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SOUTH AFRICA'S PAN AFRICANIST CONGRESS

IN THE 80'S: CHRONIC INSTABILITY AND

REVOLUTIONARY INEFFECTIVENESS.

By Henry E. Isaacs\*

On June 30, 1985 Nyati John Pokela, the 63 year-old leader of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) of Azania, died of a heart attack in the Zimbabwean capital, Harare. The African National Congress (ANC) and the PAC are recognised by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations General Assembly as the authentic representatives of the Black majority in South Africa. When Pokela fled South Africa in January 1981 to Lesotho before proceeding to Tanzania to the PAC's

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\*The author is a former member of the Black Consciousness Movement and President of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO). He lived under house arrest for 18 months before his escape from South Africa in December 1974. He served as PAC's Director of Education and Manpower Development in Tanzania from July 1973 through September 1979 and subsequently as Director of Foreign Affairs and Observer at the United Nations until his resignation in March 1982. More recently he lived in Zimbabwe. He is the author of the forthcoming book, STRUGGLES WITHIN THE STRUGGLE: AN INSIDE VIEW OF THE PAC OF SOUTH AFRICA, to be published by Zed Books, London, in April 1986.

loss of prestige became irreversible. By the time of Pokela's death, the PAC members' disillusionment with him was as deep as it had been during the regimes of the previous leaders, Potlako K. Leballo and Vusumzi Make. (2)

This paper examines the impact upon the PAC of Pokela's leadership and assesses the implications of his death. In particular, the paper examines three major areas: (1) PAC's debilitating internal problems; (2) the organisation's revolutionary ineffectiveness and, (3) its international diplomatic isolation. This examination is important in the current climate when the resistance of the mass of people in South Africa is forcing greater recognition of and support for the national liberation movement. Even the American Secretary of State, Mr. George Schultz, is on record as urging the South African government to release Nelson Mandela, the imprisoned leader of the ANC, and to initiate negotiations with the country's Black leaders, including the ANC. (3) The white business community in South Africa, some of whose most influential members met with ANC leaders in Lusaka, Zambia, among other things, urged the government to begin a dialogue with the country's "acknowledged Black leaders," clearly a reference to the leaders of the national liberation movement. (4) This analysis

1960 following the Sharpeville Massacre and the State of Emergency declared by the South African government, the history of the organisation in exile has been characterised by factional strife, "byzantine leadership intrigues and lower rank rebellion," (6) extreme opportunism that landed the organisation in the same league as Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA), a discredited group, acceptance of assistance from the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), brutal dictatorships like the regimes of the Shah of Iran, Idi Amin and Mobutu Sese Seko and funds from the South African government through its secret projects channelled through conservative African governments. All of this has weakened the PAC and sparked debates as to whether it is worthy of continued support by the international community. To have expected Pokela single-handedly to reverse the tide of PAC's misfortunes or, Rambo-like, to raise the level of its performance in South Africa and internationally was pure folly and merely prepared the ground for organisational scapegoating when it became clear that he was not equal to the task.

As a person, Pokela was sincere in his commitment to the liberation struggle and in his efforts to revive the PAC. As a nationalist leader, however, he was naive, incompetent and completely unable to grasp the complexities of South African

constantly allege that unrest in the country, rather than being the product of the apartheid system, is the result of agitation by "subversive elements" and "communist agents." Extravagant claims by exiles, from the safety of distant capitals, lend support to such falsities and provide a pretext for increased repression by the security police and armed forces. The PAC was desperate to associate itself with the ongoing resistance by the oppressed majority since it was clear to political activists and observers that the organisation was largely irrelevant to the political developments in the country, a fact related to its persistent internal problems and increasing international isolation. We examine these inter-related aspects.

(1) PAC's debilitating internal problems.

(a) Beatings and Floggings in Tanzania:

The High Command, which is theoretically accountable to the Central Committee and is responsible for the implementation of the PAC's military programme, conducted a campaign of beatings and floggings, officially sanctioned by the Central Committee in the name of restoring "iron discipline." On March 21, 1982 a truckload of militarily-trained cadres left the PAC bush camp at Chunya in Southern Tanzania for the transit centre in Pongwe, Bagamoyo district, north of the capital, Dar-es-Salaam. The

stranded in an area of the Kenyan-Tanzanian border known as "No Man's Land." Although this writer was not able to verify the information, he learned from several PAC members that one person in the group died of hunger and exposure. Ultimately they were rescued by the Tanzanian Special Defence Unit (SDU) which is responsible for the security of liberation movement personnel. They were transferred to a refugee settlement in Tabora where they joined scores of other former PAC members living as refugees under the aegis of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

At the PAC's bush camp in Chunya the beatings and floggings of persons suspected of being "disloyal" to the Pokela faction got out of hand in mid-1982. The Central Committee despatched two of its members, Sabelo Gcweta (Secretary for Defence) and Enoch Zulu (Director of Operations) to the camp to reassert the political authority of the Central Committee. They were defied by the military cadres at the camp, including the members of the High Command and others who assaulted PAC members with the approval of the Central Committee. The Central Committee summoned the assistance of the Tanzanian People's Defence Force (TPDF) who despatched military police to the PAC's bush camp to enforce discipline. Any PAC

PAC's relations with the Revolutionary People's Republic of Guinea.

- 2.) Another young cadre, Mahoyi, was murdered in Dar-es-Salaam on suspicion of being loyal to the Azanian People's Revolutionary Party (APRP), formed by the former PAC deputy chairperson, Templeton M. Ntantala, and his supporters after their expulsion in July 1978 at the organisation's second consultative conference held in Arusha, Tanzania.
- 3.) Another victim named Mnthedisi was murdered in November 1984. He was taken from the bush camp in Chunya under the pretext that he was being sent on an assignment into South Africa. After he and his PAC captors had several drinks at a local bar in the nearby town of Mbeya in Southern Tanzania, he was escorted to a point near the border with Zambia where he was executed. He was shot eight times, after which his face was burned beyond recognition with acid. The Tanzanians gave him a pauper's burial.
- 4.) In January 1985 two other cadres, Harare and Mkumbule, died in suspicious circumstances. They were alleged to have been killed when the truck in which they were travelling from the PAC's bush camp in Chunya to Dar-es-Salaam careered off the road into a river. Their bodies were never recovered. In an interview with this writer on March 19, 1985 a PAC militant disputed the official explanation and said he was convinced that Harare and Mkumbule

than undertake a suicide mission on which he was sent by his colleagues. He made his way to Swaziland where his request for asylum was rejected and the Swazi authorities deported him to Tanzania. By then, late 1983, the PAC spread the rumour that Dlamini had defected to the South African security police to whom he divulged details about the PAC's "military operations." When Dlamini arrived at Dar-es-Salaam's airport after his deportation from Swaziland, PAC officials tried to apprehend him but he was saved by the timely intervention of the UNHCR's legal adviser since he was a responsibility of that international agency. The last information this writer had about Dlamini indicated that he was in Keko remand prison outside Dar-es-Salaam.

A number of other PAC militants were also threatened with death when they had political differences with the leaders of the organisation as will be discussed later.

(c) Murder of Administrative Assistant:

In addition to the military cadres who were killed in factional violence, a Central Committee member, Benedict Sondlo, was fatally stabbed in July 1984 in the PAC office by Pokela's former bodyguard who was also the organisation's chief of security. When details of the murder were first reported, the PAC attempted to portray the incident as a criminal attack by a burglar who was surprised by Sondlo

(d) Problems associated with reinstatement of

APRP members:

Simultaneously with Pokela's assumption of the PAC leadership, 72 former members who formed the Azanian People's Revolutionary Party (APRP) after their expulsion from the PAC in July 1978 were reinstated. Thereafter, PAC spokespersons claimed that Pokela "united the PAC." Many leading members of the group, led by the former deputy chairperson, Templeton M. Ntantala, were appointed to leadership positions. Theo Bidi was appointed to the Central Committee and sent to Nigeria as the Chief Representative; Mfanayasekaya Pearce Gqobose was initially appointed co-ordinator for self-help projects and subsequently Director of Economic Affairs in the Central Committee. Ntantala was appointed Chief Representative to Zimbabwe.

Reintegration of the former APRP members into the PAC was not successful. Many cadres in the Pokela faction suspected that the group had not abandoned the objective of forming a "Marxist-Leninist vanguard party." It was suspected that they agreed to return to the PAC in order to challenge for the leadership and gain control of the organisation. Such suspicions were fueled by certain Central Committee members who had old political scores to settle and who feared that the reinstatement of Ntantala's

clandestine trips back to meet with former PAC members and sympathisers in different parts of the country to establish links between the exiled leadership and remnants of the movement still internally-based. Bicca Maseko, a long-time PAC activist, lived in exile in Swaziland before moving to Tanzania after the expulsion of PAC members from Swaziland. Glen Mpukane is a former Black Consciousness Movement activist who joined the PAC in exile in the mid-1970's and was the organisation's deputy representative in Tanzania before his expulsion in July 1978. After his reinstatement in February 1981 he was appointed secretary of the PAC's 'Unity Committee' whose mandate was to promote and effect the reunification of the different factions of the organisation.

In their letters of resignation the three denounced the PAC and exposed the fact that the dissolution of the APRP and reinstatement of its former members did not result in unity within the organisation. (10) After their resignations from the PAC, the three were harrassed by the Pokela faction and threatened with death. Bicca Maseko ultimately left Tanzania for London with the intention of furthering his education. Isaac 'Saki' Mafatshe remained in Tanzania awaiting resettlement by the UNHCR in another country. Glen Mpukane left Tanzania for Zimbabwe in May 1984, hoping to apply for refugee status in that country and to study at the university. Within six hours of his arrival in

tour of duty. In a politically astute move the ANC appointed as Chief Representative to Zimbabwe Joe Gqabi, who received his military training in the People's Republic of China where many of the ZANU-PF freedom fighters had trained. In addition, because Gqabi had only left South Africa in the wake of the 1976 Soweto uprising (before then he served a 10 year term of imprisonment on Robben Island for activities related to the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe), he was not involved in the ANC's alliance with the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), ZANU-PF's rival during the struggle for liberation in Zimbabwe. Consequently he was well received and cultivated good relations with the ruling party, government officials and the media. The ANC had a high profile in Zimbabwe during Gqabi's tour of duty, duty that ended with his assassination in August 1981. The PAC, on the other hand, was unable to capitalise on the success of ZANU-PF in forming the first government at independence in April 1980. The PAC was seriously divided and weak. Ebrahim was ineffectual as a representative, a fact about which several government and party officials complained. A supporter of ZANU-PF and the PAC, after a visit to Zimbabwe, wrote:

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with a young inexperienced cadre in mid-1984. Thereafter the Central Committee made representations to the Zimbabwean authorities for Ntantala's expulsion from the country.

The Zimbabweans acceded to the PAC's request and Ntantala was ordered to leave the country by August 30, 1984. He resigned from the PAC after which he applied to the Zimbabwean authorities for refugee status. Certain officials advised Ntantala to refrain from publicising his resignation for fear that it would draw attention to the PAC's continuing internal problems at a time when increasing numbers of persons within the ruling party questioned the wisdom of supporting the organisation when it was obviously moribund. While Ntantala's application for refugee status was under consideration, he was allowed to remain in Zimbabwe. In December 1984, however, before he was even interviewed by Zimbabwe's Refugee Committee, the deportation order against him was reactivated; he was ordered to leave the country within 90 days. Ntantala appealed to the Minister of Home Affairs. When this writer met him in Harare at the beginning of April 1985, he was scheduled to appear before the Refugee Committee which would make a recommendation on his application for refugee status.

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they highlight the vindictiveness within the exiled organisations. Both of them resigned from the PAC for political reasons, after which they endeavoured to get on with their private lives. The PAC leaders personalised the political contradictions and with mindless vengeance orchestrated a campaign of harrassment against the two men. It is an example of how exiles easily lose sight of the political objective and instead conduct personal vendettas. It is easier to wage bitter struggles against their fellow exiles who in such situations are afforded little, if any, protection by host governments than it is to fight the real enemy, the oppressive government whose policies and practices they fled. Abuses of power by the South African government are to be condemned as a matter of principle: such abuses cannot be ignored or condoned when they occur within organisations professedly struggling for freedom. To compromise on this principle is to vitiate the morality of the cause and invite continued abuses in the new society for which South Africa's oppressed masses are sacrificing their lives and liberty. If those who are involved in the liberation struggle violate the rights of their fellow exiles, or harrass and persecute them, there is no guarantee that they will not continue such malpractices in the post-liberation era. The second reason why the case of

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facto representative, Naphallie Sidzamba, and the other led by Gabriel Sandamela and Elliot Mfana (now the Director of Education and Manpower Development in the Central Committee). Sidzamba was accused of "arrogance" and of conducting the PAC's affairs in Lesotho autocratically. Unsubstantiated allegations of financial mismanagement were also levelled against him. Sidzamba and his supporters argued that Sidzamba and Mfana were not PAC members in good standing and would first have to regularise their membership through the local representative before they were permitted to involve themselves in the organisation's affairs.

Subsequent visits to Lesotho by PAC leaders from Dar-es-Salaam fueled an already tense situation. Rather than solve the problems they took sides in the dispute, in the main conspiring to remove Sidzamba as representative. Sidzamba and his supporters resisted. In April 1982 Sidzamba was unceremoniously replaced as representative in Lesotho, a move that sparked off violence among members of the two opposing factions. A PAC Central Committee delegation that visited Lesotho to mediate engineered the arrests of Sidzamba and several of his supporters who were accused of collaboration with the Lesotho Liberation Army (LLA), the military wing of the opposition Basutoland Congress Party, that has waged a violent struggle against

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at every centre in a concentration of there were 170 former members settled under the leadership of Mphahlele, Tanzania and loyal to the Pokela leadership. 13 were members of the PAC, 13 others joined the resettlement by members from the organisation decided to pursue resettlement in West Germany and the United Kingdom. American Institute, and UNESCO. Others moved to South Africa: in 1984, approximately 12 members of the Relief Representative returned to South Africa. In addition, one member, the Central Committee, "military operations," and of a respected member of possessing arms was safe to assume that police are well informed.

Department scandal. For an analysis of the French role see Johnson, R.W., How Long Will South Africa Survive? Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 38-42 and 54-55.

- (35) See Johnson, supra., for an analysis of the continuing influence France exercises over her former African colonies.
- (36) Sibeko and Make reported that the Gabonese President gave them the cash.
- (37) Johnson, supra., p. 169.
- (38) The actual number captured was 8; one guerilla, Kenneth Mkwanazi, was killed by South African security forces outside a house in Soweto in December 1978.
- (39) Report of meeting of PAC USA chapter, New York, November 30, 1985.
- (40) During discussions with PAC members in 1982 and 1983, the author was informed that the Central Committee members concerned did not conceal their tribalism and regionalism.