

Tandi Gcabashe*

From Luthuli To Mandela: The Struggle Goes On

In order to put the topic of this presentation into proper perspective, let me relate the history of our struggle which began decades before the Luthuli-Mandela era.

The white settler community at the Cape of Good Hope arrived in 1652. The Dutch East India Company needed to obtain regular supplies of fresh meat, fruit and vegetables for the trading post and transient ships rounding the Cape. Many wars were fought between the indigenous people and the newly arrived whites as they pushed into the interior and extended to the northeast. The Dutch and the English first fought the Khoikhoi and San peoples whom they easily decimated. Later they met the more militant Xhosas and Zulus in frontier wars. Fierce military confrontations with those indigenous nations lasted 250 years. The Africans were no easy prey, but eventually in 1906 Chief Bambatha was crushed. The superior technology of the whites gave them the victory and they took our land by means of gunpowder.

At the turn of the 19th century resistance against white domination took a new form. Blacks resorted to the techniques of petition, negotiation, demonstrations, strikes, and non-violent direct action. Mahatma Gandhi had arrived in South Africa in 1893. He founded the Natal Indian Congress to press for Indian rights. He, thereby, laid the foundation for tactics that were to be used by Black South Africans in the Defiance Campaign of the early 1950s.

Meanwhile, the ending of the Anglo-Boer war and the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 set the context within which African political organization and activity germinated. There was a feeling among our ancestors that the union between the Boers and the Britons was aim-

ed at unified oppression of the African. In response to the new condition of the Africans — such as landlessness, votelessness and heavy taxation — the African National Congress (ANC) was founded in 1912.

The ANC was designed to organize united African resistance to white domination. As my father, Chief Albert Luthuli, President of the ANC from 1952 to 1967, put it: “The business of the ANC is to right the total exclusion of the African from the management of South Africa, to give direction to the forces of liberation, to harness peacefully the growing resistance to continued oppression and by various non-violent means, to demand the redress of injustice.”

The early African National Congress leaders such as Dr. Xuma, Dr. Jabavu, and Dr. Dube, tended to be elitist and sought tolerance and the accommodation of Africans within the existing white political, social and economic structures. Instead of gaining white understanding, the laws became even more restrictive and harsh. It also became quite clear that the effort of Blacks to organize through petitions, good will and logic had run its course.

The frustrated ANC Youth League, led by Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo (currently the ANC president in exile) sought a non-violent yet militant means for dealing with the white oppressor. Concurrently, the spirit of Black Nationalism was evoked in the Africans. The Defiance Campaign was formulated and its program implemented from 1949 to 1960. The objective of the campaign was to disobey, disregard and ignore all unjust laws that the Africans had no part in formulating.

There were 8,500 people who volunteered for participation in the campaign and they were carefully trained on how to respond in the face of official provocation. Luthuli and Mandela played leading roles in these campaigns in Natal and the Transvaal respectively. My father was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his pivotal leadership in this phase of the struggle. The 1960 Sharpsville Massacre of 69 persons who had gathered for a non-violent protest against the much-hated pass laws, marked the

end of the non-violent era of our resistance and the resumption of the armed struggle.

The government blamed the violence of Sharpsville on the African people. The consequence was the banning of the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress (PAC). It was at this time, after Sharpsville, that Nelson Mandela rose up in the ranks of the movement and acquitted himself nobly as the undisputed leader of the people.

After the ANC was outlawed the organization was forced to go underground. From there Nelson Mandela organized an All-African Conference. He traveled in and out of South Africa, crossing the border without a passport and at great risk to his life. His mission was to inform the African leaders about our demise and to advise them of the decision to take up arms and advocate that the United Nations should impose sanctions in order to bring about the complete isolation of South Africa.

At this time, between 1961 and 1962, Mandela was the most wanted man in South Africa. The authorities dubbed him "the Black Pimpernel," and a high price was put on information leading to his arrest. He visited my father, who himself was banished at Groutville, to report on and plan his missions. Of course he traveled in disguise and his meetings were clandestine.

On August 5, 1962 Nelson Mandela was arrested. That day stands out clearly in my mind. It felt like a dark heavy cloud had descended from the heavens. A feeling of doom and helplessness permeated all of the Black society. His arrest was obviously the work of an informer. He was charged with leaving the country without the necessary documents. While serving the sentence he was charged as co-defendant and underwent the Rivonia Trial, for which he was convicted to life imprisonment with twelve other leaders of the African National Congress.

Today Mandela's seventieth birthday is a newsworthy item internationally. When I woke up this morning, I looked at the news. There are celebrations from London to Amsterdam, to Rome, to Africa, the Caribbean and

here in Atlanta. In this city we are going to have a big celebration at the gymnasium of the Morris Brown College. This event will be organized by the American Friends Service Committee and the headquarters of the Jesse Jackson 1988 Presidential Campaign. All over the world the greatness and power of this man is being recognized. The only country in which Mandela's birthday is not being celebrated freely is South Africa!

The South African authorities refuse to accept the fact that Nelson Mandela has become a power greater than themselves. There is no prison cell that can confine his ideas; no government, no man-made laws or restrictions that can contain his influence. The present-day youth of South Africa, who were not yet born at the time of his arrest, have read about him and have been inspired by him—despite the curtailment of free information. Mandela has come to symbolize and epitomize what struggle is about, not only for the people of South Africa, but for oppressed masses all over the world.

In prison, unjustly incarcerated, cut off from the world theatre, Mandela has received many awards and honors, doctoral degrees, prizes, streets and buildings named after him. This year the Congress of the United States passed a resolution designating June 26, 1988 as a National Day of Recognition for Nelson Mandela.

As we celebrate and honor this man for his contributions to the struggle, let us challenge ourselves to a greater commitment and a greater contribution to the South African effort to secure freedom, equality and justice for all her people. Congressman Ron Dellums has introduced a bill in the U.S. House of Representatives (HB 1518) calling for total United States disinvestment from South Africa and the prohibition of trade except for strategic minerals in instances when the President of the United States deems that such restriction will be injurious to the U.S. economic and defense systems.

Those of you who are attending this First Pan-African Christian Church Conference who wish to support us in this our hour of need, can call,

write or visit the congressmen and congresswomen and ask them to vote yes on HB 1518 and the companion Senate Bill 2378.

I do thank all of you for listening to me this afternoon. Amandla! Amandla! Happy Birthday, Nelson Mandela! And may God bless you! Before I conclude, let me recognize another son of Africa, Eric Allen Shaka Thomas, born on this day on the continent of Mother Africa in Zaire in 1961, where his parents were missionaries. Happy birthday Eric! It's a challenge to be coupled with a man of Nelson's stature in any form or fashion, but I know Eric will meet this challenge admirably.