

**POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS IN  
PRETORIA'S AFRICAN TOWNSHIPS, 1940-1963**

by

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By 1960 three-quarters of Pretoria's 200,000 African inhabitants lived in the freehold township of Lady Selborne and the municipal townships of Atteridgeville and Vlaktefontein. (1) The remainder still dwelt in smaller locations and squatter encampments which the Council had been busy destroying during the previous decade. Each had a population of around 50,000 (Atteridgeville, at 45,000, was the smallest of the three) and had grown rapidly during the years since the war. (2) In character the townships were each different. Lady Selborne, the oldest, was founded in 1905 as one of two places in the environs of Pretoria where Africans could buy land. A square mile in area, situated on a hillside seven miles north-west of the city centre, by 1960 it was densely overcrowded, with an average of over thirty people living on each one of its 1,500 stands. (3) Most of these people lived in a single room in six-room houses, whose back-yards would be fringed by rows of shacks providing further accommodation. The 1,000-odd landlords were usually old, heavily indebted, and dependent on their property for a livelihood; the only people to demonstrate much evidence of material prosperity were the tiny core of professional people (ten African doctors served the three townships and ninety-two teachers worked in Lady Selborne) and businessmen (fifty-four Africans were licensed to trade in the township). (4) Most of the other inhabitants of Lady Selborne depended upon jobs in Pretoria's city centre, mainly in the commercial and distributive trades where about 20,000 people from Lady Selborne were employed. Engineering firms and the Iron and Steel Corporation, as well as the Railways, provided unskilled employment for another 4,000. (5) Approximately 10,000 children attended Lady Selborne's ten primary schools and two high schools - about fifty-five per cent of the children of eligible age in the township. (6)

In 1960 Lady Selborne was in the last phase of its history. From 1954 a threat to "rezone" the township as white had hung over the community and the legal machinery for its destruction existed from 1958. In early 1962 the first removals began to a new state-controlled township, Ga-Rankua, twenty miles to the west. The prospect of the community's dissolution evoked widespread anxiety for, quite apart from the increased expenses of living in Ga-Rankua or the municipal townships, the move appeared to young people to involve a diminution of rights: only those people with a record of previous employment in Pretoria would be allowed to take up jobs within the municipal area. (7) A rise in communal social tensions was evident in the appearance of youthful gangsterism towards the end of the 1950s, hitherto unknown in Lady Selborne. (8)

Atteridgeville was a more recent creation than Lady Selborne, Pretoria's first municipal township being constructed in 1940 to house the people evicted from the inner-city Marabastad location. (9) Four basic types of houses were built, of varying sizes, each provided with lights, baths and running water: for its time,

Atteridgeville housing was of relatively high quality. Perhaps for this reason the municipality decreed that it should be let at "economic" (non-subsidised) rents, and these were to be a perennial source of complaint amongst Atteridgeville's inhabitants. Located to the south-west of Pretoria, the township was adjacent to the ISCOR iron and steel works, and it is likely that in 1960 it accommodated the major proportion of its 12,000 African workers (10) who did not live in hostels. ISCOR wages averaged at £14.0.0. a month. In a survey conducted in 1954, 611 out of 1,450 families were found to be earning less than £10.0.0. (11)

Vlakfontein was the newest and largest of the townships. The first houses were built in the early 1950s, but it grew rapidly as its population was swollen by the displaced inhabitants of squatter camps and older locations. Fourteen miles from the city centre, it was located at the edge of its Eastern industrial district. Its population was divided between those who lived in and could afford to rent one of the 1,400 houses, also available on thirty-year leasehold, and those who constructed their own shelter on site and service plots. (12) Vlakfontein was planned according to principles which heralded Apartheid social engineering: the less privileged inhabitants of the site and service scheme were subjected to ethnic grouping, an administration of appointed chiefs and sub-chiefs, and building regulations which stressed pseudo-traditional architectural styles. (13) Because of its recent development, Vlakfontein lacked the strong sense of communal identity the other two possessed, its political culture was less organised, it was more tightly administered, and for these reasons it will feature less frequently in this narrative than Atteridgeville and Lady Selborne.

Pretoria's African population was unusually generously provided with secondary schools, the town accommodating four of the schools offering to African pupils instruction up to matriculation, a quarter of the Transvaal's total and one more than in the much more heavily populated Witwatersrand area. (14)

This was an area with rich and diverse political traditions. Up to the 1940s the African National Congress had been the dominant voice in African politics. One of the forerunners to the ANC, the Transvaal Native Congress, was founded in Pretoria by S M Makgatho of Lady Selborne, a former high school teacher, estate agent and newspaper proprietor. (15) From 1917 to 1924 he presided over the ANC itself, during the restless years after the First World War leading two local civil disobedience campaigns, one to obtain for Africans the provision of first-class railway accommodation and the other to gain the right to use the city's pavements, hitherto denied to black people. (16) Both were successful, as was a deputation led by Makgatho to persuade the authorities to drop plans to apply night pass regulations to women. (17)

In 1930 Pretoria was one of the few centres in which there was a significant response to the Communist call for pass burnings on December 16. Here the ANC was exceptional in responding to the campaign, which it opposed elsewhere. Naboth Mokgatle's account of the Pretoria pass burnings does not mention communists. (18) The protest was instigated locally by four groups: the ANC, the ICU, the "Radicals" and the "Garveyites". Those who responded to the campaign, according to Mokgatle, were mainly members of the unemployed of Marabastad, whose numbers had risen sharply recently owing to the depression. The depression had an especial impact on Africans in Pretoria, where local white politicians urged a boycott of all services employing African labour. The pass campaign was succeeded by mass arrests, and for a few years the ANC "was no longer heard of" in Pretoria. (19) But, with the threat of impending demolitions in Marabastad, the ANC once again became active. Ezekiel Mphahlele remembers regular Sunday meetings organised by the ANC in the location during 1938. (20) It is possible that it spoke with a more popular voice and to a more popular constituency than before, for the "Radicals", with the death of their leader George Daniels, had broken up and the ICU had lost heart when its local leader, Isaac Moroe, switched allegiances to become compound manager of African workers employed in the municipal quarry. (21) By 1942 the Pretoria ICU degenerated to the extent that it could be called "prima facie merely an eating club". (22)

But it was the Communists, with their advocacy of African labour organisation, who were to inherit the constituency left by the Radicals and ICU men. May Day 1932 was celebrated in Pretoria by a joint demonstration of black and white workers, led by the Communist Party. (23) That same year African members of the Party were attempting to organise trade unions. (24) Such efforts were short-lived; by 1935 Communist activity among Africans was confined to a night school, and that was forced to close down within a year of opening after losing its premises. The revival of African trade unionism in Pretoria was initially not inspired by Communists: for a short period a branch of the Johannesburg-based African Commercial and Distributive Workers' Union opened an office in Marabastad and collected subscriptions. Its local founder, Naboth Mokgatle, a shop delivery worker, had been inspired by a public meeting addressed by the ACDWU's Trotskyite leader, Max Gordon. The Pretoria branch did not prosper: for, shortly after its formation in 1939, Gordon was interned and the administration of its Johannesburg office, to which the Pretoria subscriptions were sent, ground to a halt. Mokgatle then set up his own independent Pretoria Non-European Distributive Worker Union, and shortly thereafter, in 1941, joined the Communist Party which had recently set up an "area group" in Marabastad. In the year that followed Mokgatle and his comrades formed eleven more unions, including organisations for municipal, railway, cement, building, dairy, iron and steel, laundry, meat and match workers. (25) These were all to be affiliated to the Pretoria Council of Non-European Trade Unions, presided over by Mike Muller, in 1943 a twenty-year old former student from Pretoria University. At its peak in 1943, the Pretoria CNETU boasted an affiliation of 17,000 workers (26), and in March Mike Muller led several thousand of these in a city centre demonstration for Trade Union recognition.

For three years the trade union movement flourished, its popularity strengthened by a series of minimum wage determinations made by the wartime Smuts government. The communists' and trade unionists' status was also enhanced by a commission of enquiry which exonerated them from responsibility for a riot in late 1942 in the Marabastad Municipal workers' compound. In the weeks following the riot the Municipal Workers Union's membership swelled from six to nine hundred. (27) After the war, though, African labour organisation in Pretoria went into decline. By 1948 six of the unions mentioned by Mokgatle had evidently ceased to exist and CNETU claimed only 3,300 Pretoria-based workers in its affiliated membership. (28) This decline indicated a less favourable political climate as well as organisational weaknesses within the unions and the Party. In 1945 influx control was vigorously tightened in Pretoria, and this, together with the end of the war-time industrial growth, increased worker vulnerability to dismissal. Mokgatle reports that in this year the emphasis of trade union work shifted from wages to contesting the powers of the new municipal labour bureau. (29) In 1946 the unions lost the office they shared when they were evicted by the landlord. Falling membership and the loss of the office reduced the flow of subscriptions and five of the six African secretaries (one for every two unions) lost their jobs. Muller left the Party in 1947 (after quarrelling with Mokgatle because of the latter's failure to secure the reinstatement of some Central News Agency strikers) and the administration of the unions revolved around Mokgatle and Stephen Sondag Tefu, a resident of Lady Selborne, who had been active as a Communist and trade unionist in Pretoria in the early 1930s before moving to Johannesburg to work on the Party's Central Committee and campaign amongst the unemployed. Though Mokgatle was on the District Committee (and from 1949 its chairman), his trade union work was carried on at a distance from the Party: he and Tefu hired premises independently in Marabastad and launched a "General Workers Union". (30)

The fact that African trade union work was entrusted to some of the least experienced and junior party members was a reflection of the troubled character of the Pretoria Communist Party. A diary kept by one of the socially more distinguished local members, the advocate George Findlay, provides insight into some of the essential problems. (31) Writing in 1944, Findlay depicts a group whose white members were sharply divided between advocates of "Browderism" (followers of the American Communist policy of conciliation towards allied governments during the war) and those who believed in a strategy of confrontation. The Browderites included Muller, whereas Findlay himself was highly critical of the policy. Ironically, though, Muller was one of the few white activists who were doing what the anti-

Browderites insisted was imperative: mobilising Africans. The weight of the Party's white membership and leadership was, instead, concerned to combat the influence of Afrikaner nationalism in Pretoria's white unions (where it was having an especially fierce impact). (32) Some of the tensions are evident in the diary: commenting upon "the poor quality of the European membership", Findlay complains of the "unconscious spirit of evading mass contacts" (33) and also mentions one of the leading African members, Eliphaz Ditsele, as "letting rip, saying the European comrades were largely indifferent and failing all around". (34) In 1945, in February, white youths stoned the Party's local headquarters while education and ballroom dancing ("very orderly, no mixed dancing, tap-dancing, ballroom") (35) classes were in session. Police intervened but took the side of the insurgents and many of the hundred or so African dancers were beaten up or arrested. In the following month the landlord withdrew the premises, and there were expulsions and resignations from the Party. (36) By 1950, when preparations were being made for Pretoria workers to be called out for the national May Day stay-away to protest against the banning of Communist Party leaders, the organisation was apparently entirely in the hands of Mokgatle and Tefu. (37)

It would have taken considerable social sensitivity on both sides to bridge the gulf that existed in class and background between white and black members of the Party. The white members were generally from a professional background (in some cases quite wealthy) whereas the African communists listed for Pretoria in the Government Gazette (38) included five shop workers, messengers, or delivery men, three labourers, two bus conductors, one clinic worker and one carpenter, as well as Ditsele, who served as Pretoria agent for the Guardian. Eleven lived in Atteridgeville and four in Lady Selborne. With the exception of Ditsele, it is unlikely that the rest had an extensive formal education and, not surprisingly, Findlay's diary only rarely mentions Africans as playing a significant role in the discussions which took place at party meetings. Mokgatle may not have been typical but, despite his attendance at a party school in 1943, his understanding of the Party's policies seems to have been limited to its advocacy of an ideal society "in which all children would have free education and equal opportunities ... [and] all ... would have the right to vote". (39) This is not to disparage the achievement of Mokgatle and his fellow trade unionists (most of whom were also originally from the shop-worker group), for their efforts to organise and mobilise a working class movement were in the face of determined opposition. Before the 1950 May Day strike, for example:

On Sunday evening the police accompanied by the army, began to transport workers to their places of work to sleep there. I went to the bus terminus to see what was happening. There I found the workers being taken away from their families to sleep at work, escorted by the army and police motor cycles. When the workers passed me into the buses their heads were hanging down. (40)

Popular apathy, a strong police presence and opposition from local Youth Leaguers all contributed to the fruitlessness of Mokgatle's efforts to organise demonstrations of working-class consciousness. Undaunted, he continued his soap-box oratory on Market days, advising local ANC activists on how to conduct their campaigns, and in 1953 founding an ambitiously named "Federation of African Trade Unions of South Africa" before going into exile the following year.

Political radicalism within Pretoria's black community had, during the 1940s, been centred around the Communist Party and had found the major part of its following in Marabastad and in Atteridgeville, to which the majority of Marabastad's inhabitants were removed. In the following decade the ANC was to fill the space left by the Communists, and indeed it is possible to trace a continuity of membership between the two organisations: at least five people who had been prominent in the Communist Party or in the labour movement it created held office in the Pretoria ANC branch during the 1950s. (41) These included Mokgatle's collaborator, Stephen Tefu. Notwithstanding overlaps in membership and office-holders, the local ANC had a rather different character. Its strength was in the freehold village of Lady Selborne where for years it was able to maintain an office and a full-time official, from money regularly donated by the village's Chinese trading community. In Lady Selborne

it had a membership of between four and five hundred, whereas in other townships there were only small groups of adherents. At the beginning of the decade the ANC was well represented on the Village Committee - essentially a vehicle for the interests of property owners. However, the ANC itself was not an organ of the socially privileged: the leading members of the Lady Selborne Committee included two dairy workers, a shop worker, a carpenter and a painter, and a former trade union official. (42) The ANC's strength in Lady Selborne reflected the economic resources which the existence of a black propertied class (43) made available, but the composition of its leadership was at least partly influenced by the preceding decade of proletarian oriented organisation. What the Lady Selborne ANC appeared to lack were people from a professional or well educated background: here the proximity of Johannesburg worked to their disadvantage. Dr William Nkomo, for example, a local resident, a recently qualified medical practitioner and a founder of the Youth League, did not take part in local branch activities, attending instead national executive meetings in Johannesburg until his resignation from the ANC in 1953.

It is also possible that the location of the ANC in Lady Selborne distanced it for a time from the trade union tradition built up by the Communists during the 1940s. Only in the late 1950s were efforts made to re-create a politically aligned trade union movement. A South African Congress of Trade Union local committee was established in 1956 but sent no delegates to the "National Workers Conference" held by SACTU in 1957. In 1959 an attempt was made to establish a domestic and catering workers' union, and in 1961 a full-time official was appointed by SACTU in Johannesburg to organise Pretoria's iron and steel workers. (44)

The history of the Lady Selborne ANC in the 1950s was a troubled one. Regular meetings, efficient and energetic organisation and assistance from the local Indian community, all contributed to the local impact of the Defiance Campaign in which ten batches of volunteers broke railway segregation or curfew regulations between August and November 1952. (45) The following year the branch committee disbanded in protest against Dr Nkomo, collecting funds from local traders for the Johannesburg office. The branch was reconstituted only in 1955, after the Congress of the People, the initiative being taken by Peter Magano, a former dairy worker and Defiance Campaign volunteer who had served on the committee in 1952. Local interest in the ANC was considerably strengthened by the Federation of South African Women's great anti-pass demonstration in Pretoria in 1956: the Lady Selborne branch collected food from local traders and arranged accommodation for the visiting women. Thereafter, women appeared to play an especially assertive role in local political activity.

At the beginning of 1957 the Lady Selborne branch organised and led a communal boycott of buses in response to fare increases. In doing so they were part of a larger movement which affected Alexandra, north of Johannesburg, as well as Sophiatown. But though the initiative to boycott the buses came from outside, the protest against the fare rises was a reassertion of a well entrenched communal tradition. There were bus boycotts on at least four occasions during the previous decades: in 1943 in Atteridgeville, in Eersteruste and Riverside later the same year, in Lady Selborne in July 1945, and in Atteridgeville, again, in 1947. As with these previous boycotts, the 1957 protest demonstrated a striking degree of communal mobilisation. (46) The boycott was preceded by a house-to-house leafletting campaign, the ringing of church bells, the picketing of street corners, and the beating of telegraph poles to warn people to rise early so they could walk to work. Previously, the ANC delegation had successfully taken over a Village Committee meeting which had initially opposed the concept of a boycott, advocating instead legal action against the Public Utility Transport Company (PUTCO). The success of the first few days of the boycott was partly explained by the option those who could afford it had of using the nearby train service. In response to the South African Railways System's reduction in the number of railway coaches serving the adjacent station, the ANC called an evening meeting on January 18. The meeting was broken up by the Police Mobile Unit (a Pretoria-based squad formed to combat rural women's anti-pass unrest) and many people were beaten up, and one cyclist returning from work was shot dead. His funeral attracted most of the population of Lady Selborne and in its aftermath the ANC's branch membership swelled to 3,000. The boycott spread, picking

up an especially militant and sometimes violent female following in the squatter communities of Mociplas and Eastwood. (47)

The boycott's dénouement, however, was to be anti-climatic. In Johannesburg, a complicated arrangement involving subsidies from the Chambers of Commerce and the Municipality was worked out so that the pre-boycott fares could be retained, but the negotiations did not cover Pretoria and the local Afrikaans *Sakekamer* was unwilling to consider a similar settlement. From April, the Pretoria boycotters were left isolated and gradually their resolve weakened as the PUTCO buses shortened their routes so as to provide a service to commuters at the old fare. For the second time the Pretoria ANC had been let down by the Johannesburg-based leadership. Not surprisingly, there was no response in Pretoria in 1958 to the ANC call for a nation-wide three-day stay-at-home. (48)

Given this background, it is not surprising that splits developed in the Pretoria ANC leadership. In 1959 a leaflet was circulated by the Lady Selborne branch calling for women to demonstrate against the pass laws. Since 1956 the Lady Selborne branch had regularly been active in mobilising local women's anti-pass protests. The leaflet was drafted by a relatively new member of the branch committee, Dr Peter Tsele, a prominent Africanist. The language and tone of the leaflet prompted the Pretoria Municipality to ban the demonstration and the ANC leadership in Johannesburg counselled the branch to heed the ban. A narrow majority of the committee opposed the idea of calling off the ban, and on the 26th February, after leading a small delegation of women to protest against passes in front of the Native Commissioner's office, Tsele presided over a large meeting. The meeting was brutally interrupted by the police, many women (including several who were pregnant) were beaten up and Tsele and his confederates were arrested. (49) Shortly thereafter, Tsele announced his defection from the ANC and founded his own Africanist organisation, the Pan-African Freedom Movement.

Tsele's followers included men who had played a prominent role in the Lady Selborne ANC since 1955, but it is possible that their withdrawal helped to strengthen the ANC's local organisation. Tsele himself was a wealthy doctor, and his leading followers included two self-employed craftsmen, whereas the new ANC branch executive, headed by Peter Magano, which was constituted after their resignation, was drawn mainly from manual labourers. (50) In 1961, according to the ANC's own account, the local clandestine ANC leadership, in conjunction with the SACTU local committee, managed to organise a remarkably profound response to the 1961 anti-republican stay-away. On the first day, the 28th May, fifty percent of the work force in Vlakfontein and Atteridgeville and eighty percent of the Lady Selborne workers stayed at home. This was despite three massive police raids which immediately preceded the strike, ostensibly in search of pass offenders, and the arrest and "endorsement out" of several organisers (Magano had been subjected to house arrest in March). (51) SACTU's efforts amongst steel workers were attested to by a high level of participation in the strike amongst African ISCOR workers. Other sectors of the Pretoria African work force which the ANC claimed to have responded particularly well were dairy workers, railway workers and domestics. There was a demonstration in support of the strike at Kilnerton High School, and Indian shops, in accordance with a well established communal tradition, remained closed for the duration of the protest. (52)

In a slow and halting fashion the ANC in Pretoria during the 1950s was in the process of constituting itself as a movement of the poor and underprivileged. By the end of the decade it is possible to discern a social reorientation of the local movement away from a dependence upon the resources of a small but politically significant propertied class (itself, in any case, throughout the decade increasingly threatened with the impending destruction of the freehold township) and towards a working-class political identity, some of the foundations of which had been established by local Communists in the preceding decade.

The first reports of PAC activity in Lady Selborne occurred very shortly before the pass campaign on March 11 1960, when leaflets were distributed in Lady

Selborne advertising a street-corner meeting for 2.30 p.m. the following Sunday. The PAC's leaders turned up in force for the meeting, accompanied by some members of the Pan-African Freedom Movement, which, according to a police observer, was in the process of "being consumed by the PAC". (54) From Johannesburg came Robert Sobukwe, Josias Madzunya, Jacob Nyaose, Z B Molete and Potlake Leballo. Z B Molete told the assembled gathering that:

... when a white man set his foot in Africa he started land-grabbing, robbery and raping our country. The fight of Tchaka and Dingaan is now and we are starting today. Because Tchaka and Dingaan fought on tribal lines their struggle failed and they were defeated ... Whites are people that should be carrying passes. (55)

Amongst the local PAC men and their allies who were on the platform were Elias Ntloedibe, Stephen Tefu, Solomon Sello, S S M Maimela, and Isaac Kopanye. We know a little about each of them. Ntloedibe, the chairman of the Pretoria PAC, was a comparatively young man, aged thirty-one. Until recently, though a resident of Lady Selborne, he had worked as a court interpreter in Johannesburg and had had a local reputation as a writer of novels and articles in Afrikaans. (56) The previous year he had made a stormy impact at the first African Writers' Conference, which was held in Atteridgeville (attended also by Sobukwe), where he had called upon his fellow writers "to throw away their blinkers". (57) Stephen Tefu has already appeared in this narrative as Mokgatle's partner in trade union organisation during the 1940s. In 1960 he was fifty, with thirty years of political experience going back to his recruitment by the Communist Party in the early 1930s. Magano remembers him from the 1930s as a "diehard" Congressman in the mid-1950s, and the circumstances of his joining the PAC are a mystery. Sello, the PAC branch treasurer, had been present at the boycotters' meeting on January 28 1957 and had been shot that day in the stomach. (58) In 1960 he was slowly dying of the after-effects of the wound. It is possible that the isolation of the Pretoria boycotters after the Johannesburg settlement turned him against the ANC. Maimela and Kopanye, former ANC committee members (Maimela had also worked with Mokgatle on trade unions) (59), were known as associates of Tsele. The Pan-Africanists in Lady Selborne, then, included some of the more dominant figures in local political activity over the previous couple of decades.

This notwithstanding, their efforts to arouse support for the pass campaign were in vain. On March 21 Ntloedibe, Sello and four others presented themselves at Hercules police station outside Lady Selborne without their passes and with lapel badges inscribed "Africa for the Africans". (60) This was after a morning of tramping the streets and holding meetings around a green, gold and black PAC flag. The only place where they seemed to make an impression was at Lady Selborne High School, where a former student of the school held a meeting. He was ordered off the grounds by the headmaster, Mr Bob Ieshoai, who later claimed that there was a considerable amount of unrest among his charges, many of the pupils desiring to surrender themselves alongside the PAC men. (61) After leaving the school the PAC group marched through Lady Selborne calling upon its inhabitants to throw away their passes and stay away from work. Ntloedibe was overheard by a policeman to remark that "it would have been better if we had gone to Atteridgeville - we would have got more support there". (62) After their arrest, Ntloedibe and his five comrades were sent to prison for varying terms of six months to one year. Little was heard of the PAC for some time after this.

The local ANC men fared little better. In response to Lutuli's call, Magano and his executive burned their passes and agitated for a stay-at-home. Indian shops closed and taxi drivers observed a "day of mourning", but otherwise the only departure from normality reported in the local newspaper was the emptiness of the Commissioners's Courts because of the national suspension of pass laws. (67) Afterwards, though, police attributed a certain amount of disorderliness to local "Tsotsis". (64)

Perhaps, though, the events of March 1960 made a deeper communal impression than appeared on the surface. On September 9 1960 a car carrying two

white men collided with a black cyclist in Prinsloo Street in central Pretoria. The cyclist was unhurt and was roughly told to look where he was going. In response, he pushed the driver in the face. The white men drove off but stopped at a nearby cafe to buy cigarettes. They were immediately surrounded by an angry crowd of two hundred. There were shouts of "This is our land. Don't think you are in Katanga now". Before the driver and his passenger were rescued by police they were slashed across their arms with knives. (65) And Lady Selborne had a new local celebrity. During an end of year address at Lady Selborne High School Bob Leshoai reminded the five hundred pupils of a recently distinguished old boy, Philip Kgosana, and requested them to stand in his honour. (66)

It does appear that the reorganisation of a clandestine PAC organisation began at the high schools. Tommy Mohajana, a former pupil at Kilnerton High School, remembers PAC posters going up in the school on March 22 1960. He joined a group of PAC adherents numbering about fifty in mid-1961. They helped organise a strike in June that year, ostensibly in protest against being kept in class after examinations. (67) Several members of the group were thereafter expelled, one of them, Ernest Dikgang Moseneke, enrolling at Hofmeyr High School in Atteridgeville, at the beginning of 1962, where he immersed himself once again in PAC activities. (68) At the Atteridgeville school there existed a branch of the African Students Union of South Africa, which had been formed shortly after Sharpeville by PAC loyalists at Turfloop University College outside Pietersburg. (69) In August, the Atteridgeville ASUSA members were told that they now formally constituted a PAC cell. (70) By now, leadership of the Pretoria PAC seems to have passed to a new group centred in the schools. Ntloedibe, after serving his prison sentence, had stayed in the country long enough to issue a leaflet denying that the PAC had collaborated with the police in opposing the 1961 stay-at-home and then travelled to Maseru to join the National Executive. Sello was dead; he died shortly after an operation in a prison hospital had failed to make good the harm caused by the police bullet he had received in 1957. Tefu was in prison after breaking his banning order by attending a meeting called by the Lady Selborne Village Committee to discuss the impending removals. (71) The strength of the movement as well as much of its following had shifted from Lady Selborne to Atteridgeville and the new township of Vlakfontein, both of which were being enlarged to accommodate the tenants displaced by the demolitions which had begun in the old freehold village.

In 1963, a series of six trials revealed extensive PAC activity in the two municipal townships, the nearby educational institutions, as well as in Lady Selborne. (72) A witness in one of the trials, the secretary of the PAC's Northern Transvaal Region, testified to the existence of three concentrations of PAC membership in his region, at Pietersburg, Nelspruit and Pretoria, together numbering over 1,000. To support his claim, he recited to the court the names of over a hundred of the Pretoria members with whom he was acquainted. (73) If his claim was accurate, it seems sensible to assume that the greater part of the region's membership was in Pretoria.

Beyond the actions and alleged intentions of those who were convicted in these trials there is only very sketchy information about them. There seems to have been a well developed cellular structure in the three townships, put on a systematic organised footing at the end of 1962. At this point delegates were sent to Maseru, where they were instructed to recruit and make preparations for the impending uprising. In response to this, the Atteridgeville cells began the highly hazardous task of collecting and caching unexploded mortar bombs from the Skurweweg Artillery Range. As with other groups elsewhere in the country, PAC followers were told to buy and store mealie meal and clothing and manufacture weapons and petrol bombs. A list of suitable targets was drawn up. In Atteridgeville, a group named "The Twelve Disciples" was formed and given the task of assassinating selected security police and informers. They made two attempts upon the life of a local policeman, but on each occasion when they approached his house he had company and they lost heart. (74) Students at the Hebron Teacher Training College planned to kill their teachers and then use their cars to travel to Church Square where they would join detachments from Vlakfontein, Atteridgeville and Lady Selborne in an attack on the city. (75) In Vlakfontein a plan was made to hold up the regular dynamite truck which passed by



the township on the way to the diamond mine. (76) Such intentions were resolved and cemented in oath-taking rituals conducted during night-time meetings in the hills surrounding Pretoria: those who were present at these were told to cut their wrists as a symbol of their sacrifice for Africa. (77) Though some state witnesses spoke of being compelled to belong to the organisation, much of the evidence seemed to indicate a strong level of commitment: before March 1963 the Vlakkfontein group apparently sent a message to Leballo announcing their readiness for the uprising and their unwillingness to be kept waiting. At the same time, though, Vlakkfontein members were reproved by their leaders for "recruiting far too many children". (78)

All these plans were anticipated by the police: the organisation was well infiltrated by informers and between March 22 and April 8 nearly seventy suspected PAC members were arrested. A large proportion of these received heavy prison sentences, five of them for life.

Apart from their names and ages - the majority were in their late teens or early twenties - little can be gleaned from the trial evidence concerning the background of these men. Many were high-school pupils and, in Atteridgeville at least, teachers seem to have played a key role. The Atteridgeville teachers included John Nkosi, Jeff Masemula and Peter Rikhotso - the last a history teacher who in classroom was alleged to have told his pupils about the whites' theft of the land and the need to fight for its restoration to Africans. (79) The only name from the past was the chairman of the Atteridgeville PAC, Simon Brander, convicted alongside Masemula. Brander had been the Lady Selborne ANC's full-time secretary during the Defiance Campaign and had later associated himself with Tsele during the 1959 women's protest.

Peter Magano and other ANC loyalists remained active throughout these events. In 1962 they had formed cells linked to Umkonto we Sizwe's leadership in Johannesburg, and in the course of late 1962 and during 1963 were responsible for at least half a dozen sabotage attacks upon government buildings and railway lines. In conformity with Umkonto policy, care was taken to avoid putting lives at risk. The group involved a relatively small number of men. Along with Magano, one of the key organisers was Tseleng Mosupye, who, from 1959, had led a union of catering workers; waiters and other people employed in the catering industry made up a significant proportion of Umkonto's local membership. With their arrest in 1964, an era spanning nearly four decades of radical black dissent came to a close in Pretoria. (80)

This sad drama took place against a backdrop of communal tension. The removals from Lady Selborne, though not energetically contested (81), were widely feared, especially by the young and the very old: the former because of the prospect of losing their chances of employment in the city and the latter because, for many of them, life in Lady Selborne was the only life they could afford. (82) Many of the inhabitants of the municipal townships were forcefully resettled inhabitants of the ring of squatter settlements which had grown up round Pretoria during the war and had been eradicated towards the end of the 1950s. For many, life in their new homes was difficult: in August 1960, anger which had been accumulating in Atteridgeville over high rents, low wages and poor transport boiled over at the railway station, when delayed passengers assaulted the drivers and ticket examiners on the late trains. Arriving buses were stoned to cries of "Azikwelwa" from the crowd. (83) During 1960 and 1961, anticipating political unrest and to check a growing wave of youthful gangsterism, the police subjected Vlakkfontein and Atteridgeville to massive pass raids, on occasion deploying eight hundred policemen. (84) In two days in May 1961, 1,500 men and women appeared in the Commissioners' Court on charges of illegal entry. (85) The gangsterism the police complained of was itself a relatively new symptom of social distress among the young in all three townships. (86) Even those for whom education offered the possibility of escape from poverty had fiercely curtailed chances of meeting their aspirations. In the 1961 matriculation results, 178 out of 958 African candidates passed, three out of seven at Atteridgeville, fourteen out of thirty-four at Kilnerton, and none out of a matriculation class of sixteen at Lady Selborne. (87)

It has been suggested above that in the course of the 1950s the ANC in Pretoria was in the process of acquiring a definite social character, with a membership and leadership drawn increasingly from a working-class background. This created a social space for local PAC activists; in very broad general terms, from the little we know of its local following, the PAC seems to have had a more middle-class character. (88) A survey conducted in the Pretoria area and on the Rand in 1962 among a small sample of professionals, teachers, clerks, students and school children revealed that a 57 per cent majority of the group preferred the PAC to the ANC. In the sample, a relatively high degree of education, youth, acceptance of violent political methods and support for the PAC tended to coincide. (89)

Commitment to either the PAC or the ANC insurgents in Pretoria was socially exceptional. Even during the days of its legal existence, the ANC was not a powerful movement. The community rallied behind it only sporadically, at moments when an act by the authorities could be seen as a material injustice with an immediate effect on their daily lives. Africans in Pretoria during the 1950s and 1960s had yet to occupy strategic positions in the local political economy. Confined mainly to menial employment in commerce and services, or in the least skilled sectors of industry, they lacked the necessary confidence and resources for continuous participation in a political movement. In a particularly repressive local environment, political activity of the type undertaken by Mokgatle, Magano, Tefu, Sello, Ntloedibe and Masemula, to name a few in this narrative, required unusual reserves of imagination and courage.

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#### Notes

- (1) Vlaktefontein was shortly to be renamed Mamelodi.
- (2) Population statistics from Pretoria News, 1 March 1960, 23 May 1960, and 24 September 1960.
- (3) "Pretoria Group Areas proclaimed on 6 June 1958", SAIRR memo, 99/58, 24 June 1958, p 3.
- (4) H Cluver, Survey of Lady Selborne (SAIRR: Johannesburg, 1954), p 10 and p 14.
- (5) Ibid., p 22.
- (6) Ibid., p 14, and Pretoria News, 13 February 1960.
- (7) Pretoria News, 16 February 1962.
- (8) Hannah Stanton, Go Well, Stay Well (Hodder and Stoughton: London, 1961), p 49.
- (9) An outstanding description of Marabastad and its decline is in Ezekiel Mphahlele, Down Second Avenue (Faber: London, 1980), especially p 151.
- (10) Pretoria News, 26 April 1961 and 13 July 1961.
- (11) Joint Council papers, University of the Witwatersrand, AD 1433, Cp 9 1, Pretoria Joint Council, File 3, Findings of a City Council social survey in Atteridgeville, July 1954.
- (12) Joint Council papers, Pretoria Joint Council, AD 1433, Cp 9 1, File 3, memorandum prepared by Pretoria Joint Council on Vlaktefontein, 25 August 1954.
- (13) Inkululeko, 2 July 1947.
- (14) Joint Council papers, AD 1433, Cp 9 1, File 6, List of Bantu Secondary Schools giving instruction up to matriculation, 27 September 1958.
- (15) See profile in Imvo Zabantsundu (Kingwilliamstown), 20 October 1962.

- (16) Interview with William Sebina Letlalo, Johannesburg, 1978. Letlalo, who participated in the campaign, provided in this interview the only detailed account of these incidents.
- (17) Peter Walshe, The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa (Hurst: London), pp 80-81.
- (18) The Simonses mention a strike by African bricklayers in Pretoria as part of a national response to a Community Party call for a general strike in protest against amendments to the Riotous Assembly Act (H J and R E Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950 (Harmondsworth, Penguin: 1969), p 426. I have found no details of Communist Party activity in Pretoria before 1930. In 1911 a Socialist Society was formed in Pretoria, including in its membership both Marxists and anarchists. It provided the basis for the foundation of a local branch of the International Socialist League in 1918. Evidently, however, both groups confined their activity to public debates and platform oratory aimed at white workers and took no steps to organise blacks. (For details, see: Sheridan Johns, Marxism-Leninism in a Multi-Racial Environment: the origins and early history of the Communist Party of South Africa, PhD dissertation (Harvard, 1965), pp 92, 100, 158 and 293; Wilfred H Harrison, Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa, published by the author (Cape Town, 1948), pp 33-39.
- (19) Naboth Mokgatle, Autobiography of an Unknown African (University of California: Berkeley, 1971), pp 174-180.
- (20) Mphahlele, op. cit., p 139.
- (21) Ibid., p 222.
- (22) Judicial Commission of Enquiry, Pretoria Municipal Riot of 28 December 1942, Report, p 40, SAIRR papers, University of the Witwatersrand, AD 843/B 95 3.
- (23) A Nzula, II Potekhin and A Z Zusmanovich, Forced Labour in Colonial Africa (Zed Press: London, 1979), p 157.
- (24) See biographical information on S Tefu and P Ramutla in: Edward and Win Roux, Rebel Pity (Rex Collings: London, 1970), p 129; Simons & Simons, op. cit., p 459; Edward Roux, Time Longer Than Rope (University of Wisconsin: Madison, 1964), p 269.
- (25) Mokgatle, op. cit., pp 227-244.
- (26) Baruch Hirson, "The Mines, the State, and African Trade Unions", unpublished seminar paper, p 24. Estimates of the numbers of African trade unionists vary. An Inkululeko report in the issue of 5 March 1943 gave a figure of 7,000.
- (27) Judicial Commission of Enquiry, p 32.
- (28) Extract from evidence given by Transvaal CNETU to Industrial Legislation Commission, Rheinallt Jones papers, Ja 2 11. CNETU figures, both at their peak and their decline, were probably overestimations. 17,000 in 1942 would have represented a very high proportion of Africans in wage employment. The 1948 figure attributed 2,500 workers to the Municipal Workers' Union, three times the figure given in the judicial commission of enquiry in 1943, when the Union was in its prime.
- (29) Mokgatle, op. cit., p 249 and p 264. It may be that Mokgatle's account dates this development a little early. Inkululeko reported in 1949 (24 September) that Pretoria had recently been affected by a tightening of pass regulations, with more than 3,000 bannings a month from the city and the refusal of applications for permits to seek work by any African who had left a previous job in Pretoria.
- (30) Mokgatle, op. cit., p 274.
- (31) Findlay papers, University of the Witwatersrand.
- (32) The first split in the South African Trades and Labour Council, the main federation for white industrial unions, came in 1948 in Pretoria, when six unions broke away in opposition to the affiliation of African unions. Ken Luckhardt and Brenda Wall, Organize or Starve (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1980), p 82.
- (33) Findlay papers, George Findlay's diary, Vol 1, p 79.

- (34) Ibid., Vol 1, p 54.
- (35) Ibid., Vol 2, entry for 16 February 1945.
- (36) Ibid., Vol 2, entry for 4 March 1945.
- (37) Mokgatle, op. cit., p 281.
- (38) Republic of South Africa, Government Gazette, Pretoria, 16 November 1962, List of people associated with the Communist Party of South Africa. This list is not altogether accurate, but, in the case of the listed Pretoria members, with those whom it has been possible to check it has proved correct.
- (39) Mokgatle, op. cit., p 234.
- (40) Ibid., p 284.
- (41) An extensive interview with Peter Magano provided the author with a list of office holders and members who could be cross-references. Author's interview with Peter Magano, Johannesburg, 1982.
- (42) Interview with Peter Magano.
- (43) For its composition, see Cluver, op. cit., p 10 and p 17.
- (44) Luckhardt and Wall, op. cit., p 186.
- (45) Tom Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa since 1945 (Longman: London, 1983), p 46.
- (46) For details of the 1940s boycotts, see Inkululeko, 28 August 1943, 23 October 1943, 14 July 1945, 29 October 1945, and 1 April 1947. Communists from the Lady Selborne and Eersteruste Groups of the Party played a prominent role in the boycotts in their localities.
- (47) Margaret Ballinger papers, A 410, C 2 5 4, File 2, affidavits re ANC meeting, Eastwood, 18 January 1957.
- (48) Interview with Peter Magano.
- (49) Interview with Peter Magano. See also Ballinger papers, A 410, C 2 1 48.
- (50) Branch executive named in Pretoria News, 28 March 1960 and 21 April 1960. Names cross referenced with detail in Magano interview and in Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, 1960-1964 (Northwestern University Press, 1971), p 184.
- (51) Pretoria News, 17 March 1961.
- (52) SAIRR papers, AD 1189, ANC unsorted box, "Report from Organisers", typescript.
- (53) State v Z B Molete, Johannesburg, 9/1962, transcript held at SAIRR, p 4.
- (54) Ibid., p 25.
- (55) Ibid., p 18.
- (56) Details from Contact, 25 July 1959, and Pretoria News, 22 March 1960.
- (57) Contact, 25 July 1959.
- (58) Ibid., 10 July 1960.
- (59) Mokgatle, op. cit., p 312.
- (60) Pretoria News, 21 March 1960.
- (61) Ibid., 9 June 1960.
- (62) Ibid., 19 June 1960.
- (63) Ibid., 28 May 1960.
- (64) Ibid., 6 April 1960.
- (65) Ibid., 30 September 1960.
- (66) Contact, 3 December 1960.
- (67) Author's interview with Tommy Mohajane, York, 1975.
- (68) Azania News (Dar es Salaam), profile of E D Moseneke, 27 January 1966.
- (69) Gerhart, Black Power in South Africa: the evolution of an ideology (Berkeley, 1978), p 257.

- (70) State v Jeffrey Masemula and 15, Pretoria, June 1963, transcript held at University of York, p 263.
- (71) Contact, 23 March 1961.
- (72) State v Masemula and 15; State v Isaac Mthimunye and 10; State v Dimake Malepe and 11; State v Dela Tsweleng and 12; State v Michael Maluleka and 7; State v Moses Makau and 11, Reports in Pretoria News, April-September 1963.
- (73) Pretoria News, 30 September 1963.
- (74) Ibid., 10 June 1963.
- (75) Ibid., 12 July 1963.
- (76) Ibid., 17 June 1963.
- (77) Ibid.
- (78) Ibid., 26 September 1963.
- (79) Ibid., 14 June 1963.
- (80) Feit, op. cit., pp 183-188.
- (81) Though at the beginning of 1961 the local branch of the Liberal Party obtained 5,000 signatures from Lady Selborne residents for a protest addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. See Contact, 2 November 1961.
- (82) See Pretoria News, 12 March 1960 and 16 June 1962, and Contact, 2 November 1961.
- (83) Contact, 10 September 1960.
- (84) Pretoria News, 19 May 1961; 30 June 1961.
- (85) Ibid., 27 May 1961.
- (86) See, for example, Pretoria News, 21 April 1961, for report of increase of "tsotsism" in Atteridgeville.
- (87) Pretoria News, 2 February 1961.
- (88) It is possible that this social space may also have been occupied by the Pretoria branch of the Liberal Party, who, after 1960, succeeded in recruiting several hundred African members, mainly in Lady Selborne. More research is needed on the Pretoria Liberals, for they were for a time a significant force in township politics.
- (89) E A Brett, African Attitudes, SAIRR Fact Paper No 14 (Johannesburg, 1963).