



SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL

605 THIRD AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10158

(212) 661-0280

FAX 1-212-370-7896

TOM LODGE, Staff Associate

Benjamin Pogrund
4 Ulysses Road
LONDON, NW6 1EE

June 25, 1991

Dear Benjie

I hope this review (to appear in University of Natal's **Transformation**) pleases you more than Ann Harries's effort. I enjoyed "How can man die better..." very much indeed.

Best wishes.

Yours,

Tom.
Tom Lodge

REVIEW ARTICLE: "A LIBERAL OF ANOTHER COLOUR"

Benjamin Pogrand, *How can man die better... : Sobukwe and Apartheid*, Peter Halban, London, 1990, pp. 406, L14.95.

Tom Lodge

Pogrand's biography of Robert Sobukwe tells two stories. The first is a fairly straightforward "life and times" of a politician: childhood, upbringing, education, professional career, intellectual formation, and organizational activities - a narrative generally confined to the public personality and not the private man. The second story concerns the development of a friendship; it dominates the second half of the book and takes place in the later part of Sobukwe's life. It is a much more intimate story and reveals private emotions and inner feelings. The first story is constructed largely from other people's recollections; the second rests much more firmly on Pogrand's first hand knowledge as well as Sobukwe's own testimony through his correspondence. A major difficulty for any reviewer is to decide whether the two stories are about the same person.

The first story represents a solid contribution to the existing literature on black South African politics. Sobukwe was an influential leader and played a decisive role in the formation of African nationalist opposition to apartheid; a comprehensive biography has long been overdue. Pogrand begins by supplying a substantial quantity of information about his subject's childhood and education. Robert Mangaliso ("It is wonderful") Sobukwe was born in 1924 in Graaff-Reinet where "even the dogs bark in Afrikaans" (p.5), one of four surviving children in the household of Hubert Sobukwe, municipal laborer and part-time woodcutter. His mother cooked at the local hospital and also worked as a domestic servant. His father was Sesotho-speaking, whereas Angelina Sobukwe was "a Pondo of the Xhosa tribe" (p.6). Notwithstanding the strong Christian ethos of the Sobukwes' home - Hubert was a conspicuous local methodist - Robert underwent "tribal initiation ceremonies": circumcision and three weeks in the bush smeared with ochre colored clay. In 1940, two years after outgrowing the local primary schools, Robert enrolled at the Healdtown Institute, the biggest methodist school in South Africa. He spent six years there, rising to be head boy, distinguishing himself according to fellow students for "his brilliance and command of the English language", surviving an attack of tuberculosis, and securing financial support from bursaries and the private generosity of Healdtown's headmaster, George Caley.

His matriculation and entry to university at the age of 22 consolidated a remarkable record of family achievement. The Sobukwes were poor - they celebrated Christmas with a new suit of clothes for each child, the only ones they purchased through the year. Angelina could not read but she brought back home cast-off books from her employers and joined her husband in encouraging their children to obtain the education which had been denied to them. When Robert began attending high school he became one of less than 6,000 African secondary school students nationwide. All three Sobukwe brothers graduated from high school and the oldest, Ernest went on to train as a priest and later was ordained as an Anglican bishop.

Robert Sobukwe began his studies at Fort Hare in 1947 - his fellow students included Joe Matthews, Nthato Motlana, Ntsu Mokhehle and Herbert Chitepo. For the first year he concentrated on his books, sustaining a reputation for zealous good conduct which he had earned as a Healdtown prefect by lying on a roof to catch junior pupils urinating in the open. In his second year, though, prompted by a course on native administration, a growing consciousness of racial discrimination "of which he was a victim only when he was close to his mid-1920s" (p.18), and the influence of one his lecturers, Cecil Ntloko, a follower of the All-African Convention, Sobukwe became more engaged politically, helping to prepare a daily commentary on current issues, called "Beware"; its favorite topic was "non-collaboration".

At that stage, the AAC was considered "more advanced in thought" (p.28) by Fort Hare students than the African National Congress. The initiative to start a branch of the ANC Youth League was taken in August 1948 by Godfrey Pitje, a lecturer in the Department of African Studies. Sobukwe and his classmates were at first skeptical and had to be urged to become founder members; for them the ANC was compromised by its continuing participation in the Native Representative Council and the township Advisory boards. Sobukwe rapidly attracted the attention of more senior Youth Leaguers, beginning in 1948 a regular correspondence with the CYL's President, A P Mda. At Fort Hare, the League seems mainly to have functioned as a discussion club though it played a significant role in the lobbying leading up to the ANC's adoption of Mda's militant Programme of Action at its 1949 national conference. In Pitje's words, Sobukwe "towered over" (p.29) his peers and mentors alike; some of the intellectual grounds for his ascendancy are evident in the text of an extraordinary speech made as outgoing SRC President at the 1949 "completers social".

The speech was "quoted for years by students" (p.39) and in the context of its time it was remarkable, anticipating the political perceptions and rhetoric of several successive generations. It included a closely argued critique of liberal gradualism ("if you see any signs of 'broadmindedness' or 'reasonableness' in us, or if you hear us talk of practical experience as a modifier of man's views, denounce us as traitors" (p.36)). Its depiction of "the second rape of Africa" by "financial and economic imperialism under the guise of a tempting slogan, 'the development of backward areas and people' " was also of a different order of sophistication to most of the anti-colonial polemics then in vogue. As Pogrud observes, the speech "contained much of what was to be Sobukwe's later political philosophy" (39) (1). Above all it emphasized the transcendent power of ideas, whether in defining social identity - for example, Europeans and other "minorities" could "secure mental and spiritual freedom" in South Africa by learning to breath, dream and live Africa (p.37) - or in mobilizing popular revolt - "show the light and the masses will find the way" (p.36). For Sobukwe, the "choice" of an appropriate "ideology" by leadership was the key to developing an effective political movement - then and later he was demonstrably unconcerned with the more technical and pragmatic dimensions of activism and organization. Revealingly, when the nurses at nearby Victoria Hospital went on strike and Fort Hare students began raising support, Sobukwe, then the SRC President, remained aloof at first: "He said he was busy with his studies". His fellow students had "to persuade him that the nurses were his sisters and he had a duty to help them ...for days he remained with his books" (p.33).

The speech confirmed Sobukwe's rising reputation "as a major standard-bearer for African Nationalism" (p.46): in December 1949 Sobukwe was selected by Godfrey Pitje as the Youth League's national secretary (2). With the inception of the new decade, though, Sobukwe withdrew to the political margins; accepting a teaching post in Standerton, under his and Pitje's stewardship the League stagnated. He remained on the sidelines during the Defiance Campaign, though he courageously put his teaching job in jeopardy by addressing a public meeting convened by the local ANC branch of which he was secretary. Otherwise his political activities were limited to writing articles for a cyclostyled newsheet distributed by the East London "Bureau of African Nationalism". He was critical of the Defiance Campaign as a "communist stunt", distrusting its motives because African nationalists "had not had a hand in planning it and the decision making was not theirs" (p.53). Two years later, Sobukwe married Veronica Mathe, one of the nurses who had participated in the Victoria Hospital strike, and moved to Johannesburg to take up a post at the University of the Witwatersrand as a Zulu language instructor. He joined the Mofolo branch of the ANC and cautiously emerged from the "hibernation of Standerton", writing articles for *The Africanist*, a bulletin issued from Orlando by disgruntled members of the Youth League. Sobukwe published his contributions under a pseudonym as was common practice with *Africanist* contributors, most of whom were teachers and therefore barred by the authorities from participation in the ANC. Sobukwe had a different reason for discretion; he believed that of his views were publicly known communists might dispossess him of his university post. To Pogrud who first met Sobukwe in late 1957 this fear seemed then "far fetched", though "it did indicate the depth of anxiety among those in the ANC who were opposed to communists" (p.65). Sobukwe's first hand experience of communists in the ANC could not have been extensive; during this time he was not a vigorous participant in the ANC's activities preferring, as even friends noted, to "remain behind the

scenes"; "being at the university he found it difficult to get in touch with people"(p.66). His antipathy to communists was in any case philosophical. Though he shared the Africanist conviction that communists subverted the ANC and "diluted" the force of its nationalist inspiration he was also opposed to communism "as a creed, believing it to bear its own oppression" (p.68).

The leadership crisis in 1958 within the Transvaal ANC prompted Sobukwe to abandon circumspection; he played a central role in the Africanists' efforts to takeover the provincial conference though privately he doubted the likelihood of their succeeding. Outmaneuvered by Oliver Tambo, the Africanists were forced to withdraw and Sobukwe drafted the letter which announced their "parting of the ways". Pogrund's description of the events surrounding the conference is the most detailed available and it confirms the exaggerated sense of drama with which the Africanists perceived their conflict with the ANC leadership; Sobukwe himself was sure that Oliver Tambo and his colleagues had assigned killers to three of the leading dissenters.

Pogrund's chronicling of the PAC's formation, its subsequent efforts to build a following, the pass campaign and the Sharpeville crisis, does not suggest the need for major revisions to the existing scholarship, but he does add telling anecdotal details. The PAC was distinctive for holding its public meetings on time and dispensing cool drinks from a refrigerator; otherwise, though, it was inept organizationally, failing, for instance, to print leaflets in time for its pass campaign. The personal responsibility for this omission was Jordan Ngubane's, whose membership of the PAC was a well-kept secret (3), but generally the PAC's preparations were hurried and haphazard. Its leaders were certain "that the country was ready and waiting for them to give the lead"; support didn't have to be prearranged, they thought, though they did hope that unions would play a major role, pinning extravagant hopes on an alliance with the inert and insubstantial union federation, FOFATUSA. In fact most of the PAC's committed following was amongst ununionised migrant laborers in Cape Town, as events after the Sharpeville massacre would demonstrate. Sobukwe may have predicted that Cape Town would become the focus of the campaign; apparently he gave his lieutenant, Nana Mahomo, "a specific message to Liberals in Cape Town asking for support" (p.122) (4). The episode conflicts with the recollections of at least one of the Cape leaders who insists that Sobukwe warned them against having anything to do with local Liberals (5). On the day of the protest, March 21 1960, a PAC member employed on one of the SABC's African language stations broadcast a programme of warsongs.

The passages describing the opening moments of the pass campaign contain some of the most evocative and compelling writing in the book. In particular the image of Sobukwe and his lonely disciples "walking silently and determinedly, picking their way through the people hurrying to work and the peak-hour buses and taxis" (131) captures the simultaneous dimensions of surreal pathos and heroic dignity which distinguished the PAC's first public action. For in Soweto the PAC leaders attracted no crowds and in the centers where it succeeded in eliciting a mass response no leaders of stature were at hand. Not that it would have made much difference if they had been; PAC principals insisted that leaders should lead through force of moral example and concentrated their energies on getting locked up soon as possible. Seriously underestimating the length of the prison terms they would receive they took only the most desultory precautions to install a chain of command which could function in their absence; Sobukwe's deputy was an inarticulate and shy office typist, William Jolobe, outside his organization completely unknown. By March 28, Sobukwe was sufficiently insulated from what was happening outside jail that he issued a statement opposing the ANC's call for a day of stay-at homes, mourning and passburning; as Pogrund notes, the PAC leader badly "misjudged the mood of huge numbers of black people, including those in PAC strongholds" (142).

With his conviction for incitement, Sobukwe's active career as a political leader was over, notwithstanding his efforts to communicate with his followers from prison. For the PAC he continued to fulfill important symbolic and charismatic functions, partially compensating for the serious shortcomings of those people who at liberty to actually lead the organization. An illuminating chapter on the PAC's prison existence makes it quite clear that Sobukwe had no linkages with the Poqo

movement (6) and knew nothing about the plans developed by the Maseru exiles for a general insurrection; indeed, had he known "he would have vetoed it" (p.183) according to one of the other PAC prisoners, Hamilton Keke. Pogrand himself was better informed; a Poqo member supplied him with regular updates after every secret meeting.

What kind of assessment can be made of Robert Sobukwe's public life? Pogrand does not attempt any form of evaluation; he shares with his subject an unquestioning confidence of his "relevance" to the "politics of power" (p.348). In this perception Sobukwe's historical greatness is too self evident to require measurement or analysis. In reality, though, Sobukwe's achievements as a political leader were very uneven.

In the first place, his active participation in any political organization was limited to two comparatively brief periods; the year in which he helped to build the Youth League's base at Fort Hare and the eighteen months between the Africanists' attempt to win control of the Transvaal ANC to his arrest on the first day of the PAC's pass campaign. In the interval separating these two phases, Sobukwe's political contribution mainly took the form of polemical writing, none of which, unfortunately, is documented in Pogrand's biography. For most of his twelve years' association with the ANC he was chiefly preoccupied with ideological dissent within the organization; he played no role in campaigning. He was incisive and eloquent as an orator, though, and he brought an intellectual refinement and clarity to the Pan-Africanists' philosophy, especially in conceptualizing its non-racialism. In matters of strategy he could be insightful and sensitive in assessing popular political feelings ("the masses do not hate an abstraction like 'oppression' or 'capitalism'. They make these things concrete and hate the oppressor - in South Africa the White Man". (7)). His insistence on the force of moral example by exemplary self sacrificing leaders reflected a broader vision which stressed the psychological dimensions of nurturing a popular susceptibility for rebellion. In these respects he stands out from his contemporaries. He was skillful in adapting his manner and style to his audience, alternating between the tightly reasoned discourse of his presentations at press conferences or in the columns of *Contact* and the folk wisdom which laced his speeches to audiences of migrant workers: "I am the son of Sobukwe, born in Graaff Reinet - that land of goats, the animal which we often have to quarantine when it has scabies" he told a rally in Cape Town's Langa location on February 8, 1960 (8). Then, as on other key occasions, he addressed his listeners in their own language, in this case "a pure Xhosa, untouched by township lingo" (p.119). At the fateful 1958 ANC conference in which the Africanists seceded, Sobukwe stated their case in Sesotho, on other occasions he was reputed to employ the language of Johannesburg's pavements, the "tsotsi-taal" of street-smart youngsters (9). A P Mda recalls that even while at Fort Hare, Sobukwe "felt he was one of the peasants", appearing at one conference at which all the other delegates wore suits dressed in workman's overalls (p.31).

These strengths need to be balanced against Sobukwe's shortcomings as an organizer and planner. His activist inexperience and his faith in ideology as the sufficient trigger needed to ignite a revolutionary combustion led him, as Pogrand observes, to disregard the necessity for the PAC "to develop an organizational base from which its message could be spread" (p.125), as well as the command structures through which its influence could be sustained. His strategic conception of the pass campaign was that it was only the opening stage of "a never ending stream" of offensives "until independence is won" (p.127). His disciples believed that these would follow each other almost spontaneously. Moses Dlamini, a young PAC recruit in 1960 who later served six years in prison, remembers Sobukwe as "the man who had said he would open only one page by launching the Anti-Pass campaign and thereafter all other pages would open of themselves" (10). Certainly he was inspirational: his attributes of courage, honor, and imagination laid the foundations of a powerful charismatic myth which endowed the PAC with a sense of moral purpose which more than anything else explains its lasting influence. Sobukwe was worshipped by his followers. Pogrand quotes Randolph Vigne's description of the young Cape Town leader, Philip Kgosana, whose "every action, every inflection of his voice, every gesture, was a copy of Sobukwe" (p. 138). In 1962, Poqo "task force" partisans huddled in dimly-lit Soweto rooms planning their uprising and singing:

Sobukwe lead us on. Sobukwe lead us on.
 We want our land.
 By 1963 we shall win back our land. (11)

Later, the same men, returning from their harsh daily servitude in the granite quarries of Robben Island, would approach a barbed wire-enclosed white-painted house "filled with expectant joy". they would feel "revitalized and rededicated, because the man who occupied that house was none other than the one most loved by his followers, Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe" (12). Pogrand describes a similar scene in a magnificent passage in which Sobukwe returns the prisoners' salutes, bending down to pick up a handful of earth, holding it up and letting it trickle through his fingers. "They knew he was addressing them as sons of the soil" (p.190). But then, in a richly ironic departure from the symbolism of indigenous nativism, one of the convicts says in Xhosa: "When it is like this we remember the words of Horatius":

And how can man die better,
 Then facing fearful odds,
 For the ashes of his fathers,
 And the temples of his Gods. (p.191)

Macauley's poem, written in the high noon of Victorian imperialism, was a favorite amongst PAC prisoners, always recited on special occasions, representative of "the romanticized heroic tradition which so many Africanist leaders seem to have acquired during their 'English' missionary education" (p.191). Nor was it an isolated example of this: Dlamini and his companions at Leeukop prison comforted each other by repeating the stanzas of Tennyson's "Ulysses" (13).

For Sobukwe, these two sources of moral reference, evocation of a pristine African community and the ethos of individual martyrdom drawn from Victorian and Edwardian epic literature, were emblematic of the tension which existed between his public personality and private self. Sobukwe the politician was an advocate of "positive action" but, as we know, his personal predisposition was to remain in the background, not as a consequence of any timidity, but because he probably sensed that his true vocation was as a thinker not an organizer. Nevertheless he admired his more physically assertive and down to earth colleagues enormously, and the more rough hewn they were the better. He was tolerant of their flaws, refusing to find fault even in the bellicose and reckless Potlake Leballo: "actually a good fellow" (p.102) (14).

Yet he had a profound moral antipathy towards violence; as Zeph Mothopeng, his successor as PAC president, remarked: "I don't think he would ever have been commander of an army" (p.332). Even at the PAC's inception he demonstrated the "hesitations and doubts of an honest man who was struggling to decide what he should do" (p.68). At the time Pogrand attributed these uncertainties to the conflict between his domestic and professional contentment and his commitment to the cause of political freedom. Such doubts may also have stemmed from the cultural ambiguities he represented as a Western-educated African intellectual. Despite his own accomplishments as a Xhosa poet and folklorist (his BA honors dissertation was on Xhosa riddles) he remained captivated by the literary culture of Europe, in 1957 translating "Macbeth" into Zulu, and ten years later observing that "an oppressed people have never produced great literature or art" (p.251). He perceived in moral aversion to racism "the distilled essence of Western thought" (p.228)

Nor was his admiration of Western culture limited to its canonical literature. He praised Lyndon Johnson as "the hope of all who stand for non-racialism" (p.231), he enthusiastically subscribed to the *Readers' Digest*, and worried about his children's pronunciation of English. At the same time African conventions and traditions remained extremely important to him. He insisted that his two sons should "undergo, like me, the *rite de passage* of circumcision" (p.265). He discerned in his wife's stoic endurance and undemonstrative reticence "the time embodiment of African womanhood" (p.249) (15). In various political observations he admired the acumen and "shrewdness" of peasant "tribesmen"

(p.230) and was adamant that within African societies "class interests are either non-existent or irrelevant or muted" (p.252). Yet, he said, authentic nationalists needed to "sever their tribal umbilical cords" (p.252). African identity should be constructed on the basis of continental patriotism not racial affinity; Sobukwe even reached the view that African-Americans and West Indians could not be pan-Africanists (p.270). In the end, Sobukwe's political testament breaks down into paradoxes: intuitive and romantic, visionary and blind, absolutist and tolerant, nationalist and *evolue*.

* * * *

Benjamin Pogrund's friendship with Robert Sobukwe began in late 1957. Pogrund then worked for an industrial firm and in his spare time was active in the Liberal Party, helping to establish a branch in Sophiatown. He wrote regularly for the Liberal fortnightly, *Contact*, using the pen-name "Umhlabeni". The friendship began quite casually; Pogrund encountered Sobukwe while collecting his fiancée from a language class. The two men began meeting fairly often after that; Pogrund knew that Sobukwe was a leading Africanist and he was interested learning about the mounting tensions inside the ANC. Initially quite critical of his new acquaintance, by June 1958, Pogrund was responding to Sobukwe's intelligence, warmth and humor. By then he had professional as well as personal reasons for maintaining contact with the Africanist leader; a recent recruit to the *Rand Daily Mail* as a reporter, Pogrund was encouraged by an enterprising editor to specialize on black politics, then a topic normally neglected by South African newspapers. At first wary of the Africanists, Pogrund became increasingly convinced of their importance, and supplied them with some of their most detailed and objective press coverage. On the day of the pass campaign, Pogrund drove to Soweto at 5.30 am to cover the day's events, he bid Sobukwe farewell before the PAC president began his walk to the police station, he spoke to him briefly later in the morning, and then journeyed to Vereeniging where confrontations had already broken out between large crowds and policemen. He arrived in time to witness the shootings outside Sharpeville police station and barely managed to escape after a crowd "transformed into a mob" (p.133) attacked his car with a barrage of sticks and stones.

Pogrund believes that he may have unconsciously associated Sobukwe with this incident and maybe for that reason he neglected to write to his friend for over a year. He resumed contact in mid-1961, receiving a reply to his first letter in October, suggesting a meeting at Pretoria Local prison where Sobukwe spent the days sewing mailbags alongside Nelson Mandela. The friendship deepened after Sobukwe's transfer in May 1963 to Robben Island for his six year's confinement under the specially legislated "Sobukwe Clause" of the Suppression of Communism Act. Pogrund "decided that life had to be made as tolerable as possible so that his intellectual vigor could be maintained and his spirit sustained" (194). Beginning with a pair of trousers and five newspaper subscriptions, Pogrund assumed responsibility for most of Sobukwe's needs, raising money for university course books, Veronica's visits, and the children's school fees, setting up a support system from old Liberal Party friends, obtaining permission for fresh fruit deliveries, negotiating and sending to the island a record player, records, deck chairs, kettles, heaters, clothing and a variety of other comforts and necessities over the years. In 1964, Pogrund succeeded in persuading the authorities to allow him to spend six days interviewing Sobukwe for research purposes; Stanford University had given him a grant to write a history of communism. The time they had together "brought us a lot closer" (p.207) both emotionally and intellectually. Towards the end of the sixth visit Sobukwe told him that during the Sharpeville crisis "a number of whites had given clear proof of their willingness to work as equals with blacks in a completely disinterested spirit ...if the PAC were to be re-formed now, it would in his view be on wholly non-racial basis" (p.205).

Aside from the practical issues arising from his daily needs - shirt measurements, extra food, medical treatment - Sobukwe's letters document the restless vitality of a mind which delighted in "trying out ideas for size" (p.232). Pogrund sustained his friend through a crisis of religious faith - later Sobukwe returned to his original methodist allegiance, kindled a curiosity in Judaism, - "I wonder what typical Jewish dish you could prepare for me" (p.279), discovered a common enthusiasm for the novels of Howard Fast as well as those of Arthur Koestler, and provided a sympathetic audience for Sobukwe's

scepticism about *dirigiste* economies: "nature is nicely balanced and the exclusive pursuit of a particular programme or idea leads to an imbalance" (p.232). In the same vein, Sobukwe characterized liberalism and conservatism as two essential and complementary forces in public life:

"...uncontrolled, liberalism led to chaos. On the other hand, conservatism never initiated anything and resisted change - and yet had a stronger appeal to the ordinary man than liberalism. Conservatism had to be continually prodded by liberalism which in turn had to be continually restrained by conservatism" (p.232).

There can be no question about the depth of the two men's relationship or its importance to Sobukwe. Asked by Pogrund to write a testimonial on his behalf he responded: "I cannot write a testimonial for my brother" (236). Later he told Pogrund "I have long since passed the stage of even thinking of you as a friend" (263), entrusting his "brother" with the preparations for his wedding anniversary, requesting his help in arranging the surgery for his sons' initiation into manhood, and making him the guardian of his public reputation - "...it will be your task, more than anybody else's, to keep my proportions true" (p.265). Despite the self consciousness engendered by the wider significance Pogrund perceived in their friendship ("It pleased me, and it seemed to me a happy event in South Africa, when friendship meant the leader of the Africanists, in writing to me, a liberal of another color, could say 'Speaking as one African to another' " p.244), he is modestly reticent about his own life, detailing only the matters which were of mutual concern to him and Sobukwe. By intention, this is a book about another man's life, not his own.

Or is it? To be sure, this is "the Bob" Pogrund knew and he has described him as best he can: gentle, conciliatory, generous, forgiving, moderate, inquiring, open-minded, affectionate, and unassuming. The portrait he gives us is one which is drawn with immense empathy. But that is part of the problem. The letters which underpin the prison narrative are the expression of a dialogue in which two men help form each other's views, use each other as sounding boards, and find in each other reflections of their own beliefs. There are indications, though, of different dimensions of Sobukwe's personality and thinking which lay outside the boundaries which embraced their friendship. For example, on Robben Island, Sobukwe wrote poems in Xhosa and in English. Oddly, Pogrund does not list any poetry amongst the "cartons of books" he dispatched to the island. He does quote one poem at length, a disturbing monologue, in the angry and anguished voice of a woman directed at her husband; what feelings prompted Sobukwe to write it we never learn. Another example: towards the end of his confinement Sobukwe apparently "developed the idea that the idea that the authorities were using a machine which was influencing the functioning of his body" (p.301); the fears and anxieties which underlay this belief are not given direct expression in the text; Sobukwe could not communicate them in letters and did not seem to have discussed them with Pogrund retrospectively. Most strikingly, Sobukwe the political person virtually disappears in the final chapters. This is partly because both he and his followers perceived his house arrest in Kimberly to be "a state of forced suspension"(348). But he remained certain that one day "circumstances would inevitably draw him into the politics of power" (p.348). Even while dying of cancer he found solace in his conviction that "God put me in this world for a purpose and that purpose is not ended" (349). This consciousness of a divinely ordained public destiny appears as a surprising revelation after the intimate narrative of private preoccupations and domestic concerns which fills the second half of the book. Virtually cut off from the PAC, which in exile had become very different from the organization he had helped to found, Sobukwe had occasional encounters with Black Consciousness leaders, including Steve Biko, but what passed between them Pogrund cannot tell us.

The ambiguities surrounding Sobukwe's life were made noisily manifest during his funeral at which rival political groups and personalities contended with each other in claiming affinity and succession: Progressive parliamentarians, Pan-Africanists, Black Conscious youngsters, and Chief Gatsha Buthelezi. Pogrund, probably the closest friend of Sobukwe present, was dissuaded from making a speech. If he had been allowed to speak, his text would have emphasized Sobukwe's capacity for love and forgiveness; instead the mourners heard fiery words from Godfrey Pitje "in praise of Sobukwe and

in condemnation of white liberals" (p.377). By the time he left the ceremony, Pogrand "did not feel that this was Bob Sobukwe's funeral" (p.377). Perhaps he was right, for the past in which he had Sobukwe had first nurtured their friendship and in which Sobukwe had remained in "enforced suspension" was another country from the South Africa of 1978. In the end, though, Pogrand's moving memoir of his Africanist friend will be remembered and the fiery words forgotten; whatever he may have been, Robert Sobukwe's place in the South African liberal firmament is now firmly established.

Notes

1. For a commentary on the speech see: Baruch Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt*, London, Zed Press, 1979, pp. 319-320. As Hirson points out, the anti-imperialist theme was never again as conspicuous in any of Sobukwe's subsequent speeches or writings.
2. The speech was one of several incidents which persuaded the college authorities to ban the Youth League at Fort Hare, another was a protest connected with the nurses strike. Godfrey Pitje reported in a letter to Jordan Ngubane dated 9 November 1949: "The European staff ...is altogether opposed to the League... even when a student who is not a Leaguer ...cheeks a member of staff or a warden, his cheekiness is attributed to the influence of the League". In the same letter, Pitje praised Sobukwe as "by far the most brilliant fellow we have at college at the moment". Pitje Correspondence: *South African Institute of Race Relations Papers*, University of the Witwatersrand.
3. Ngubane's membership of the PAC was news to this reviewer. Ngubane, the son of a wealthy Zulu farmer, attended Adams college before training as a journalist on the *Bantu World*. While working in Johannesburg he helped to found the Youth League. In the late 1940s he became editor and part-proprietor of the Durban weekly, *Inkundla ya Bantu*, which served as an important vehicle for the Youth League's views. Ngubane broke with the ANC in the mid 1950s and joined the Liberal Party rising to become one of its vice-presidents in 1959. He angered fellow Liberals by missing a party conference to attend the PAC's founding convention, later he said there was "no conflict between my Liberal loyalties and my sympathies with the PAC" *Contact*, 25 July 1959. Such sympathies were qualified though; he believed that the PAC needed pressure exerted on it to ensure it remained democratic and non-racist and later he was critical of the organization for favouring terrorism and the promotion of the "collective racial mind" (Jordan Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid*, New York, Praeger, 1963, p. 110). Ngubane offered once again to print leaflets for the Pan-Africanists in 1961 to help them oppose the ANC's anti-republican strike call; perhaps mindful of their previous experience with him, PAC leaders Z B Molete and Matthew Nkoana turned him down.
4. Nana Mahomo, active in Transvaal Youth League through the early 1950s enrolled for a law degree at the University of Cape Town in 1957, entrusted by his Africanist comrades with the "main task of initiating political organization in Cape Town" (Nana Mahomo, "The Rise of the PAC", M Sc. Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute for Technology, May 1968, p. 48).
5. Philip Ata Kgosana, *Lest We Forget: An Autobiography*, Johannesburg, Skotaville, 1988, p. 17.
6. Pogrand explains the emergence of Poqo as the outcome of "a power struggle inside the (Cape Town) PAC ...young men linked up with ghetto thugs...the PAC leadership fought back and lost" (p.180). The tensions which generated the Poqo movement were more complicated. At least one dimension was rivalry between two different leaderships, with the Poqo group first arising from the PAC branch established in the migrant worker hostels of the Cape Flats.

Clarence Makwetu, today's PAC president, was branch secretary in the Cape Flats at the time (*State vs. Mandla and 31 others, AS 69/8* (trial record), *Contact*, 16 April 1960).

7. *Golden City Post*, 29 March 1959.

8. Kgosana, *op cit*, pp. 16-17.

9. Interview with Tommy Mohajane, York, July 1975.

10. Moses Dlamini, *Robben Island Hell-Hole*, Africa World Press, Trenton, New Jersey, 1986, p. 196.

11. Z. B. Zwelonke, *Robben Island*, Heinemann, London, 1973, p. 5.

12. *Ibid*, p. 39.

13. Dlamini, *op cit*, p. 160.

14. Jordan Ngubane also respected Potlake Leballo, finding him "the most interesting character in the PAC" (*An African Explains Apartheid*, p. 101).

15. Sobukwe, like other PAC leaders of his generation, seemed to view politics as a chiefly male concern. In the pass campaign women were told to stay at home, though they were assured that in time "they (would) be assigned their historic role" (Thomas Karis, Gwendoline Carter, and Gail Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Volume 3, Hoover Institution, Stanford, 1977, p. 564). No women were arrested in the PAC's anti-pass campaign (*The World*, 23 April 1960) despite the extensive women's opposition to passes in preceding years. On March 21, 1960, while Robert Sobukwe walked to the police station, Veronica, his wife, travelled to work as usual at her clinic.

Robert Sobukwe Papers

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand

Location:- Johannesburg

©2010

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

DOCUMENT DETAILS:

Document ID:- A2618-Da16

Document Title:- Letter to Pogrund from Tom Lodge, with attached review article 'A liberal of another colour' (signed original letter)

Author:- Tom Lodge, Social Science Research Council

Document Date:- 25 June 1991