

From Drum - MAY 1959

The Police will pick me up ...
And in the forefront is the polished, unassuming intellectual of the measured words, whose story is inseparably bound with the movement he now leads. Sebukwe was born at Graaf Reinet, in the Cape, "the son of a number", as they say in the countryside of people born in the location. He was brought up on a hand-to-mouth fashion by poor parents, but was fortunate to have a strict disciplinarian for a father. It was a discipline fashioned in the crucible of poverty and religion.

The parents were staunch Methodists, and Mangaliso was the last born of six brothers, all of whom sang in a church choir. He was given the name of Mangaliso because his parents thought it "wonderful" that all their children should be boys.

From an early age, the boys had to help keep the family going. Their father had a job, but also operated as a wool-cutter after "office hours" and the boys had to do their share of cutting wood before and after school. They also did odd jobs on Saturdays, for about sixpence a day. His routine gave them strength and discipline, but very few illusions.

Mangaliso early showed himself a brilliant student - he read Milton's "Paradise Lost" when he was only in Grade V of "Native education" - and eventually got a first-class matriculation pass.

Brotherhood - of - man - argument.

The white principal of the Healdtown Institution offered Sebukwe a loan of £20 a year to help him go to Fort Hare University College, and obtained a further £20 a year loan from the Cape Education Department. The Bantu Welfare Trust also lent £20, and the Healdtown principal and a white teacher undertook to provide pocket money for the youngsters at Fort Hare. It was at that time that a brilliant young lawyer, Anton Muziwakhe Lombard, was infusing a militant spirit into African politics and setting African youth on a course that kept the then staid A.N.C. leadership on tenterhooks. In 1949, Mangaliso was elected - under a new constitution - the first president of the Students' Representative Council at Fort Hare. His political career had begun in earnest, and he set himself on a course from which he has never deviated.

An indication of Mangaliso's fortrightness, his refusal to allow sentiment to intrude on his outlook is shown by an incident at Fort Hare. The principal of the

Healdtown Institution - the man who had made it possible for him to go to Fort Hare - was addressing a meeting at the college. The principal spoke of the brotherhood of man, and suggested that such a spirit could be fostered between white and black in South Africa by personal contact in homes and at other informal meetings without changing the state's laws. It was a different Sobukwe from the youth who had left Healdtown who stood up to face his former missionary principal. He said: "The moment I step out of your home, sir, after a show of the brotherhood of man, the police will pick me up for a pass offence." "But that won't be my fault," countered the missionary.

"It will be," protested the young Sobukwe. "You are part and parcel of the set-up in this country. The Church cannot absolve itself from this. The Methodist Church itself is pursuing a segregationist policy. It has different stipends for its white and black ministers."

The missionary explained that this was because African congregations could not afford to pay more.

"Then why is it that white ministers who administer to African congregations get more than their African colleagues?" went on Sobukwe remorselessly.

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