

GMC: Would you tell us about your first contact with the Youth League. You were one of the founders, weren't you?

Yes, I was. The beginnings of the Youth League go right to 1939/40, when, as it happened, I went with a man by the name of Moerane, (M.T.). He was a teacher. He was Sotho-speaking. I am Zulu-speaking. Both of us went to Durban and he taught at Durban. He suggested to me the idea of a Youth League. He'd been to the Bloemfontein conference. Prior to this time I had not been to the Bloemfontein conference of the ANC myself. I'd been to Provincial conferences.

GMC: You were a member of the ANC all right?

I wasn't then.

GMC: But you'd been to the Provincial councils?

Yes, quite. More as a pressman really than anything else. For Ilanga Lase Natal. I was in a slightly peculiar position with Ilange. The head of it then was the late Dr. John Dube. He founded the Ilanga. He happened to be president of a splinter in the Natal Native Congress. He'd been one of the founders of the ANC in 1912 and he broke away from his colleagues in the ANC and formed the Natal Native Congress.

GMC: Why did he break away?

Partly personal, and partly because he felt that the ANC was becoming extremist. Exactly what he meant by this I've never been able to understand. Apart from everything else, he was principal of Ohlange College. He was its founder. He was a moderate because he depended very much on government grants to pay his teachers. He didn't favour the idea of being too extremist.

GMC: He wanted to keep respectable.

Respectable . . . he sent delegations. In fact, he was very hostile to direct actions and everybody who favoured direct action he opposed. This was one of the reasons why he broke away from the ANC to establish the Natal Native Congress.

GMC: When did he do that?

I can't remember precisely. Dube wanted me to join the Natal Native Congress, but I don't think this was good for me or that Dube had done the wisest thing by breaking away from the ANC. Consequently, I was in a slightly equivocal position where my boss wanted me to cover Natal Native Congress meetings when my sentiments were with the ANC. Up to 1939/40, besides, I worked with Moerane. This is the period when we worked with Moerane to establish what was then-called the National Union of African Youth. Insofar as I know, these were the beginnings, really, of the Youth League movement.

My memory doesn't serve me very well here, but what happened was this.

Moerane and I got together, and a group of young men; we established the National Union of African Youth and he published a statement, more or less a brief manifesto, stating the goals that we wanted to set ourselves. These were: (1) to stir up the political consciousness of African youth; (2) to encourage youth to participate more effectively in the political struggle; (3) to set the pace of movement towards our goal of freedom ourselves. In other words, we were attempting to wrench the initiative to influence events from the White rulers.

Moerane was a teacher, unfortunately, but we appointed him head of the movement. I was Secretary.

GMC: How many people were there in it?

I can't remember. More than a dozen.

NS: Was it limited principally to Natal?

Yes, at this stage. It was short-lived, as I am going to explain: No sooner had he issued the manifesto than the chief inspector of Native Education, this was his title at the time, came down very heavily on Moerane, saying, Now look; remember you're a teacher; no politics for you. I couldn't take over because my boss was Dube. So this meant the end of the National Union of African Youth.

GMC: So it only lasted a few weeks?

A little over a year.

Then I transferred to the head office of the Bantu press in Johannesburg. This was 1940, I think.

GMC: Before you get to Johannesburg, did you have meetings to which <sup>other</sup> people came?

Yes, quite. Every weekend we met. Regularly.

GMC: For several hours?

Yes, quite. We met mainly on Friday evenings or Saturday afternoons. This committee. We even had a committee. I remember we had a duplicating machine. When the collector (?) found us, he impounded the duplicating machine as well. And published some form of newsletter.

GMC: What was it called?

I can't recall now; I think we called it NUAY Newsletter. I don't have copies of it now.

GMC: And did you publish just around Durban, or did you go into the Inanda area?

We went far afield I remember now. One of our supporters came from Mapumalo, beyond Stanger, about 70 miles from Durban. We had members from Martizburg as well. I don't remember that we had gone beyond Martizburg.

GMC: Were they mostly teachers?

Yes, quite. My age group; most of us were comparatively young.

So that was the end of the Youth League. And about a year later I was transferred to Johannesburg. There I met quite a number of young men, some of whom I had been at school with at Adams and very many of whom had been to the Bloemfontein Annual Conferences of the ANC.

GMC: You hadn't yet been to one?

No, I hadn't yet been. I was not a member of the ANC, in fact. I wasn't until I got to Johannesburg that I joined the Transvaal ANC. This should be 1940. In the ANC I met quite a number of young men with whom we were later to collaborate in forming the Youth League. The most outstanding of them was Ashby Peter Mda.

GMC: The one who is in Basutoland?

Quite. I had the highest respect for him. In very many ways he also influenced my own attitude. Firstly, he'd been to the Bloemfontein conferences of the ANC several times. And I thought him at the time - and I still think now - that he was one of the finest political brains produced by my community. Of course the other thing that attracted me to him was his hostility to communism, even at that stage. He took up a very realistic attitude. He felt that it wasn't important for us at that stage to declare war on the communists. In the sense that we had to expel them from the ANC. We were too weak. If we could use them at that stage to strengthen the ANC we should do so. there were very heavy pressures in the ANC to expel the Communists at that time.

GMC: Even among the senior members of the ANC?

Not the senior members, but the younger members, our age group. The leader of this Anti-Communist crusade was Anton Lembede.

GMC: He wanted to expel them?

Yes. He was militantly anti-Communist. My own thinking was nearer Mda's. Also, of course, one was afraid of bringing about a split in the ANC.

GMC: Why were you so opposed to them?

Partly ideological reasons, and partly because my background. . . I come from a land-owning family. So it was partly family and partly my association with Adams College. Ideologically, in any case, my mother was old traditionalistic, in the sense that she believed in heroic solutions to the race problem. My father was sometimes embarrassingly realistic. I suppose it's very largely because of his influence that I became a non-racialist and a liberal. Father set the greatest store by the values that one adhered to. He rejected race as a criterion by which to fix the position of the individual in society. And he argued that we couldn't say that all white men were evil, just as they said that all black men were lazy.

GMC: So there's no particular evidence that he was trying to maneuver you?

I tell you quite frankly I haven't any proof. Mda would probably have it if there was any evidence at all. But I don't.

GMC: So on your side you hadn't the feeling of being used by . . .

Not by Nkomo certainly. Not at that stage.

GMC: Or anybody else who was a Communist?

Certainly not the Youth League.

GMC: In fact, it was the opposite direction. It was an attempt to get away from .

Yes, quite. We specifically set up the goal of seeing to it that we destroy the Communist influence in the ANC. At one stage, now that we are talking about it

I am not too sure that Willy Nkomo was altogether unhappy that he'd lost the leadership of the Youth League. Because it was moving progressively to the right, in hostility to the Communists, and he might have been embarrassed by it if he had been elected leader.

GMC: Was there ever a chance that he might have been elected leader?

Because of his Communist connections, no.

GMC: But because of his position in the provisional committee?

No. Supposing he had not been a Communist . . . I don't think though that it would have been probable for him to be elected. This was a handicap so far as the inner conference of the League was concerned. And they would emphasize the fact, rally, to influence opinion.

GMC: I've heard another story about the Youth League - that it started out in meetings which were held in Ballinger's office in response to Self Mampuru's appeal for help to become President of the Transvaal ANC.

My word. That's very interesting. That's the first time I've heard of it. But let's see.

GMC: Self Mampuru wanted to get support of young people and subsequently then divorced himself from that group and went on to the African Democratic Party, but those people that he had brought together to discuss the mobilizing of youth in

support of his candidacy then continued to meet and out of those meetings came at least one of the springs of the Youth League.

I see. Strange though, because he wasn't particularly industrious in the efforts to establish the Youth League. He put in an appearance now and then, more because it was the fashionable thing, really. He didn't play a role. — If this was said of Nkomo, then I would say that the story is creditable.

GMC: This was rather not that he took an active share in forming the Youth League, but that in a sense he provided the reason . . . (end of tape)

GMC: Let's just follow this up. You said you were placed in a uniquely advantageous position. Did you remain a reporter all through this period?

Yes, quite.

GMC: Where did you write about these developments, or did you?

Partly in the BANTU WORLD. Let's go right back to Ilanga Lase Natal, first, and the BANTU WORLD, but most of it in IMKUMTLA YA BANTU.

GMC: Because I've often thought of you as writing in INDIAN OPINION.

And, of course, finally in INDIAN OPINION. Very much later and more opinionated really. I think IMKUMTLA YA BANTU would be most helpful.

GMC: And that would be the period of the Youth League?

I edited IMKUMTLA from 1944 onwards to about 1952. So it would cover that period which was one of the most important for the Youth League.

GMC: You don't know where we could find this?

Government Archives, Pretoria. I reported it as it went along.

GMC: And before that would it be the BANTU WORLD?

Yes. From '40 to '44. There was a peculiar set-up in the World. I didn't write freely or as profusely as in Inkumtla. Most of it was written in English. We were a mixed group. We spoke a variety of languages.

GMC: Most of your discussions, say, in the Youth League would have been in English, wouldn't they?

It would have been impossible to have them in any other language. Not all of us spoke Afrikaans. English was the only common factor.

GMC: In that Youth League group, you were mostly professional people, weren't you?

At the time, yes. But quite a number of the people were students as well. Peculiar like Nelson Mandela, for instance. Professional and businessmen. Walter Sisulu was an estate agent.

GMC: Who among those people was important originally.

Sisulu.

GMC: Did he have an important position right from the beginning?

No, not an important position. Let's see now. He was one of the most enthusiastic and diligent workers. From the very beginning. Another person who was very highly thought of was Oliver Tambo.

GMC: Why was he highly thought of? For his eloquence . . . ?

For two things. His integrity and, of course, his intelligence.

GMC: Would you say he's more intelligent than Sisulu?

No comparison. It's the first time I've thought of a comparison. Let me explain the difference between the two men. Sisulu's intellectual endowments are on the limited side. He's a self-made man, whereas Oliver was a university man. He impressed me with his balance of judgment. Sisulu was a hard worker, a diligent man who was prepared to do any job and thoroughly to see that it was done. It was a major contribution. You could even say that when it came . . . He was the sort of man who would sit up for nights up to about 3 or 4 in the morning, getting statements out, duplicating, doing clerical work, sort of at that level. Tambo featured very largely on the plane of contributing ideas.

GMC: So he and Lambete and Mda were all in the idea group.

Quite. Also I was in that group. Mandela was a student at the University. He didn't feature very prominently. Not at the beginning. But shortly thereafter he certainly rose to eminence. He became one of our finest orators.

GMC: And did he command a lot of respect?

In the Youth League, yes. There was always criticism that he was lazy and more or less interested in focusing the limelight on himself. I certainly liked him for his ability to deliver himself very persuasively.

GMC: What about Duma Nokwe?

He doesn't come at all within my orbit. He was a very much younger man. He came in towards the end of the Youth League period.

GMC: Is there anybody else you think of?

Godfrey Peechin (?).

GMC: Did you feel he was an important person? He's a modest man.

I certainly would not place him in a category with men like Mda, Lambede. Or Tambo, or Sisulu, for that matter. He was more a camp follower.

GMC: That's what he says, himself. Why did you drop out in '44? Because you left Johannesburg?

Yes. I went back to Natal to edit IMKUMTLA YA BANTU. And then, of course, to start the League in Natal and carry on the old fight against the Natal Native Congress.

GMC: So you identified yourself with the ANC?

Completely.

GMC: And what was the situation when you went back?

Well, the Natal Native Congress, of course, dominated the scene in Natal, so the first task I set myself was to establish the Natal wing of the League. I became its president. In '45 I think, almost. We set about destroying the Natal Native Congress. I think by 1946 . . . What we did was we finally destroyed the Natal Native Congress, unified the province and got it to identify itself with the ANC. Task number two, well, this was my personal one, now, and it's one that I never looked back to with much happiness. The next was to build up Luthuli, push to the top

GMC: Why do you say you don't look back on it with happiness?

In a sense it's tragic. I had faith in Luthuli. Not so much in the quality of his ideals. It was his character, his integrity, that impressed me. And I felt - I see now that I was very wrong - I did feel that in the struggle against two forms of totalitarianism his moral and physical courage would be the sort of thing. . . well, would make him a tower of strength in critical moments. And that wouldn't lose political cause or direction. Very many unfortunate developments took place. And certain conflicts even in his own makeup came to the fore. I had the feeling to a very large extent that he encouraged Communists to take over the ANC. That's why I think it's tragic. I see it now as a personal tragedy. The failure of an idea.

GMC: What about the role of Champion?

As you know, he started life as a labour leader. He split the ICU and finally helped in crushing the cause. He is one fellow who feels no sense of embarrassment when he says: I am the incarnation of perfection. His career, however, has been progressively in the direction of collaboration. And to a very large extent our quarrels with him were on this issue.

GMC: He was pretty anti-Indian.

Yes.

GMC: I presume you felt that Luthuli worked very closely with the Indians.

No, not at all. With the Communists, not the Indians. Unfortunately, it happened that the Communists were also Indians. I myself worked with the Indians.

GMC: Of course, well you were with Gandhi. What about the 1948, or is it '49, the Natal Indian Riots? Have you any reason to suppose that any responsible African leaders were connected with that?

No, not at all. But very many of them were sympathetic. It's one of those particular developments in history. I have always been very keenly interested in it myself.

GMC: It seems to me it was quite a crucial point.

Quite. Crucial for me also personally.

GMC: You were there writing, I suppose.

- Yes, quite. It was a turning point in the evolution of my attitude toward the race question. This made me a liberal.

GMC: Why, because you felt that this was such a dangerous . . . ?

Initially . . . to this time I think of myself as having been an intellectual non-racialist. I remember that it was extremely difficult for me to lift an Indian baby or touch an Indian child. I didn't have Indian friends. And I didn't feel that I lost anything at all by this. I was primarily concerned with the task of asserting African initiatives. The rationale I used, I suppose, was that we are despised by everybody else and we are the most backward, so we had better look after our own house. More or less my thinking was similar to the PAC. Indian, Coloured, White, please now; don't complicate our task of putting our house in order. When we are through with this business, then we will treat you as equals. There was of course implied in this that those who have been sinned against most have the monopoly of virtue. The riots shattered that. I believed in African nationalism as a creed of salvation. But also I believed in it as an ideal \_\_\_\_\_. When I saw reality now in action, all ugliness was \_\_\_\_\_ and I was shattered. I became a liberal.

GMC: Were you one of the people that went around the townships trying to stop them

Not only went around. I was a member of the Executive Committee of the ANC. So that I was feeling involved politically in this thing.

GMC: And you think the weight of the ANC was thrown against all the things that were happening.

Even Champion, in spite of his anti-Indian preferences, went out of his way.

GMC: He hints darkly at other things.

I am inclined to think that the Youth League did more than the official ANC.

GMC: And you still felt yourself apart, did you?

Yes, right through the time Champion was president. It wasn't that we liked it any more, but we were now forced into it. By Champion's hostility to the League.

GMC: He was really hostile to the League, was he?

~~Oh yes. He made several efforts to expel us from the ANC.~~

GMC: You mean from the Natal ANC?

Yes. And even made efforts to persuade the head office of the ANC not to recognize us. It was when Xuma started being sympathetic to Champion and it cost Xuma his leadership of the ANC.

GMC: I thought you turned against him, in the end because he wouldn't accept your constitution.

Quite a number of factors came in there now. But one of the most decisive as far as the Natal League was concerned was Xuma's support of Champion.

GMC: It wasn't so much your desire to form Xuma into your pattern as it was that you didn't like his support of Champion.

There were quite a number of factors. In the Transvaal the issue was very largely the pattern that Xuma accepted, which we didn't like. The old-guard attitude. The quarrels with the League on that plane were sharper in the Transvaal. In Natal, emphasis was on the relationship between Xuma and Champion. There were undertones also of the constitutional . . . well, with Xuma's making a mess of the constitutional position and that his attitude in fact now would lead us to defeat, and that he wasn't able to manage the Communists as well as we did. There was another aspect about which I was somewhat . . . well, I suppose at this time my attitude was somewhat equivocal. Xuma was getting very friendly with the Indian Congress and criticism was raised in the League that, whereas we had set out to assert African Initiative, he was trying to undermine our movement toward this goal.

GMC: Did you feel the Dr.'s pact, for instance, did this?

Oh yes, Dadoo, Naicker, and Xuma? I think things were inflamed more when Dr. Xuma went to the United Nations with Rastonzi (?). This cost him a lot. The pact, well, we got it more as issuing inevitably from the commitment to Rustonjee.

GMC: You feel that when he made the decision to go with Rasonjee that this was already a kind of acceptance of his leadership?

Quite.

GMC: And you didn't have much faith in Rastonjee?

In a sense, it tended to undermine the position that we had taken as a League, namely that we wanted to assert African initiatives. So if we went back now to getting the Indians to lead the Africans, we were going back to the position assumed by the Communists.

GMC: Why do you think Xuma supported Champion so much?

Champion was a determined fighter. Xuma needed allies and he couldn't control the League at all. The Youth League. In desperation . . . Here were two men, both of them threatened by the same enemy, the Youth League. And both were forced to pool their resources.

GMC: Champion has always been a bit apart from other African leaders, hasn't he? He and Dube didn't get along?

Yes.

GMC: I never understood quite how Champion got his position in the ANC at all.

I'm involved in that. Again, it was an extremely unhappy episode, but I am happy about it myself, because the outcome . . . It's very curious. What happened was this. In the effort to pave the way for Luthuli . . . More or less I was in the position to influence events because I edited IMKUMTLA at this time which was used as the organ of the League. I was pushing Luthuli to the top in the League, and it wasn't easy work. He was a friend of the missionaries; he was a chief; he was a moderate. Everything was loaded heavily against him. But because of IMKUMTLA, I was able to carry the League with me. But the biggest obstacle was Champion in Natal who felt that he was the historical and legitimate successor to Dube.

GMC: He's a real Zulu nationalist I thought.

Yes, he is. Whereas we felt that it would be calamitous for Champion to continue to lead us. At the same time I wanted Luthuli. If Luthuli came out openly and staked his claim, he never had the nerve, nor the willingness, to do that sort of thing. He's always been a gentleman. And he had condemned the way that personalities were bandied about in politics. So we had now to clear up the political debts - so to speak - before. The caucus in Natal - it included the Youth League as well - took a view that what we had to do was to destroy Champion to see that he never came into the ANC. And then push in Luthuli. My argument was that if we pushed in Luthuli, who had no stomach for intrigue (?) what would happen is that we would encourage Champion to continue banging his bosom, in the position of a martyr. And as long as he was likely to be an embarrassment to us it would keep the Natal province divided.

~~CHAMPION~~  
GMC: And you thought this would be a way to . . . NEW AFRICAN  
Quite. And in order to unify Natal, what we had to do was elect Champion as President of the ANC and then pack the Executive. In the introduction to my first chapter, I gave the type of the new African - the historical and other influences that have given us our very peculiar attitudes. It was certainly in my mind now that Champion didn't understand these attitudes very well, so the shortest way to kill him politically was to give him the leadership. Get him to antagonize himself with the people. Then our problem would have been solved forever. That was one success I achieved. It really happened. No sooner had he got in that he got himself in a mess; we quarreled very badly. I had anticipated this sort of thing. But the quarrel ended very disastrously for him. So disastrously in fact that he's never been again able to give trouble to Luthuli.

GMC: But he was in a fair amount of control at a very decisive period?

Yes, he was. This was part of the price that we had to pay.

GMC: And did the others see this, too?

I lost friends which I have never recovered.

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GMC: People who didn't recognize the strategy?

The Zulus take their politics as seriously as the Afrikaners.

GMC: More than the others?

✓ The Xhosa-speaking are very sophisticated in their politics. So, to a certain extent, are the Sotho-speaking. But the Zulus look upon it as life and death. I don't . . . them for that; I'm Zulu-speaking myself. But it's too serious. The Zulu-speaking were the first to commit political murders.

GMC: I'm curious also about Champion's role before all this Youth League business. Did you know anything about his role with the ICU?

Not as much, of course, as when I was in the League. He comes from Natal of a polygamous family. He was educated at Adams College and he was expelled; he didn't finish. From Adams he went first to serve in the police force in Natal. After that he went up to Johannesburg, was employed on the mines, and subsequently became secretary of the first mine staff association. From there he moved on to the ICU.

GMC: And what impression have you of his role in the ICU? Did he and Kadalie spar a good deal?

Yes, a lot of friction developed between them. Kadalie came from Nyasaland. And Champion used this fact . . . accused him of being a foreigner. It was one of the factors responsible, I think, for the internal collapse of the ICU. But right through the period of the ICU, Champion was always the man with insatiable ambitions. On the other hand, he has always been confused on the real issues involved in the conflict between black and white, the race problem. His own attitudes inclined to be very largely heroic. In a sense he is a Zulu militarist fighting to recover the land of his ancestors from the white conqueror.

GMC: This is what you mean by heroic. You used the word in regard to your mother, too.

My mother had this, too, uncompromisingly.

GMC: But it was less African nationalism, as such, than Zulu nationalism, Zulu traditional position.

The sort of thing that you find in Swaziland, for instance, a form of nationalism. It's narrower. And Champion belonged to that school. He believed, for instance, in the destiny of his own people.

GMC: As a dominant people or just in their own territory?

I suppose he was more concerned with them in their own territory. Although there were expansionist motives, as well. The Zulus have always been imperialists. They worked harder than any other single group. For instance, for the unification of the African people in 1912. Seme and Dube were Zulus. They themselves were merely pupils of another master, the Zulu King Cetshwayo.

GMC: You feel that he was the person who really expressed these ideas.

Cetshwayo himself believed that the best way of stopping the white tide from engulfing the country was for the various African kingdoms to present a united front. He didn't succeed because the Zulus were imperialists and the other African peoples didn't trust the Zulus. (end tape)

Bill Bengu.

GMC: You say his role was somewhat similar to that of Pitje?

More or less. He never figured very prominently. Certainly not until the time of the continuation committee. 1961. He was a member of the Youth League. I don't think he rose to high office, but he's always been close to Luthuli. I regard him, still, as one of Luthuli's advisors. His own position, his relations with Luthuli were not affected by my quarrel with Luthuli. We had the fallout with Luthuli, then I became reconciled.

GMC: What kind of a person is he?

Rather on the quiet side. A typical lawyer. He was a very close friend of mine. He hates political intrigue. He's a family man and a Catholic. He's a Liberal, of course, as well. In fact, he is Vice President now that I no longer hold office, because of the ban. Oh... he's been banned, too. So he too is not allowed. Things move so quickly.

...going back to one of the old figures, tell me about Selby Msimang.

That's very, very interesting. He's about the only man I know now who attended the original Bloemfontein Conference of 1912. Though his memory isn't too good, he's kept himself physically very fit, and mentally alert, but I didn't find him very helpful.

GMC: You talked to him about the meeting?

I talked to him about everything I could.

GMC: Are there things which stick in your mind that he said which you haven't put in your book?

No. He was a disappointment to me.

GMC: Someone told me that he had sort of an idealized picture of the past.

Yes, quite. And even then there wasn't any meat in the picture, something one could pin upon and say, this is new. His descriptions of situations and events tended to be very vague. For instance when I wanted to know from him why Dube and Seme quarreled he was very vague about it.

GMC: So you never got that straightened out?

Of course, on the other hand, we never were very close friends and he probably didn't want to furnish me with ammunition. The Youth League didn't hit him with the maximum kind of . . .

GMC: I see. He was one of the ones you regarded as being on the opposite side?

Well, not exactly on the opposite side. He believed that the Youth League would push him to the top. And we found his attitude and ours irreconcilable.

GMC: On what basis?

Partly, he belongs to the old guard. To this day I'm not like the old guard. This kowtowing type.

GMC: Kowtowing to the government or kowtowing to whom?

The real line there was don't pursue extreme causes lest you antagonize Whites who are friendly-disposed to our cause. We moderates of the old guard are waiting for a change of heart among the whites, which meant absolutely nothing to us.

GMC: Would Msimang have expected you to raise him to high office in Natal or in the country?

In Natal. He was Champion's secretary. He did work with us to get Champion thrown out of the presidency in Natal. He wanted to move in the direction of getting himself to take Champion's position, whereas we were working for Luthuli. We were working at cross-purposes. I don't think he has forgiven us, really.

GMC: How did you actually get Champion out?

Well, it was a long campaign. Reported very fully in IMKUMTLA. But what we did was to demand a more militant stand against the government.

GMC: This was after the Durban Riots?

By that time trouble had already started. Some Youth Leaguers had already resigned from Champion's executive. I hadn't myself.

GMC: That was before the Riots?

Before the riots, yes. He was coming increasingly under fire for his moderate policies. What we wanted was confronting apartheid with \_\_\_\_\_, that was one of the phrases used. Which meant in fact that the African community had to take a definite militant stand. In the form of a national strike or a resistance move, a campaign of Defiance. The sort of thing that Champion didn't want. He's been involved in bloody events, when Africans lost their lives in the demonstrations in 1929. And he didn't want this sort of thing repeated. And we felt that we were under no obligation ourselves to be moderate just because certain people had been shot and blood had been shed and he didn't want to involve himself in that. Our own generation, too, had to \_\_\_\_\_ its own matters and we didn't accept this.

GMC: So how did you work to get him out?

Firstly, we made it impossible for him to work with the executive. And presently he got in a position where he tended to collaborate more with his own friends and \_\_\_\_\_ than he did within the executive. We encouraged this cliquing process. And the moment we felt it working then we started pulling out the powerful fellows

one by one, people like Chief Kumalo; Msimang was one of those and Luthuli remained almost until the end. I pulled out, and quite a number of others, until Champion was left with his former ICU colleagues. From then onwards it was very much easier to attack him. Well, of course, press attacks and public attacks. Until finally, really, he was confronted with no choice. Of course, it contrasted with Luthuli, always contrasted with what he did and said with what Luthuli said he did. Luthuli himself was never involved in a collision with Champion. That was fought mainly by the Youth League.

For nearly two years he refused to call a conference of the Natal ANC.

GMC: That was after the Riots?

'49, '50, until '51 in fact. In May, 1951, he was thrown out of the presidency of the ANC. We literally forced him to this conference because we were certain now that we controlled the majority of the membership.

GMC: You forced him to call this conference?

Yes, and he was thrown out of office.

GMC: And then he had no office.

None at all.

GMC: And that was when Luthuli came in.

Yes, quite.

GMC: But do you see this yourself as part of the struggle of the Youth League against the old guard which threw Xuma out in '48?

It was part of the Process.

GMC: So that if you threw Xuma out then Champion was still one who was there, or do you see it as a more local process?

On the contrary, if perhaps, Xuma had not supported Champion, we - that is the Natal section of the League - would probably have not taken up too hostile a position against Xuma.

GMC: So Xuma might have kept his position.

Insofar as we in Natal were concerned, certainly.

GMC: Then you voted against him at that time?

Not only that, we organized against him. We discovered that it was impossible to get rid of Champion without getting rid of Xuma. Because whatever decisions were taken in Natal, even by the conference, against Champion were defeated by Xuma.

GMC: Did it help him that much?

Yes, quite. So much so that in the midst of our quarrel with Champion, Xuma left and went over to the United Nations; as if to put us in our place he appointed Champion as his \_\_\_\_\_. This was the red flag we couldn't tolerate at all. It was a most painful slap in the face for us. We never forgave Xuma and he had to be punished for that sort of thing. The sort of thing that antagonized him.

GMC: And Moroka, it was just a spur-of-the-moment decision, was it?

We were caught in a very ugly position there. We wanted Professor Matthews. And negotiations were conducted over a fairly long period. Since I was involved I can tell what happened from my side of the picture. Joe Matthews and I were very close friends. I couldn't approach Matthews just then to ask him to stand in Xuma's place. Natal certainly wanted Matthews. We thought he was balanced in judgment, intelligent and realistic. And he wasn't the type of fellow who tended merely to appeal to the gallery. We could even have confidence in his judgments as a man.

The Youth League, particularly the Cape League - this was Mda (Lembede had died and AP had taken over the leadership of the League.) Naturally as leader of the Natal League I got in touch with him and asked to him to . . . well, sounded him on his reactions to becoming president after Xuma. Mda wouldn't have him at all. He didn't think he was reliable. And he didn't think he was sympathetic to the Youth League.

At the time, I suppose, he could have been said to think more or less along liberal lines. He was more a non-racialist and feared that the Youth League would gradually racialize the ANC and its policies.

After pressure, Mda finally accepted the Natal line. So we opened up correspondence with Joe Matthews and in time he sounded his father and his father said that he'd be willing to stand provided the League supported him. So I drafted a few questions for publication, a written interview, really, a publication in IMKUMTLA which I sent to Matthews which he replied to and signed accordingly. This interview was published. By the time we went to Bloemfontein everything was more or less all set. We looked very hopefully to having Matthews as president. He was friendly to Natal; he was certainly friendly to us.

When we got to Bloemfontein, Joe Matthews came over to me and said look here, my father's changed his mind. This was a bombshell, taking into account the preparations made for his election. He said, 'My father's changed his mind; he wants to concentrate on organizing the Cape.' (He was president of the Cape there.) Mda called a caucus of the Youth League. It was presided over by Oliver Tambo. Mda himself didn't turn up because of a very sharp difference of opinion which developed as a result. If matters didn't stand, others argued - particularly the Cape and the Free State and a section of the Transvaal Youth League. These argued that if Matthews didn't stand then let Xuma remain where he was. So far as we were concerned in Natal, this was really the death warrant for us. We could under no circumstances follow Xuma. He was a bit hostile now towards us, precisely in the way we were ourselves.

GMC: Largely because of your attacks on Champion?

Yes, quite. And of course our support for the Transvaal's criticisms of his drifting toward the right and hobnobbing with Rostominsee (?). All this came together and it snowballed against Xuma.

The caucus was presided over by Oliver Tambo in Mda's absence. After a very heated argument - I remember Dr. Njome (?) walked away; he didn't want Moroka; then the delegate from the Transvaal - he's in Sutherland now, in Mtlabati, MP, and he's Dr. Verwoerd's chief liaison officer with Paramount Chief here. He's a Swazi. He lived in South Africa at the time.

Yes, quite. This process of thinking of Luthuli had already started. And it continued from year to year, from stage to stage. You can see the process in IMKUMTLA  
GMC: Do you think he was really aware of this? It doesn't come out in his book.

No. He wasn't at all. Except perhaps in a sort of vague way. Because we started to discuss leadership problems with him. The line he took was to say, Now look here, I'm not interested at all. My attitude was whenever he's got to make a decision, always confront him; don't persuade him into it because he'll probably say, I don't want to fight Champion, Dube, everybody; I have too much to do at \_\_\_\_\_ ville, etc., with the missionaries and the like. So always confront him with situations of bitter choices or embarrassing choices. This is how we were able to carry him from situation.

But by 1946 he was aware. He hadn't made up his mind. It was not until 1951 that he did make up his mind. Just before the elections.

GMC: What do you think persuaded him? Did you discuss this with him?

Quite a number of factors. Chief among which was the retained power of the Nationalist government. I think it shattered Luthuli. He emerged from the collapse of the Native Representatives Council a changing man. This is the impression I got. He went into the Natives Representative Council a moderate, a confirmed moderate. But no sooner had he got in than he aligned himself with the - shall I say - radicals in the Council. Matthews was . . . They weren't very radical at all. However he hadn't been there for a very long period that he soon . . . Luthuli, came from the Natal coastlands. Afrikaner influence there is very limited, whereas very many of us came from the northern parts of the country where there is much more. It wasn't until he came face to face with the Afrikaner political leader as represented in the Department of Native Affairs for instance, which dealt directly with the Natives Representative Council. When he came up we consulted very frequently; he even slept in my house. As we consulted I could see Luthuli disillusioned bitterly.

GMC: He really had hopes at first?

Not in the sense of believing that the situation could be transformed radically to suit the African, but he felt that \_\_\_\_\_ pressed with determination could allow of evolutionary development toward freedom. I think he believed very strongly in this. And very many people believed more or less this.

When the Afrikaner government just turned a deaf ear to the pleas of the Representative Council, in fact replied with threats of more trouble, Luthuli was disillusioned. I began to hear him now when he came to the house, which was fairly frequent, in the evenings he spent his nights with us when we lived in Durban, I began hearing him use a new phrase, we need to consider new methods of struggle. This of course interested me no end. The man was changing and adapting to what we ourselves were wanting. By this time, of course, he was aware of our designs, our intentions. He already had a seat on the Executive of the Natal Congress.

GMC: He wasn't President than of the Natal Congress?

Not until 1951.

GMC: You think he was aware before that?

Yes, quite.

GMC: The government came into power in '48.

I think from 1946 he got a seat first on the Congress executive. '45-'46.

Particularly he was supported very largely by the League. Even at that early date.

GMC: He never was a member of the League?

No.

GMC: You didn't find anybody among yourselves you wanted to support?

It wasn't a question of looking to ourselves. Very many of us were idealists on the one hand. And I suppose that led us into very serious trouble because that's how Sisulu got in and this led to the capture of the ANC by the Communists. We felt that it was far more important - very naively I feel now . . . We felt, all right we don't want to get to positions of influence in the movement ourselves. Very largely because we were then attacked very savagely by the old guard that we wanted to take

over their positions. So in effect we had to take up this tactical position of saying it's not the position that we want; it's the change of policy. And we were quite prepared to work in any capacity, provided we had the right policy. So partly it was because of that.

Partly I think that we were naive ourselves. Not realizing that unless we wielded power in positions of leadership events wouldn't go away. In Natal more or less a similar attitude prevailed as well.

GMC: How actually did Sisulu get in. That was chance too, wasn't it?

I suppose the debates on the merits and demerits of Moroka being president exhausted us really and imposed very unpleasant strains on the League. I don't think . . . And consequently when we next had to consider who was to be Secretary-General very many of us who had been occupied too much with Moroka as the President General, we were quite prepared to take anybody. Another reason was that none of the senior leaders of the League was prepared to take the position of Secretary Gener

Some argued that they were busy with their affairs. Some argued that they were in poor health, like me, for instance, Mda. All sorts of excuses. At the time we thought they were good excuses. And over and above that of course we dared not take positions lest the old guard say, 'See now, we thought this was coming.'

Finally Sisulu volunteered. He said, well look here; after having done so much to put the ANC into shape at this moment not one of our fellows is willing to take on the job of Secretary-General; I volunteer myself. I am ready to take it over.

At the time we thought naively; we cheered him and congratulated him. That a good son of Africa was prepared to sacrifice quite a lot. His business was in trouble then, but he was quite willing to take on the additional responsibility.

GMC: You feel it was a plot, rather, do you now?

Sisulu's coming in? Not at all. Bad judgment on our parts.

GMC: But do you think from his side, from the people who were pushing him, that they were trying to maneuver. . . ?

~~Not at all. I think that the fault is entirely the Youth League's. It's~~

just that none of us realized at the time that . . . Sisulu's business finances were chaotic. Very badly off indeed. We didn't realize that if we gave Sisulu political power the peculiar influences working in Johannesburg and the ideological pressures exerted on the Johannesburg head office would find him susceptible and vulnerable. This we didn't foresee. No sooner had he got in than trouble started. Executive pressures now were going to be exerted on him, in a variety of ways.

GMC: And you feel he was a weakling (weakling?) . . .

We could always deal with Moroka, and besides he couldn't be pushed over to the Communist side. But all sorts of pressures, including money, gradually came in and Sisulu gradually slipped to where finally he became a Communist.

GMC: But you think he wasn't before?

Not at all. I knew him very well. We were very close to each other. Surprisingly enough he was the most anti-White of the Youth Leaguers. Uncompromisingly anti-White.

GMC: There was then a split, wasn't there, in the Youth League, over the Defiance Campaign whether you should cooperate with Whites and Indians or not?

A difference of opinion, really, rather than a split. Very sharp, of course. Particularly the Natal section of the League. We argued . . . First of all, Johannesburg was handling more or less the organizational side. Johannesburg argued that it would be a very fine thing if Black and White and Asian, for that matter, worked together in one demonstration against apartheid. That in the Campaign we had spoken of in 1949 the other races should be allowed to take part in it as well. We wanted to know who would control the campaign. Johannesburg proposed - and here trouble started - that representation should be on the basis of parity between the three groups. We said now, look here, we represent the majority group, one, and we'll make the greatest sacrifices and over and above all in fact this demonstration is our own. If the other people want to help us, let them trail behind us. Because really more than the other groups we shall have to justify ourselves.

We had to justify ourselves to ourselves, to our people. And parity, we feared, could in fact give the Whites and the Indians the majority in the consultative committee. Ultimately this happened of course. We in Natal were particularly sore about this. We found before long that minority groups had majority votes in the coordinating body. It was something we couldn't stop.

Luthuli had just been installed as President of the ANC and the situation was extremely sensitive. The Government was trying to drive a wedge among Natal's political organizations. And secondly on the national front, the Youth League felt itself pressed for direct action and we couldn't afford a split at that moment. In any case, the League always . . . splits, unless on ideological or fundamental questions. So we decided to swallow our pride and to support the resistance movement.

MC: There were many people like Joe Matthews who were in favour of it, though, at that time, weren't there? You say there was a division of opinion . . .

I got the impression that Natal felt strongest against parity and that the other provinces didn't feel as strongly. I even had the feeling that they welcomed it.

MC: Was anybody against cooperation or were they only against parity?

I can't remember anybody opposing cooperation. Not that we would have been reluctant to go it alone. But against the background of the Indian Riots in 1949 we felt that we don't want this sort of risk again. If the Indians stood out, our people would say the good boys, . . . look at what they bring now again. They would say the neutrality was benevolently disposed toward the White men and it caused trouble again. So it was a very peculiar situation with limited choices.

MC: Who actually proposed the timing of the Defiance Campaign?

This decision was taken in Bloemfontein. That year I didn't go to Bloemfontein.

MC: But it was a general acceptance?

The conference decided now, it was 1950, to launch the Defiance Campaign on June 26. We were still bogged down in Natal's troubles with Luthuli and Champlon.

MC: Was there very much of a campaign in Natal?

That's Njongwe and Matthews. And Robert Matji; he's in Basutoland now. He's a trade unionist and a communist. The Transvaal came a bad third and Luthuli was disgusted with them. His argument was that they talked a lot and did very little. Leo Kuper's book on this movement gives the figures.

GMC: But actually that resistance campaign petered off. Was your feeling of disillusionment or do you feel it really accomplished something?

Apart from the Six Laws, it was designed to focus attention on, other motives were behind it. These were held by different groups in different situations. There were those, for instance - and it was the group to which I belonged myself - who felt we were reaching a situation where unless Afrikaner nationalism was confronted with a truly opposite force and in this context 'truly opposite' meant not only a powerful African force, but a powerful non-racial force, if possible. What we had to do was to try and split the Whites. Along the lines of values. And this was point number one. And the resistance movement, avoiding violence, force, and bloodshed, seemed to us, against the background of our own history from which we had learned some lessons, wherever we laid the greatest emphasis on peaceful demonstrations and on values by certain Whites and by some White people we had succeeded in splitting the Whites - in very limited ways, but we had these minor splits. So what we wanted to do was to place the White democrat, and particularly the White racialist, in a position where he could revolt against his group and join hands with us and we could stand together. This was one of the motives behind the demonstration.

GMC: Did you feel this was successful?

Yes, quite. Two years later the Liberal Party came into being. The next year in fact.

GMC: And you thought this was a reflection of this struggle of conscience?

We believe this. Secondly, we felt very badly, we were very much discomforted, to put it mildly, by the Riots. They put us in a very bad light. And many of us felt that we had to whitewash ourselves. Partly to mollify India's feelings. The

'49 Riots. (end tape)

We wanted to dramatise, really, the internal situation.

GMC: What about the argument that this brought in a lot more members?

Yes, it did.

GMC: Did you expect this?

Not at all. Except, now this is the fourth motive, this was very largely a Youth League motive, Mda used the phrase the African people had to be politicised. By which he meant, in fact, that they should be charged with a desire for uhuru, freedom, and the like. To the extent that the campaign had \_\_\_\_\_ of politicising. I attach more importance to the change of approach rather than to the actual interest in the machine.

GMC: The change of approach of Africans?

The African people, yes. The new image that the ANC got definitely, which of course to our everlasting chagrin the Congress exploited fully, the new image was a tremendously enlarged, clearly defined and more effective. This was the image of an ANC determined to confront the race oppressor with disaster. A militant ANC and an ANC which was ready and in the position to give effective leadership. An ANC also aware of its own goals and how to reach them.

GMC: And you really felt that in this they expected the Youth League objective?

Well, we \_\_\_\_\_ ourselves specifically, and in any case we were the most dominant influence in the ANC by this time.

GMC: And now you think the communists took it away from you?

Yes.

GMC: Through the Congress of the People?

Not exactly. After 1951 the ANC . . . . The old guard of the ANC had come to a more or less easy collaboration with the League. The communists too, they helped the resistance movement. The campaign had no sooner petered out of existence, than the communists came in in full force, firstly to divide the League, take over the leadership of the ANC, isolate the nationalists, and then move events in the direction of dominating the ANC.

GMC: I frankly don't quite see how they tried to do this.

Again, we have to go back to the years 1926, '27, '28 to get a clearer picture of the events we're now discussing. You remember I mentioned J.T. Gumede went to Moscow. I mentioned Kadalie also and others and the effort to get wider acceptance of communist leadership in the African community. In 1929 - Eddie Roux mentions the fact, and he was in the Communist Party by this time - the Communists decided that the Communist Party was not going to become a mass movement.

GMC: It was going to be an elite movement.

Yes, quite. They believed that the best influence remained this little group committed very clearly to the doctrine. 1929 to 1937, it was shortly before the war, the Communist Party had its ups and downs, mainly downs, but shortly after the beginning of the war, September 1939, the line was that the Communists and the oppressed of the world should keep away from the war between rival imperialists.

Russia had no sooner got into the war than the war suddenly became a people's war for liberation. Right through the war the Communists played their part assisting Smuts in the war. After the war the formation of the League, the rise to power of the Nationalists. Of interest to us, inside the ANC events were moving in a very interesting direction. I've already mentioned Mda's hostility to the Communists as well as Lembede's. My own thinking was nearer Mda's. That we shouldn't throw them out

At this stage we had the feeling very strongly that the Communists didn't want to sing over the ANC at that time, but they and ourselves were very keen rivals for the leadership of the Trade Unions. This is whether the struggle more or less started. They had very many advantages over us there. Firstly, they had men they could deploy almost full time on the trade unions. They certainly were trade men and not one of us knew anything about trade unions. And we found it a very complicated business. Complicated and expensive. But we felt that . . . It wasn't enough merely to declare goals for the African Nation. There had to be force to carry us to our goals.

Since we didn't have military force, we had to use economic power. And the worker was a key factor. However, if the Communists dominated the trade unions we never could use it. In quite a number of negotiations, for instance, we had discovered that in dealing with the employers the Communists ultimately didn't seek to bring about a conciliation. That is, to create conditions where the worker could feel, our united strength is the guarantee of improvement. Rather the Communists tended to sharpen conflict. And we felt that wherever this was the case the African worker who had been disillusioned by the failures of the political side would never cultivate a confident and organised effort. This was the main prerequisite for success insofar as we were concerned. And we preached nationalism to him we wouldn't carry him very far against the armed might of the White man, the location system, the pass laws, and then of course the very wage itself. And the fact that by sharpening conflict the Communists were in fact sabotaging the consultation of the African worker into a striking political force.

This takes us up to more or less the resistance movement. There was, you know, this rivalry between ourselves. We felt that we were no match for the Communists on this plane. We didn't have the resources.

GMC: You don't feel the Labour Party was doing anything for them? You feel that it was only the Communists that were pitted here against you?

I don't remember having any dealings at all with the Labour Party.

GMC: Or with the Trade and Labour Congress?

Well, yes, some trade unions had some dealings with them. The Trade and Labour Congress itself was adverse to the idea of trade unions following or being committed to a particular pattern or political goal. They rather took the classic British position of saying draw the line between trade unions and politics. Whereas our own position was, in South Africa you just cannot draw the line between the two. If the wage itself is a political weapon, the discriminatory wage.

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GMC: In this struggle between you and the Communists you were the ones who both saw the political.

Yes. We accused the Communists of themselves remaining the elite and we accused them also of themselves remaining leaders of . . . not wanting to make the sacrifices which they would call upon our workers to make. In order to move events to their goals. Up to this time, the struggle was more or less on the trade union front. After the resistance movement, by this time Sisulu had definitely come almost completely under Dr. Dadoo's influence. We felt that the head office was speaking now with two voices. Where before it had taken a clearly defined course, it tended to equivocate.

Then the resistance came. The great debate on the resistance. Then the Communists came out openly. At first they opposed the resistance movement. They dismissed it in a disparaging way. They certainly reflected Gandhi in a disparaging light. But the League was so committed to make a demonstration either in the form of a national strike or a defiance campaign, that in time they swung over. Mandela rushed down - he was one of the leading Youth Leaguers - to Durban and he met our people in Durban and said to them, look here, gentlemen, if you hesitate to support the campaign, the Communists are going to take it over now. Well, you know what happened to us. This was one of the arguments that swung Natal.

We have always believed that the Communists insist on parity to sort of accustom the African people to the habit of tolerating non-African majorities in political councils.

During the course of the campaign itself, collaboration became closer and closer and closer until practically every directive came from Johannesburg and the provinces were expected merely to comply.

GMC: Even Port Elizabeth?

Robert Matji was in a key position; he was secretary there. Njongwe was there but he wasn't anti-Communists. Although a Youth Leaguer himself, his argument was . . . well, he was more interested in power. Whoever came along with power as far as