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Sisulu's guiding role

JOHANNESBURG. — Walter Max Ulyate Sisulu, convicted with Nelson Mandela in the Rivonia trial, was at the centre of ANC affairs from the 1940s until his arrest in 1963.

Sisulu, 76, the main defence witness in the Rivonia trial, is being held at Pollsmoor.

The other trialists, each jailed for more than 24 years, are Andrew Mlangeni, Raymond Mhlaba and Ahmed Kathrada, who were transferred from Robben Island to Pollsmoor in 1982, and Elias Motsoaledi, the only remaining Rivonia prisoner on the Island.

Govan Mbeki was released last year and Dennis Goldberg was released in 1985 after renouncing violence in return for his freedom.

Former Island prisoner Martin Ramakgadi, of Alexandra, said Sisulu had acted as a guide and mentor to Mandela when he first came to Johannesburg.

Sisulu had worked with Mandela, Oliver Tambo and others in the ANC Youth League to convert the ANC from a "moderate" to a militant organisation.

Ramakgadi, who spent 18 years on the Island, said Sisulu's worth was recognised when he was elected secretary-general of the ANC at its 1949 congress where the "Programme of Action" was adopted.

"Sisulu held everybody together through the 1952 Defiance Campaign, the Congress of the People, the Treason Trial, the strikes and boycotts, the stresses and conflicts of the late 1950s.

"He guided the ANC underground after its banning in 1960 and laid the foundation for the formation of Umkonto WeSizwe."

Sisulu was born at Engcobo in the Transkei on May 18 1912, less than three months after the formation of the ANC.

He was brought up by his mother and an uncle, a village headman, according to the strict tradition of his people.

He lest school in Std 4 when he was 15 to look after family affairs

when his uncle died.

Sisulu went to work on the mines in Johannesburg. When his contract ended, he returned to the Transkei and got a job as a "kitchen boy" in East London.

He soon went back to Johannesburg and delivered bread for 18 shillings a week.

During his early days in Johannesburg he made a study of Xhosa history and wrote a series of articles about national heroes for Bantu World, a white-owned newspaper aimed at blacks.

He joined the ANC in 1940 after hearing a speech by Dr AB Xuma, who became president of the ANC in December that year. Sisulu later became critical of Xuma's "moderation."

He worked as an estate agent by buying and selling bits of freehold land that were still left to a handful of Africans under the country's land

He was first active in the ANC Youth League, working with Anton Lembede, Oliver Tambo, Govan Mbeki, Nelson Mandela and others.

The strategy of the youth league was to bring about radical change in South African society during their lifetime.

One of those who took part in the discussions was Albertina Sisulu, a nurse, who married Sisulu in 1944.

At the wedding Mandela was best man and Lembede, congratulating the bride, warned Albertina: "You are marrying a man who is already married to the nation."

Sisulu, now an attorney, was elected secretary-general of the ANC Youth League in 1949 and was one of the key leaders of the 1952 defiance campaign, which led to the treason trial of 1956-1961, where all 156 accused were acquitted.

Sisulu was banned under the Suppression of Communism Act and detained under the first State of Emergency in 1960.

Early in 1963 he fled his Orlando West home after being placed under house arrest. He reappeared in Rivonia where he was arrested.

THE name Mandela personifies the unity of all those opposed to apartheid, including Inkatha, Mrs Winnie Mandela said in a wideranging interview.

Asked about her husband's release, she said:"I do not think any member of the family is in a position to give an actual date. It depends entirely on the government. And I think the government has very serious problems."

It was difficult to say whether Mandela would be released before Christmas or next year because the government had to create a climate for his release.

It was stupid to anticipate any release in the present political climate. There would be no point in releasing Mandela to the South Africa of today because it would simply mean that he would go to prison the very next day.

She added that Mandela's health was fine now. He was much better and "looked very well indeed".

Mrs Mandela said: "They have taken the trouble to give him the best medical care."

older and 'ancient' grey

Asked if Mandela was kept in solitary confinement, Mrs Madela said: "Yes, he has been in the prison hospital wing ever since his operation for the prostrate gland and there was no explanation for that."

"We really never understood why he was never taken back to his colleagues and he had to apply to see his colleagues like we apply to see him. That alone was peculiar."

She said Mandela's physical appearance had totally changed from the pictures taken of him when he was about 44. He had grown much older and his face, now that he had recovered from TB, was filling out

When he got TB he had become gaunt and very lean and was showing signs of wrinkling. Now his face was much more lively and his complexion had returned.

"He does not have a beard, he has shaved, and he has gone 'ancient' grey," Mrs Mandela said.

Asked how his release would affect the power structure in the country, she responded that there would be no point in releasing Mandela to presentday South Africa without a package

Mrs Mandela explained: "He has to deliver goods to his people. His release is equated with liberation. He has to return to a situation where he can only negotiate the transfer of power from the minority to the majority.

Mandela's got to deliver the goods

"To the millions of oppressed blacks in this country and to the millions of oppressed people of all colours Mandela's name is equated with the freedom we sacrificed our lives for for the liberation of the oppressed in this country."

The government would make a terrible blunder if it released Mandela with strings attached.

His release would have to be total release from prison of himself, all his colleagues and all other political prisoners behind bars.

Would this mean releasing all the Rivonia trialists?

Mrs Mandela said: "Absolutely yes. There is no question that Mandela would walk out of prison without his colleagues and there is no question of Mandela walking into so-called freedom with strings attached, with banning orders and all that sort of

Would he defy restrictions or banning orders? — "Of course yes."

But they had done it to Govan Mbeki? — "We do not expect that to



Mrs Winnie Mandela with her daughte

Winnie Mandela believes there is no her husband Nelson Mandela without the conditions would be to unban the A in an interview with MONO BADELA on prison now i

happen to any of our prisoners."

Mrs Mandela explained: "Yes, they have done that to Mbeki, but if they do that to Mandela, Sisulu, Mhlaba and others they can expect them to return to jail the following day because they will not obey banning orders."

She was asked to comment on cynical critics of the movement who said Nelson Mandela had served the movement better in jail than he could possibly have served it outside.

"It's part of the government's campaign to discredit the ANC and to make the leadership appear as if it's a

sheer terrorist group, a band of men who are interested only in power. The press has been leading various campaigns against the ANC. Different attempts are being made to destroy the organisation."

Mrs Mandela was questioned on how Mandela's release would affect the relationship between the leadership in exile and the leadership inside the country?

She replied: "That is sheer mischiefmaking by the government. There has never ever been any question of any power struggle between the leadership in exile and the internal leadership —



Martin Ramokgadi

Free Mandela

will not mean freedom

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THERE is absolutely no mistaking the hottest issues in South African politics at the moment.

It preoccupies cabinet ministers and the securocrats; it fills columns in the local and international press; but it is also what people are talking about in the suburbs and the townships, in factories, offices, buses and trains.

It is, of course, The Release — the exit from the prison gates that have held Nelson Mandela and the other Rivonia trailists captive for almost a quarter of a century.

This is the topic that grips the attention, fuels the rumours, feeds speculation, and excites the imagination. It is the question dominating our politics. And all this without a multi-million rand advertising campaign!

And yet - what exactly does the release mean? Why is it suddenly on the cards? What will it mean for the state? And for the democratic movement? What is likely to happen after the release?

It is difficult to answer these questions with any precision, especially in the present "will-theywon't-they?" phase. But the questions are so obviously important that it is worth asking them.

Certain aspects are clear enough. Firstly, and emphatically, the imminent releases are a triumph of democratic pressures inside and outside South Africa.

That Mandela is the world's best known political prisoner — his release demanded alike by rock stars, trade unions, foreign governments and mass organisations — is not some strange coincidence. It is the result of years of campaigning; a measure of the extent to which the Botha regime has been discredited and its chief opponents recognised.

Secondly, the popular call for the release of Mandela and other longterm political prisoners has become bound up with international pressures (economic, diplomatic, strategic) being exerted on the state. It may well be that foreign bankers have made Mandela's release the price of new loans; it is widely reported that even Mrs Margaret Thatcher refuses to visit South Africa unless she can justify the trip by pointing to Mandela's release. However grudgingly, the financial gnomes and the Iron Lady are simply acknowledging the cutting edge of resistance — and trying to blunt it by exacting concessions from Botha.

Acute dilemma

Thirdly, we know that the prospect of the release has created an acute dilemma for the state. On the one hand, the Cabinet aches for the benefits it hopes will result from the release: weaker sanctions and a stronger Rand, a new dose of "constructive engagement" from Bush - and perhaps even a Buthelezi in the Groot Indaba Club.

On the other hand, the security establishment quakes for the dangers it fears might flow from the releaser such "dangers" as public enthusiasm, mass demonstrations of loyalty, and irresistible demands for real change.

This is not an imaginary conflict within the state. There is plenty of evidence already of disagreement between the opportunities ("look at the benefits") and the security hard-liners ("count the costs"). The former played footsie with the EPG and authorised the release of Govan Mbeki. The latter carried out cross-border raids and slapped restrictions on the ANC veteran as soon as his popularity became visible.

Fourthly, one should anticipate a similar contradiction in state responses if — when — Mandela, Sisulu, Kathrada, Motsoaledi, Mlangeni and Mahlaba gain their liberty. They will be released into a society shackled by emergency regulations — regulations which will surely be used to curb their appearances and restrict their

Symbolic value

The end of their imprisonment will be accompanied (as it has been preceded) by bannings and detentions of those who are their natural allies.

Fifthly, it is important to recognise in advance that the releases mark an important step, but not any sort of conclusion. For all their emotional and symbolic importance, they will not translate instantly into actual political changes.

Of course the releases will generate a huge tide of joy; but they will not of themselves dislodge minority rule. Of course any public appearance by Mandela will draw thousands; but his eloquence will not by itself end exploitation and poverty.

Of course the released leaders will command respect and affection (as Mbeki already has); but in the longer run it is collective action and unity rather than inspirational leadership that counts.

These are only some of the factors that make the probable release such a compelling and vital political topic. And nobody has needed squirrels to be convinced about its significance!



Zinzi (left) and Mrs Leaby Piliso, Nelson Mandela's 54-year-old sister.

jestion of the government releasing reating the right climate. And one of rican National Congress. She said this he jailed ANC leader who has been in ır 26 years.

that is what the government would like to see happening; that there would be differences between the ANC's external mission and the internal organisation.

"It is just the Afrikaner pipe-dream. It is just the old tactic of divide and rule. They think by propagating such mischief there will in fact be some kind of power struggle."

Mandela's position on unity was very special. She herself was one of his followers. He was her leader. The name Mandela was equated with unity, with the unity of all the oppressed people of South Africa.

This meant the unity of all ranks within the country, the unity of all ideals that would normally not meet at any table.

"The name Mandela personifies the unity of all those ranks that fight apartheid. This includes everybody."

Did this include even Inkatha? — "Yes, this includes everybody."

Mrs Mandela dismissed press reports that her 30-year-old marriage with Mandela was on the rocks.

"That's laughable - my marriage

doesn't have to be questioned by any person," she said, adding that the reports were sheer mischief-making that did not even merit her attention.

The campaign had been going on for some time now — the government and its agents were using journalists who were in a position to use their newspapers.

"You know we have no press and therefore we have no mouthpiece."

She said she lost everything in the fire that destroyed her home in Soweto earlier this year.

"I lost all the history of 50 years of struggle — just about everything Mandela owned. The idea was to destroy Mandela."

The recent municipal elections were dismissed as a "non-issue" to the oppressed masses of this country.

Apartheid must be destroyed

Mrs Mandela said: "Elections can only be a test of white political trends. They have no value to us because either way it is the same National Party entrenching apartheid.

"The elections do not mean anything to us because there are no reforms and, as far as we are concerned, apartheid has to be destroyed in its entirety. You cannot reform an immoral act.

"Apartheid is immoral, a sin against humanity and therefore it has to be destroyed in its entirety."

She believed that the international community should isolate the South African government.

"We want the world to freeze whatever assistance they are giving to South Africa to maintain apartheid," Mrs Mandela said.

"We know about suffering. We have been suffering all these years and we are prepared for that."



Govan Mbeki shortly after his release · Constitution