

# NOTES OF THE HISTORY OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS OF SOUTH AFRICA



meridian  
liberation

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ALEX LA GUMA

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## INTRODUCTION

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**T**ODAY the African National Congress of South Africa is leading the fight against the most vicious form of racism since the destruction of Hitler fascism.

In order to fully appreciate the political and social significance of and necessity for the type of organization we have today, we have to take a peep into the past; we have to look back into the history of the contact between the African people and the whites in South Africa. It is a bitter and grim story of national struggles against foreign invasion, plunder and political domination.

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## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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White settlement in South Africa dates back to the beginning of the second half of the 17th century. On April 6, 1652, employees and servants of the Dutch East India Company, a mainly Dutch concern, arrived at the Cape to establish a halfway house or station for supplying their Asia-bound ships with fresh provisions. At first the settlement did not appear to have been conceived as a base or bridgehead for the conquest of the country. Not long afterwards, however, it turned out to be such. Soon a struggle began between the inhabitants of the territory and the new settlers. The causes of the dispute were the questions of

- a) labor supply,
- b) livestock and
- c) land ownership and control.

In these struggles the Nama, who were called the Hottentots, and the Khoi Khoi, who were called Bushmen, were practically wiped out, just as the so-called red Indians in America were. The white colonial usurpers actually organized hunting expeditions to track down and kill off the Khoi Khoi like wild animals. Possessing superior weapons, the whites shot down these relatively unarmed people, deprived the survivors of their land and drove them out of the area, took away their livestock and forced those whom they had captured to work for them as slaves.

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## Clash at the Bay of Cows

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Long before the time of white settlement, as far back as the second half of the 15th century, there had been several bloody clashes in which lives had been lost on both sides. Those clashes had been between the Khoisan and other African people, on the one hand, and the would-be Portuguese colonizers on the other hand.

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## Aggression and expansionism

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Whereas the Africans welcomed the new arrivals from Europe with open arms, the latter harbored evil designs. The colonists soon spread rapidly over a wide area and violated the boundaries which had been fixed with the indigenous people. They rode roughshod over the original inhabitants' prior hunting and grazing rights and their right to own arable land.

Because of the intrusion and the predatory and aggressive policies of the whites, disputes ensued which soon led to wars. In the Cape alone, there were nine such wars of resistance against encroachment by the whites.

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## The arrival of the British

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The arrival in South Africa of the British military forces toward

the end of the 18th century brought about quantitative and qualitative changes in the resistance struggle of our people; they immensely strengthened the forces of colonization and national oppression. The British were the foremost reactionary power in Europe and were at that time allied with Holland in the war against Republican France. With their overwhelming superiority in arms, their economic might and above all their long experience at intrigue, they were able, in spite of bitter and spirited battles against them, to eventually subdue all opposition offered by the African people to their grand design for the colonization of the country and the subjugation and exploitation of our people.

The last attempt at armed resistance by our people was the Bambata rebellion in 1906 in Natal, which was drowned in blood by the British colonialists.

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#### Reasons for defeat

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There are political, economic, military and historical reasons

which contributed to the setbacks we suffered.

- 1) This was a confrontation with advanced, commercial capitalist Europe, personified by Britain and Holland. Our part of Africa was only just emerging from communalistic social organization and had no modern industrialized development. Therefore, the ganging up of a powerful combination of Britain and Holland proved difficult for our people to withstand.
- 2) The industrial development of Europe placed powerful up-to-date weapons of destruction in the hands of the colonialists, which they did not hesitate to use against our ill-armed people.
- 3) There was lack of coordination and united struggle by our people against the common enemy. We know that attempts were made by the various tribal leaders to achieve a grand alliance of the African people against the white invaders, but these did not succeed.

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#### THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS IS BORN

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On January 8, 1912, an unusual and truly remarkable conference assembled [at Bloemfontein]. Present were a few professional men and intellectuals and a large number of chiefs, tribesmen, workers and peasants. They came from all parts of South Africa, which only two years earlier was constituted into a Union; they came from the rural areas of the Transkei and Zululand and from the urban areas of Johannesburg, Kimberley, Durban, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town; they came from as far as Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland.

The most astonishing feature of that conference was the number of



tribes that sent representatives. There were Zulus, Xhosas, Tswanas, Sothos, Vendas, Shangaans, Tongas and others.

The assembly conferred, and, at the end of its deliberation, the African National Congress emerged.

The conference participants saw the need for a united national struggle of all the oppressed. They also saw, as their most important demands, the universal franchise and land. In matters of foreign policy, the conference advocated the freedom and unity of the whole of Africa.

Since its formation, the ANC has gone through various phases; it has been in the vanguard of innumerable struggles, although some of its work and leadership was under fire from other organizations. Today there is no doubt about its supreme position as the spearhead of armed revolution in South Africa.

The ANC is not only the oldest liberation organization in South Africa but unquestionably the only body with a mass base; with an organizational framework; with a dedicated leadership; and, above all, with a highly-trained People's Army — Umkhonto we Sizwe (the spear of the nation) — capable of leading the national liberation struggle to ultimate victory in South Africa.

As we look back on those far-sighted pioneers who met on that hot January 8, 1912, we salute them. Since then, thousands upon thousands have sacrificed much, including their very lives, in the cause of liberation.

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### **The key to our freedom struggle**

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Britain, in 1910, granted "independence" to the white minority, and the Union of South Africa — which excluded Africans and other nonwhites — was established

in the place of four existing provincial regimes. Soon after assuming power, the white minority regime passed the notorious Land Act in 1913. This law robbed the Africans of their remaining land and created a state of affairs whereby 87 percent of the land passed into the hands of the whites, while the Africans retained only 13 percent. This piratical piece of legislation was designed to impoverish the African people and thus compel them to work in the mines and industries and on large white-owned farms for miserable wages.

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### **The workers are organized**

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During the '20s, with rapid industrialization taking place in South Africa and with hundreds of thousands of African workers being drawn into secondary industry, the struggle of our people shifted largely onto the economic plane. Trade union activity was stepped up, and a great many industrial struggles and economic strikes took place.

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### **The program of action**

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During and after World War II, there was a new upsurge of national liberation movements in Asia and Africa. In South Africa, this upward wave of anticolonial struggle gripped the ranks of young African intellectuals, and there were political disturbances in such education centers as Fort Hare and Lovedale. In 1943, the ANC formed a Youth League. The ANC Youth League played a prominent part in getting the parent body to adopt a militant program of action.

The program of action adopted by the ANC conference in 1949 proclaimed that the main content and principal vehicle of the struggle against the racist regime must be mass action. The program set out various tactics to be employed flexibly, depending on the prevailing situation. These tactics of struggle included the use of boycotts,

passive resistance, strike action and other forms of mass action.

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### Mass struggles

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The adoption of the program of action in 1949 ushered in a new militant era of mass struggles. Thus, in 1950, the ANC in Transvaal Province participated in the launching of a one-day strike on May Day. On June 26 of the same year, the ANC, together with the South African Indian Congress, called a national day of mourning in the form of a nationwide strike to mourn the victims of police shootings during the May Day strike and to protest against new repressive legislation.

In 1951, the ANC National Conference in Bloemfontein resolved to embark upon a massive campaign of defiance of apartheid laws. On June 26, 1952, together with the South African Indian Congress, the ANC launched the Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign. The Defiance Campaign was carried on through 1953, covering all major centers in South Africa. Over 8000 volunteers belonging to the ANC and its allies defied apartheid and were jailed. In 1954, the ANC launched a struggle against the imposition of the inferior Bantu educational system that was calculated to reduce African youth to "hewers of wood and drawers of water" for the white man. Massive agitation took place among the parents and teachers, and a boycott was organized against Bantu schools.

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### The united front grows, and the struggle broadens

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In the meantime, the question of unity among all genuine democratic forces — which has always consumed the serious attention of the ANC — was beginning to take a more concrete shape.

Having succeeded substantially in mobilizing the various African tribal groupings into a single fighting nation, the ANC, in keeping



with its overall strategy of leading a united front of all antiracist, democratic forces, hammered out a common program with the representatives of the various racial groups and the trade union movement.

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### The Freedom Charter

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This program was further crystallized when, early in 1955, the ANC called for 50 000 volunteers from all sections of the South African people to go among the people and collect freedom demands to be incorporated in a common program for South Africa.

Thus began one of the greatest campaigns in the history of the South African liberation movement. Demands flowed into the offices of the ANC from every corner of South Africa; from Africans, In-

dians, Coloureds and whites; from workers and peasants; from shopkeepers and intellectuals.

On June 26 that year, at the historic Congress of the People, the fighting demands of the people were enshrined in the Freedom Charter.

The success of this campaign and the widespread support the Charter received from the people did not go unnoticed by the racist regime in South Africa.

In 1956, the political police swooped down and arrested 156 leaders of the ANC and its allies and charged them with high treason, using the Freedom Charter as the basis of its charge.

The South African regime, alarmed by the powerful wave of action by the masses of our people, declared the African National Congress illegal. The ANC refused to accept the order and decided to continue the struggle as an underground illegal organization.

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### **The correctness of nonviolent struggle**

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Historical experience has clearly demonstrated that any struggle, whether nonviolent or violent, will end in failure if it does not conform to objective and concrete conditions in the country in which it is fought. Its revolutionary content is determined by the objectives of the popular movement and the correct and flexible application of various tactics by the revolutionaries. Experience has also demonstrated that, even in the course of an armed struggle, political and nonviolent action is still valid. For example, the ANC will continue political agitation inside and outside South Africa to isolate the regime of racism, and, whenever the opportunity arises, we will once again call upon the masses to take part in mass demonstrations, boycotts and strikes, while in another theater of



struggle our militants will be engaging the enemy in armed action.

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### **Government by violence and massacre**

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The Sharpeville massacre of March 21, 1960, was one of the worst in the long history of indiscriminate killings of Africans in the Republic of South Africa. It was not the worst, as anybody with any knowledge of our history will know. The importance of the Sharpeville massacre was that, occurring when it did, in "Africa Year," 1960, when people all over the world eagerly awaited the complete collapse of the disgraceful colonial system, it received maximum, world attention and laid bare a side of racist rule in South Africa which was not generally appreciated outside the country.



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### **South Africa's war preparations**

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South Africa has been and continues to be a land ruled by the gun. The regime increased the size of its Army, its Navy, its Air Force and its police. Pillboxes and road-blocks have been set up all over the country. Armaments factories have been set up in Johannesburg and other cities. Officers of the South African Army have visited Algeria and Angola, where they were briefed exclusively by the French and Portuguese colonialists on methods of suppressing popular freedom struggles.

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### **The unholy alliance**

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The important position of South Africa in the whole imperialist economy is mainly responsible for the close political, ideological and military links which have made the imperialists cling to the white rac-

ists with a stubbornness unprecedented in Africa and the world. When the white regime was threatened by developing events in Africa and internal mass resistance, the imperialist powers — one and all — rallied to her support and protection by giving her all the assistance necessary to build one of the most formidable arsenals in Africa. This has made South Africa the bastion and bulwark of reaction in Africa and a springboard for subversion in the continent.

The major Western powers, such as Great Britain, the United States of America, West Germany and France, have vast economic interests in South Africa, and it is clear, therefore, why they are persistently giving political, economic, military and diplomatic support to the South African racists.

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### **Preparation for armed struggle**

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The tactics in our struggle have always been determined by an analysis of the concrete objective conditions confronting us.

Following the banning of the African National Congress in 1960 and its decision in 1961 to embark on armed struggle, the movement decided to operate on two levels — internally in South Africa and externally in the international arena.

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### **On the external front**

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The external mission of the African National Congress is headed by Oliver Tambo, its President. The mandate of the external mission of the ANC was to mobilize democratic, progressive opinion in Africa and the world to support our struggle. Our external mission forged strong links first of all with the All African People's Conference; during the 2nd Congress of this movement, which was held in Tunis in 1960, the African National

Congress was elected to its steering committee. Our organization played an important role in the work of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Movement and is a member of the Permanent Secretariat of the Movement, whose headquarters are in Cairo.

In Europe, America, the socialist countries, Asia and Latin America, the African National Congress resolutely raised the voice and demands of our people. The African National Congress was one of the founders of the Antiapartheid Movement, which was established in the early '60s in Great Britain and has spread to other parts of the world and has today become one of the major forces which mobilizes world opinion against the iniquities of racial oppression and apartheid.

The African National Congress has also appeared on the platform of the United Nations, where we exposed the fact that the South African regime of white domination and racism continues to perpetrate monstrous crimes against the basic human rights of our people and showed UN member states that South Africa was a threat to international peace.

However, the ANC did not once suggest that we looked for deliverance and salvation from outside the borders of our own country.

Speaking at the Conference of the Pan African Freedom Movement for East and Central Africa held in Addis Ababa in 1963, Nelson Mandela, leader of the underground organization of the ANC, declared:

"We believe it would be fatal to create the illusion that external pressures render it unnecessary for us to tackle the enemy from within. The center and cornerstone of the struggle for freedom and democracy in South Africa lies inside South Africa itself."

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### The ANC underground

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We have indicated that the ANC had resolved to operate as a clandestine organization inside South Africa. Nelson Mandela was elected as the leader of our internal sector. Having fully satisfied itself that the patient, political, peaceful and nonviolent struggle which our people had waged for half a century could advance the struggle no further, the ANC embarked on the path of armed revolution.

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### Guerrilla warfare

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The problems of launching guerrilla warfare are known clearly by those who have made a thorough study of the subject or who have actually participated in its conduct, and we need not deal with these problems here.

Again, we should stress that our organization had to take into account the concrete situation which had developed for the enemy, as well as the situation on our side.

South Africa had emerged as an imperialist state in its own right. Behind the sugarcoated assurances from the Pretoria regime of its desire to develop "good neighbor" relations with the newly independent African states lay the conspiracy to impose her economic — and, ultimately, her military — domination of these territories, especially those in southern Africa.

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### The Morogoro Conference

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Following our guerrilla forces' commitment to fight, it became necessary for the African National Congress to once more review the new situation which had arisen. A conference was therefore convened at Morogoro, Tanzania, in April 1969 whose main aim was to bring about qualitative changes in the organizational content of our move-







ment so as to harmonize with the new situation which history had imposed on the South African liberation movement — namely, a revolutionary people's war. The conference, which opened in the presence of representatives of the Organization of African Unity, the All African Trade Union Federation and such fraternal organizations as FRELIMO, ZAPU and the MPLA, also defined the new tasks facing the organization:

The conference defined the fundamental problem of the South African revolution as the liberation of the African oppressed majority. At the same time, the conference noted that the cruel oppression meted out to the Africans also applied to the Indian and coloured peoples.

The conference, therefore, advocated the reorganization of the

Congress alliance in a manner that harmonized with the new situation and affirmed the necessity to integrate all oppressed national groups and revolutionary forces under the banner of the ANC.

The conference observed that a vital factor making for our inevitable victory was the support of progressive peoples the world over and the possibility of finding direct allies among the millions of fighting peoples in southern Africa: in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, Angola and Guinea-Bissau.

The conference observed that, like all oppressed peoples, we would naturally like to get rid of the oppressors and exploiters in the shortest possible time. Should it turn out that the revolution developed faster than expected, we should be ready for that, but serious analysis suggested that the struggle would be a long one.

The conference confidently pointed out that victory was absolutely

certain and that, both historically and in practical terms, the conditions which now existed were favorable for a successful revolutionary war in our country.

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**Freedom or death**

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To sum up, in the words of our President Oliver Tambo:

We in the African National Congress do not imagine that the defeat of imperialism in southern Africa will be quick or easy. We realize it will be long-drawn-out and bloody, but we are confident of the final

outcome. As our forces drive deeper into the south, we have no doubt that they will be joined not by some but by the whole of the African nation; by the oppressed minorities, the Indian and coloured people; and by an increasing number of white democrats.

Toward this victory, we will fight to the bitter end.

Our battle cry is and shall continue to be VICTORY OR DEATH! WE SHALL WIN!

Long live the armed struggle of the people for freedom!

Amandla Ngawethu! Maatla ke A Rona!

Power to the people! ●