

Reflections, Recollections and Experiences of a Rank and File Activist - 1946-1960.

Biographies, more often than not, deal with the lives and experiences, values and beliefs of leading personalities. Invariably they highlight the important role of an individual within a political movement or party, in government or more generally in the history of a country within a specific time period. Without underplaying or bringing into question the importance of such academic exercises, particularly in South Africa, where there is a desperate need to ^{accurately} objectively and ~~as correctly~~ present biographies of leading political figures working distinctively outside the parliamentary political framework and establishment politics. It is also necessary ~~important~~ and informative (from the point of view of historians) to compile biographies of less well-known, rank and file political figures. With them reside a wealth of political experience (which can most certainly inform present political issues).

More significantly ^{perhaps} for the historian or political scientist, it can provide a richer understanding of past developments which present a perspective 'from below' i.e. not simply from leadership elements of organisations or movements. It can also help us to come ~~more~~ ^{to} grips with the 'nitty-gritties' of organisation and mobilisation, and the difficulties and problems that activists had confronted in their day-to-day tasks relating to mass political activity. This kind of exercise can possibly contribute to an understanding of the relationship between the leadership and rank and file activists, their role as an intermediate layer between the leaders and the rank 'masses', their level of participation in decision-making and the direction of an organisation or movement, their personal political development - all of which are crucial to any in-depth understanding of a political movement or organisation of a mass character.

This paper does not attempt to cover all these areas of investigation. All it sets out to do is record the personal experiences and reflections of an activist from the Transvaal Indian Congress which ~~serves to highlight~~ sheds ~~some~~ light on some of the ~~above~~ issues raised above. It is also simply a preliminary attempt which has many gaps and ^{is in} no way fully exhaustive.

1. → The individual selected for this paper is unique in a number of ways. His participation in the struggle for national liberation covers a time-span of approximately three generations. At the same time he is an ordinary individual of working class background who participated in political activities of varied forms. In the 1940s he was a member of the Young Communist League. In the 1950s he was an activist for the Transvaal Indian Congress ^{and} in the 1960s he became a combatant in Vorkonto We Sigwe. ~~He was arrested and convicted for his activities and served a ten year sentence.~~ ^{in 1962 1963} ~~He~~ ^{and house arrested} was arrested and convicted for his activities and served a ten year sentence. On his release he was banned for 10 years and ~~as his release~~ played an important role in the revival of the Transvaal Indian Congress in the early 1980s. Presently he is closely associated with the Transvaal Indian Congress, but because of poor health (a consequence of torture at the hands of the police) ^{he} is unable to participate to the degree he wishes to. Nevertheless he is firmly committed to the struggle for national liberation in S.A. and his loyalties are unquestionably with Congress Movement.

Reggie Vandeyar was born on 15 July 1932 in Newclare in a relatively poor family. His father was originally from India "who came to S.A. as a wealth-seeker - hoping to find gold and diamonds". Guided by this objective ~~to~~ his parents travelled the "length and breadth of Transvaal eg. Hammanskraal, Heidelberg and Vereeniging." Because of this mobility, his father gave his mother "a very, very rough time and she was never able to settle down."

His school days were spent in Fordsburg where his family of nine members (of which he was the youngest then) ~~eventually~~ eventually settled down. From the age of about seven Reggie "mixed around with children from other race groups - Africans, coloured and afrikaner children." But at a very early age "the conflict between the afrikaner children and the other races was sort of focussing itself." Reggie attended the Bree Street Indian Government School and next to it there was the Afrikaner school. "In my primary days already the senior pupils of our school would have regular clashes with the Afrikaner kids across the border."

"It was fantastic being in Fordsburg in any event because it brought about some sort of understanding of life itself. We were all living in poverty (which was most intense during the war period) and as kids we could see what poverty really meant. You would come home and you would ^{not} find any bread at home and no proper meal."

"My mother used to work for a shilling a day at an Indian laundry and we had to virtually manage with that for the day. My brothers were unemployed and life was difficult. Out of all this there was a real struggle within me, you know; I couldn't get money for school books, for instance. As a result I did not complete my schooling. I left school in Standard 5."

"During the war years I became a bit of a drug-pusher just to make a few pennies. I also used to collect empty brandy bottles and exchange them for a few pennies. I used to supply the soldiers at Brown Mines with dagga. I did this innocently - I mean I was not aware of the danger of doing this type of thing. In relating this type of thing to show you the anger that built up in me - about this struggle in life, where you don't get food to eat."

"It's at one such instance where four of us, who were about 13 or 14 years of age, were swimming at the river near Brown Mines. [with him were Paul Joseph who is in exile ~~now in London~~ & who visited the Soviet Union in the 1950s and Barney Desai of SACPO], when Afrikaner boys gave us a tough time. They ^{stole} ~~used to steal~~ our clothes and burnt them. We had to run naked to the Grovenor Station in Mayfair, covered only by gum leaves. We then decided to find a safer place of swim. We decided to go to the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Wentworth. There we met African kids and mingled with them. We also messed around in the Jubilee library, not really interested in reading."

"One day a chap from Fordsburg walks in and we asked him for some money. So he suggested that we go to Chancellor's House (office of Communist Party of SA). 'There's a meeting there,' he said, 'and they'll give you fellows little tasks to do'."

for the war effort, and, in return, you can get coffee and sandwiches.' So off we went to the Communist Party office. We didn't know that at that stage, you see - It was when Dadoo made a call asking South African people not to support the war. Now when the Soviet Union was attacked then of course the policy changed and Dr. Dadoo called upon the people to support the war effort. Some Indians and botocreds joined the army. So we went to Chancellor's House and true to his words there was a canteen there and we ate. The first persons I met was Patsy Gilbert ~~(and later married to the Reddy)~~ and Ruth First. They asked us to give out some leaflet on the war effort. We were asked to return that evening for a meeting."

"The Young Communist League was having a meeting. We sat through it and it was helluvne boring (laughs) - all we were interested in was food. We later met some Indian chaps, like Vella Pillay, and were called upon to give out leaflets for the Indian Congress. It was a period when the moderate Nana-Kaje group was in power in the Indian Congress and it was election time. Well, we reluctantly accepted that kind of thing, but over the years (from 1947), mingling with these people disciplined us. They gradually gave us pamphlets to read and there was this eagerness now in us to know more about things. We became a bit more committed and the terribly boring thing was to get other youngsters from the streets to lectures. Political development slowly took place and we became increasingly conscious of what we were doing."

"Eventually we became acutely aware of what was happening. We were aware of the 1946 Passive Resistance campaign & later got involved in it. We had the Passive Resistance Bulletin and we had people camping outside the Red Square. We also met people like Nana Sita. We were of course very young and were not taken too seriously. It was then that we met B. Solomon 'Babla' Saloojee (who was killed in detention in the 1960s) and we did all the hard work of the Indian Congress."

"As I grew up I had to now find work, because the question of poverty never really left our family - it was even more difficult after the war as things were rationed. I remember waiting in long queues for bread. There was a shortage of sugar and rice which was like the stable diet of Indian families. We never had oil. I remember we mainly had sheep tail fat which my mother melted - it was quite horrible."

"This was the initial development that took place in my youth and then periodically I would sell flowers to make ends meet. Constantly I was dragged into political activity. By the age of 17 or 18 I was politically conscious and was a fully-fledged member of the Young Communist League. I used to read a lot of Marxist and Congress literature."

"What's interesting is that when when Mahan campaigned for the elections in 1948 the Communist Party held a very big meeting on the Johannesburg City Hall steps and the chaps I was impressed by were Vella Pillay and Bram Fisher. A big clash broke out between us and the Greyshirts, a farist? clique. This was a regular feature of these meetings and we had a strong force of Communist Party members. This was a period when many people became politically active. The Communist Party was very powerful and was at its strongest. The Indian Congress's influence was also more pronounced and I one could identify with it because there was a high interchange of Party and Indian Congress cadres?"

"When the Nats came into power things were already beginning to become bleak. The CP was still strong, but Mahan immediately began attacking it through the press. This at home were also not going well. My mother was ill and I had to find work. I then found work at the Ambassador Hotel as a porter. Over the years I was promoted from porter, floor-waiter, dining-room waiter, and senior waiter. I spent a total of about fifteen years in the catering trade. At job I was able to politicise a number of Indian and African waiters who had grievances. Many joined the Indian Congress and Yusuf Isachalia and 'Mervin' Thandray (TIC & CP member) played a leading role in politicising these workers. I worked in as a waiter until my arrest." DT

Reggie became a volunteer very early in the Congress of the People Campaign initiated by the African National Congress, South African Indian Congress, South African Coloured Peoples Organisation and South African Congress of Democrats in 1954. He worked for the full length of the campaign and attended ^{the COP} as a delegate in 25 June 1955. Recalling the objectives of the campaign Reggie explained that, "In the 1950s, particularly after diving and after the Defiance Campaign, there was a growing unity between the different racial groupings and their Congresses. There emerged a need for a document that could reflect this unity and to establish a way forward. The Campaign for the Freedom Charter ^{aimed} to draw all the races together and politically legitimate their grievances, so that the political organisations could spearhead the struggle with a political programme document. The Passive Resistance and Defiance Campaigns brought ~~into~~ inspiration to the liberation movement. The Defiance Campaign was proof of unity in action and joint struggle. We now needed a joint document."

"The COP campaign was significant. We went around with blank lists asking very general questions such as 'What do you think of freedom?' Sometimes we got non-sensical answers such as, 'I want to marry a white woman.' There were mixed demands which at times did not make complete sense. But when we went out we were specifically instructed not simply to ask questions and get replies. We had to politicise people! This is precisely what we did. If a fellow went off at a tangent (and some of them would do it mockingly) then we'd rap this fellow over the knuckles and speak to him. We would educate him. We would engage in political dialogue and sort him out. In most cases after a lengthy political discussion and debating the particular problems of the fellow, we would get a definite positive response. People often invited us to come back saying it was a nice refreshing talk. A key problem was that people could not always express themselves clearly. They ^{sometimes} put forward crude demands, but when we discovered the crudity of their answers we would lead them on to facilitate discussion - they were not always articulate & clear."

"The campaign for the COP served under political discussion and stimulated a great interest in the organisations. People would ask what organisations we belonged to. I remember churches were criticised quite a bit and some people said: 'Oh, this is not just another church group.' (laughs). This was

This was particularly so when we went to shebeens. Now when we knocked on the door we didn't know it was a shebeen-house, you see. Some of our activists would be scared to go in because chaps were boozing and so on, but we encouraged our people to have talks with them. We had quite a bit of fun and at the end we would come out all friends. I don't remember an incident where anybody attacked us. Shebeens were to be found in all areas - Coloured, Indian and African. 'Shebeen discussions' always ended up in group discussion."

- "In many areas we went out in linguistic groups - Gujarati, Urdu, Tamil etc so as to facilitate communication with ordinary elderly people as well. Sometimes an interpreter went with. When we went to African areas this was important. A fair amount of work was done with African comrades. When we went to Alexandra and Kliptown for instance, Indian and African comrades went together. I must add that African comrades did not work in Indian areas, although reflecting back on it now, I think it would have been a healthy sort of thing. In some areas there were ^{racially} mixed residents. This was very healthy and people responded quite well to a mixed activist grouping. There wasn't any antagonistic feeling at all?"

- "Very often people raised demands which we hadn't thought of - things we thought were insignificant, but what people thought to be important. The question of trade unionism, the workers problems were not explicitly formulated in the questionnaires. For eg, when we approached people we would ask them if they liked the areas they were living in. Wouldn't they like to live in Houghton or Wondeboom in Pretoria? Do you know you are restricted from this area? This was aimed at stimulating political discussion - arising out of that a lot of people wouldn't exactly know why they can't live in Houghton and say, "well, we can't afford to live in Houghton and Parktown, who'll pay so much?" Now this is a bit unrelated to our idea of political action eg. linking it to group areas and residential segregation. For them it was a practical question of economics. This helped to concretise our questions and be more flexible. It also made us think more carefully about political and economic issues and its relationship."

"We also held quite a number of house meetings, for eg, the Wolluter Hostel in Jeppe. I remember going with Tom Nkobi (who holds a very senior position in the ANC today) and he spoke in the vernacular. I noticed that it was a fiery sort of meeting where the hostellers were asking them a lot of questions. Because of the low level of literacy we got a discussion going with them and later wrote down the demands. After extracting the demands these were read out to the meeting."

Sophiatown,
Newclare,
Mabindale

"The Transvaal Indian Congress did extensive work in the following areas: Fordburg, Vrededorp, Doornfontein, Alexandra Township, Jeppe, Malay Camp, Pretoria (Asiatic Bazaar and Marabastad), Benson, Nigel, Springs, Germiston, Kiptown, Coronationville, Noordgesig and Albertsville (with SACPO). We were briefed at the Indian Congress offices and always returned to report back on our trips. We made regular assessments of the development of our work. SACPO was not a very powerful organisation and we normally helped out when it worked in its constituency."

"Abdulhay Jassat, 'Mosie' Mooler, Essop Jassat, Herbie Pillay, Harry Naidoo, Tommy and Bobby Vassen worked in the schools and had discussions with scholars. They used to have group meetings and discuss conditions in schools. Pupils were asked to talk to their parents and join the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress."

"I remember addressing flower-sellers at Multiflora (Indian Flower Market). I got these chaps to stay behind and addressed them about conditions at the flower market and the attitude of white farmers towards them. We then asked them to think about the issues and made a point of meeting them again at home. So we didn't always catch them by surprise."

"I personally did not go to rural areas - many African comrades went out and held meetings with the tribal heads and local people. I was once told by Stephen Dhlamini and Harry Gwala that they had a meeting with Matshe Bothaletszi and his people. He was a better chap than."

On the participation of women in the campaign, Reggie made the following point. "We had a number of female volunteers - not very many from the Indian Congress. Generally, the Indian women did not play a very active role in the campaign. This was ^{particularly} evident of the house visits. My view is that the women took a back seat. One has to really look at the make up of the community to understand this. The Indian family is male dominated and though women were present when we ~~we~~ did house visits they did not fully participate in the discussions. This does not mean that they were unconcerned about political issues, generally speaking. The emergence of the independent states of India and Pakistan generated wide interest and discussion, even among the women and parallel with S.A. could quite easily be drawn. But in other areas, particularly the Coloured areas, I found women taking active part in the discussion. You found that Coloured women, many being factory workers, coming with a lot of grievances - such as wages and ~~housing~~ housing. The Garment Workers Union was quite a strong union. They would say that our union says this and that. They would interlink your questions with the demands they were making at work. Amongst the African people (Alexandra Township, Sophiatown and Newclare) ^{you'll find} that the African men dominated the discussions. I suppose ~~was~~ language was a barrier and the African women sometimes felt embarrassed when she saw activists from other races addressing them on political issues. In those houses where people were of middle class background ~~go~~ and where there was a higher level of education both women and men participated in the discussion."

"We did experience a mild degree of harassment. It intensified as we came closer to the actual day of the Congress of the People. There was a general sporadic harassment eg. police presence at meetings etc. They were not really around when we conducted our house-to-house work and house meetings. I suppose they were not really aware of what was going on."

For Reggie the Congress of the People was not simply a culmination of a long period of hard work, it was a great moment in his life.

"Through all the years of going to meetings and listening to speeches and seeing the dynamism of mass struggles in the form of the Passive Resistance campaign and Defiance campaign, one felt that this was the epitome of your contribution to the struggle. You saw people coming together in a convention of all People it was one of the most inspiring meeting and dynamic gathering ever. Just the delegates were in their thousands. Every delegate was as a speaker - if he/she was called upon to say something he/she would be able to articulate his/her grievances and the people or he/she represented. They would be able to say something about their plight in S.A. and that was the most inspiring thing of all."

After the COP the Congress Alliance launched a One Million Signature Campaign for the the Freedom Charter. The Various provinces were asked to collect a certain number of signatures. Trl. had to collect 450 000. Quite clearly this figure was not reached. Reggie, was commenting on the popularisation and propagation campaign made the following observations:

"There were report back meetings. The Transvaal Indian Congress members got together and discussed the Charter. Public report back meetings were held and dealt with the success of the Congress of the People itself. There was more discussion of a jubilant nature, rather than proper discussion on the Charter itself. People and activists spoke about the greatness of the gathering. It was simply accepted that the Charter was okay. But at the leadership level there was more intense discussion and analysis of the content of the Charter."

"Criticism really only came from the Leballos and Mahomeds who were racialistic. Ordinary people did not criticise the document, they accepted it as ~~as~~ their document."

"Popularisation of the Freedom Charter did take place, but it was only in 1963 that I realised how little work was put into propagating the Charter itself. Because when in prison, from 1963-67 we initiated discussions... 11. 11. 67

'And little did we realise (until then) how little work went into that great achievement. It was done in a sort of sporadic fashion, but not on a concerted basis. I personally realised this terrible weakness in the organisation only in prison. More interest was shown in the campaign for the Freedom Charter and Congress of the People, instead of the Charter itself. Organisations felt a bit short. A few explanations can be offered. Firstly, the main concern of the ANC and Congress Alliance was to try and settle ^{the} ~~this~~ dispute with the Africanists. There were rumblings in the ANC and dissident groups came about - racist groups really. The ANC had to deal with this problem - that took precedence over everything else. At the same time the racist government came on with an onslaught against the Congress Alliance and fragmented the organisation. There was a spate of banning orders so that the leadership couldn't really concentrate on propagating the essence of the Freedom Charter. It had no time to do that sort of thing. By 1960 it was becoming more difficult to work openly. You see, I don't want to ~~state~~ state our leadership of the period as being negligent, because I don't think they were given the opportunity to carry out their work. One very important thing is the Treason Trial. This fragmented and disorganised the organisation completely. It sent a wave of fear over people and political organisations."

But shortly afterwards, the Congress Alliance adapted to this new ~~era~~ phase of ~~the~~ political repression and political activity was to continue. In 1958, the Congress Alliance called for a national stay-at-home in protest against the all-white general elections. ~~xxx~~ Reggie ~~recalls~~ remembers his role:-

"In 1958 the ANC called for a national stay-at-home. ^(in the TIC) We ~~worked~~ worked a helluva lot.

Amin Bajie, Ibrahim Moola, Solly Eoachjee and myself worked for a number of days preparing for the stay-away itself. Now the stay-away was called mainly because of the white elections. As far as I recall, it was a success. I know that a number of people say it was a failure. I remember we canvassed heavily in Lenz, asking people to support the stay-at-home call. You know Lenz was sparsely populated then and most people

KATHRADA - WITS GRADUATION. Tuesday. 11th December, 2012

Esteemed Chancellor, Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke, Vice Chancellor, Professor Loyiso Nongxa, the Academic Staff, and all staff members who keep the wheels of the University turning, distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I wish to express my deep gratitude to the University of Witwatersrand for the surprising honour to bestow an Honorary Doctorate on me.

At the same time, my congratulations to all students who graduate today. You have achieved a milestone in your lives, and may all your future endeavours be crowned with success.

I have a humble plea to all of you who are graduating today, and leaving the University. You will be going out into world, full of numerous challenges. When employing your newly acquired skills and expertise, please remember that with success come responsibilities.

There is the very important responsibility to the country. You are no doubt aware that South Africa is in dire need of skills and expertise in every direction. Without these our country will not be able to make the progress that it needs in order to face the challenges before us.

Honourable Chancellor, I'm ashamed to confess that about 60 years ago I had a brief association with Wits. I spent all of 3 months of my life as a student. Thereafter, at the age of 22 I succumbed to the attraction of an overseas visit, and I abruptly abandoned my student life to descend into the army of drop-outs.

It had to take 19 years to redeem myself, But we went into that.

Honourable Chancellor, with sincere apologies, I intend to depart from what I guess would have been expected from me in a speech at such an occasion.

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I wish to dedicate the remainder of my speech to ³ outstanding former students of Wits, and one, who though not a former student of Wits, he is inseparable from it.

All 3 of them are distinguished scholars, whose exemplary careers should inspire students not only to be achievers in their fields, but to contribute towards the needs of wider society.

Firstly, I single out Advocate Ismail Mohamed, who made history by being the first member of the legal fraternity who was not white, to serve in the position as Chief Justice of the Appeal Court in Bloemfontein.

But his tenure in this exalted position was not without added humiliation.

Chief Justice Mohamed was born and grew up in the Transvaal;- As in other provinces, the Province of his birth unashamedly boasted warning signs at all public facilities - libraries, cinemas, railway stations, post offices, lifts, parks, hotels, restaurants, toilets etc. Signs that decreed that the facilities were for Europeans Only. There were also signs that decreed "Non Europeans and Dogs Not Allowed". Thus maintaining that people who were not white were lesser human beings and as such were reduced to the level of dogs!

But his humiliation did not end there. He now had to carry out his duties as Chief Justice in Bloemfontein - in the Province of Orange Free State. Since 1913 the Government had made it a criminal offence for Indians to be in the Orange Free State altogether.

The most senior judge in South Africa and ^{was} ~~his colleagues~~ ^{he} ~~himself~~ were placed in a position where ^{he} ~~they~~ found ^{himself} ~~themselves~~ helpless to prevent the indignities and humiliation that ^{he} ~~Chief Justice Ismail Mohamed~~ had to face literally every hour that he spent in Bloemfontein. Because he was not white he was barred from every public amenity - hotels, restaurants, libraries, transport lifts.

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Allow me, Esteemed Chancellor, to cite my personal experience in this Province. In 1955 I was arrested in Heatherdale, a suburb of Bloemfontein. My crime was to be illegally in the Orange Free State, and in the Coloured Township.

The Senior Officer at the Bloemfontein Police Station was placed in a quandary, and he confessed he had never seen an Indian in his life and didn't know what to do with me. There were cells only for Blankes and Bantus, but no cell for Indians. He asked me - his prisoner - where he should lock me, I relieved him of his anxiety by telling him I was not white and he should lock me in a cell for Africans. In my Court case I was defended I was defended by my good friend, comrade and lawyer - Advocate Joe Slovo managed to get me off on the main charge, but I had to pay a ten shilling (or one Rand) fine for being illegally in the Coloured Township of Heatherdale!

My next Alumnus was my friend and comrade, with whom I grew up in politics from a very young age. She was an author, a highly acclaimed journalist, and a courageous and committed politician, and brilliant student.

Ruth Slovo was living in exile in Maputo, and teaching at the University.

One day she received a package from the United Nations. She of course could not have guessed that the package had been intercepted by the Security Police in Johannesburg; they had carefully inserted a tiny but powerful explosive in it and posted it to her. She innocently opened it and the powerful explosion killed her on the spot. We learnt of the tragedy with shock, while we were in Pollsmoor prison. South Africa was left the poorer by her death.

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he was about 18. During his 10-year imprisonment, he completed his matric, a B.A. and B.Juris.

His academic achievements as a young prisoner has won widespread admiration.

He may not be a Wits. alumnus. But he is Chancellor of the University of Witwatersrand, the Honourable Dikgang Moseneke.

In addition, he is Deputy Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court, the highest Court in the country.

As the guardian of our democracy, the Court holds the final power to pronounce judgement on all matters relating to the Constitution. There is no organ of State that can over ride its decisions.

Since its establishment, the Court has jealously guarded the Constitution without fear or favour. Some of its judgements have been criticised by individuals in Government and the ruling party. A disturbing feature have been hints that can be interpreted as desire to curb the powers of courts, including the Constitutional Court.

Interestingly these reactions have contributed towards the birth of new terminology.

Counter Revolutionaries
We increasingly hear and read of "untransformed", "neo liberals", "coconuts", and the newest is "clever blacks".

On their own they can be dismissed, ridiculed or ignored. However, it is the constant repetition of such terms that is disturbing.

Arthur Chaskalson and other leading lawyers have made their views known about the perceived threats to the independence of the Judiciary, especially on the Constitutional Court.

I conclude with the hope that the legacy of the founding fathers of our democracy—President Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Joe Slovo, Arthur

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Arthur Chaskalson and other leading lawyers have spoken out about these perceived, or real threats to the independence of the Courts.

Less than a month before his death, on the 9th of November, Arthur CVhaskalson said in a speech:-

FORMER CHIEF JUSTICE ARTHUR CHASKALSON ON 9th November, 2012, less

than a month before his death

".....the independence of the judiciary and the legal profession are central pillars of our constitutional democracy, and ...we should be astute to ensure that there is no erosion of these fundamental principles."

Further on, he said:-

" The supremacy of the Constitution and the rule of law require everybody in our country, including Parliament and the executive to obey the law, and to respect and uphold the provisions of the constitution....the courts are mandated to be guardian of the constitution...."

When, ^{on} ^{severed} ~~When, on~~ his death, Government leaders pledged to uphold the legacy of Arthur Chaskalson, we express the hope that they will not only recall these words but desist from pronouncements that undermine the last public admonition of the first President of the Constitutional Court.

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Jannie Momberg's
book

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Foreword - by Ahmed Kathrada

"Dear Comrade Kathy" began the email I received last December from Jannie Momberg. These three words symbolised how far this man had travelled in his 72 years. From having been raised in a staunch National Party family, to joining this Apartheid Party, to his involvement in liberal White politics, to finally becoming an African National Congress Member of Parliament, Jannie had come full circle.

The email was short - just five lines - and being Jannie, he got straight to the point. He explained that he was in the final stages of writing a book on his "political years", and attached a few chapters to the email. He wanted me to write the Foreword. Again in typical Jannie style, he said: "You can write whatever you think is best. The length is entirely up to you, as long as it's not too short."

This was vintage Jannie - warm, enthusiastic, direct and witty. I agreed to meet him to discuss it, and we arranged an appointment to coincide with my visit to Cape Town. Just days before the meeting, he telephoned me and pleaded to be allowed to reschedule our engagement, saying: "I have just got to see the cricket match!" We agreed to postpone the meeting; however this was not to be. A few days later a phone call came. I assumed it was a confirmation of our appointment, or another reschedule ... but it was much worse; our dear Jannie had died! It took some time to get over the shock. At the Memorial Service, Jannie briefly lived again, through the heartfelt words of the Dominee, Trevor Manuel, and Jannie's sons.

The Foreword stayed in my mind. Although I felt that it would have been presumptuous of me to conclude that Jannie's request would still hold, I strongly believed that it would be a huge loss if the story of this outstanding son of South Africa remained unpublished. I was subsequently to discover that my doubts were unfounded, when some months later, Jannie's widow Trienie came all the way from False Bay to my place in Cape Town, to inform me that the book was due to be published soon, and my Foreword was required.

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From Malan to Mbeki

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As tempting as it is, I will not steal Jannie's thunder and reveal any of the fascinating or amusing anecdotes that appear in the pages of this frank account of his remarkable story. His was a life which spanned political eras - from Apartheid to Democracy, and his story (as the son of an elite Afrikaner family) only serves to highlight his extraordinary personal transition in later life.

Jannie was born in 1938, in the same year that I - at the age of eight - had to be wrenched away from my mother and father to attend school in Johannesburg, as Apartheid had decreed that an Indian boy could not be admitted to the White or Black schools in Schweizer-Reneke. My first traumatic awakening to the evils of racism took place at a very tender age. In later years, I vowed to use my life to oppose it however I could - a journey which led me into the Young Communist League, the South African Communist Party, the ANC, and ultimately to 26 years in prison - but that is another story.

As I was learning about Anti-Apartheid activism, on the other side of the country, Jannie was growing up as the son of a Hitler supporter. He was ten years old in 1948, when the National Party won the General election, and came to power in South Africa. Its leaders, such as the "Architect of Apartheid" (D.F. Malan) and John Vorster were counted amongst his family's close friends. Jannie's account of sharing tea with a wheelchair-bound Malan - and the political advice he dispensed to the young student - makes for interesting reading.

While Jannie campaigned for South Africa to become a Republic, we in the ANC were campaigning against the All-White Republic - in fact, one of the charges on which Madiba was sentenced to jail for five years (in 1962) was for inciting a strike against the proclamation of the Republic. In 1963, Jannie had his first confrontation with the National Party because a group of "Coloured" people had been turned away from a symphony concert in Cape Town. During the same year, we were charged with sabotage at the Rivonia Trial, and in June 1964, sentenced to life imprisonment.

We first got to hear about Jannie Momberg at Pollsmoor Prison in the mid-1980s, when he was Zola Budd's manager. We had been in prison for 16 years when we were first allowed to have newspapers, and in 1985 we had television. Like the rest of the world, we got to

hear about the Olympic Games. There was one fact that I was a wine farmer that he often what was real the point of an organisation. We had of Party support years. He was a "limb". His shunning point used this opportunity.

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In 1990, Pieter Madiba from of Jannie Momberg. Jan van Eck from the Department of the first ANC National Assembly.

My partner and I had our and his colour Restaurant. I the Legislature.

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hear about this barefoot runner who was good enough to race in the Olympic Games. We were probably more interested in the fact that here was another South African breaking our sporting boycott than the fact that she ran without shoes, or was managed by an Afrikaner wine farmer - but for Jannie, the job of managing Zola Budd meant that he often travelled overseas, where he saw media accounts of what was really happening in South Africa. He could also read about the point of view of the ANC - whereas any information about this organisation was banned at home.

We had observed through the media that this committed National Party supporter had broken with the Party after a membership of 30 years. He writes in his memoirs that this act was "akin to losing a limb". His slow awakening, from 1963 onwards, had led him to a turning point in 1985. At what was to be his last NP Congress, he used this opportunity to call for the abolition of certain Apartheid laws.

He finally resigned from the National Party in 1987. In 1988 he involved himself in the formation of a new Party - the Independent Party. A year later, he was one of the founders of the Democratic Party, which was formed out of a merger between the Independent Party and the Progressive Federal Party. Later, in 1989, he was part of the group of (mainly) Afrikaners who travelled to Lusaka to meet the leadership of the ANC in exile. He was enriched by his encounters with Thabo Mbeki and Chris Hani. The visit was lauded by the Anti-Apartheid Movement and lambasted by the Regime back home.

In 1990, President F.W. de Klerk unbanned the ANC and released Madiba from prison. This move was another turning-point in the life of Jannie Momberg. In 1992, he and four other Democratic Party MPs: Jan van Eck, Pierre Cronje, Rob Haswell and Dave Dalling resigned from the Democratic Party, and joined the ANC - making them the first ANC Members of Parliament in the All-White House of Assembly.

My partner, Ms Barbara Hogan (also a former political prisoner) and I had our first personal encounter with Jannie in 1993, when he and his colleagues invited us to lunch in the Parliamentary Restaurant. This was the very first time we had crossed the portals of the Legislature. Jannie showed us around the building. He took us

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From Malan to Mbeki

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into the House of Delegates, formed in 1983 as part of the Tri-Cameral Parliament, ostensibly to represent the Indian community. This was a toothless body - a dummy institution with no powers. It was with a feeling of revulsion that I witnessed adults pretending to be equal partners amongst the rulers of the country. In reality they were 2nd class citizens, talking (as has been described elsewhere) through a toy telephone to deaf people at the other end.

My mind went back to Pollsmoor Prison, when a Member of this body applied to visit me, and I informed our jailers that I refused to see him. It was not an easy decision on my part; the man in question was someone with whom I had served a month's imprisonment in Durban Central Prison during the Passive Resistance movement launched by the South African Indian Congress in 1946. Forty years later he had allied himself with individuals who were regarded as collaborators with the Apartheid Regime.

I next met Jannie in 1994, while we were campaigning for the first non-racial, Democratic elections in the Indian Group Area of Roshnee, near Vereeniging. His powerful, down-to-earth speech made a significant impact upon the people.

After the ANC victory, I was elected as a Member of Parliament. Apart from what we had gathered in the media, we had absolutely no idea about running Parliament. We lacked experience - even in the running of a little Town Council! Having had years of experience, Jannie was appointed as one of the ANC Whips. In this capacity, Jannie was especially instrumental in making us comfortable.

One of his numerous tasks was to allocate seating in the House to Parliamentarians, which sometimes proved to be a challenge, as this book reveals. Taking us around that day, however, he insisted on giving me a seat with the Cabinet Ministers. He was relying on media reports that I had been appointed Minister of Prisons, which was true - but he was not yet aware of the change in the situation, that had taken place virtually overnight. I was an ordinary MP. Jannie was a very energetic and valuable Member of Parliament who did his job thoroughly. Whether directly or indirectly, he also trained many others who knew nothing about the Whippers, let alone about being Members of Parliament.

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Ahmed Kathrada
28 August 2011

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wanted - and he was sometimes even criticised for his directness. This was the first time he had come into a situation where he was dealing with people as equals. He had only heard the names of some of the people he was going to work with, but he got widespread support from Madiba downwards.

We should never underestimate the sacrifices he made by moving from a racially exclusive set-up, to becoming a pioneer of non-racialism in the ANC. He was one of those people who turned their backs on the racist Parties to join our movement in the early 90s. Moving into what was the beginning of the first Democratic non-racial ANC was a very bold thing for them to do, considering where they had come from! The response of his own community caused him to suffer immensely. He was isolated and branded a traitor.

Jannie served us well in Parliament, finally resigning in 2000 - but this was not to be the end of his contribution. He was appointed South Africa's Ambassador to Greece; a position he served with distinction until 2006. (On a personal level, I have always regretted that we were never able to take up any of his kind invitations to visit the country.)

No mention of Jannie and his life would be complete without paying tribute to his family. His wife "Trienie" stood by his side from the time they first met in 1963. They married in 1964, and she became his partner and most ardent supporter during some of the most turbulent years of his life. Together they had four sons - Niels, Steyn, Jannie and Altus - and Jannie was blessed with very happy years in his role of grandfather to five grandchildren. I have no doubt that he has helped to instil in them an understanding of the importance of non-racialism and equality in every aspect of their lives.

Jannie travelled a long journey through the history of South Africa - and emerged both enlightened and lightened from the load Apartheid had placed on his shoulders. He has left a legacy that can only inspire young South Africans to do even better, as they chart the future together.

Ahmed Kathrada

28 August 2011