

Helen Suzman:

That Robert Sobukwe was an exceptional man is evidenced by the fact that to the best of my knowledge he was the only person against whom a law was specifically passed in Parliament, and re-introduced every year for six years: ie. Section 4 of the General Laws Amendment Act of 1963. This law *could*, of course, have been used against any person who had been sentenced to a term of imprisonment under the security laws.

In fact, as the Minister of Justice (Mr Vorster) clearly stated when he introduced the law in Parliament in 1963, it was Robert Sobukwe he had in mind, as *Hansard* of 24 April 1963 (Col. 4652) clearly reveals. This — in part — is what Mr Vorster said: "I want to tell honorable members why we are inserting this clause. We may find it necessary. Sobukwe will have served his sentence on 3 May. He was the leader of the PAC and I can tell honorable members there has been no change in him during the time he has not

been in our midst. If the Government comes to the conclusion that it would be failing in its duty to the peaceful citizenry if it were to set this man free, this clause will be used to keep him there longer.

"For here we are dealing with a person — let me say this — who has a strong magnetic personality, a person who can organise, a person who feels that he has a vocation to perform this task well knowing what methods will be applied."

In fact, Robert Sobukwe was the only person that law was ever used against during the six years that it was in operation, and when the Government finally decided to release Robert Sobukwe from Robben Island in 1969, that law was suspended and it remains so to this day.

So it became known as the Sobukwe clause. As we all know, after his release from the Island, Robert Sobukwe was still not allowed to exercise his "strong magnetic personality" in any way, at home or abroad — he was

silenced — banned — restricted to Kimberley, and he was not allowed to leave SA on an exit permit in 1971.

Symbol of oppression

Even today, after his death, certain restrictions still obtain, for we may not quote anything that Robert Sobukwe said or wrote when he was alive.

The silencing of this man continues beyond the grave. Thus instead of being an active leader of his people, Robert Sobukwe has become instead a symbol of oppression. Where his words could have been a deterrent to violence, his enforced silence has had the opposite effect, for ironically enough, it was only after he was sent to prison and the organisation that he led — the PAC — was declared a banned organisation, that the PAC, having gone into exile, abandoned the policy of non-violence that Robert Sobukwe had always advocated when he was not restricted in any way.

One cannot help wondering what the situation in South Africa would have been like today if Robert Sobukwe had been able to exert his influence during the challenging years of the seventies.

One cannot help wondering whether the polarisation that has occurred over the last decade or so between White nationalism and Black nationalism, and the ominous signs of an ever-widening gulf between the races, is not, at least in part, attributable to the removal from the political scene of a man like Robert Sobukwe, who for so many years had to lead the twilight existence of a banned person.

We shall never know to what heights Robert Sobukwe would have risen if he had had the freedom to use his very considerable talent and ability in the service of his people — as a negotiator and as their representative, during the challenging years of the seventies. He surely would have been far more eloquent and persuasive than any of the Whites who over the years have tried to persuade the Government to change the direction of its policy, for he could have spoken as one who actually experienced, rather than just observed, the consequences of that policy. Instead, this man was banned under the Suppression of Communism Act — though not only had he never encouraged or advocated Communism, but he had actually broken away from the oldest African political movement on the Continent, the ANC — because, inter alia, he felt

it was falling under the influence of Communists.

The rule of law

I want to make it clear that what I tried to do for Robert Sobukwe I did as a matter of principle. It was, in fact, of no interest to me whether his views coincided with mine or not. The important thing was — and still is — that no man should be deprived of his liberty unless he has been found guilty in a court of law.

The important thing was — and still is — that South Africa should adhere to the rule of law. Keeping a man in prison after he had served his sentence was a gross violation of the rule of law. Banning and restricting a man without trial was another gross violation of the rule of law.

It was in keeping with the principle underlying the rule of law that I tried to regain his freedom for Robert Sobukwe, and it is in keeping with that principle that I will continue to strive to regain their freedom for all the people presently detained without trial.

As you all know, although the Sobukwe clause has been suspended, other laws have been passed giving the Minister of Justice the power to keep people in jail although they have not been found guilty of any crime. The most far-reaching of those laws are the Terrorism Act of 1967 and Section 10 of the Internal Security Act of 1976.

According to the latest figures I could obtain

from Mr Kruger, 240 people are presently being held under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act, and there are 61 people being held under Section 10 of the Internal Security Act, the preventive detention law. (Ten were released this week-end, 11 March, the week-end of Robert Sobukwe's funeral.)

I shall continue to strive for the right of these people to be charged or released. On this point certainly I have no doubt that the views of Robert Sobukwe and myself coincided entirely, as indeed they did on many other fundamental issues, such as race discrimination, the pass laws, and equal opportunities for all.

I last spoke to Robert Sobukwe when he was at Groote Schuur hospital. Our conversation ranged over many subjects — he showed no extremism, only sadness and intense dismay about the deterioration of race relations in our country. I was struck by his quiet dignity, and his lack of bitterness about a wasted life which he knew was nearing its end. Perhaps he knew that although he could be banned his ideas could not be banned and they would live on in the minds of young Blacks.

I believe I am speaking on behalf of very many White people today when I say that the wasted talents of Robert Sobukwe are a source of deep regret, and I am sure I speak on behalf of all men and women of goodwill in expressing very sincere condolences to Mrs Veronica Sobukwe and her four children.

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