

Wreckers of the Fight against Apartheid : I

In 1960 the Verwoerd dictatorship banned both the African National Congress and its right-wing splinter organization, the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC). Leaders of the latter group fled abroad almost to a man and have concerned themselves while in exile with their campaign, not against apartheid, but against the Congress alliance. Their slanders find a willing audience among people abroad who do not know the facts. That is why we have considered it necessary to embark upon the present series.

The Myth of PAC Militancy

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THE PAN-AFRICANIST CONGRESS of South Africa made its appearance as an independent political body in November 1958. In its short span of seven years it has managed such a multitude of political somersaults in so many important fields that it is becoming increasingly difficult to talk of PAC policy or to pinpoint its fundamental credo. Its only consistency has been an automatic rejection of everything said or done by the African National Congress. Apart from this it has managed, during this period, to be both racialist and multiracialist, anti-communist and pro-communist and, pro-violence and pacifist.

The precise determination of its approach to many fundamental issues is often very closely related to the question of which of its leaders is asking for what from which part of the world. When Potlako Leballo its present leader tours China, he offers himself as a leader of a truly revolutionary left, anti-imperialist force. When Nana Mahomo goes begging for funds from the United States he presents PAC as a bastion against communist influence in the National Liberation movement. They have swung from the most virulent racialism against the Whites and Indians to allowing representatives of both groups (in some cases with very questionable political ties) to occupy leading and dominant positions in their apparatus.

In Africa their militant talk against Verwoerd knows no bounds.

Before the United Nations their spokesmen (the ex-British Colonial Office employee, Patrick Duncan and Mahomo) go on record against the imposition of full sanctions—a policy which happens to suit the imperialists.

Inside South Africa, the absence of a principled approach towards the struggle for national liberation found many of the PAC leaders on the same side as Verwoerd in their attempts to sabotage the various nation-wide demonstrations which were organized by the ANC before 1960. An examination of PAC literature during this period shows that very scant attention was being paid to the oppressive white regime and the bulk of PAC invective was devoted to the undermining of the ANC.

Even today, leaders of PAC like Matthew Nkoana (a journalist with a long history of association with the Chamber of Mines' *Bantu World* and Verwoerd's *Elethu*) spends more energy and resources in an attempt to discredit the ANC than in campaigning against the apartheid regime. In an endeavour to tap yet other financial resources in Africa and elsewhere lip service is paid to the unity of the liberation forces. At the same time the procession of attacks, and slanders about the ANC and its allies is unabated. In this campaign lies and fabrications fall from the pens of their journalists only too easily.

In its public relations work the PAC has (particularly in Africa) attempted to build up a picture of itself as a fiery national movement which, in contrast to the ANC, is African both in form and substance. It wants to be accepted as the more militant and more revolutionary wing of the National Liberation movement. It attempts to paint a picture of a white, Indian or communist dominated ANC consisting of moderates and compromisers who don't really wish to have a real confrontation with the white state. It tries to present itself as a body which was instrumental in introducing a new, militant and revolutionary spirit into the anti-Verwoerd struggle.

An attempt was made to destroy Mandela, the unchallenged mass leader of the struggle against white supremacy. When this attempt failed they try to make the best of it by the insinuation that Mandela is different from other ANC leaders and cap it with the concoction that he is advising his followers to join PAC (*Africa and the World*—April 1965—article by Nkoana). Where they can no longer maintain the pretence that the ANC stands for moderation and compromise they resort to the fable that insofar as the ANC is showing its teeth it has followed in the footsteps of the PAC.

This myth of PAC militancy does not stand up to even a superficial scrutiny. For a short time it struck root in some parts of Africa because the murders committed at Sharpeville led, understandably, to a confusion between white brutality and the character of the campaign

which led up to the massacre. Events since Sharpeville (including the general conduct of affairs by the ever-changing and ever-bickering PAC leadership) have served to disenchant many of its former friends and members and to expose this myth of militancy. A short survey of the main events both before and after 1960 should serve, once and for all, to prick the bubble.

As a formal organizational group the PAC was created in November 1958 after a group of hooligans had failed to break up the ANC conference which was being held in Orlando under the chairmanship of Oliver Tambo. In a statement adopted by a group of 100 Africanists (including Leballo and Madzunya) and sent to the chairman of the conference, the signatories stated,

We are launching out on our own as the custodians of ANC policy as formulated in 1912 and pursued up to the time of the Congress alliance.

This breakaway occurred against the background of the ANC campaign of protest against the undemocratic travesty of the 1958 general election. It is of importance to recall that the forces of the white state were mobilized as never before to deal with this protest. The Prime Minister threatened retaliation 'with the full might of the state'. The white opposition United Party called for strong government action against the ANC. The police force and the army were called into action against the proposed strike. The so-called 'Bantu' press on which many of the Africanist leaders were employed made common cause with the Nationalist and U.P. dailies to threaten the ANC and to goad the government into action.

Treachery and Expulsion

It was not therefore altogether surprising that these same pillars of white supremacy should hail both Leballo and Madzunya as 'the most responsible and powerful native leaders' because they too joined the campaign of opposition to the proposed action. For this treachery they were expelled from the ANC. Since this date it has been the hallmark of the PAC leadership to make common cause with white reaction in attempting to persuade the people not to take a part in any ANC-led demonstration.

It is characteristic that the 'Africanist' clique within the ANC which was the nucleus of the PAC should have been expelled because of their opposition to a political general strike, which was the most radical form of mass action until then undertaken by the ANC. At no time was their opposition directed against any alleged lack of militancy. In setting up the PAC as their own separate organization they stressed their adherence to the emphasis on exclusively 'non-violent' methods of

struggle which the parent body was already beginning to abandon. Their pledge to carry on as 'custodians' of the moderate policy as 'formulated in 1912 and pursued until the time of the Congress alliance' was designed to reassure the white authorities that PAC would not associate itself with the increasingly militant forms of mass struggle which, under the Lutuli-Mandela-Sisulu leadership, the ANC itself was turning to in the late fifties.

Those who still harboured any illusions as to what was in the minds of the leaders could read in *Contact* these words of explanation by Leballo (November 1st, 1958):

The African people in general do not want to be allied with the Congress of Democrats. They know these people to be leftists and when we want to fight for our rights these people weaken us. This is so because they use campaigns for their own ends and *also because the Government will not listen to our requests and demands because of their outlook.*

If it had come from the Institute of Race Relations which sees the advancement of 'our Native friends' in terms of becoming *persona grata* with the white supremacists, this sort of statement would not have been surprising. But coming from the leader of a movement which would have us believe that it injected a new revolutionary fervour, it is, to say the least of it, a despicable form of Uncle Tomism. For not only does it reflect an anti-left bias but a cringing 'Ja-Baas' attitude to politics in South Africa. It also serves to demonstrate a tendency which was to become more and more evident with the progress of time, of unprincipled phrasemongering and of teaming up with any group or any idea which, for the moment, will serve to weaken PAC's main enemy—not Verwoerd but the ANC.

At about the same time Patrick Duncan who was to become a top executive and representative of the PAC, was devoting his columns of *Contact* to publicizing memorials to 'the victims of Mau-Mau terrorism' (December 27th, 1958) and attacking the United Arab Republic for 'challenging the Ghandian policy of the peaceful arrangement of affairs with the ex-colonial powers' (December 13th, 1958) and supporting U.S. action against the Chinese People's Republic. 'No one with any sense' said *Contact* on October 18th, 1958, 'could expect the Americans to run away the moment the cannons started to fire'. And then, with disgusting bad taste, 'No doubt each shell fired into Quemoy and Matsu was painted with an emblem of Picasso's dove.' Africans will also not forget the most shameful act of all—the build-up by Duncan in his columns of the murderers of Lumumba. *For which of these acts, I wonder, was he initiated into the circle of the select few white men who could claim to be 'African' in terms of PAC definitions?*

No doubt, partisans of PAC will point to pro-left utterances by Leballo

when he was in Peking and pro-U.A.R. utterances by Duncan when he was in Algeria. But this does not destroy my thesis, it proves it.

Well, you might say, let us judge these people not on what they said but on what they did—which after all is the acid test. It is in the field of action even more than in the field of their ever-changing and easily accommodating views, that PAC's calibre has, in some cases, been misunderstood and in others, distorted.

Having launched itself as an independent body this self-styled elephant gave birth to a mouse. The decade proceeding the formation of PAC had been a decade of big events which only people with small minds could belittle. The heroic defiance campaign of 1952 and taken place. 8,000 had gone to jail and the campaign had culminated in pitched battles between the people and the police in all the principal urban centres. Memory was still fresh of the magnificent resistance organized by the ANC, with the support of the other Congresses, to the introduction of pass laws for women. A sense of achievement was still being felt by the hundreds of thousands of workers who had, on more than one occasion, participated in ANC-organized general strikes against the white regime. The prosecution of the people's leaders in the treason trial, with its emphasis of the Freedom Charter as the most serious threat to the white state, saw outside the court room one of the most massive and inspiring demonstrations of the African people which had even been witnessed. The peasant revolts of Pondoland and Sekhukhuniland—the magnificent Alexandra bus boycott—the growing number of economic strikes—this and much more was evidence of a people in turmoil; a people which had been moved to great heights of struggle by the ability and militancy of the ANC. *Those who distort the character of the Congress alliance would do well to remember that these events occurred during the period when it was in existence—a period which the PAC propagandists would like to describe as one of compromise.*

Against such a background of growing militancy on a far greater scale than had been seen in the previous half century, what was PAC's introduction card in the sphere of action? It was the so-called 'Status Campaign'. In the words of Sobukwe,

an all-embracing and multi-frontal unfolding and expanding campaign involving the political, economic and social status of the African.

No one can deny that the bad manners displayed by the whites in every sphere of life towards the non-whites is just another example of white supremacy and arrogance which has to be smashed along with much else. But against the background of the numerous militant struggles which had been organized or inspired by the ANC, a courtesy

campaign could by no stretch of the imagination be regarded as a break with so-called moderation. It smacked more the liberal illusion that 'if only *we* talked to *them* properly we would get on better' than fighting talk. No objection can of course be taken to attempts by either liberal white ladies or 'fiery' PAC leaders to improve racial manners. But need one even argue that in South Africa of the late fifties, with all that had happened, this was like preparing for a journey by sewing up the upholstery of a car when the engine has dropped out.

Little surprise therefore that (in the untypical frankness of Nkoana's admission) the status campaign 'deceptively simple in its title raised not a hair in the white supremacists camp when he (Sobukwe) first announced it shortly after the PAC was formed' (*Africa and the World*, March 1965). Nkoana proceeds to quote Sobukwe that the campaign was intended to make 'white supremacy mentally untenable to our people' and as a result it would become 'physically untenable' too. It is not necessary at this stage to quarrel with this rather woolly formulation, in order to reject out of hand the conclusion that the protagonists of such a thesis are embarking on a militant revolutionary struggle. This was the much heralded break with so-called ANC moderation and it surprised no one that 'it raised not a hair in the white supremacist camp'. It also surprised no one that the campaign failed to inspire the people and fizzled out before it ever got going.

In keeping with its role as the leading liberatory organization, the ANC in 1959 once again made new preparations for an onslaught on the pass system. At the same time the PAC also embarked on an anti-pass campaign which culminated in the Sharpeville murders. This event more than any other helped to create most of the illusions about the PAC and its contrast with the ANC. An examination of the literature preceding Sharpeville (including PAC's own publications) can lead to no conclusion other than that the PAC action was in fact an ill-organized, ill-thought out and second rate copy of the 1952 defiance campaign.

The Pass Campaign of 1960

Far from breaking with previous techniques of pacifism in struggle the corner-stone of it was non-violence. Sobukwe duly wrote to the head of the police informing him about the campaign and advising him that he and his followers would present themselves for arrest on March 21st, 1960. *The letter ends 'hoping you will co-operate to try to make this a most peaceful and disciplined campaign'*. Nkoana describes this as 'action of a disciplined, physically non-violent nature; but firm, positive action propelled by a violent interior revolution'. Whatever

this diarrhoea of words might mean it does not serve in any way to show that *here* was a new approach; that *here* was a revolutionary break with ANC 'moderation'.

The justifiable emotion raised by the Sharpeville massacre made it possible for some people to overlook the relatively second-hand, mild, out-dated and moderate approach of the PAC. It has also made some people forget that the half-baked unprepared campaign was triggered off on March 21st for the sole reason that the PAC had at all costs to steal a march on the ANC which, it was well known, was to announce the second phase of its own campaign on March 31st.

Indeed, the response from the people was according to Sobukwe 'disappointing'. In the largest industrial metropolis, Johannesburg, ($\frac{3}{4}$ million Africans) 200 responded. In Natal and the Free State almost none at all. Of the claimed total of 38,000 who (according to the PAC) responded, 35,000 came from just two residential complexes—the Vereeniging area and the Western Cape. Sobukwe's own area (the south-west of Johannesburg, with a population of about a quarter million) could muster only a few dozen.

This lack of response in most parts of the land was not due to any absence of hatred for the pass-laws—this was in plenty. It was due to the fact that the African people saw in it an ill-prepared echo of what had been done more efficiently and effectively in the defiance campaign of 1952; that the PAC leaders appeared not only as relatively unknown men, compared with the seasoned warriors of the ANC in whom the masses had learnt to have confidence, but also as men with nothing new to offer.

The lack of preparation by the PAC showed itself in the weeks following Sharpeville. With the entry of Sobukwe and a few of his colleagues into gaol the PAC leadership in most of the country had disappeared. It was only in the Western Cape where a semblance of PAC leadership was left. Its role in the famous march on Cape Town could be made the subject of a separate investigation. Suffice it to say that both Duncan and Phillip Kgosana (now in the U.S. on a 'leadership training programme') worked with the police to turn the people back.

The PAC propagandists have often attempted to make a virtue out of this political amateurishness and crass irresponsibility. 'The leaders will be with the people in the gaols' was the cry. They did not bargain for the fact that the mass of the people would not follow the leaders into voluntary surrender to the white police force—that the period of passive surrender to the state was no longer acceptable as an effective instrument of struggle or protest.

In the result the event which rocked the world—the shooting down of the peaceful crowd at Sharpeville—found a situation in which,

except for the Western Cape, the ANC provided the leadership. It was the ANC which organized the nation-wide general strike of protest against the Sharpeville massacre which brought out over 250,000 workers. It was the ANC which called on the people to burn their passes (with Lutuli publicly starting with his own) which led to the temporary suspension of the pass laws. *From the PAC there was absolute silence. Not one direction and not one leaflet. Events had overtaken them completely.*

Apart from the moderate character of the campaign and the criminally irresponsible manner in which it was carried out, only one further aspect remains to be considered—an aspect which is conveniently never referred to by the PAC ‘historians’ these days—the fiasco of their loudly-proclaimed slogan ‘No Bail, No Defence and No Fines’. In no time this became ‘Bail, defence and run away’. Almost every single PAC leader (including Sobukwe who appealed against the severity of his sentence and conviction) soon demonstrated the emptiness of this slogan.

This conduct, one might add, was in striking contrast to the consistent line of Mandela who both in his first trial when he was sentenced to six years (Sobukwe got three years) and in his second trial when he was sentenced to life imprisonment refused to appeal for mercy to the white appeal court. No one suggests that a struggle should not make use of legal processes when the cause demands it. But this is a far cry from breaking faith with your proclaimed principles.

What is even more irksome about this slogan is the use to which it was put, at one stage, to attempt to contrast PAC ‘militancy’ in the courts with alleged ANC ‘moderation’. As in so many other cases, when it came to the real thing the conduct of Mandela, Sisulu and other Congress leaders in the courts attracted the most excited admiration of the South African people and the whole world. And let us remember that it was not Mandela and Sisulu who had boasted about ‘no bail, no defence and no fines’.

A further lesson which the Sharpeville episode drives home is the ANC’s undeviating devotion to the principle that the struggle against white supremacy is primary. Before the PAC campaign, Duma Nokwe, in his capacity as Secretary General of the ANC, wrote to warn Sobukwe that

... it is treacherous to the liberation movement to embark on a campaign which has not been properly prepared and which has no reasonable prospect of success.

Despite this warning, borne out by the practical fiasco of the PAC campaign, the ANC did not waste time saying ‘we told you so’, but devoted its full attention to rallying the masses and arousing them to

protest against the horrible massacre at Sharpeville. While PAC remained silent and with no leadership to offer, the ANC stepped into the breach to rally nation-wide protest and mass action. However justifiably disgusted with PAC irresponsibility, the ANC recognized that this was no time for recriminations.

This is in marked contrast with the behaviour of PAC which time and again lined up with Verwoerd and the police in the capacity of strike-breaker on every occasion when the ANC and its partners in the Congress alliance organized national demonstrations, stay-at-homes and other forms of mass action. This was true of the 'Africanist' faction in the ANC before it broke away in 1959 to form PAC. It was true of the brief period between then and 1960 when the Verwoerd government declared a state of emergency and outlawed both organizations. It has remained true during the past five years of illegality.

After the banning of the organizations, the ANC made a number of attempts to bring about national unity, including PAC, against the increasingly Nazi methods of the Verwoerd-Vorster dictatorship. Abroad PAC was invited to join a 'South African United Front' to campaign against apartheid abroad. At home, the remaining PAC leaders were invited to join in the preparations for the coming all-African Conference at Maritzburg. Both these well-meant attempts broke down as a result of the apparently incurable habit of the PAC leaders of slandering, intriguing and lying against the ANC and its allies, and even of lining up with Verwoerd against them.

Some PAC representatives came to the meeting in December 1960 which preceded the Maritzburg all-in conference, and which discussed ways of struggle and protest against the Verwoerd government's new attacks on the Africans, and also its blatant ignoring of the African majority in holding an all-White referendum on the issue of declaring a baasskap republic. But when the Johannesburg meeting had been raided by the police, and when it became clear that the forthcoming Maritzburg conference would reject the slogan of 'non-violence' as an absolute principle, the PAC leaders got cold feet and backed out.

The great three-day strike of May 1961, which turned the planned 'Republic Day' celebrations into a farce, with a tense atmosphere of virtual martial law, found the PAC leadership once again in the role of strikebreakers. The PAC, which had remained as silent as the grave since Sharpeville, made a brief and inglorious reappearance on the South African scene to issue leaflets calling on the workers to ignore the stay-at-home call of Maritzburg and Mandela—and to go to work as usual. The excuse was that the declaration of a republic was the white people's affair. Small wonder that Vorster's police were delighted and even helped distribute these leaflets.

Such is the Record

Such then is the PAC balance sheet, up to and including the Maritzburg conference—that historic turning point when the African people, without PAC participation truly broke with the past tradition of exclusive non-violence which—however justified in its time—had served its purpose and become an obstacle to the ‘new forms of struggle’ now required. Whatever else may be inferred from this period, one thing is incontrovertible. The myth of militancy which its representatives managed to build up in some people’s minds, had no basis in reality. The man who more than any other helped to create this myth, was the brute who ordered the massacre and not Sobukwe with his well publicized ‘hope you will co-operate’ letter to the police.

It is certainly false to claim as Nkoana does (*New African*, October 1965) that the breakaway of PAC resulted in ‘an era of militant positive action’. This sort of public relations puffery must no longer be left unchallenged.

A new era was indeed ushered in in the sixties in South African politics—the era of preparing for the armed revolutionary overthrow of the white state. The nation-wide explosions which rocked the country on December 16th, 1961, ushered in the new period of a break with ‘call me mister’ and ‘hope you will co-operate’ type of campaigns. This was the first public break with pacifism. In themselves the bombs which exploded in various government buildings did relatively little damage. No one believed that the toppling of electric pylons would be enough to topple the white state, but this date and the actions which occurred symbolized (as they were intended to do) a public wrench with past tactics which were swiftly becoming an anachronism in the new situation.

In a statement which was widely distributed on the same night as the explosions, *Umkonto we Sizwe* proclaimed that it would ‘carry on the struggle for freedom and democracy by new methods which are necessary to complement the actions of the established national liberation organizations. Violence will no longer be met with non-violent resistance.’ It gave the first tangible warning that, to use Mandela’s words, ‘the dispute between the government and my people will be settled in violence and by force’.

Thus the ANC once again demonstrated its foresight and leadership qualities based on a scientific analysis of objective conditions. The refusal by Mandela to give himself up for arrest after the strike and his decision to continue leading the struggle from underground in South Africa also spelt a new departure. No more of this ‘hope you will co-operate’ business. His heroic action which stirred the nation was

consistent with the new spirit of positive defiance and the use of counter-force which the ANC initiated into the political scene and which was subsequently adopted by all serious political groupings.

Mandela's action (and Sisulu's after him, and Mkwayi's after him, and Fischer's after him, etc.) was in marked contrast to the undisputed fact that after 1960 not one single top leader of the PAC remained at his post to lead the people in the place where it counts—South Africa.

It is now a matter of public record that sitting in the safety of Basutoland the PAC leadership—this time with Leballo at its head—again showed its irresponsibility and its ever-readiness to substitute sensation and limelight-seeking for constructive struggle. After almost two and a half years of silence they and the South African white-controlled press together, attacked the ANC's sabotage campaign. In one of the most irresponsible and disgraceful acts ever committed in the history of the liberation struggle, Leballo gave Verwoerd his plans of 'rebellion'—plans of child-like nonsensical proportions. Also presented to the government was a complete list of the names and addresses of those who were supposed to be taking part in this fiasco which was found in his public office by the British police and handed to the South African police.

The cost, both in lives and periods of imprisonment, to many thousands of African youth which can be directly traced to the Leballo boasting is incalculable. *The South African security police did not need a secret agent in the PAC camp. Vorster did not need to invent an excuse to go in for a new round of retaliation. It was all handed him on a plate by Leballo.*

In any event the enemy wanted nothing better than the uncontrolled violence of Poqo which operated not as an organized force as part of a political movement, but on the basis of spontaneous, unplanned, uncontrolled outbursts of useless violence—most of it restricted to a small corner of the country. This was playing with the people's lives and was calculated to discredit serious preparations for a real confrontation. So disorganized was it that Leballo himself was forced to concede in his notorious March interview that the two biggest events of Bashee Bridge and Paarl were undisciplined and unplanned actions. In fact you had the tragi-comic spectacle of Leballo being unable to decide whether Poqo was or was not part of the PAC.

This tragic Poqo episode was the first time that the PAC had come out publicly in support of a policy which the ANC had already proclaimed in 1961. It is interesting to note (but not altogether surprising) that the PAC propagandists who are ever anxious to project an image of its 'militancy' to the world outside, seldom if ever refer to this, the only (albeit tragic) PAC sojourn into the field of armed resistance.

I have dealt at length with the myth of PAC 'militancy' because a few outside South Africa, in particular those who have no intimate knowledge of events there, can often be misled by big talk and false claims. It does not, of course, follow that every PAC member or participant in its activities is of the same stamp. There must be many whose loyalty and devotion to the cause of the African people cannot be questioned and who were taken in by the false and inflated claims of militancy and 'true' African nationalism. The ugly spectacle of endless leadership putsches outside and serious heart-searching as to why Verwoerd should in 1964 give Leballo free and unmolested passage through the Republic—these and other equally serious misgivings has already moved many genuine elements to break with the PAC and to join the organization which unites all African patriots—the African National Congress.