation struggle, led by the African National Congress, and in the organization of black workers and trade unions.

She worked in many organizations, fighting for the rights of the oppressed, including the Housewives League, the Non-European Dependents League, the South African Federation of Democratic Women, of which she was vice-president, until she left South Africa in 1967. She participated in many strikes of black workers, fighting for better wages and working conditions, and against oppressive industrial laws.

Mrs. Ponnen was the first woman to be banned for five years under the Communism Act in the province of Natal. After the term of the ban expired, it was renewed for another five years, during which she was also under house arrest.

She was not permitted to speak to her husband, George, during this time because the law states that a banned

person cannot communicate with another banned person.

Her husband was the first man to be banned in the province.

After writing to the minister of justice to complain about the law, she was permitted to speak to her husband.

Mrs. Ponnen left South Africa in 1967 on an exit permit to join her husband, a political refugee in Zambia. While in Zambia for nearly 10 years, she continued to carry on her work for the liberation of South Africa from racial oppression.

Surviving besides her husband are two daughters, Indira (Mrs. Barry Haridersad), Sherwood Park; Masha (Mrs. Richard Domingo), Mississauga, Ont.; and four grandchildren.

