

MOVEMENTS

By Roger Wilkins

South African leader
Oliver Tambo (kneeling)
and Jesse Jackson
were among those
who paid their respects
(right); relatives
hold the photo of
a 14-year-old boy
held in prison (below).

Bound by Blood

what his friends from the United States could do in order to continue the struggle to which Johnny had given his entire life.

"We need more sanctions," Tambo said. "South Africa is not in your news much anymore, but the terrorism ... is unabated. Apartheid is a crime against humanity."

We knew, of course, that in his gentle way Tambo was telling us that though flowers and tears were nice, the true way to honor Johnny's memory was to serve the cause that had filled his life. I looked at Oliver Tambo then with a heart full of recognition. He seemed so like many of the dignified elderly men I had seen walking over the uneven ground in segregated cemeteries at home or leaving NAACP meetings in their best suits on Sunday afternoons.

And of course there is a reason for this resonance. The NAACP will be 80 years old this year, and the African National Congress just turned 77; when this century was young, South Africans watched the birth of the NAACP and then created their own organization in its image.

Standing apart from Tambo, framed by the rich green of the plains, stood Thabo Mbeki, director of information for the ANC. Mbeki is a small, quick, dapper, and extremely likable man in his 40s. Disarming onlookers and allies with his urbane polish, his pipe, his beard, and his handsome, friendly face, Mbeki plays much the same role for the ANC that Andrew Young played for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference a quarter of a century ago.

As Johnny's memorial service ended, the white ANC chaplain, with lank hair and a long, white cassock, spread his arms to bless the gathering. His left

hand was large, ending in long fingers. But his right arm was cut short at the wrist. The hand that belonged there was blown away some years ago in Lesotho by a letter bomb sent to him by South African security forces. Johnny and the chaplain: black and white together, like martyrs Reverend James

GENTLE BREEZE RUFFLED THE LOOSE SHIRT worn by Oliver Tambo, president of the African National Congress, and I was reminded of the warm welcome he received two years ago on a

Perhaps we will have to welcome Oliver Tambo to Washington, D.C., once again, and call a new round of demonstrations.

natural causes in Lusaka in December, and the Americans, gathered there weeks later for a major conference on African issues, were at last able to say their farewells. There was a mixture of grief, blood, memory, and yearning at that graveside as the Africans, who are investing all of their life forces in their freedom struggle, and the African Americans, who had all gone to jail to fight for sanctions, laid down their wreaths and their flowers side by side on the raw earth where Johnny lay.

In talking of their yearnings, Oliver Tambo was quite clear about

neatly manicured lawn just down the street from the South African embassy in Washington. Tambo had come to salute the Free South Africa movement's demonstrations, which ultimately added muscle to the drive for sanctions against South Africa and effectively reversed the Reagan administration's disgraceful "constructive engagement" policy.

Now Tambo and a number of Africans and Americans were standing in the red mud of a cemetery in Zambia beside the new grave of Johnny Makatini, who had collected a host of U.S. friends and admirers during his politically shrewd and persistently good-humored service as the representative of the ANC at the United Nations. Johnny had died of

10 may 1989

Photographs by Mark Peters/SIPA Press

PEOPLE, POLITICS, AND OTHER PASSIONS

Reeb and Viola Liuzzo in Selma in 1965-intermixed with blood, grief, memory, and yearning. That's the reason for the strong support by both blacks and whites of Congressman Ron Dellums' new bill calling for even stronger sanctions to heighten the pressure on the South African government.

In a speech at the conference that followed the funeral, Tambo asked Americans not to worry so much about the injuries that would result from the new sanctions. "Nobody worried about the German children when Nazism was crushed," he recalled. "It was just necessary to crush it."

Since the imposition of the state-of-emergency decree in June 1986 (when news coverage by journalists was severely restricted), roughly 40,000 people have been detained without charges or trial, according to the Southern Africa Project of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Up to 40 percent of the detainees have been children under 18, and 10 percent of them have been women. The average daily detainee population for 1988 was 1,500.

The Southern Africa Project puts the number of convicted political prisoners now incarcerated at about 700. Though not all executions in South Africa are for political crimes, executions do serve a political purpose in that country. South Africa executes more prisoners per capita than does any other nation in the world. In 1986 the total was 129; in 1987, 164; and for 1988, the estimate is 105. In 1988, the authorities constructed a seven-noose hanging facility in order to accomplish mass executions.

In addition, since 1963 at least 67 prisoners have died in detention under suspicious circumstances, 15 of them since 1986. The most famous of those deaths was that of Steven Biko, the leader of the black consciousness movement.

The nature of the Pretoria regime was described most poignantly at the conference by

a young man who recently spent time in one of its jails. He said that the practice of torturing prisoners by electric shock and sleep deprivation continues-and that even children are tortured.

"I would often be awakened at night by cries of children having nightmares about their torture," he said.

People of conscience in this country have no recourse but to press for more sanctions. One would hope that in post-Reagan Washington that could be accomplished by reasoned discourse. Otherwise, we will have to welcome Oliver Tambo to demonstrations on Massachusetts Avenue once again. Our determination arises not only from the responsibility we feel to help Africans secure freedom, but also from our need to enlarge our own decency. Q