



OLIVER REGINALD TAMBO

The Modest Revolutionary 1917 – 1993



An exhibition celebrating the life and times
of Oliver Reginald Tambo

APARTHEIDMUSEUM

cnr Northern Parkway & Gold Reef Rds, Ormonde
Tel + 27 11 309 4700 www.apartheidmuseum.org

Foreword

More than twenty years after his death, a belated – yet significant – step has been taken to acknowledge Oliver Tambo's pivotal contribution to the freedom struggle in South Africa.

This exhibition entitled *Oliver Reginald Tambo: The Modest Revolutionary (1917-1993)*, has been produced by the Apartheid Museum, in association with the Tambo Foundation and the Airports Company South Africa (ACSA). It was first displayed in Cape Town jointly with Iziko Museums of South Africa in 2013.

Within days of the Sharpeville shootings in 1960 in which at least 69 peaceful protesters were shot dead, Tambo was instructed by the ANC to leave the country to establish a Mission in Exile – a complex and exhausting task that was to last for 30 years.

Formally elected president of the ANC after the death of Chief Albert Luthuli in 1967, Tambo is credited with being the “glue” that held the liberation movement together, through troubled and immensely difficult times, while Nelson Mandela and the other leaders languished on Robben Island.

Comprehensive in its scope, the exhibition covers Tambo's early life and education in the Transkei, his training as a teacher, his difficult choice of entering politics rather than the priesthood, his partnership as a lawyer with Nelson Mandela, his escape to exile, his unfailing determination to build the movement in a hostile world, his principled leadership of the armed struggle and his championing of the isolation of the apartheid regime.

It concludes with the drafting of the historic Harare Declaration, which became the blueprint of the negotiated settlement and paved the way to the birth of democracy in South Africa. Indeed, as the exhibition shows, it was his tireless and exacting personal involvement in the formulation of the Harare Declaration that led to him suffering a devastating stroke.

Finally, arriving back home in South Africa in December 1990, a frail and sick man, he died on 24 April 1993, almost a year to the day before the first democratic elections were held. Like the fabled Moses, he had led his people – but was denied entry – to the Promised Land!

While the exhibition is faithful to the historical record, it is also concerned that Tambo not be lionised as a messiah, but remembered for his humanity, compassion and incorruptible integrity.

Tambo's story has not been told before in a popular way that talks to the youth of the country. We hope that this exhibition will begin the process of restoring this great man to his rightful place in the hearts and minds of all South Africans and future generations that are to follow.

Christopher Till
Director
Apartheid Museum
November 2014

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PART ONE 1917 – 1960





Tambo

DETERMINED FREEDOM FIGHTER

For 30 years Oliver Reginald Tambo was central to the struggle against apartheid. With so many of his comrades imprisoned, he served as the key organiser, strategist, representative and father figure of the liberation movement. A man of enormous discipline and determination, he was renowned for his compassion, and his gentle nature.

Tambo's life was shaped by the epic struggle to free South Africa from the violent grip of the apartheid state. He faced many years of unrelenting danger and difficulty. Through all of this, he maintained an extraordinary humanity.

“In a life that spanned the 20th century, Tambo spent the greater part of his time in the blood and dust of battles against apartheid as a loyal supporter and later leader of the African National Congress.”

Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission

“A father of a polygamous family can bring peace in a big household ... He can only do that if he himself has what we call *ubuntu* — that all-embracing generosity, love, humility, dignity, grace.” Phyllis Ntantala, activist and intellectual

A Communal Culture



Oliver Tambo Heritage Museum



Wife Historical Papers



Oliver Tambo Museum

Oliver's father, Mzimeni Tambo – known by his clan name Manchi – was the head of the homestead in Nkantolo, Pondoland (now the Eastern Cape). He had four wives and many children. Oliver said it was a credit to his father that his wives had good relationships with each other.

Oliver was born on 27 October 1917 and grew up in a large, busy household. Life was not easy and the family faced many hardships. But their burden was eased by the communal culture in which they lived.

The community shared their resources and helped each other with tasks such as ploughing. From the age of three, Tambo proudly joined his older brothers in herding the family's cattle.

But then, tragedy struck. In 1926, when Oliver was eight years old, two family members died in a horrific coal mining accident.

“My father broke the tragic news that my uncle Mbizweni and brother Zakhele had died in the Dannhauser coal mine. It caught fire and consumed hundreds of lives.” Oliver Tambo

Manchi, Oliver's father, had to sell his ox and wagon. The sad loss of loved ones, along with the income they contributed, deeply affected young Oliver and sensitised him to those in need. The family and its culture of *ubuntu* would strengthen the values that guided Tambo throughout his life.



Tambo's family was steeped in the traditions of rural Pondoland. These Xhosa women, photographed at Lovedale Mission Station in the Eastern Cape in 1896, probably lived similar lives to the women in the Tambo homestead.

© M. Tambo

Oliver Tambo

Swallowing Up The Land

In 1894 Pondoland was annexed by the Cape Colony. The Mpondo lost less land to colonialism than most other African societies in South Africa. The authority of the traditional political structure was more intact than elsewhere. However, even in Pondoland, the impact of colonialism was huge.



Museum Africa

“My father had to look after cattle as if he were a herd boy! Many of my age group had left their homes and gone to Natal to work in the plantations and in the coal mines ... My father insisted I still go to school.” Oliver Tambo

- In 1905 a poll tax was imposed on all African men over 18, forcing them to become wage labourers on the gold mines of the Witwatersrand and the sugar fields of Natal.
- Diseases like Spanish Flu decimated families in 1918 while many miners suffered from lung diseases.
- Life became even harder after East Coast fever and other cattle diseases swept through the area in the early 1900s destroying huge numbers of cattle.



Wits Historical Papers

Later, Mpondo society re-stabilised itself on the basis of the wages earned from migrant labour – but it was both physically weakened and greatly impoverished.

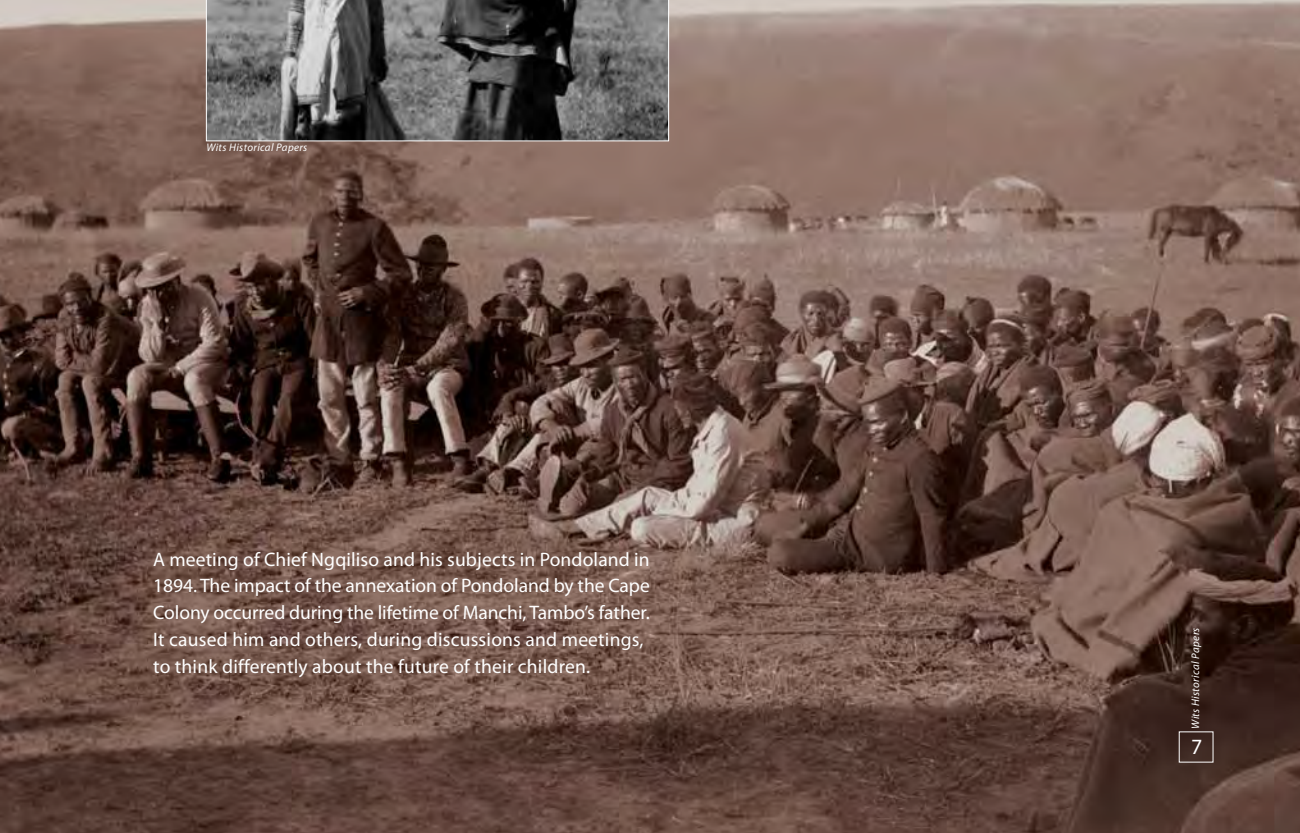
Along with colonialism came Christianity which also greatly transformed Mpondo society, changing traditional practices and beliefs. Tambo later recalled how the old ways gradually disappeared.



Wits Historical Papers

“Women ... participated in the groups moving from place to place, and in the singing. It is strange that that singing, which was unique, has not been developed or picked up by music recorders.” Oliver Tambo

A meeting of Chief Ngqiliso and his subjects in Pondoland in 1894. The impact of the annexation of Pondoland by the Cape Colony occurred during the lifetime of Manchi, Tambo's father. It caused him and others, during discussions and meetings, to think differently about the future of their children.



O. K. Tambo

The Lure Of Knowledge

Oliver had been a reluctant schoolboy, but when an uncle suggested that Holy Cross Mission School near Flagstaff in the Eastern Cape was looking for students, he jumped at the chance. Not literate himself, his father Manchi was prepared to sell his last horse for his children's schooling.

27 October 1926
Dear Friend

I thank you all about what you are doing for me, to pay money for me, and above all, I stay here at Holy Cross by your money. I am glad because I learn by your money. There is a good thing I want to tell you, that there was a Bishop here and he baptised me, and I am glad for that. It is nice here at Holy Cross, we play some certain games, and our meal is well made. I hope that sometimes you will come here and I shall see you. On November we shall be examined by Mr. Pope and I am in Standard 4 but I do not know whether the inspector will be very strict, and I hope that you will pray for me.

I remain there
Yours
Lovely child
Oliver Tambo

Oliver & Adelaide Tambo Foundation



With Historical Papers



With Historical Papers

Two women in England, sisters Joyce and Ruth Goddard, helped pay Oliver's school fees. On his eleventh birthday he wrote this letter to them.

Many years later, when Tambo was president of the ANC, he met the sisters in person. He told them that their support had not only changed his own life but had also been an act of international solidarity against apartheid.

Oliver was an inquisitive student with a love for words. A perfectionist since his herding days, he impressed his family with his diligence. His intelligence, discipline and patience eventually earned him a place at St Peter's in Johannesburg, a secondary school run by the Community of the Resurrection, an Anglican religious community dedicated to the ideal of social and spiritual upliftment. He enrolled in 1934.

Reverend Father Alban Winter was the first principal of St Peter's from 1922 to 1934.

Oliver and his classmate Joe Mokoena went on to make history, achieving the top marks in the Junior Certificate (Grade 10) exam in 1936, written nationally by black and white students.

But the joy of success was diminished by the fact that his parents were no longer alive to celebrate his achievement. His mother Julia had died in 1934, and his father Manchi shortly after her in 1935.

"I had lost my parents before I could repay their love and care for me – before I could do any of the things I promised myself I would do for them when I started working." Oliver Tambo



This is the earliest known photograph of Tambo, in the front row, second from the right in Standard 7 (Grade 9) at St Peter's in 1935. Interestingly, he turned down the position of head prefect at St Peter's as he had an aversion for the limelight, and preferred to work collectively.



S. PETER'S



HOSTEL



A SCHOOL
FOR NATIVE BOYS
JOHANNESBURG
(ROSETTENVILLE)



W. K. Tambo



Tambo's top marks earned him a bursary to university. In 1939 he returned to his home province to study at Fort Hare in Alice in the Eastern Cape. He was pleased to be joined by his closest friends from St Peter's. Tambo is pictured here with Congress Mbatha and Lancelot Gama, with whom he formed the Syndicate. Their mission was to stand by each other through their university years, and forever afterwards.

"We felt we should keep together and work together for the good of life. We used to study together right into the night, drinking tea or coffee. We would test each other. We pledged to help each other." Lancelot Gama



Fort Hare University: Where It All Began



Fort Hare Archives



Courtesy of Dr Lancelot Gama

“I had wanted to study medicine, and on completion as a medical scientist, to get myself apprenticed to a ‘herbalist’ with a view to doing research into a field of knowledge which I was certain had great potential for medicine and the natural sciences.” Oliver Tambo

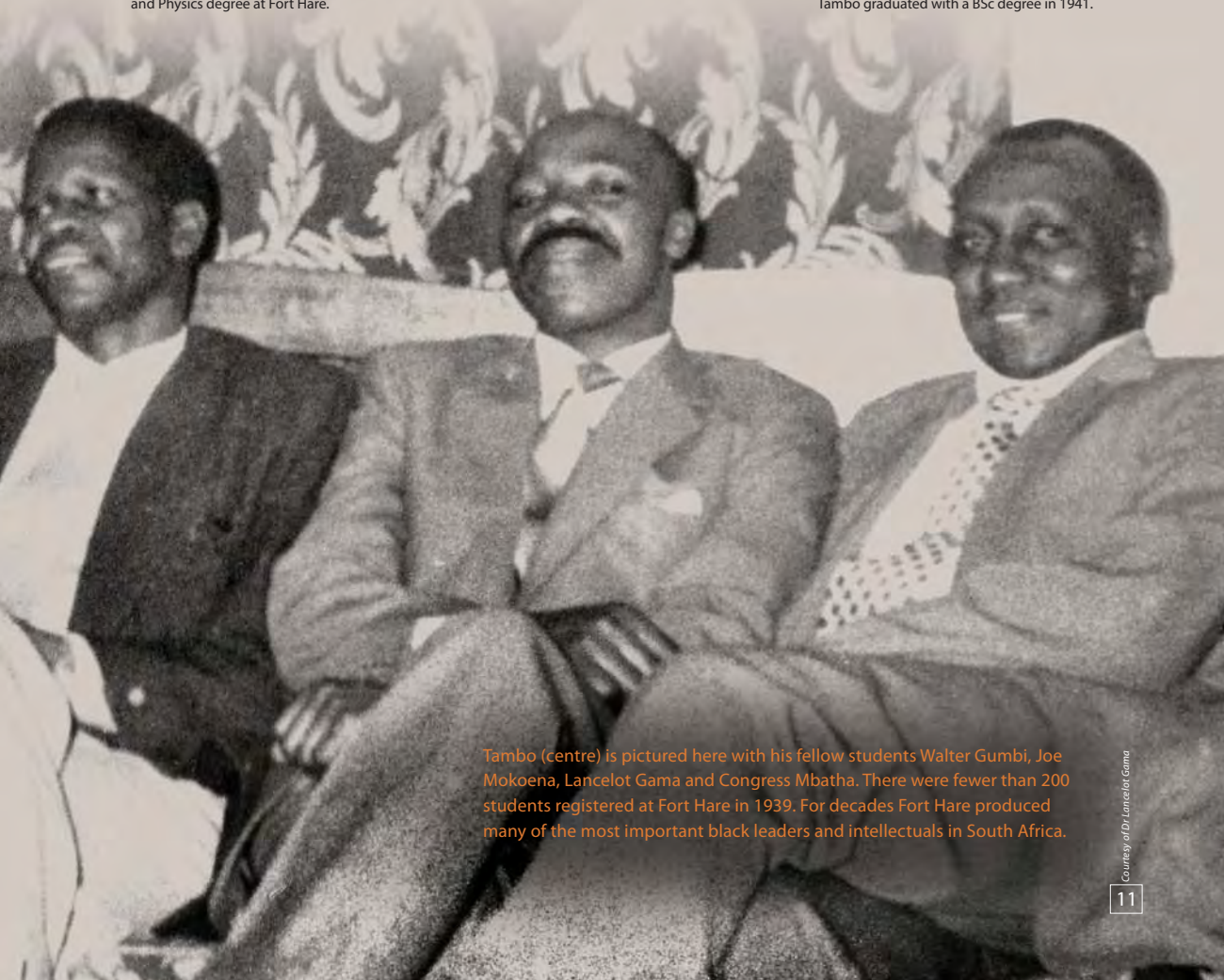
Oliver wanted to unite the two opposites in his life – the traditional and the modern. He wanted to draw on the best resources from both worlds and place them at the service of his people.

At the time, it was not possible for black students to study medicine at any university in South Africa. Tambo recognised that there were too few black scientists, so he registered instead for a Mathematics and Physics degree at Fort Hare.

St Peter’s multiracial culture – Xhosa, Tswana, Zulu, Sotho, Indian and coloured boys learning and living together – had prepared Tambo for the realities of life in South Africa. He was more sophisticated and discerning than most of his fellow students at Fort Hare, who came from the relatively restricted world of the rural aristocracy.

His love of debating had honed his ability to consider all sides of an argument. His peers at Fort Hare recognised this skill and voted him onto the Students’ Representative Council.

Tambo graduated with a BSc degree in 1941.



Tambo (centre) is pictured here with his fellow students Walter Gumbi, Joe Mokoena, Lancelot Gama and Congress Mbatha. There were fewer than 200 students registered at Fort Hare in 1939. For decades Fort Hare produced many of the most important black leaders and intellectuals in South Africa.

Courtesy of Dr Lancelot Gama

“It hasn’t come out nearly sufficiently what a deeply religious person Oliver was and how much ... ethical and moral principle mattered to him; far, far more than any political philosophy.” Bishop Trevor Huddleston

Walking With God



Oliver’s first impression of Holy Cross school had been of the splendour and pageantry of Easter Sunday celebrations, and he eagerly embraced this new life.

His mother Julia was a Christian and he had fond memories of the lively church services and melodious hymns in her hut. Eventually, his father converted to Christianity, along with his other wives.



Tambo’s intensely personal relationship with God sustained him in many moments of pain and uncertainty in the long years of fighting for freedom and justice. In all his life, he never missed his daily prayer in a church, or in a place where he could be alone.



In 1942 students at Fort Hare went on strike to protest against the abuse of a female worker. After a few weeks of the strike the warden called Oliver into his office and placed a ‘Pledge’ before him. It began, “We the undersigned ...”. The warden wanted to end the strike and believed that if Oliver signed the pledge, the other striking students would do so too. But Oliver pointed out that he was being asked to sign a document without consulting his fellow students.

“I asked the warden for time to pray about this, and went to the chapel for half an hour. I ... could not sign that pledge. It would have killed my religion stone dead.” Oliver Tambo

As a devoted Christian, Tambo believed that to sign the pledge would be a betrayal of his fellow students and therefore a sin. He refused to sign it and was expelled from Fort Hare.

“The Easter procession at Holy Cross ... wound its way onto the main road with singing and the beating of a drum. It finished up at a cemetery. It was all quite mystifying to me. It was headed by a boy clad in this uniform who was swinging a smoking object followed by someone who was carrying a cross.” Oliver Tambo



“My father grew up in a community of migrant workers. If he had not had the opportunity to be educated, he no doubt would have become a migrant labourer himself.” Dali Tambo, son of Oliver Tambo

Mines And Migrants

When Oliver was a young boy in the 1920s, industrialisation had already come to remote Nkantolo. Three adults in his family were migrants in Natal: his uncle Mbizweni and brother Zakhele died in a coal mine while another brother, Willy, contracted TB on a sugar plantation.



Wits Historical Papers

- Coal was essential to transport gold from the mines in the interior of the country to the seaports to be exported to Britain.
- Sugar was greatly sought after in Europe.
- Following the discovery of diamonds, coal and gold, South Africa attracted economic immigrants from all over southern Africa, as well as from further afield in Africa, Europe and Asia.

Dali Tambo



Museum Africa

The growing towns were products of South Africa's industrial revolution. Johannesburg became a boom town, with fine buildings, shops, trams, and houses alongside crumbling tenements, for a rapidly growing population of all races.

But this urban landscape took on a racial and deeply unequal form. It was divided into rich and poor areas, 'locations' for black residents and 'suburbs' for white people.



Museum Africa

Between 1936 and 1946, the population of Johannesburg doubled. People arriving in the city included:

- Thousands of young Africans, most of whom were fleeing deteriorating working and living conditions on white farms;
- Thousands of Boers, bywoners or small farmers, ruined by the drought of 1933;
- Immigrants from Europe seeking a better life after the Great Depression of the 1930s;
- Political refugees, like the Jews of Eastern Europe, who were fleeing the Nazis.

All came to make a living in the bustling city of Egori, the 'place of gold'. If they were black, they were likely to find a hostile environment.



Oliver Tambo



Oliver Tambo, deep in thought, on the rooftop of Ahmed Kathrada's apartment in central Johannesburg. As a result of the growing co-operation of the African and Indian Congresses in the 1950s, Kathrada became a close comrade of Tambo.

"Of that early group of young men, Mandela and his close friend and co-leader Walter Sisulu are perhaps the fastest to get to grips with the harsh realities of the struggle." Oliver Tambo

Tambo returned to Johannesburg, a rapidly growing city, in January 1943. The population included a vibrant black community of activists. Among them were two men in particular who were to have a profound impact on Tambo's political and professional career: Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela.



More Than Brothers

By the end of the Second World War, more and more Africans began to claim a permanent place in Johannesburg. Some were ordinary labourers, others were part of a tiny, closely-knit African elite of lawyers, doctors, clergymen, estate agents and teachers.



Only thirty years old when he met Tambo, Walter Sisulu had little formal schooling but a range of life experiences. He ran an estate agency in Johannesburg, and many newcomers to the city met at his office.

He was a member of the African National Congress (ANC) and a mentor to Tambo. It was Sisulu who encouraged Tambo to study law and join Mandela in defending their people against unjust laws.

“Walter Sisulu is committed to the liberation of our people ... He uses no devices to overwhelm others ... but makes no concessions when questions of principle are at stake.” Ruth First, activist and academic



“Nelson is passionate, emotional, sensitive, quickly stung to retaliation by insult and patronage. He has a natural air of authority. He cannot help magnetising a crowd.”

Oliver Tambo

Tall, athletic and a Thembu aristocrat, Mandela had met Tambo at Fort Hare. His personality was the opposite of the more subtle Tambo. Throughout his life, Tambo saw Mandela as the natural leader of the ANC.

Mandela is pictured here in 1952 with Dr Moroka, president of the ANC from 1949 to 1952 and Dr Yusuf Dadoo, president of the Indian Congress and senior member of the South African Communist Party.



O. K. Tambo

“You cannot love an unseen God until you perceive Him in those you are sent to serve.” Father Trevor Huddleston

Teaching with Passion



BAHA

After Oliver was expelled from Fort Hare, his job applications to schools were turned down repeatedly. In desperation, he considered a job as a ‘garden boy’ to support the family. Then, unexpectedly, St Peter’s School in Johannesburg received a grant for a Higher Maths and Science post in 1943. They immediately offered the position to Tambo.

“I was the right person at the right time.”
Oliver Tambo



Community of the Resurrection

Tambo soon found that he loved teaching. He guided his students with discipline, warm praise and an interactive method of teaching far ahead of its time. His love of sports and his award-winning success as a school choir master boosted his popularity. Many of his students – among them Desmond Tutu, Andrew Mlangeni and Joe Matthews – went on to make their mark as role models in society and in the struggle.



BAHA

Coincidentally, Father Trevor Huddleston arrived in South Africa in 1943 as superintendent of St Peter’s. When he moved to his parish in nearby Sophiatown, he soon realised that conditions there required drastic social change.

Tambo and Father Huddleston became lifelong friends. With Tambo’s support, Huddleston was able to join the liberation movement. In turn, Tambo learned from Huddleston that even non-Christians such as Communists, could be sincere comrades in the struggle to achieve freedom.

Huddleston’s protests against the evils of apartheid led to his being recalled to England in 1956. When Huddleston left, Tambo wept.

“The men and women who founded the ANC shared a vision of a society whose institutions were open to all. This collided with the colonial order upheld by a racist constitution.” Z Pallo Jordan

The ANC: Its Birth and Early Years



Museum Africa

In 1910 the Act of Union joined the four separate states (the Cape, the Orange Free State, Natal and the Transvaal) into the Union of South Africa. Africans were not included in the running of this new country – except in the Cape, where some Africans still had the vote.

In response, on 8 January 1912, a handful of Africans from all parts of South Africa met in Bloemfontein to form the South African Native National Congress, changing the name a few years later to the African National Congress.



Source unknown

One of the first actions of the new government was to pass the 1913 Natives Land Act. Africans would be confined to 8.7% of the land area of South Africa.

The Land Act forced thousands of Africans off their own land. Families walked with their animals along country roads looking for a place to stay. Many died of cold and starvation. ANC Secretary General Sol Plaatje travelled through the rural areas to see the situation for himself.



Mayoyaye Archives

The ANC mounted a huge campaign to fight the Land Act, raising significant amounts of money, above all from the chiefs.

In 1914, the ANC sent a delegation of five leaders to Britain including, from left to right, Thomas Mapikela, Rev Walter Rubusana, Rev John Dube, Saul Msane and Sol Plaatje. Because South Africa was part of the British Empire, the ANC believed that the British government could help them to remove the Land Act. But Britain turned them away.

Then the ANC slumped into virtual inactivity for fifteen years. But in 1936 African politics was revived after African voters were finally removed from the voters' roll. In 1939 Dr AB Xuma was elected president and began to build a stronger, more vibrant ANC.

J L Dube 1912 – 1917
Museum Africa

S M Makgatho 1917 – 1924
Wits Historical Papers

J T Gumede 1927 – 1930
Wits Historical Papers

A B Xuma 1940 - 1949
Wits Historical Papers

Z R Mahabane 1924 – 1927 and 1936 – 1940
BAHA

Pixley ka Seme 1930 - 1936
South African Library

Wits Historical Papers



BAHA

Wits Historical Papers

BAHA

Walter Sisulu (1912 – 2003) Sisulu insisted that the ANC was the only organisation capable of inspiring people to resist. He nurtured the most able and committed young people as they arrived in Johannesburg, making it possible for a youth league to be formed.

Anton Lembede (1914 – 1947) An MA graduate and articled clerk, Lembede was the moving spirit of the Youth League and its first president. He preached a return to collective African values and decision-making.

AP Mda (1917 – 1993) A graduate and Lembede's intellectual sparring partner, he too was passionate about African self-reliance and national pride. After the untimely death of Lembede in 1947, Mda was elected president of the Youth League.



BAHA

Wits Historical Papers

Mayibuye Archives

Jordan Ngubane (1917 – 1985) A talented journalist, Ngubane was an early member of the Youth League. As a committed Africanist, he left the ANC after it formed an alliance with the white Congress of Democrats.

David Bopape (1915 – 2004) Bopape was a teacher and member of the Communist Party. He was also a member of the Transvaal African Teachers' Association and led the imaginative teachers' anti-pass campaign in 1944.

Dan Tloome (1919 – 1992) A founding member of the Youth League, Tloome was a trade unionist and a speaker at the launch of the Youth League. In both the League and in the NEC of the ANC, he consistently kept the African trade union movement on the agenda.



The Youth League: Young, Gifted And Militant

“An extraordinarily able group in their twenties and early thirties, mainly teachers or students of medicine or law.” Tom Karis, political scientist

The ANC Youth League was launched at the Bantu Men’s Social Centre in Johannesburg in 1944. Five years later it went on to steer the mother body into a spectacular turning point through its Programme of Action.

The National Party election victory in 1948 helped create the climate for more militant political action by the ANC. The Youth League’s Programme of Action called for a campaign of civil disobedience and non-cooperation.

This was the ANC’s most militant approach yet. At the same conference where it was formally approved, its leadership was changed. Dr Xuma was ousted as president, and Youth League members, including Tambo, were elected to dominant positions in the ANC National Executive Committee (NEC).



Mayibuye Archives

Nelson Mandela (1918 – 2013)

A law student at the time, Mandela was part of the delegation that tried to get the support of the ANC president, Dr Xuma, for the Youth League and its Programme of Action. Mandela was elected onto the first executive committee of the Youth League.



Mayibuye Archives

Albertina Sisulu (1918 – 2011)

At the early meetings of the Youth League, Albertina Thethiwe, a nurse, was not yet married to Sisulu. When they married, the couple decided that she would be the breadwinner while Walter would devote himself to politics. Albertina made history as the Youth League’s first woman member.

B. K. Touba

Apartheid: A Way To Divide And Rule

The National Party was unprepared for its election victory in 1948. However, it was soon passing a raft of apartheid laws, including the six unjust laws targeted by the ANC's Defiance Campaign of 1952.



Rapport Newspaper

In May 1948 the National Party won a whites-only general election – thanks to a host of grievances by whites which had festered as a result of the social and economic repercussions of World War Two:

- Industrialisation exploded, especially on the Witwatersrand;
- Industries drew hundreds of thousands of new black workers to the cities.

During World War Two no new residential areas were built. From black townships to white suburbs, living conditions became dangerously congested, unhygienic and impoverished. The National Party proposed to protect its white voters through a policy of apartheid.

Huge numbers of dissatisfied white farmers called for pass laws for Africans to stop African farm workers from leaving for the towns.

White workers and white suburbanites felt swamped by the thousands of new African migrants streaming into the towns.

As Africans flooded into the towns, their politics entered a new phase. They demanded to be treated as permanent urban citizens with urban rights. Their demands led to a spate of strikes along with a wave of unionisation of African workers from 1942 to 1946.



Museum Africa



BAHA



Apartheid Museum



BAHA



Ngobane Archives



Wits Historical Papers



NLSA



BAHA

The Population Registration Act, 1950 classified all South Africans according to their 'racial' group, and determined where they were allowed to live and what work they could do.

The Group Areas Act, 1950 caused the forced removal of black people from 'white areas' – Africans, coloureds and Indians each to their separate townships.

The Suppression of Communism Act, 1950 Communism was widely defined to include any strong opponents of apartheid, like those on trial here.

The Bantu Authorities Act, 1951 confirmed the 1913 Land Act, with black ownership of South Africa's land limited to 11.7%.

The Separate Representation of Voters Act, 1951 removed coloureds from the Voters' Roll. The Torch Commando, formed by white ex-servicemen to protest against this law, attracted 250 000 members.

The Abolition of Passes Act, 1952 Despite its name, this Act combined the official papers that regulated the lives of African men (and later women) into one 'pass book'.

WE WONT MOVE



O. K. Tambo

A Weapon to Defend the People

Tambo qualified as an attorney in 1952 and, with Mandela, opened South Africa's first black law firm. As an attorney, Tambo combined the traditional values of humanism and Christianity with the technical and academic skills of the ruling class as a weapon to defend his people.



In 1952 the ANC launched the Defiance Campaign, along the lines of the strategies of the Programme of Action of 1949. Inspired by MK Gandhi's passive resistance, the campaign targeted six unjust laws, which supporters resolved to defy and court arrest.

Thousands of black volunteers all over the country walked through 'whites only' entrances of government buildings and invaded 'whites only' waiting rooms at railway stations. The campaign was a massive success and the jails were filled to overflowing.

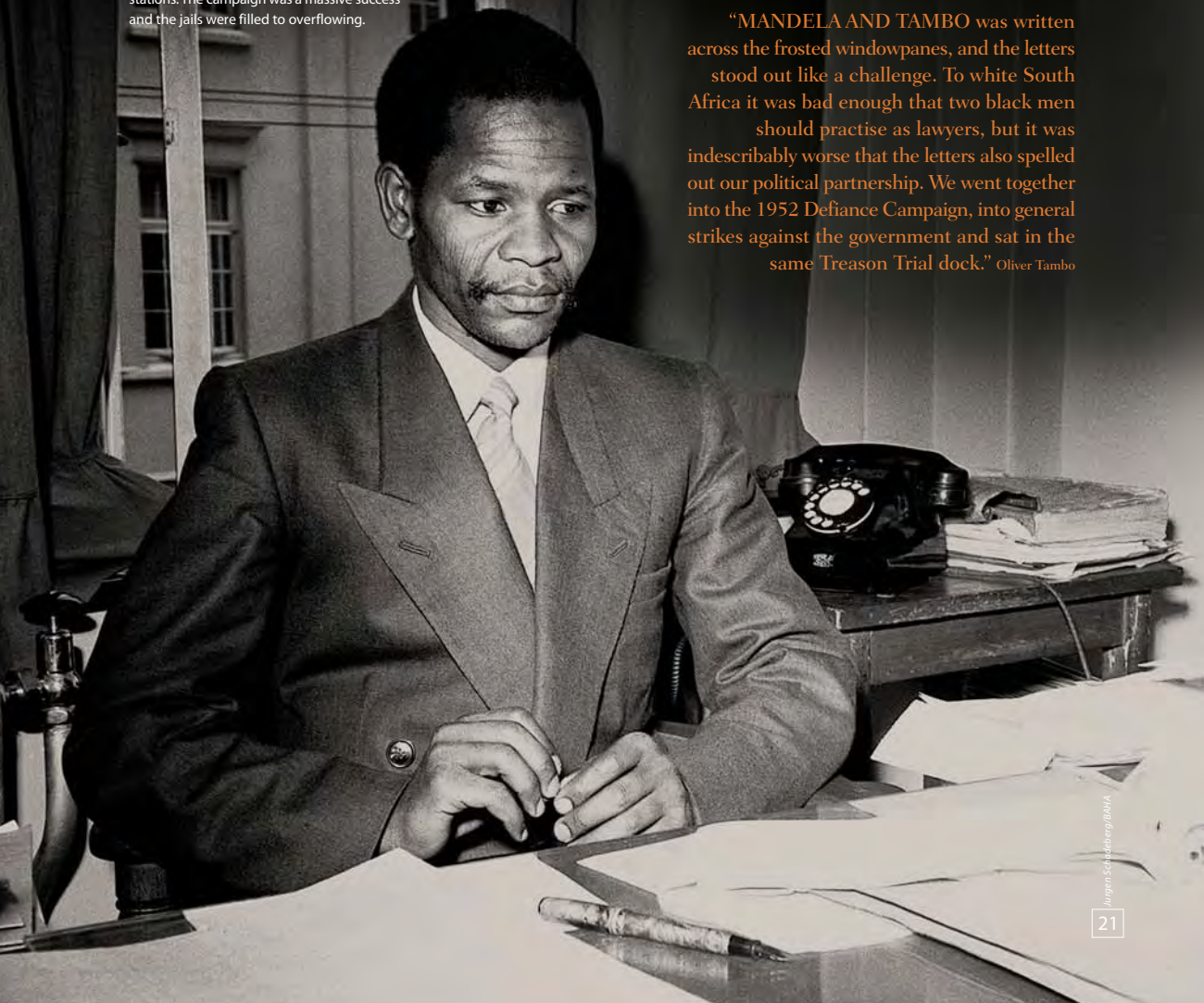


Women 'defiers' often organised themselves in batches. This group had been arrested and were consulting with Tambo in the offices of Mandela and Tambo. Mandela, as the full-time Volunteer-in-Chief of the Campaign, was travelling around the country mobilising volunteers while Tambo took care of their practice.



Once in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, Tambo spent all night persuading campaigners to end their protests. The Campaign had been running for nearly six months and had achieved its aim of getting thousands of people to participate. It dramatically increased the ANC's membership from about 4 000 to over 50 000.

"MANDELA AND TAMBO was written across the frosted windowpanes, and the letters stood out like a challenge. To white South Africa it was bad enough that two black men should practise as lawyers, but it was indescribably worse that the letters also spelled out our political partnership. We went together into the 1952 Defiance Campaign, into general strikes against the government and sat in the same Treason Trial dock." Oliver Tambo



“The time has come for the ANC to convene a national convention representing all the people of this country, irrespective of race ... to draw up a Freedom Charter for the democratic South Africa of the future.” ZK Matthews, ANC leader and academic

A Road Map To Freedom

Chief Albert Luthuli was elected president of the ANC in 1952. When the government could not force him into withdrawing from politics, it deposed him from his chieftainship. A committed Christian, he was gentle, yet fearlessly outspoken. Tambo, who admired him greatly, served as his secretary general from 1954.



For Tambo the most distressing apartheid law was the Bantu Education Act of 1953. It removed black children from normal education and condemned them to an inferior programme, sentencing generations of black children to a life of servitude.

“Bantu Education is intended to undermine the entire liberation struggle. The campaign against it should not be handled in isolation from other campaigns ... We must learn that organisational preparedness does not happen overnight. It is the result of steady, even slow, persistent work.”

Oliver Tambo

In 1955, the Congress of the People attended by 7 000 people was held in Kliptown, Soweto. Delegates presented demands drawn up by their communities and the Freedom Charter was adopted.

“Nothing in the history of the liberation movement in South Africa quite caught the popular imagination as the Freedom Charter campaign did.” Chief Albert Luthuli, ANC President

The Congress of the People launched a multiracial alliance of organisations. Tambo personally chaired the formation of the small white Congress of Democrats, which became an ally of the ANC.

When Tambo was in exile, the Freedom Charter became the ANC’s guiding star because it represented the voice of the people themselves. President Luthuli had insisted that the Charter be endorsed by every branch before being officially adopted.

Despite all attempts, the apartheid government was never able to remove the Freedom Charter from people’s memory. Down the years, the demands of the Freedom Charter and the document itself resurfaced in a variety of contexts.



President Luthuli (centre), with Duma Nokwe and ZK Matthews on his right and Oliver Tambo, Leslie Masina and Moses Mabhida on his left, at the 41st Annual Conference of the ANC in 1954. About 300 delegates came to give their views, pass resolutions and discuss an economic boycott as a weapon against apartheid.

It was an important conference because it planned the mobilising of 10,000 volunteers to spread the concept of the Freedom Charter around the country and solicit people’s demands for a free South Africa.

THE FREEDOM CHARTER

ADOPTED AT THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE AT
KLIPTOWN, JOHANNESBURG, ON JUNE 25 AND 26, 1955.

WE, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know:

that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people; that our people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality;

that our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities; *Article (1) (2)*

that only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief;

And therefore we, the People of South Africa, black and white together — equals, countrymen and brothers — adopt this Freedom Charter. And we pledge ourselves to strive together sparing neither strength nor courage, until the democratic changes here set out have been won.

THE PEOPLE SHALL GOVERN !

Every man and woman shall have the right to vote for and to stand as a candidate for all bodies which make laws; *Art 2*

All people shall be entitled to take part in the administration of the country; *Art 2*

The rights of the people shall be the same, regardless of race, colour or sex; *Art 2*

All bodies of minority rule, advisory boards, councils and authorities shall be replaced by democratic organs of self-government.

ALL NATIONAL GROUPS SHALL HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS !

There shall be equal status in the bodies of state, in the courts and in the schools for all national groups and races.

All people shall have equal right to use their own languages, and to develop their own folk culture and customs;

All national groups shall be protected by law against insults to their race and national pride;

The preaching and practice of national, race or colour discrimination and contempt shall be a punishable crime;

All apartheid laws and practices shall be set aside.

THE PEOPLE SHALL SHARE IN THE COUNTRY'S WEALTH !

The national wealth of our country, the heritage of all South Africans, shall be restored to the people;

The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole;

All other industry and trade shall be controlled to assist the well-being of the people;

All people shall have equal rights to trade where they choose, to manufacture and to enter all trades, crafts and professions.

THE LAND SHALL BE SHARED AMONG THOSE WHO WORK IT !

Restriction of land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended, and all the land re-divided amongst those who work it, to banish famine and land hunger; *Art 10*

The state shall help the peasants with implements, seed, tractors and dams to save the soil and assist the tillers; *Art 10*

Freedom of movement shall be guaranteed to all who work on the land; *Article 13 (1)*

All shall have the right to occupy land wherever they choose; *Art. 17 (1)*

People shall not be robbed of their cattle, and forced labour and farm prisons shall be abolished.

ALL SHALL BE EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW !

No one shall be imprisoned, deported or restricted without a fair trial; *Art 10*

No one shall be condemned by the order of any Government official; *Art 10*

The courts shall be representative of all the people;

Imprisonment shall be only for serious crimes against the people, and shall aim at re-education, not vengeance;

The police force and army shall be open to all on an equal basis and shall be the helpers and protectors of the people;

All laws which discriminate on grounds of race, colour or belief shall be repealed. *Art 1, 2*

ALL SHALL ENJOY EQUAL HUMAN RIGHTS !

The law shall guarantee to all their right to speak, to organise, to meet together, to publish, to preach, to worship and to educate their children; *Art 20*

© K. Tambo

“It was during the Treason Trial that I had the honour of being invited to Oliver and Adelaide’s wedding. It was a treat to see them dance, to be part of such an enjoyable yet solemn occasion ... such warmth, such comradeship.” Reg September, trade unionist and secretary general of the South African Coloured People’s Congress



One December morning in 1956, security policemen arrested Tambo on charges of high treason. They took him to the Fort in Johannesburg where thousands of black prisoners were jailed every year. There Tambo met other comrades who had also been charged – a total of 156 men and women from all races and walks of life.

High treason was a serious charge. But there was something else on Oliver’s mind: he was due to attend a wedding in a few days’ time – his own!



“For Better or For Worse”



The Treason Trialists rise during a break in proceedings in the Drill Hall in central Johannesburg. The trial dragged on from 1956 to 1961, the longest in South African history. The government failed to prove treason and so everyone was eventually acquitted.



Oliver & Adelaide Tambo Foundation

In April 1958 Tambo, by then deputy president of the ANC, attended the Africa Day rally in Alexandra, Johannesburg. Dressed in Sotho attire, Tambo was sending a message to those Africanists unhappy with the Congress Alliance, who were planning to break away from the ANC. The ANC was as African as any Africans, he was saying symbolically.

It was on that day too, that the ANC informed Tambo to prepare to leave South Africa to rally international support against apartheid.

“The ANC wants us to leave the country as a family and tell the world what is happening here.” Oliver to Adelaide Tambo, April 1958

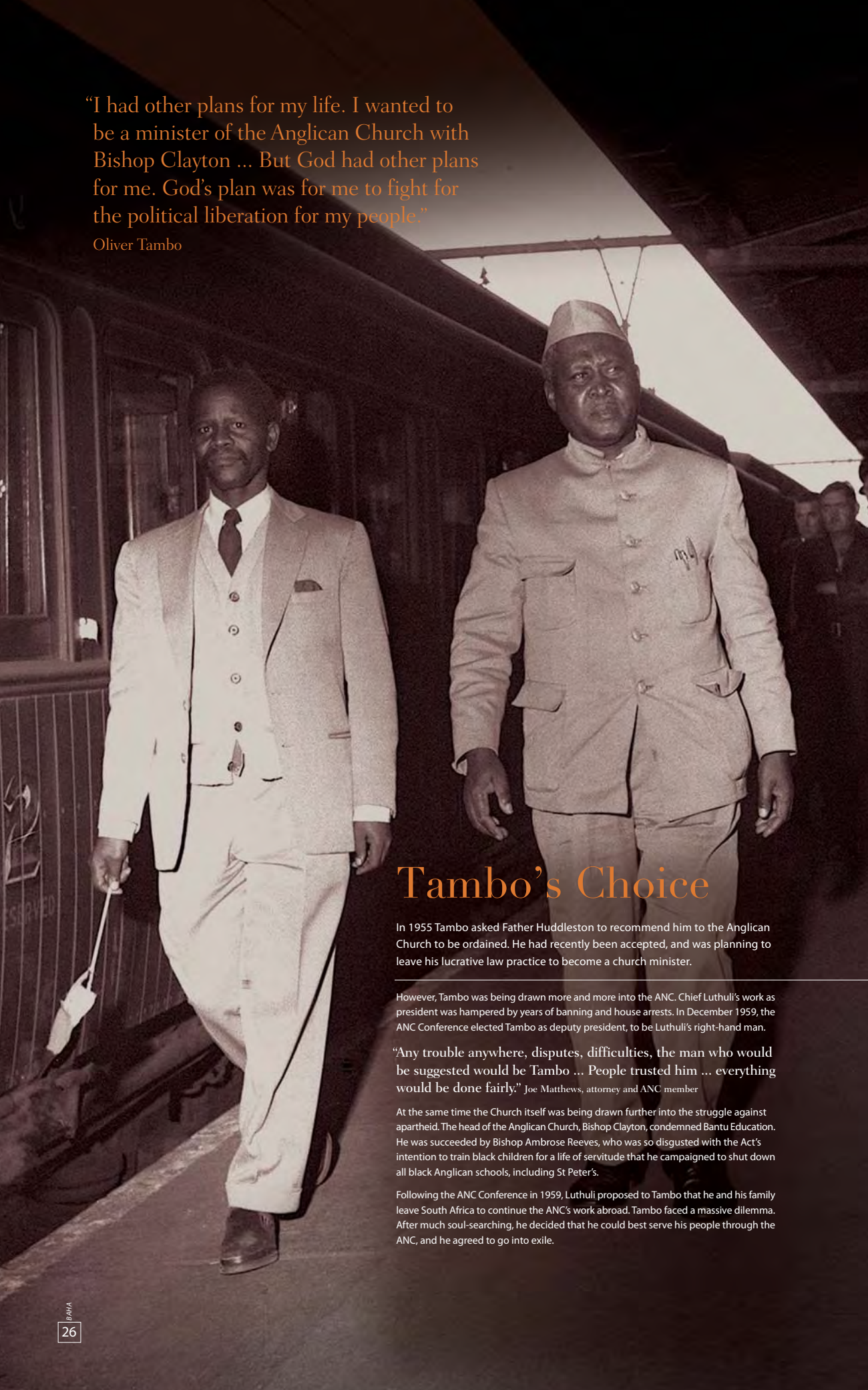


Oliver married Adelaide Tskulu, a nurse, on 22 December 1956. They had known each other since 1948, when as a schoolgirl, she attended her first Youth League meeting and was impressed by a speech Tambo had made there. “We will get married,” they both vowed, “even if it means doing it in prison!” But two days before the wedding, all the Treason Trialists were granted bail, so the celebrations took place in a friendlier venue. Their first two children, Nomatamba (Tembu) and Dalindlela (Dali), were born before they went into exile.

Oliver & Adelaide Tambo Foundation

“I had other plans for my life. I wanted to be a minister of the Anglican Church with Bishop Clayton ... But God had other plans for me. God’s plan was for me to fight for the political liberation for my people.”

Oliver Tambo



Tambo’s Choice

In 1955 Tambo asked Father Huddleston to recommend him to the Anglican Church to be ordained. He had recently been accepted, and was planning to leave his lucrative law practice to become a church minister.

However, Tambo was being drawn more and more into the ANC. Chief Luthuli’s work as president was hampered by years of banning and house arrests. In December 1959, the ANC Conference elected Tambo as deputy president, to be Luthuli’s right-hand man.

“Any trouble anywhere, disputes, difficulties, the man who would be suggested would be Tambo ... People trusted him ... everything would be done fairly.” Joe Matthews, attorney and ANC member

At the same time the Church itself was being drawn further into the struggle against apartheid. The head of the Anglican Church, Bishop Clayton, condemned Bantu Education. He was succeeded by Bishop Ambrose Reeves, who was so disgusted with the Act’s intention to train black children for a life of servitude that he campaigned to shut down all black Anglican schools, including St Peter’s.

Following the ANC Conference in 1959, Luthuli proposed to Tambo that he and his family leave South Africa to continue the ANC’s work abroad. Tambo faced a massive dilemma. After much soul-searching, he decided that he could best serve his people through the ANC, and he agreed to go into exile.

A direct result of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 was that St Peter's school in Rosettenville, Johannesburg, one of the most famous schools in Africa, announced that it would be forced to close its doors in 1956.

The "Eton of South Africa", as St Peter's had been called, had an astonishing record of scholastic achievement over its 32 years. But the Community of the Resurrection, who ran the school, felt that as a matter of principle they could not carry on with the syllabus and control demanded by the new Act.

