

# MANDELA - Man of the Resistance

by R.B.

*July 1982 marks the 20th anniversary of the capture of Comrade Nelson Mandela. As the campaign to secure his release mounts in South Africa and internationally, a SECHABA journalist looks at the man, who after twenty years behind bars remains the most vital symbol of our people's struggle for freedom and human dignity.*

Consider a man in prison for twenty years, on an island where there is nothing other than the prison, cut off from the world by sea, enclosed in silence, visited only at long intervals by a few permitted relatives. Consider that at the end of those twenty years—with uncounted more years there stretching out before him—that he has become the most talked about and quoted, the most respected and popular figure in his country. How is one to explain such a phenomenon? How to explain that thousands of young people who have never seen or heard the man acknowledge him as their guide and their leader; for no one under the age of twenty five can possibly remember hearing or seeing him, except in the frozen lifelessness of pictures in the press.

How to explain the phenomenon of Nelson Mandela? What can account for the fact that now, at the end of twenty years, still in prison, he stands at the peak of public popularity, its most important national and international political figure?

It is not enough to look to the man himself. For all his charisma and all his leadership qualities, who now remembers him clearly after all the years? For all his speeches and his writings, who now is able to read them after all the years of censorship and repression?

There must be something more to this phenomenon to make Mandela the central figure he is. Mandela, I am certain, is remem-

bered better for what he has done, than for what he said.

There are three episodes in his life the importance of which stamped their mark on South African history.

First, May 1961—his disappearance 'underground' to carry on the public campaign against the declaration of a republic by the white state. It was a time—like so many that our people have faced in the past, when everywhere leaders and activists were being



arrested, banned, banished—harassed into silence and ineffectiveness by an omnipresent police apparatus. If the harassment could not be beaten, the campaign would collapse. Mandela found the way to defeat the harassment—by going underground. From the underground he emerged unexpectedly, now here, now there, to address campaign meetings and disappear; to issue press statements and give radio and newsreel interviews. He became the most wanted—and yet the most fully publicised leader of the campaign.

It was something new; a new way to fight

back, a new way to resist, a new way to outflank the security police and the powers of the state. That new way inspired others. The struggle from the underground, illegal resistance, law-breaking fight-back had begun. Mandela had pioneered it. That is the first thing for which he is remembered, and for which he is respected amongst the people. Since then there have been others—Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Kathrada, striking back from underground. But Nelson was the pioneer; and the new resistance has become one with the man.

Second, his fight-back from the courtroom, in 1962. Again at a time overlaid with fear and pessimism, the liberation movement under heavy attack with widespread bans, banishments and house arrests—all without trial. Umkhonto's early acts of sabotage diminished under the onslaught of the Sabotage Act and 90 day detention without trial, the press had been cowed into silence, the new illegal resistance went unreported, almost unseen amongst the people. Mandela was captured at a road block near Durban, and charged with the technical—almost 'non-political' offence of leaving the country without a passport. Trials on such a technical charge could well pass almost unnoticed in a country where half-a-million a year are convicted of technical offences. Mandela, who had pioneered the new resistance, seized the opportunity to carry it further.

Instead of a plea, he launched a counter-attack. It was a white court, appointed by a white state, staffed by white police, prosecutor and judge. It was, by its very nature, incapable of dispensing justice to a Black, because it had been established only to maintain the power of whites. He demanded the resignation of the judge, and a trial by his peers.

It was not a demand which could possibly succeed; it had never been intended to succeed. It had been intended, rather, to strip the mask of hypocrisy from the white judicial process, and reveal its naked face of power. When the court nevertheless decided to proceed with his trial, he proclaimed a refusal to co-operate in the exercise of white supremacy. Thus the lawyer who had spent

his life in the labyrinths of court, now used the court to proclaim yet again a new form of resistance—no co-operation with the white state! Another new way to fight back from outside the law had been pioneered. For this too, Mandela is remembered and honoured, even if his words in court have been forgotten. The new resistance was branching out into new areas of life, spreading.

Third, the Rivonia Trial of 1963, at which nine leaders of various segments of the liberation movement were charged with having launched a campaign of nationwide sabotage, and with preparing to overthrow the state by armed uprising and guerrilla warfare. Mandela, who had been in jail for a year, was brought from Robben Island to become No. 1 Accused. Alongside him sat the other pioneers of the new underground—Sisulu, Mbeki, Kathrada and others. It was a time of high drama; the state was claiming that the so-called 'National High Command' had been captured, Umkhonto's plans and materials seized, guerrilla warfare preparations disrupted.

But how were people to understand all this? What underground was this, with its unheard of 'National High Command'? What, for that matter, was Umkhonto, known more through vague rumour than by any hard information? Umkhonto and its acts of sabotage had been almost blacked out by press censorship, and by policemen tearing down posters and proclamations before the glue could dry. What was Umkhonto up to? And what was the ANC role in all of this? Whose guerrilla force was being assembled? And to what end? Was this trial in truth the end of the new underground fight back?

It was expected by the state that the accused, facing a death sentence, would deny the allegations and try to prove they were 'not guilty.' It was with that expectation in mind that the prosecution entered the court. But they had not yet begun to understand the new spirit of resistance, or the people who were campaigning for it and living it. Each of the accused stated simply: *'I am not guilty. It is the state which is guilty.'* Even then the prosecution did not under-



*Comrade Nelson Mandela in Addis Ababa  
1962*

stand. There was a massive recital of state evidence of sabotage, of men sent abroad for military training, of formation of embryo guerrilla units; and then it was time for the defence and for Accused No. One, Nelson Mandela.

22 Again, in full presence of the world's press and radio, he returned to the challenge.

From the dock of the court, he announced: *'I did it. I helped form Umkhonto. I went abroad and arranged for military training for our volunteers. I did it. I am proud and glad I did it. If I had my time over I would do it again. I have lived for liberation,'* he told the court, *'and if need be I am willing to die for it.'* The challenge of the new resistance was

complete. The challenge of armed struggle to overthrow the state was in the open, acknowledged and endorsed by the leadership of the ANC. The new era of violent struggle, illegal struggle, was truly and publicly launched.

And as in so many steps leading to it, Mandela had been the public spokesman, the pioneer—leading not by word alone but by example. It is that example which has made him truly the man of the South African resistance movement, the symbol and the spearhead of the freedom struggle.

It is twenty years since Mandela's arrest and 19 since the arrests at Rivonia. It would be appropriate at this time to review the whole affair, the whole trial and its significance. That is not the purpose of this article. But to leave the record merely as it is summarised above is not enough. There are many other aspects that need to be considered.

Why, it is sometimes asked, did Mandela make his statement from the dock, where he could not be cross-examined, rather than face it out from the witness box? Was he trying to avoid cross-examination? Yes, he was. Not to conceal the facts or to deny his part in the acts charged. All this was admitted and explained, defended on grounds of politics and morality—not of law. But neither for him, nor for his fellow accused, was the chief issue the court's decision on their guilt or their innocence, their conviction or discharge. The real issue was that the new resistance of Umkhonto, the new challenging struggle with illegal use of arms should be explained to the people, broadcast, defended. The trial must become an indictment of the state, and a manifesto of the resistance struggle; it must be a call to the people to rise and fight back!

Such a manifesto, they all believed, could only be obscured, distorted and its message lost if it was to be dragged out piecemeal through the halting, fumbling, impromptu question-and-answer of the witness box. The manifesto had to be delivered clearly, without incoherences and unclarities. It must then be delivered uninterrupted from the dock. And the man to deliver was, as always, this pioneer of the new phase of history, Nelson Mandela—first among equals.

Mandela proclaimed Umkhonto's manifesto from the dock. But by agreement Sisulu and Mbeki sought the frontal confrontation with the state from the witness box. Sisulu's was a classic confrontation between a white prosecutor representing the white police state and a black ANC activist for the majority of the people. On the prosecution side, a string of university degrees; on the people's side a man badly schooled, mainly self educated, carrying a sense of purpose and conviction, of dedication to a just cause. It was a battle of character and of principles; and after more than a week in the witness box, Sisulu's moral triumph was complete. Day by day the prosecution and the spectre of the state behind it seemed to shrink and diminish; Sisulu, Umkhonto and the ANC to grow and grow. The new resistance had come of age, and the Rivonia Trial was the forum of the public recognition of that fact.

From that time there has been no going back. The people had been made aware of what was being done by the ANC and Umkhonto and why; their support has grown from year to year; today no-one dare doubt that the new resistance led by the ANC, backed by its armed units of Umkhonto is truly the people's shield and spearhead. The challenge to white supremacy is now out in the streets, everywhere amongst the people. We are fighting back! Not only in the public arena, but from underground. Not just in the ways legally permitted by the state, but by illegal means; not just peacefully, but in arms. That is a message which the people of our country hear now, loud and clear.

And when they hear it, old men and young will recall that it was Mandela and his colleagues who pioneered it, and laid their lives on the line to do so. This is why, when they now urge 'Amandla!' 'Power! in our lifetime' they remember and pay tribute to Nelson Mandela—the inspiration, the symbol and the power.

# MANDELA — MAN AND LEADER

On his 70th birthday, the figure of Nelson Mandela towers above the prison walls as the symbol of South Africa's future freedom.

It is a phenomenon with little precedent. There have been leaders elsewhere who have become metaphors for their people's freedom — Gandhi, Garibaldi, Mao. But each commanded an army of troops or disciples. Mandela has become larger than life-size while cut off from all contact, censored into silence.

by Rusty Bernstein

His emergence as a public figure began years back, when the African National Congress (ANC) was headed by A J Luthuli — 'Chief' as he was known and addressed. Chief was loved and respected as no liberation leader before him. To his office in the ANC he adapted the best democratic traditions from his tribal background — democratic discussion of the elders, and the striving for consensus before the leader reaches his final decision.

The process drew together all political strands, from right-wing nationalist to left communist. It made Chief uniquely the first among equals in the leadership ranks. Chief's personality and qualities drew further strength from the special qualities of the collective of equals around him. His mantle of leadership and the influence of the collective have passed to Mandela.

Over the years some of the elders and equals have passed on — Chief himself, Moses Kotane, Lilian Ngoyi, J B Marks; others remain — Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Albertina Sisulu, Archie Gumede. The collective legacy inherited from Luthuli is the matrix from which Mandela has risen to be the new 'first amongst equals'.

Leadership has its individual styles. Luthuli's style rubbed off on Mandela. But each individual shapes the style to himself. For a lesser man, leadership might have paved the way to power or privilege; for Mandela it has meant — above all else — special responsibilities and

special obligations. It was so, well back into the Luthuli years — the years of Mandela's apprenticeship.

● 1952. The decision is taken to launch a Campaign of Defiance of Unjust Laws. The first volunteer to defy and court arrest will step off into unknown territory. The consequences cannot be foretold. Mandela takes on the special responsibility of heading a Volunteer Corps which would ultimately number thousands. Leadership has its obligations — in this case imprisonment; it has few rewards.

● 1960. A national strike is called in opposition to Verwoerd's declaration of a republican constitution, without consulting blacks. There is fierce police harassment and interference. Someone must abandon job, home and family for the discomforts of 'underground' if the campaign is to be kept alive. Mandela takes on the special obligation, and its privations.

● 1960. After the strike — still in the Luthuli years. The ANC leadership decides to abandon its age-old policy of total non-violence and prepare to meet state violence with counter-violence. Someone must organise the task force and lead it into action. Mandela takes on the formation of the armed detachment, Umkhonto we Sizwe.

● 1961. Mandela has been arrested and charged with responsibility for the anti-republic strike. He is a lawyer, allegedly 'an officer of the court'. But the need is to strip the South African law and courts of their spurious veneer of legality. Even in prison, and in considerable legal trouble, leadership has its obligations. Mandela raises his chances of conviction and a heavy sentence, and denounces the exclusively white racial bias of court, prosecution, and the laws they administer. He is sentenced and sent to Robben Island.

● And then 1963, Rivonia. Nine of his colleagues are arrested and charged with some 300 acts of sabotage throughout the country. Mandela is brought from Robben Island to join the accused. He has been a lawyer in political trials long enough to know the perils. He


has an alibi of sorts, having been behind bars when the sabotage took place. But the trial has opened an opportunity for Umkhonto to reveal its aims and origins to the whole country, and break the veil of silence and censorship which has blacked it out.

As the leader of Umkhonto there is a new obligation. He will make a statement of Umkhonto's aims and his own responsibility for it, but from the prisoners' dock — not the witness stand; that way it will be coherent, uninterrupted by the question-and-answer of the witness evidence. A statement from the dock will have little legal weight, but responsibilities of leadership weigh heavy. The state is asking for a death sentence. The responsibility is discharged in his most famous speech — 'These are the ideals...for which I am prepared to die.'

● 23 years on. After half a lifetime in a penal colony there comes an offer of clemency and freedom from his life sentence if he will but renounce violence. It is in line with his whole life that he replies: 'I cannot, and will not give any undertaking at a time when I, and you the people, are not free. Your freedom and mine cannot be separated.'

Mandela is a great man in his own right, by his own deeds and personality. But as a towering symbol he has been not 'created' but induced, or perhaps extruded, by a collective of great and courageous people.

Down the years they have constituted the leading core of the ANC and South Africa's liberation movement. They did not 'create' Mandela, nor he them. But they raised him to be the torch-bearer and symbol of the nation's future freedom — truly the first amongst a fraternity of equals.

 Rusty Bernstein was a co-accused with Nelson Mandela in the 1963 Rivonia Trial.

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