

At the airport of Lusaka, Alfred Nzo introduced us. We had the same flight to Kaputo. We talked to each other on the plane. In Kaputo we met again. Interview with ZUMA, member of the African National Congress, about his experience as political prisoner in South Africa, Robben Island.

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Zuma: Firstly as a person who was born in South Africa under a very strong yoke of oppression, whilst I was still very young, this situation made its impression on me. Generally I think it was because I lost my father whilst I was still very young, and I was the first born. I started realizing that there was something wrong. I could see the gap between myself and other young people of my age around me. Of course, what could possibly have happened in my joining the struggle, it is that one of my elder brothers, who was a soldier during the last world war was in the ANC. He was very fond of talking about the African National Congress. Because of the death of my father, my mother started working immediately. While I was still young my stay was not fixed to one place. I was staying with my mother in town; at times, because of difficulties she would take me to her place where she was born at Kapumulu place, to my grandmother and grandfather. After a certain stage, she took me, where my father was born, in the rural area, the area of Nkandla, Zululand. There I stayed for some time. But she would now and again call me to town and so forth. This ambivalent situation led also to my being not in a position to attend school as I would have liked to do. In a actual fact, I did not have a chance of attending school. But it was very clear to me, that it was because at that time, my father was not there. When I came to town, even at a very early age, I would then work as a child, not employed as a big man, attempting to help my mother. And I kept on thinking about the other young ones, my brothers and sisters, with the hope, that, when I grew up I would be able to assist them. It made a very strong impression on me, that during that time on weekends I would go around, and it was then that I used to see the volunteers of the ANC, marching and singing freedom songs. I would go to the congress squares and halls, where the ANC used to hold meetings. And I would listen. And I discovered in the process, that my suffering really was not a suffering aimed at me as an individual as such, for I found big people and young ones, talking about it. Then I met a woman in the area where I was working, it was Nsepepe, who was in the ANC and also in the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), who then asked me to join the trade union. I then joined the General Workers Union. And in SACTU Circles, there were then discussions on labour theory, discussions that immediately took off the veil that had been covering the whole situation to me. I then began to understand the exploitation to the workers in particular, in fact that's where I got my ABC in politics. The national struggle therefore made a very clear impression to me at the time. I then felt: this was the only way, which could solve my problem; which I understood then as not my problem alone but as the problem of the nation. That situation which came to me as a result of the discussion we used to have linked up with what I used to hear during the time when I was in Zululand at my father's place; the tales about the wars of dispossession.

When you are inside jail, one becomes convinced, that you see fascism when it is naked. While we still outside, we thought we knew, what the boers were. But we did not. you see them in jail from the time of your arrest until you are convicted, you actually see, what fascism means in South Africa. To many of us it has not dismantled our political convictions. Instead our convictions were strengthened. It makes us even more harder, it makes us to be more determined. It makes us not to doubt our struggle and ourselves. I always feel, that what I have done in our revolution is still small. There is much that I must do. What I have suffered is very small compared to what I expect ahead of me. But I think with that experience, having to know my comrades so closely under difficult conditions, I always see that in our struggle, we have got men, who can stand difficulties. Who are the equals of our oppressor, who is very vicious. The South African people are a match to the oppressor. I have seen them. They are strong and tough and dedicated, ready to die. Many have died in the process of tortures and other things, in jail; But they have contributed a lot.

I often avoid thinking much about my comrades I left in jail, for I know what type of life they are leading there. I often avoid thinking about my comrades, who are arrested in 1975, with whom I was arrested with and served long times in jail, and when we came outside, we continued the struggle. But unfortunately for them, the enemy arrested them. Some of them have been given life imprisonment recently, and comrade Joseph Mdluli in particular was tortured to death in 1976; a man I knew so much, I have worked with him before the banning of the ANC. He was in jail, I came out. He was a very strong man, ready for anything, very dedicated. When I think of his family, they probably know that I am free now. They will ask themselves, what am I doing. That is why I think, what I have done up till now, is not yet sufficient. It will only be sufficient, when we actually defeat the boers. That is what I can say.

One point is important for me to mention. we as South African revolutionaries, and in particular, when we were in jail, we admired and acknowledged the international support and the campaigns for the release of political prisoners in South Africa, with all the support groups all over the world. It is good to have friends everywhere who explain to their people about the suffering of our people in South Africa. We have high regards of people who make campaigns for us. They have contributed to the international duty of peace. We hope that they will continue. We know that they have contributed to the struggle of peoples who have now gained their liberation. If only the support groups can add up and support our struggle still further. Even if conditions could be improved in Robben Island if the main answer has not yet come about, the fact remains, that people are in jail. And to be away from your people, to be starved, to be locked in a small cell, is in itself a torture. If only the struggle could be assisted ~~transmission~~ that would be highly appreciated by all of us.