James April

James April[1], from Cape Town, became active in the Coloured People's Congress in 1961. April underwent a brief spell of military training at Mamre in 1962, and was detained, together with Basil February in 1962 for painting political slogans, and re-detained and charged for attending the Mamre training camp in 1963. He subsequently left the country with February for military training. April participated in the Wankie Campaign.

I was born in a place called Bokmakeri, a suburb of Cape Town. It was part of a greater suburb, and it was mostly Coloureds that were living there. It was one of the units run by the city council, the housing schemes. I was born there in 1940 and I am the last of a family of seven; we were five brothers and two sisters. My father and mother migrated from elsewhere to Cape Town. My mother was from Greytown. My father left school early to work, although his mother was a teacher. My father was a labourer, working in various jobs in the production side, you know. He didn't have a lot of education, like most people from the surrounding countryside – he grew up on a farm. At that time very few people had skills. The family went through hard times during the Depression. My mother had a very English background. Her maiden name was Brian. I took the name when I was in MK – "George Brian". In those days the father was usually the breadwinner. The mother stayed at home.

I grew up as an Anglican. I was mildly religious, attending Sunday school, confirmation practices and so on. I schooled in the Athlone area, at a church school. At that time it was all church schools around. We had Anglican, Roman Catholic, Dutch Reformed, Methodist [and] Congregational [churches]. They all had schools under their jurisdiction. Of course, in later years the government stopped that. All these schools became government schools. But the first primary years I spent in a Methodist school. It was roughly from 1946 to 1952. I turned 6 in that year, on the 20th of March. It was 1946, a year after the Second World War ended.

I stayed in that school from Sub A to Standard 4, which is six years. And then from there I went to another primary school in Standard 5, Sunnyside Primary. And then from there I went to Alexandra Secondary High. It was a secondary school, junior. I stayed there from Standard 6 to Standard 10. When I completed there I went to university for two years where I did a B.A. It wasn't really my aim to do a B.A. I wanted to do law. But what happened is that my principal sent me to a firm, a financial institution, to start working there. I thought I would do my legal studies after hours. But then one of the managers persuaded me to go to university after the interview with him. He sent me back to the principal and the principal persuaded me to get a loan-bursary and to do a B.A. to train to teach. At that time we were still under the old Cape provincial administration[2] – the Coloured schools. The provincial administrations in those

[1] Edited by Gregory Houston from an interview conducted by Nhlanhla Ndebele and Moses Ralinala, 30 July 2001, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

[2] When the Union of South Africa was formed on the 31 May 1910, four provinces were established with their own provincial administrations. Each provincial administration was headed by an administrator appointed by the Governor-General with the advice of the Prime Minister, assisted by an Executive Committee whose members had to be elected members of the Provincial Council. Education was one of the responsibilities of this tier of government.

years were in charge of primary and secondary schools. The Bantu Education Act put Africans under the Bantu Education Department. They subsequently did that to the Coloured schools. But when I was in high schools they were still under the provincial administrations.

The high school I attended only had Standard 6 to Standard 8. It was only that year when I got there that they went up to Standard 10. But they didn't have facilities. I wanted to do law. So I took Latin. Then I was given a choice between Latin and maths. Most of my family went up to Standard 6. My father really didn't have money. You know, up to Standard 6, schooling was free. My father didn't pay for our schooling. Schooling was free. The only thing my father had to provide basically was our clothing and books. But not so many books were required in those years. But after Standard 6, Standard 7, you had bursaries. From, I think, six, seven and eight there were a lot of societies that provided bursaries. I was the last person in the family up to Standard 6. All my brothers and sisters went to work after Standard 6.

My father was very politically conscious. He was a big communist at the time. I don't think he was a member. But he was a supporter. He used to attend the rallies at the Grand Parade in the late '40s. You see, the post-Second World War period was a period of this resurgence of the communist philosophy. It was the time that China became an independent communist country. The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe all became communist. Not the Soviet Union. But it was expanding in Eastern Europe. Generally, the communist mood strengthened, not only in Europe, but also in what you call the East. The liberation struggles first took place there; in Indonesia, in China. That's where the liberation struggles took place. That gave a boost. I think if you were a worker you wanted a workers' state, determining your own destiny and so on.

We went to church. My mother sent us to Sunday school. My father didn't stop us from going, us children. But he encouraged us to question the Bible. “Where does God come from?” Simple questions like that. We couldn't answer. But it was mainly a struggle for existence. I went to school barefoot.

Our high school wasn't really a political school, so to speak. My principal was totally conservative, you know, politically. His politics was regarded as conservative. He was criticised in fact by the more radical elements in the Coloured political spectrum. At that time the political school in Cape Town was Trafalgar High. That is where the political teachers were, and Livingstone in Claremont in Cape Town. Those were the teachers who were really political teachers. They were intellectuals[1]. They were the people who influenced me, because they were members of the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) and the Cape African Teachers' Association (CATA). I remember with the introduction of Bantu Education from the early '50s, from the mid '50s, a lot of these teachers were expelled from the teaching profession because of their opposition. Many of them had an important impact on the education – they

[1] Dr Abdullah Abdurahman was behind the formation of Trafalgar High School in 1911, the first institution in the country to offer secondary education to Coloured students. He was also behind the founding in 1934 of the Livingstone High School, only the second such school in Cape Town.

were really dedicated teachers – of the youngsters because of that political background. So, many members of our staff were opposed to the introduction of Bantu Education. Later on there was Coloured Education. Most of the teachers, for instance, at Trafalgar School in District Six – it is still standing there – and Livingstonee belonged to the Fourth International (FI), socialists you see, and belonged to these different societies; the FI and Forum Club, for instance.

There were also a number of Jewish socialists teaching at Coloured schools. They played a very prominent role in the education of the black population during the 1940s and 1950s – members of the Communist Party. They also influenced the teachers. They, in fact, helped form the opposition to the introduction of separate institutions for blacks; firstly, for Africans, and then Coloured schools. I was also influenced by that. I took part in civic work, forming parent-teacher associations while I was an aspiring teacher.

I was interested in politics when I left school, because of my father's influence as well. When I started matric some of these lecturers were there. A.C. Jordan was living in the same area as us, in Athlone. Pallo Jordan's father and mother were prominent members in the area. His father was lecturing at the University of Cape Town. And Dan Kunene was also there. They were prominent Congress people in the area. I went to university with Fikile Bam. So we had quite an interesting mix. A.C. Jordan was prominent. But in 1960 he broke away. Although they were militant, you know, basically they were in a sense restricted by their class position.

There were no other organisations among the Coloureds in Cape Town except the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM). Although there was a CPO (Coloured People's Organisation)[1] group, they were very weak. And they made a very basic mistake in 1958 when

[1] Before the introduction of apartheid, there were three political organisations for Coloureds: the African People's Organisation (APO), the Coloured People's National Union (CPNU), and the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM). These organisations adopted conflicting tactics and approaches to challenge the government. Representatives from various political and professional groupings, including the CPSA, APO, the ANC, and trade union formations, met in Cape Town to discuss the Separate Representation of Voters Bill of 1951. The meeting culminated in the formation of a 33-member Franchise Action Council (FRAC). The CPNU expressed its support to this newly formed structure while the NEUM rejected it on the grounds that it focused on the issues pertaining to the Coloured voting rights. The FRAC embarked on a self-led anti-Separate Representation of Voters Bill campaign in 1951. In its second conference in June 1951, FRAC resolved to participate in the ANC national campaigns against apartheid. When the Joint Planning Council was instituted in 1951 to prepare for the Defiance Campaign, the ANC invited the APO to represent the Coloured people. APO turned down the ANC invitation and subsequently slipped into political oblivion. The FRAC made a formal commitment to the campaign during its March 1952 conference. When the Defiance Campaign was launched in the Western Cape, it attracted a low turnout, and FRAC collapsed, leaving the CPNU as the only leading Coloured political organisation. The decay of the FRAC raised a fear amongst other Coloured leaders that CPNU would misrepresent their opinion. The situation led to a call for a People's Convention in Cape Town in August 1953. This Convention gave birth to the South African Coloured Political Organisation (SACPO), with Alex la Guma as President and Reggie September as Secretary. SACPO managed to forge a political cooperation with other liberation movements to form the Congress Alliance, and participated in the drafting of the Freedom Charter in 1955.

they fielded a candidate for the separate elections[1]. The Unity Movement was saying the Coloureds should boycott the elections, because they had just lost the issue of the common roll. They fought the common roll issue. And the NEUM said, no, we must boycott the elections. And then the Congress group fielded a candidate. Subsequently, they managed to ouster the Unity Movement. Of course, they didn't have their roots. Technically, the intellectuals were the Coloureds, because they were the ones who set the tone – formed opinion, you see. The organised Coloured workers were not strong. The political intelligentsia of the Coloureds formed opinion, and they were strongly in the Unity Movement. So that is why we can say, no, what happened in the second election – the Unity Movement reached their apogee. They went out campaigning against the separate election, night after night. That was in 1958.

You see, they did not go out to organise the masses before they campaigned against the elections. The NEUM was just prepared to boycott, unlike the Congress Movement, especially the ANC, who would draw the people into various campaigns. The boycott was a tactic that was very suited to the petty bourgeoisie. It doesn't expose them to retribution so much. But if you go out and campaign, marching and so on, that is very inconvenient. Socially, they were better off than their African counterparts. And that was probably one of the things that led to the split. The South African Coloured People's Organisation (CPO) was very weak. They had just been formed, and Alex la Guma and Richard van der Ross were among the founders. They had certain limitations. There were rumours, for instance, that these were the communists. La Guma[2] was well known. But the organisation itself was not well known. It was only in the early '60s, when the name changed to the Coloured People's Congress (CPC), and many people were disillusioned with the Unity Movement, that many of the youth crossed over to the Coloured People's Congress. They infused it with a lot of energy and drive, new blood. And it was the political consciousness of the 1960s that infused the Coloured People's Congress with a new spirit.

1 With the passage of the Separate Representation of Voters Act of 1956, which removed the Coloureds from the common voters roll and put them on a separate one, the SACPO had to decide on what steps to take. The Act provided for the election of two white provincial councillors in Cape Town by the Coloureds and for the formation of the Union Council of Coloured Affairs (UCCA) to advise the government on matters concerning Coloureds. In April 1957, the conference of SACPO rejected the Act and resolved to demand full franchise rights for all. It further resolved to boycott the 1958 elections to elect white parliamentary representatives for the Coloureds. The decision to boycott elections was reversed after advice of the ANC at its 1957 December congress. At the congress SACPO resolved to support candidate Piet Beyleveld of the Congress of Democrats (COD), who stood as Coloured representative. The CPNU rallied behind the United Party (UP) candidates, while the NEUM boycotted elections. The COD candidate performed dismally during the elections with only 900 votes cast in their favour. These elections were the last major SACPO campaign.

2 Alex la Guma was born in District Six, Cape Town, in 1925 and twenty years later graduated from the Cape Technical College. His parents were active in left-wing politics and the labour movement, and La Guma grew up conscious of the political and socio-economic implications of South Africa's separatist policies. He became an active member of the Plant Workers' Union and was dismissed from the Metal Box Company after organising a strike for higher wages. He became politically active as a result of his dismissal, joining the Young Communist League in 1947 and the South African Communist Party in 1948. Employed by *New Age* as a reporter in 1955, he began to write short stories critical of the government's policy of racial discrimination. He helped organise the Congress of the People and was chairman of the SACPO in the Western Cape in the 1950s and an executive member in the 1960s. Due to repeated detention and imprisonment for his anti-apartheid activities, and the banning of his writings and speaking by the South African government, he and his family left for exile in 1966.

I spent two years at UCT from 1958. I didn't complete university because I spent too much of my time on politics. I was interested in politics basically. I did have time to study, but I didn't complete my second year. I have no real excuses because I started off well. But then I got involved in politics in my second year and academic studies became secondary. When I left I went to work full-time. I worked in various places, as a clerk, and so on. My first job I worked as a costing clerk. I subsequently worked at a factory where they refined oil for ten months. I then worked for a re-insurance company, for more than a year, during which time I was arrested. I went back after my detention.

You see, truthfully, the Coloured People's Organisation wasn't a strong organisation. There were unions amongst the Coloured people. SACTU (South African Congress of Trade Unions)[1] at its heyday had 55,000 workers, 1960, '61. It was building up slowly. The one union that was really strong among the Coloured people, SACTU union, was the Food and Canning Workers' Union (FCWU)[2]. The Garment Workers Union was concerned with conservative issues – very conservative issues. They were very happy with very immediate gains, almost like the sweet-heart unions. They were not a sweet-heart union, but they were close to being one. They were very conservative. Actually, the more militant unions were the ones to which a lot of the Africans belonged, such as the Railways Workers Union, which was one of the hardest hit. It was small numerically.

My first campaign was the separate election campaign in 1958. Then in 1960 there was Sharpeville and the stay-aways. The Coloureds were not interested in stay-aways and the anti-pass campaign – they didn't have to carry passes. They had to be persuaded to stay-away for another reason. And it wasn't easy. It was very tricky to organise among the Coloureds especially because they just lacked political consciousness. There were just certain pockets, very few, who would take part in political action. I joined the Coloured People's Congress in 1961, when the Coloured People's Congress changed its name. I was in the same branch as Alex la Guma. He had quite a history of political activism. I was secretary of the Athlone branch. Most of our work was to organise people. We were a newly-established branch, and our first task was to consolidate, try to mobilise around day-to-day issues. And later on, of course, it became national issues – show them the link between the day-to-day, the local issues, and national issues. And it was not easy because people were more concerned with things that were affecting them right there. And that was our problem. They found it very difficult to see the link between the national issue and the local issue. It was hard. It was much harder for us than for people who were working amongst the African people.

[1] SACTU was formed as the first non-racial trade union co-ordinating body in the country on 5th March 1955. At its formation the council committed itself and its affiliates and workers to struggle on both economic and political fronts against all forms of oppression and exploitation. SACTU became a member of the Congress Alliance in that year.

[2] The Food, Canning and Allied Workers' Union was formed on 6 February 1941. It was originally one union until 1947 when the union was forced by state pressure to form a racially separate union, the African Food and Canning Workers Union.

The people we know who were active were the ANC. The ANC was very active, especially in 1960. There were people like Elijah Loza, Archie Sibeko, Looksmart Ngudle and so on. Barney Desai[1] was Vice-President and Reggie September[2] was the secretary. So we worked closely with them; they used to come to talk to us. We also used to try to popularise *New Age*[3], which came with the message. We also distributed leaflets for the strike of 1961. Barney was the main organiser of the underground. We also had structures so that we didn't expose all our leaders to unnecessary arrest. A lot of the guys were picked up because of the advocacy of the strike of 1961. George Peake, September and Desai were arrested. September was one of the first to be put under twenty-four hour house arrest. So it made it very difficult to operate. The government was also trying to break the open organisations. We were the next line of leaders to take over, to run the show. It was Erics and Barney Africa, who also joined the leadership outside, who took over.

Now when Reggie and them were arrested, skipped the country or went underground, we took over as the executive. The CPC used to meet regularly, in secret. Now we never used to say where we were going to meet. We just used to meet at a particular spot, get picked up in a car, and get taken to the meeting. Howard Lawrence used to arrange our meetings, take us by car to some place. It was about five of us. The next day the police would go to the house where we had the meeting, intimidate the owner of the house. We knew that it was one of us who was giving that information to the police. Gugulethu was just being built that time. So we used to meet there on Sundays at one guy's house. So one of the guys in our group of five was asking this guy where he worked, and all those things. And, a few days later Howard was telling us that this guy was a spy. We had been infiltrated.

1 Barney Desai was born on 10 April 1932 in Durban. He grew up as an Indian but was "reclassified" Coloured in 1957. Desai was the Vice-President of the South African Coloured People's Congress before leaving South Africa in 1963. At the time of the Defiance Campaign he helped to produce a short-lived newspaper called *Spark,* and he was subsequently banned. Elected to the Cape Town City Council in 1962, he was prohibited by the government from taking his seat and shortly thereafter left the country. In 1966 he joined the PAC after an abortive attempt to take the Coloured People's Congress into the latter organisation.

2 Reggie September was born in Cape Town in 1923, the son of politically conscious working-class parents. He joined the National Liberation League of Cissie Gool and James La Guma in 1938. He moved into full-time trade unionism, organising textile and distributive workers in Port Elizabeth and Cape Town in the 1940s. He also participated in the formation of the Franchise Action Council. From 1954 until 1961, when he received a government order requiring him to resign, he was general secretary of SACPO (known as South African Coloured People's Congress after December 1959), a position that made him one of the principal spokesmen for Coloured people within the Congress alliance. From December 1956 until charges were dropped against him a year later, he was a defendant in the Treason Trial. He was imprisoned for five months without charges during the 1960 State of Emergency, and in 1961 was jailed again for helping to organise the May stay-at-home, though charges against him were later dropped. Subjected to bans and harassment, he left South Africa in 1963.

3 *New Age* was established in the early 1950s after the banning of *The Guardian*. *New Age* journalists and camera people reported on events that were reported in the white-owned press as well as political events of relevance to the struggle not reported by the mainstream press. Operating under conditions of press censorship laws, restrictions on reporting and harassment of reporters, the staff of *New Age* responsible for writing, producing and distributing the newspaper were political activists. Significant stories included the inhuman conditions on the potato farms of Bethal and such places, which led to the campaign for the boycott of potatoes, the peasant struggles in the countryside between 1956 to 1960, and the bus boycott of Alexander Township in 1957. *New Age* was banned in November 1962.

My father wasn't a scientific socialist. Because he was a worker he believed that it was good for the workers to be socialist. He saw the success of socialism in the Soviet Union, especially in 1957 when they launched their first rocket. He saw this as a triumph for Soviet production, science and technology. Relatively, the Soviets were still weak compared to the United States at the time. Industrially and economically they didn't even have half of what the United States had. But in order to achieve those things, to show that they were mobilising their manpower correctly, they made these achievements.

The Unity Movement also had Marxists ideas, but they went with the Trotskyites. When I was at university, in first year, I didn't know much about Trotskyism and Stalinism and the differences between the two. And then one day Richard van der Ross wrote an article – he used to write a weekly article for a newspaper in the Cape – and he said, "Yes, as it is known, the difference between the two leading liberation movements in this country, that is, the Congress Movement and the Unity Movement, is the difference between Trotskyism and Stalinism." And basically that was the first time I learnt about this – the two different approaches. And that's why a lot of the Unity Movement guys – I won't say all of them – were socialist. Some were not. But the hardcore, who grew up in Cape Town, some from the Spartacus School of the '30s and '40s, they were the ones who built on Trotskyism. The Stalinists were Jack Simons, Michael Harmel, you see. Albie Sachs's father was a Stalinist but his uncle, Bernard Sachs, was a Trotskyite. They were a bit older than J.B. Marks and them. But they were based in Johannesburg, and because of their activism they were able to influence a lot of people. Johannesburg was really the centre of political activism. Johannesburg was the political centre. It wasn't the white political centre. But it was the black political centre.

The first time I was arrested was in '62 when there was this Cuban missile crisis[1]. You know, when the United States couldn't invade Cuba, it started building all those missiles. We went to demonstrate against this. To say: "We want peace, not war", at the United States Consulate. And then we were arrested and charged later. And we were fined 10 pounds for demonstrating. Later in '63 they introduced detention without trial, the so-called 90-day Act[2]. It affected quite a

[1] The "Cuban missile crisis" began on October 22, 1962, when United States President John F. Kennedy informed the world that the Soviet Union was building secret missile bases in Cuba, a mere 90 miles off the shores of Florida. After weighing such options as an armed invasion of Cuba and air strikes against the missiles, Kennedy decided on a less dangerous response. In addition to demanding that Russian Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev remove all the missile bases and their deadly contents, Kennedy ordered a naval quarantine (blockade) of Cuba in order to prevent Russian ships from bringing additional missiles and construction materials to the island. In response to the American naval blockade, Premier Khrushchev authorised his Soviet field commanders in Cuba to launch their tactical nuclear weapons if Cuba was invaded by U.S. forces.

[2] The 90-day detention law (the General Law Amendment Act, No 37, of 1963), effective from the 1st of May 1963, provided for solitary confinement without charge or trial for renewable periods of 90 days, without access to lawyers or family. The Security Police could interrogate for an unlimited time, until the detainee had given "satisfactory" replies, and many detainees were held for a further 90 days on the expiry of the initial period. Some 682 people were detained under this law within 8 months of the Act being enforced.

few of the guys who were picked up. But we were only picked up – I wasn't picked up, we were arrested – because we were painting slogans at the time, Basil February and I. So we went to prison in Roeland Street (it's the Archives now). We got out on bail. While we were on bail they picked us up again because of some sabotage that was taking place. They just picked up people at random because they couldn't solve the case. And then we were held and subsequently charged. I forget to tell you, in 1962, we were invited to a camp, in Mamre. There we were taught the rudiments. It was supposed to be a ten-day camp. We were just there for four days – the fourth day a chap came there and brought the police. It was towards the end of the year. We had just got into the question of drill, marching, some guerrilla warfare, and how to operate a car. There were very few cars around, but we had to be able to run a car. They didn't arrest us. They arrested some of the guys in the camp. And they told the guys: "Look, guerrilla warfare can't even work in this country." The first chaps were arrested. Denis Goldberg was one of the key guys in the camp. Another key guy was Looksmart Solwande Ngudle.

I met Chris Hani at the *New Age* offices at the corner of Barrack Street and Plein Street. Sonia Bunting introduced me to Chris. Chris had just been in Cape Town for a short period. His father had been in Cape Town for some time, but Chris had been studying at Fort Hare. I met Chris again years later outside at the camp in Kongwa, and he reminded me about the meeting with Sonia. The Buntings were running the *New Age* office.

In '63 they arrested us for painting slogans, and the bail was paid. But they also charged me for furthering the interests of an illegal organisation, because I had in my possession some illegal documents; how to organise, and so on. The charges were very vague. The ANC had adopted the armed struggle, but we (the CPC) were still a legal organisation. So we tried to make use of our legality. But, at the same, the police also knew our movement and they were clamping down on us. So, we decided we couldn't expose ourselves like that. We must do certain things underground because of the situation. But even then I knew that when I saw ANC people – they were very few – they were underground people. They were operating underground.

We were charged and I spent some time in prison, awaiting trial. We appeared twice and we were charged for sabotage, arising from the incident in the camp in 1962 – Basil was not at the camp. We came out in January '64, and I was approached and told I must leave the country. A chap like Albie Sachs: when we were out on bail in '63, Basil February and myself, we thought we were either going to spend some years in jail – we expected a sentence of three years – or we were going to leave the country and join the liberation movement outside. And we put it to him, and he wasn't at all keen. He told us, then: "It will be alright to go out, and save your skins and all that. But what effect will it have on the morale of the people here? We must think of that because a lot of our leaders have left. And that is already demoralising." But some of them had been sent out to go and work for the organisation outside – to be part of the External Mission. Others had left because of persecution. Others like Leon Levy and Wolfie Kodesh were told: "Look, you have to leave the country permanently." Albie told us: "Try and serve the three years. And then when you come out you can still work. If you run away – although you can still work there – it will have a very bad effect on morale." So we decided to stay. And everybody was asking us: "Why don't you leave the country? Are you going to stay here? Why aren't you gone yet?"

And, actually, we stayed on until we appeared in court, until we were picked up again. And then we were charged. Basil got a fine. We were very young. The slogans were like: “Free detainees!”; “Fight for the liberty of all!” – painted on the road and on the walls. Albie Sachs was the one who insisted that we stay, because he was our legal representative, and our lawyer was [Dullah] Omar. Albie was our advocate. They knew one another from university. Albie was the first student to be banned in the fifties. He had quite a lot of credentials. People respected him, especially the youth in Cape Town. We were not sentenced. I was with the guys arrested for the sabotage because I was in the camp at Mamre. Basil was just fined, because apparently he made a very good speech, impressed the magistrate. The magistrate said: “Okay. Because of your youth you will pay the cost of cleaning the paint”. I was kept in prison for another two months or so, awaiting trial, until early in '64 when we were charged. Most of the guys were from the ANC who were at that camp. Some of the guys had already left the country. Now they said: “You would be more of a danger because now the police know you. There is not much work you can do without being a danger to other people. Rather retreat, go outside the country. And then re-emerge.” Basil was underground; the police were still looking for him, to charge him again. So we met. We decided there was nothing much we could do inside the country. So we decided to leave the country.

Abbas Gadief had a shop, and he organised the train-fare for us to leave. Although he was in the Indian Congress he worked more for the CPC. There were four of us who left for Johannesburg. It was Basil, a chap called "Army", and Kenny Jordan. Kenny Jordan was with Neville Alexander's group, and they (the security police) wanted him to give evidence against Neville and them. And he didn't want to. So he went underground because the police were looking for him. He couldn't stay underground for long, so we decided to help him get out of the country. The organisation wasn't so narrow, you know, to take care only of its own members. They were fighting the government as well.

The person who collected us in Johannesburg was Babla Saloojee, who took us to Molvi Cachalia's house. I didn't know him. Molvi was talking to us there, and I was sitting with him and asking him where the Cachalias were, because the Cachalias were a very famous family in the fifties. I didn't know I was taking to Molvi. He took us to various places in Fordsburg – I think to Jassat and Mosie Moola. We stayed in Fordsburg for a night. Then we went to Coronation and then to Grasmere; stayed there for a few days while we were waiting for them to take us out. The guy who took us out was a brother of Mokgotsi. He took us to the border, near Zeerust. It was in April 1964. We were not illegal, but we had no passports. So one day he just took us and brought us to the station. We went by bus to Zeerust. We then went by bus to Mopane. And then we walked the rest of the way across the border to Lobatse. This guy knew the route. We were walking in the darkness. We were received by Fish Keitsing in Lobatse – ANC people who were in the Botswana People's Party. When we were in Lobatse we got the news on the radio about the sentencing of Neville Alexander and the others.

We only stayed there for a day. The next day we went by train to Francistown. It was a whole-day journey. And then in Francistown we stayed for a few weeks while transport was being organised for us to Kasane on the border. We stayed there in a refugee camp. There were also

PAC refugees there. It took us three days to get to Kasane. The roads were bad, and we were travelling through bush and forest. We even got stuck at one time. It was a four-by-four Land Rover. We stayed in Kasane for about a week or so before we crossed the border into Zambia – it was still not independent then. We stayed in Livingstonee for a day or so. We were met by some ANC guy there, and we stayed in a hotel for a night. And from there we were taken to Lusaka, where we were met by Tennyson Makiwane. We stayed there for a day or so. We had met Benny Bunsee in Francistown. Benny was from the Coloured Congress in Cape Town. I knew him. So we met there in Francistown and went up together. And he was going to stay in Lusaka. But they wouldn't accept him, so he stayed with us. From Lusaka we went to Dar es Salaam. We stayed at various places along the way.

We were very young. What influenced us was the news we heard of Neville Alexander's sentencing. Basil was related by marriage to Alexander. Neville got ten years, and the others five. So Basil felt that he was not going to go anywhere – he must go back and fight for freedom. We were in a way already persuaded to take up arms. Basil initially wanted to go and study under the auspices of the organisation. But this persuaded him to postpone his academic studies. When we reached Dar es Salaam, the following day the secretariat saw us – that was the deputy-president [Oliver Tambo], Moses Kotane the treasurer, Barney Desai and Duma Nokwe the secretary-general – we were asked what we wanted to do. We told them we wanted to train, quite voluntarily, and we went to stay in Luthuli House. We stayed there for a short while. The ANC wasn't so well-organised then – outside the country. But, at the same time, the police inside were not so sophisticated. However, they had many people working in the organisation, as agents. They checked out our credentials, you see, and then you stayed in the camp. You didn't go out. We were not too many because at that time we were coming in little groups. But later on the numbers grew, and we were taken from the house complexes to Kongwa. From there I went in a small group to Czechoslovakia in June 1964 for military training.

The Academy had many faculties – we were in the foreign campus. At this faculty there were also students from, say, Afghanistan, Egypt, and so on. We were given commander's training; training in small arms, explosives, infantry training, engineering, camouflage, how to fire a mortar, how to calculate distances, first aid, how an automobile runs, and political science (very important part of the training). In political science we were taught the fundamentals – basics – of Marxism. They taught us about the national liberation struggle – national democratic struggle. They taught us how capitalism works, and also taught us other aspects of Marxism – Leninism, and so on. The chap who taught me had been a youngster of 16 years old in the resistance to Nazi occupation during the Second World War. He had been involved in organising the resistance during the war and was arrested. So, he was sent to a concentration camp in Poland and in Germany. He stayed there a few years. He taught us how they operated underground in the concentration camp. It was more theory. We were also trained how to conduct ourselves in cases of chemical warfare.

We changed our names when we went out. We all took our mothers' maiden names. Basil February's mother's name was Petersen. My mother's maiden name was Brian. We found other cadres there, in Czechoslovakia, who had been there since '63 – we joined them in June '64. But they stayed only a few months while we were there before returning. We were there for about 11 months. There were also about 20 Kenyan students there. And then, the other students who were there were the foreign students from Africa, who were at the university there. There were a lot of foreign students from Africa – Mali, Sudan, Ethiopia and so on – who were studying at the university. They had a Foreign Students' Society. We also interacted with the local population. They did not restrain us. We got off on a Wednesday afternoon from 11 o'clock, and the weekend we got off – Saturdays from 1 o'clock. This allowed us to go out. Sundays we were off the whole day until 11 o'clock. Some chaps got married to local girls there.

After our training we returned to Dar es Salaam – stayed there for a short while before they sent us to Kongwa in 1965. Kongwa was a base camp – we didn't get much training there. We were just waiting. People who had gone for training returned there. We used to teach one another what we had learnt in the various places. Sometimes we used to go out on marches. The food was regular – predictable. It was enough to keep you going.

The dissatisfaction of people with the leadership for failing to put us into action was one of the big bones of contention; waiting, waiting. Others had been waiting before us for almost a year. They got impatient. You weren't just sitting and waiting – you had to occupy yourself – kept busy. We worked out a programme – besides what the organisation had for you as a soldier. There were youngsters from Zeerust – they were very young when they came there, about 11, 12 years old – who were taught the basics of education. They got their education there. Other guys used to play chess, draughts and so on a lot. The leadership used to come quite often to Kongwa. [Moses] Mabhida, who was the army commissar, came quite often. He was based in Morogoro. The ANC had moved its headquarters to Dar es Salaam. But MK leaders were stationed in Morogoro. So Joe [Modise] and Mabhida, who were members of the high command, the administration, came quite often. They spent weeks sometimes. J.B. Marks and Oliver Tambo would come at times, especially when there were troubles in the camp.

Some of the guys were impatient. They just refused to be objective. They didn't believe there was this commitment among the leaders to get the cadres back home. The leaders had suffered these setbacks inside the country, first with Rivonia. And then later on the other leadership was arrested. So the leadership inside the country was cut off. And it fell now onto the leadership outside the country. Their primary task when they were sent out was not to conduct the struggle. That was to be done by the internal leadership. They were there to garner support, international solidarity, to get funds, receive the recruits from home, to organise the training and send them back; and also, at the same time, to build up international solidarity. And they did have that structure to do that. They had a guy representing them in Egypt, who was there to organise training with the Egyptian government; the same with the guy in Algeria. They had somebody in London because London was a central place in Europe. That was in the early sixties.

And those guys had to come from time to time to meet with Oliver and the secretariat there – Moses Kotane, J.B. Marks, Duma Nokwe – to work out strategy. Now, the task fell on them to conduct the struggle. There was this group from Natal who wanted to pressurise the leaders to send the cadres home. We had a "people's court", but nothing happened. They were arrested by the Tanzanian government[1]. We decided that we were not going to punish them. We just wanted to show that it was wrong morally. There was no real reception machinery inside the country.

Some of us were in transit; we were not supposed to stay there. I was given my assignment by Joe Modise and Moses Mabhida. We were a group, with Basil February, who had been recruited from the Western Cape. We were given this mission in Morogoro, where we had gone from Kongwa. I then went to Zambia, where we were put in houses. There were quite a number of guys in Zambia, the Phokanokas and so on, and they were raided by the Zambian police. The Zambian police were still working with the Rhodesian whites. So those guys had to retreat, while a number were held by the police for a short while. This was in early 1966. We stayed away from the population, staying in the houses until '67. We also stayed on a farm with one of the guys.

The ANC had to negotiate with ZAPU about the mission to return. And the first indication we got that something like this was going to take place was when Uncle J.B. [Marks] made a speech at a seminar in late '66 in which he flogged the idea that Southern Africa was one region. We couldn't separate the struggle – the struggles in South Africa, the Portuguese colonies and Southern Rhodesia were one. The liberation movements must therefore cooperate very closely. The colonial powers were working closely, and we also had to work closely together. He was not saying that we must integrate our forces and work as one force. No, he didn't. Only months later when the idea was put forward that ZAPU and the ANC must form an alliance, then there was opposition. I know Moses Mabhida was opposed to it – I am not sure why. I know, some people were saying that a guerrilla army would have the maximum advantage if it was like fish in the water – merging with its surroundings. Like Vietnam – a peasant during the day and a guerrilla at night. It mustn't go into countryside it doesn't know. We must know the countryside like the back of our hands. But we weren't going to stay there [in Southern Rhodesia]. We weren't going to stay and fight there – we were just going to use it as a route down south. The minute we went through Botswana we'd get arrested and sent to jail. Initially Botswana didn't put us in jail. They sent the guys back. But then they said: “No, we can't continue”. Put some pressure on by putting us in jail. They did that. They put [Ureah] Maleka and [Tlou] Cholo in jail.

Ultimately, although some people felt that we were going south, some of us could stay in Southern Rhodesia; prepare bases; allow us to operate; fight with ZAPU. It wasn't possible to spare many comrades for this, just a few to build relationships with the people, and not to put all our eggs in one basket; that wasn't our intention. In fact, O.R. was very upset about this later. A lot of our guys were sent to the east, Sipolilo. And he questioned this at the Morogoro Conference. He asked: “But why did you send so many guys there, Sipolilo?” The military

[1] Refer to the section dealing with Justice Gizenga for more details on this event.

headquarters said that they had made a collective decision to put most of the guys in the eastern front. It was, for us, a political decision and a military decision. The main goal was to get to South Africa.

We were called together to discuss the Wankie Campaign. We didn't have a very long discussion. Oliver was very strict, especially with Lawrence Phokanoka, because Lawrence had reservations about this. He was in charge of that group going to Sekhukhuneland.

People started getting ready for the journey across. We were together at one time with the ZAPU people in the camps. There was one camp just outside Lusaka, about 40 kilometres from Lusaka. We were concentrated there, training. There was another camp where some of our cadres were – Chris Hani and his lot. We were camping on a farm. There we trained, to refresh ourselves from the previous training. And later on we were marching, on roads, on ploughed fields, and so on – it was part of the training programme. And that carried on for about two weeks.

The plan was for two groups to go in – one to go to the east and the other to go to the south for infiltration into South Africa. Chris Hani and the leader of the ZAPU group were going to the south. People like Andries Motsepe were tasked with establishing bases – establishing ourselves was in itself a big problem because it was very far from the rear bases. But the fellows wanted to be there to establish bases because they needed something for the South Africans. They were not going to be too far from the Botswana border. It took us the whole night to cross the river. We started when it was still light. We had to use ropes to go down; a boat took us across. You had this haversack on your back – each of us had a haversack.

We might have taken on too much with this long march. You see, instead of going south, we should have actually stayed, all of us, and established ourselves in Zimbabwe and moved south gradually. We could have been close to our rear bases. It was important to be able to retreat to the bases and get supplies; because sometimes the locals are so intimidated by the security forces, terrorised by them, you know, it is difficult to get cooperation. But we could only do it over time. That is why we needed a lot of guys [ZIPRA forces] from the local population, and to be able to establish links over time. Of course that was very vital for us. But if you wanted to go straight down – the main thing was that it was the wrong time of the year. And the water question. Then there were those catchment areas. But I suppose those things, if planned… That's why OR told us, subsequently, that the people selected for operations were going to be involved in the planning. Some of the preparation was bad, logistically speaking. But these things were ironed out subsequently. I think the main thing was preparation – we needed to have infiltrated people earlier in these areas. ZAPU had contact with people and this was part of their preparation. The guys were very critical when they returned, and they made it known publicly. And that is why O.R. subsequently resolved this. He made it quite clear that the people participating in operations should have the major say.