

Chapter Four

There was an animal which had two colours. One of its colours is white and the other is black. But that animal has only one tongue and with that one tongue it licks both colours. Therefore I think what we say in our deliberations in this Council should be listened to. Chief Mshiyani.¹

Working from within: A Case Study in Futility

The 1940s were crowded years, at times as inspiring as they could be depressing. The most frustrating experience, however, was the suffocating paternalism of the white officials towards the African representatives in the Natives Representative Council (NRC) referred to in the previous chapter. The CPSA was slightly more successful in placing its candidates in the institutions at the municipal level than it was in the NRC. There, the ANC was represented through its more eminent, if conservative, members. But the NRC was to test the patience of even these most moderate men.² It was a far cry from the democratic, representative institutions the ANC and the CPSA called for and was an anachronism in form and design as well as in the paternalism it displayed towards its educated, professional, often erudite members. Formed to replace the informal conferences that government occasionally held with Africans, it was set up in the context of the removal of Africans from the common voters' roll and in the belief that it would be a collaborative body to consult with the African chiefs, rural headmen and "Native leaders" on an annual basis.³

Its African elected members were doubtless expected to treat the white government appointees (who oversaw its work) with the deference and respect these officials normally received in their interaction with Africans. They were to be disappointed. By 1942 the NRC was something of a recalcitrant council of twelve of the most eminent elected African leaders; the majority of them preferred to debate policy rather than simply receive it. Initially, most of them were moderately independent rather than defiant, but that changed over the years, culminating in their eventual revolt. Yet as the decade played itself out, the confrontations between officialdom and the elected representatives on the NRC mirrored the new political sensibilities of Africans towards governance and the urgency of their need for a break with the paternalism of the past. It was, in a sense, the embodiment of the change from the slogan "Away with Passes!" to the broader appeal for

the abolition of all discriminatory legislation and the adoption of the more imaginative theme of “Votes for All!”

It was this concept of political freedom that was to challenge the racial hierarchy of power in the country from the mid-forties; the proceedings in the NRC therefore illustrated the futility of working towards democratic reform from the “inside” and entrenched the preference for extra-parliamentary struggle adopted by the liberation movement for the next half century. The status of the NRC was often debated in the Debating Club of the YCL, when I was its convener and I was often taken aback by the virulence with which the NRC was discussed. Smuts, the country’s prime minister in the 1940s was often the target of the club’s attack. His attitude towards the majority of the country’s black citizens was notoriously retrograde and little different from Hertzog’s. For him Africans were noble savages still under the pupilage of their civilizing white masters who created laws for their wellbeing and established institutions to guide them in the art of responsible governance. He believed that the “Native had the patience of an ass” and that they consequently did not press for reform unless manipulated by communists and agitators. However, as in most matters concerning “native affairs”, he was wrong in this too – although he was not the prime minister of the country when the NRC commenced its sessions in 1937.

The CPSA regularly contested the NRC’s elections. In 1942, it selected Edwin Mofutsanyana as the communist candidate for the urban areas in the Transvaal and Orange Free State. Mofutsanyana had joined the Party in 1927 after attending the CPSA night school in Johannesburg two years earlier, where he literally learned the ABCs of Communism from the works of the Marxist writers Bucharin and Preobrazhinsky.⁴ He became a Lenin School graduate in the 1930s and was general secretary of the CPSA until 1939, when Moses Kotane succeeded him; he was the Party’s star candidate for the NRC. When I first met him, I felt he should have been in a university or schoolroom, but appearances are misleading. Far from having had the opportunities of study, he began his working life underground in the mines in the Transvaal, having come from Witziesshoek, a small town in the OFS. His labour on the mines must have been brief because he later became a teacher. A photograph in *The Guardian* in 1942 during his election campaign shows him as a rather youthful-looking man, wearing a trendy scarf, a club tie and suit jacket, looking very thoughtful and dapper.⁵ This was quite different from my mental image of him as a rather dour, serious individual, conventionally clad in a dark suit – and very much a fish out of water in the formal surroundings of the district Party office; his desk strewn with minutes, reports and papers under newspapers and ashtrays. He must have been about 43 in 1942 when he stood for the Natives Representative Council a year or two before he became editor-in-chief of the Party newspaper, *Inkululeko*. For all his professorial appearance and unassuming image, he was well respected in the Party and the

ANC where he was valued for his quiet authority and strong intellect.⁶ He stood three times for the NRC and lost three times, in 1937, 1942 and again in 1947. The Party would have repeated the exercise (and Mofutsanyana would have been willing) but for the demise of the NRC and boycott.

Mofutsanyana was not the only Party candidate for the NRC in 1942. The other was Alpheus Maliba, who was unfortunately also defeated.⁷ Maliba, an activist, was quite different in profile and appearance from Mofutsanyana, two years younger and from a poor peasant family in Venda in the Northern Transvaal.⁸ It was regrettable that neither of them was elected although I doubt whether the history of the NRC would have been very different had the CPSA been more successful in its election interventions.

From the start, the NRC was a powerless advisory body whose resolutions were sent to government officials in state departments for consideration and then systematically ignored. It did not even have the limited executive functions of local councils in rural areas.⁹ It was composed of 22 members, twelve of whom were elected by a remote electoral college system,¹⁰ six government officials, all of them white and all of them appointed by the government. Four were traditional leaders, also appointed by government. It was the embodiment of an effete and powerless instrument that made a mockery of the idea of political representation. It was irrelevant from its inception but became noteworthy for the transformation of its members whose conservatism was turned into deep-seated defiance of the government as they asserted their demands for genuine forms of representation. From an instrument peripheral to the ANC's increasingly outspoken opposition to undemocratic laws, it became a site of protest and later a reference point for resistance to the paternalism of government officials.

Initially the NRC's sessions were held in the Pretoria Raadsaal, the old republican legislature, presumably to add gravitas to its proceedings, but they soon moved to less auspicious quarters following protests that the presence of "Kaffirs" in Paul Kruger's Raadsaal was an insult to the old man's memory and white sensibilities.¹¹ From the NRC's inception the elected members were a mixture of caution, conservatism and moderation, chosen for their local standing, their seniority and their professions. They were often educators, traditional leaders, doctors, a professor (Z.K. Matthews) and trade unionists, like the conservative A.W.G. Champion. From 1942 onwards, their insistence that their grievances be heard, that political issues be addressed squarely and that attitudes of deference be put aside, struck a new note in their relations with government. It was a reflection of their intellectual calibre as well as a pressing sign of the times that they would accept nothing less than the abolition of discriminatory legislation.

Many of the NRC's elected representatives were leaders on the National Executive Committee of the ANC, which exposed them to more radical influences. John Dube and A.W.G. Champion, both arch conservatives, were elected to the NRC in 1942¹² Dube was

the oldest member, first president-general of the ANC and editor of Natal's first African-English newspaper, *Ilanga lase Natal*. A.W.G. Champion, ostensibly more radical but equally conservative and later the *bête noir* of the African youth, was a leader together with Kadalie in the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) in the 1920s and politically destructive in excluding the communists from the ICU executive and the union. The men that followed Dube and the core that remained on the NRC, from its inception to its end, were not revolutionaries. But as they confronted the humiliating condescension of the secretary for Native Affairs who chaired the NRC sessions and the (white) native commissioners, all of them faithful watchdogs of government, they became increasingly angry, assertive and impatient for government to respond positively to their demands.

The government would do no such thing, despite the protests and efforts of men like Professor Z.K. Matthews who was the leading representative on the NRC after 1942. A moderate man, cautiously conservative in his politics, his actions often had more radical outcomes than he conceivably intended. These included his contribution to "African Claims", an ANC document relating the Atlantic Charter to human rights at home in 1943; his seminal role in the adjournment of the NRC in 1946; his conceptualization of a congress of the people in 1954 for which he "proposed the basic idea", and the Freedom Charter, which he endorsed but did not write.¹³ I met him on a number of occasions much later, the first during the planning stages of the Congress of the People; the second time in the well of the magistrate's court in 1956, when he had with remarkable mobility, moved from acting principal of the University of Fort Hare to being an accused on the Treason Trial. He was elected to the Natives Representative Council in 1942 and remained there until 1950, becoming its acting chairman and also chairman of the influential caucus of the elected representatives. He took his duties in this capacity very seriously, interacting well with the government officials and the strong-minded ANC men in the NRC. Whether he bridged the gap between the older stalwarts in the ANC and the increasingly militant ANC youth in the 1940s and 1950s as some commentators claimed, is debatable. I doubt whether he was all that acceptable to the African youth who respected his erudition and status but not his caution. Nelson Mandela, writing from his prison cell in 1970, noted on Matthews' death: "There were some people inside and outside the movement who were critical of his cautious attitude. But I am not sure whether they were not wild ..."¹⁴ However, Z.K. undoubtedly enjoyed the confidence of the older, similarly cautious representatives of the NRC, most of whom had been members of this council since 1942.

These included, R.V. Selope Thema, later editor of the *Bantu World* and very much opposed to the radical youth and boycott strategies, R.H. Godlo, also a journalist, who had been on the Council since its inception in 1937 (a protégé of Sol Plaatje); P.R. Mosaka, a Fort Hare graduate, articulate and independent-minded (who with Hyman Basner helped to form the short-lived African Democratic Party in 1943);¹⁵ and Dr J.S. (James) Moroka,

president general of the ANC in 1949. Moroka was defeated in the elections for the ANC presidency in 1952 by Chief A.J. Luthuli, a giant of a leader with whom the militant history of the ANC may be said to have begun. Luthuli joined the NRC in 1944, already admired for his sterling qualities of leadership. In welcoming Luthuli the acting chairman, a government bureaucrat, noted quite remarkably: "Chief Luthuli comes to this Council with a huge reputation of uprightness, ability and progressiveness ... I think he is the first chief who has fought and won an election on his own merits."¹⁶ If this official expected him to be just another pliant traditional leader he was mistaken. It was the very qualities with which he introduced the chief to the NRC that made Luthuli rise to be one of "the most widely known and respected African leader of his era".¹⁷

By 1946 the NRC had imploded on itself, a casualty of the arrogance of government and the frustration of the councillors. It was a far cry from the democratic expectations of Africans after the war, especially the ex-soldiers who returned after working and living in close proximity "with men of different racial backgrounds who treated them as soldiers fighting the same enemy and not just as labourers".¹⁸

The strike of African mineworkers in August 1946 was the occasion for the first serious row in the NRC. An initial resolution on the status of the NRC itself requested that the council adjourn indefinitely (unless government undertook to review its "native policy"). It was drafted *before* the 1946 mine strike and was to be proposed by James Moroka.¹⁹ In the event, the council was in session when reports of police brutality on the mines reached the NRC. The regular chairman, W.G.A. Mears, the secretary for Native Affairs was unable to attend the session, having to report to government on his personal assessment of the "rumours" of police violence. The under-secretary stood in for him but was unable to contain the strained mood of the councillors, whose tense feelings were exacerbated by Smuts' cold comment that he was "not unduly perturbed" by the strike or the reports of improper police behaviour. As events unfolded, the elected representatives showed more outrage over the indifference of the government to the plight of the miners than the MPs in the all-white parliament or any of the paternalistic government officials. P.R. Mosaka, with remarkable assertiveness, expressed his "surprise" that the under-secretary had made no reference in his opening remarks "to some most important matters" pertaining to the "disturbances" on the goldmines. He demanded a statement from government on the extent and nature of the disturbances, the number of people killed, injured and arrested and whether any negotiations had been entered into with the miners. All he got in response was the bland statement that the "present position is very much in a state of flux", but the matter was receiving the personal attention of the prime minister who had appointed a cabinet committee "and that that sub-committee was still sitting".²⁰ Mosaka responded irately: "Personally I'm not at all satisfied with the appointment of this committee. I understand that some people are dead, have been shot ... as a result of

instructions received from Pretoria.”²¹ He believed a judicial commission should be appointed and wanted to know from the acting chairman “where we as a council come in ...? We want to see this Cabinet committee today ...”.²² He eventually proposed the adjournment of the session, saying they could not go on calmly discussing estimates of “this and that” when African miners were in danger less than 50 miles away. A row erupted when the acting chairman could “see no reason for the adjournment”. The elected representatives requested a meeting of their caucus, when all the members spoke to the resolution that followed in plenary, including Chief Luthuli, whose third meeting it was. He did not mince his words: “Our people are beginning to feel that the deliberations of this Council are so much waste of time. If the views of quite a large number of our people were given effect to, none of us would come to this Council at all.”²³

This was the moment of truth. The representatives were frustrated at the impotence of the NRC and had become increasingly aware of the humiliating insult that this dummy institution was to the people they represented. Their impatience was reflected in their speeches as they rose one after the other, to speak their minds. Mosaka complained: “The government deals with us as it has been dealing with us all the time ... [it] regards us as nothing, as ... *an ‘internal affair’*.” Moroka interjected: “the Europeans of this country treat us in the same way as they treat their cattle”.

“Oh no, much worse”, said P.R. Mosaka, who went on to ask:

How long must your gold be rated above human values? How long shall the African people be huddled together in congested and unproductive reserves, industrial compounds and urban locations? How long will eight million people live on 13% of the land ... how long must the rights and life of eight million be subordinated to the interests of a few thousand mining magnates and rich farmers ... How Long?²⁴

It was an important debate, which dealt with a long list of discriminatory laws as they affected the majority of the people. The topics were diverse, covering Kaffir beer; education; old age pensions; mine workers; African trade unions; the food crisis; the Atlantic Charter; the pass laws – the government’s entire policy of segregation. Finally, Chief Mshiyani, one of the traditional leaders, gently and by way of a rural analogy, pointedly appealed to the government to hear what the councillors were saying: “There was an animal which had two colours,” he said. “One of its colours is white and the other is black. But that animal has only one tongue and with that one tongue it licks both colours”. He paused and then added circumspectly, as only a chief used to addressing his paymaster (who happened to be the government) could do: “Therefore I think what we say in our deliberations in this Council should be listened to.”²⁵ Unfortunately his words of wisdom were ignored by the government. In the circumstances, the resolution which

the councillors adopted was more radical than might have been expected. Its preamble noted that since its inception the members of the NRC had regularly brought the reactionary character of the country's native policy of segregation to the notice of the government. It deprecated the government's post-war continuation of a policy of fascism, which was the antithesis of the letter and spirit of the Atlantic Charter and that of the United Nations:

The Council therefore in protest against the breach of faith towards the African people in particular and the cause of world freedom in general, resolves to adjourn this session, and calls upon the government forthwith to abolish all discriminatory legislation affecting Non-Europeans in this country.²⁶

There was some debate about the summary nature of the demand for the immediate abolition of discriminatory legislation but the councillors' anger could not be assuaged and the word "forthwith" preceding the call to abolish all discriminatory legislation, remained in the text of the resolution. The decision to adjourn the NRC indefinitely precluded the members from hearing the government's reply to their resolution, but after some intervention by the ANC's National Executive Committee, a compromise agreement was reached between those of its members who wanted the councillors' immediate resignation from the NRC and those who favoured proceeding slowly. Professor Z.K. Matthews was in the latter group. He did not interpret the call for the immediate abolition of the NRC and discriminatory legislation quite so literally as some of the others. He believed that the councillors intended that government should accept the resolution in principle and proceed "step by step" with abolition. By way of a compromise, the ANC rather contradictorily called for a boycott of all elections under the act and also endorsed the councillors' actions in full, calling upon them to attend the session set aside for 20 November 1946 – if only to hear the government's reply to their resolution.²⁷ In the meanwhile, the people were to continue their struggle for full citizenship and not rely on impotent institutions like the NRC. It was probably one of the last confrontations of the century on the ANC's executive in which the continued tolerance of racially distinct institutions had any currency at all.

When the councillors met to hear the state's response to their resolution, they were told that the government noted "with regret and surprise the violent and exaggerated statement [that the representatives had made]; not in accord with the standards of responsibility to be expected from a body like this Council". The words were those of J.H. Hofmeyr, the acting prime minister, but the sentiments were also those of Smuts, who was conveniently abroad at a session of the UN. Hofmeyr, a liberal by reputation, dismissed all hope of a new dispensation. Nothing in the language or the substance of his response

suggested that he was in tune with the changed mood of the NRC or the country. He lectured the councillors, fatuously telling them that it would not be practicable to accede to their resolution “in the interests of the Native people themselves”. The provisions of the laws to which they objected “were enacted to protect Native interests”. The natives would suffer if they were removed and any changes in existing conditions “must necessarily be gradual”.²⁸ In reply, Matthews described Hofmeyr’s speech as an apology for the status quo and criticised the government for its policies towards Africans on the trade unions, education, housing, health, social security and the Land Act: “we do not share the obvious complacency with which the government appears to regard the situation. The permanent subordination of the bulk of the population to a minority – however well-intentioned – is a policy towards which we cannot subscribe.”²⁹

Two blunt retorts followed this political broadside, one from the elected representatives and the other from government. On the part of the elected representatives, where deference to parliament, the prime minister and the white officials of the Native Affairs Department had given way to a cold and distant stand-off, the formal response of the NRC was predictable. “[T]his Council does not regard the minister’s reply as of such a nature as to allay the anxiety of the African people regarding their place in the body politic of this country”, they declared. Accordingly, they moved that “pending the receipt of a more reassuring reply from the government the proceedings of this Council be suspended”. The state’s retort came in nine words, the next morning: “The government finds itself unable to vary its decisions.”

It was left to Matthews, as chairman of the caucus, to move the adjournment of the session, noting somewhat icily “that the Council was unable to discover [in the chairman’s statement] any disposition on the part of the government to undertake a revision of native policy”. The decision to abort the session was unanimous. Almost six months later (in May 1947), Smuts, utterly out of touch with political reality, summoned Matthews and five other representatives (three of whom were chiefs) to make various proposals to them. According to Kotane, who must have received a report from one of the five, “Smuts wanted to give the councillors a bone to chew at”,³⁰ The report that was given to Kotane stated that he (Smuts) had plans to give the NRC some definite responsibility with regard to the government and management of the reserves. Similarly, he would increase the number of members of the council and make the NRC “an all-Native body”. His plans for the Advisory Boards were to “develop them” and bring their activities under the aegis of the NRC. Kotane’s response to this, which appears to have been supported by the councillors, was that what the government had in mind was that the functions and duties presently performed by the NRC would continue to be performed by that body, while parliament would continue to make oppressive laws – which the NRC would be obliged to enforce.³¹ The reply formulated by Dr A.B. Xuma, as president of the

ANC, was in keeping with this view. It stated simply that “we do not accept any proposal that does not provide for direct representation of all sectors of the community in all legislative bodies”.³²

The election of a National Party government in 1948 meant the permanent denial of any stake in the country for Africans. The ANC had already declared the Natives’ Representation Act of 1936 to be a fraud and (perhaps precipitately) decided to boycott all elections under it. There was no doubt that the NRC had been a platform for debate as well as for the mobilization of African opinion, but there were serious misgivings on whether anything could be achieved by further cooperation with it. The ANC Youth League was vehemently opposed to co-operation with what they called an intransigent and arrogant government, and was against further participation in the NRC. Their argument took greater form in the ANC’s 1949 Programme of Action, still two years down the line in its formation. In the meanwhile, Z.K. Matthews adopted a more moderate view, that it was not the moment for the ending of dialogue, and that the NRC, though fundamentally flawed, was a forum in which African demands could still be directly made to government. The ANC supported his position, (at least until the boycott policy was adopted in 1949). This support, however, was controversial and further debate on the subject was muted. Despite the conflict with the youth, Matthews decided to stand for the NRC again, once more becoming the chairman of the caucus of elected representatives which continued to include some members of the ANC.

Meanwhile, the members of the NRC had had enough of the government’s condescension and contempt for their aspirations. Their patience came to an end when Verwoerd – at the time Minister for Native Affairs – arbitrarily declared a “no politics ban” on the NRC. In their view, what was initially a futile institution had become an absurdity. P.R. Mosaka, impatient with the endless charade, moved that the members reject the ban on political discussions and reaffirm their “determination to exercise [their] unrestricted rights to discuss all matters political and otherwise affecting the interests of the African people”.³³ Matthews and Moroka (whose continued presence on the NRC was already being questioned in the ANC Youth League) soon resigned. In his statement explaining his resignation Matthews said the ANC had other plans – he was referring to the 1949 Programme of Action.

For their part, the NP government similarly had other plans, much more in keeping with the apartheid project than the NRC would allow. In 1951 it passed the Bantu Authorities Act, which provided for the abolition of the NRC and the establishment of tribal authorities in the reserves. These would be appointed or selected by the government. Sam Kahn, still in parliament, commented that the act did not give the Africans self-government. Instead it empowered the minister “to become the Big White Chief of South Africa and appoint a number of ... “carefully selected puppets”.³⁴ In the same vein, S.P.

Sesedi (at the time president of the Local Advisory Boards' Congress of South Africa) more sensitively noted that: "the Bill was an apartheid inspired piece of legislation – another failure in the white man's efforts to think and dream for the Bantu".³⁵

The National Party had no place for the NRC in its plans for the country's future. Mears, the secretary for Native Affairs, communicated this to the NRC, telling them in January 1949, that it "could no longer serve any useful purpose ... it was the government's intention to encourage the local council and Bhunga system throughout the Union, with due regard to ethnic and tribal affiliations".³⁶ Ruth First, reporting for *The Guardian*, wrote in January 1949 that in disbanding the NRC the government hoped to remove what it believed was "the instrument that helps to weld the African people into a whole".³⁷ Nearly all the elected representatives participated in the debate that followed Mears' message. Moroka demanded nothing less for Africans than full equality; Paul Mosaka said "the failure of the NRC was the failure of segregation"; Selope Thema bitterly told the government officials, "the Nationalists want us to go back to the kraals (but they) have ... destroyed the roads leading to [them]". A.G. Champion, Msimang and Z.K. Matthews added their voices to the chorus of protest. Finally, Z.K. reminded the government that it was not that the elected representatives had misused the NRC and "turned their mind to politics" as the government claimed, but that the Council had in fact been established as a political body.³⁸

Meanwhile the ANC was in an uncompromising mood. Its Programme of Action, adopted in December of 1949, turned out to be a sharp retort to the government's policies of "creeping fascism". The programme's terse preamble stated that the fundamental principles of the ANC were inspired by Congress's demands for national freedom and the attainment of political independence and rejected everything motivated by the idea of white domination, including the conception of segregation, apartheid, trusteeship or white leadership – all of them euphemisms for subordination. The ruling party should re-think its policy of second-rate representation, for

[l]ike all other people, the African people claim the right of self determination, direct representation in all government bodies of the country ... the abolition of all segregatory institutions such as the Advisory Boards, the Natives Representative Council and the present form of parliamentary representation for Africans.³⁹

This was backed up by a decision to call a one day general strike to protest against apartheid (two "stay-aways" were in fact held in 1950, one on May Day and the other just prior to the enactment of the Suppression of Communism Act in June 1950.) In what the conference preferred to call a mood of "uncompromising non-collaboration", it decided

overwhelmingly to boycott the government's Education Commission as well as the forthcoming Provincial Council elections, the election of two native representatives for parliament, and an NRC by-election to be held shortly because of the death of one of its founding members, Counsellor Xinewe.

In this mood of militancy, especially among the young lions of the ANC Youth League, Dr A.B. Xuma, still the presiding president of the ANC, was far too conservative. His tenure ended when he voiced his preference for the continued participation of the ANC in the NRC and the Advisory Boards "to fight apartheid from *within*". The youth would not hear of it and during the election (as a result of their intervention and prior-cavassing), the less conservative Dr James Moroka replaced Xuma as president of the organization. The incoming members of the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC) included Walter Sisulu, a rising star in the organization and O.R. Tambo who did not live to witness the liberation of the country, but in a career that justified the potential that his peers saw in him, virtually oversaw the ANC's progress from exile to office. Dan Tloome and Moses Kotane, both of them communists, were also elected to the executive of the ANC at that extraordinary time. It was a path-breaking moment. Not only had the ANC adopted a Programme of Action to achieve political independence, fight for direct parliamentary representation and organize Africans in industry, but they had also changed the pace and parameters of the struggle by their decision to boycott parliamentary and Advisory Board elections and initiate a general strike. Along with their disdain for the NRC and other unrepresentative institutions, they were in no mood to indulge the conservatism of men like Xuma, although Sisulu (in retrospect) thought the treatment of Xuma too harsh. The moment, however, was a militant one, and in order to ensure that their decisions were carried out thoroughly, the young lions insisted on the appointment of a Council of Action to execute the new programme.

The label "native affairs" or "native question", was an offensive way of describing policy that applied to the majority of the population. Z.K. Matthews dismissed both of these descriptions, stating testily that "all South African politics is native affairs". I remember debating this matter in the YCL. As convenor of the Debating Club, I suggested that we adopt Matthews' phrase as the title of the debate. Ruth First proposed this motion and Lucas Masebe, national chairman of the YCL, opposed the motion, playing devil's advocate, a role he did not enjoy. Ruth was an enthusiastic debater and what she lacked in humour she made up with passion for her case. A portion of her speech appeared as a feature article in July 1947 issue of the YCL's newspaper, *Youth for a New South Africa*. She recounted how, under the 1936 Representation of Natives Act, the African voters in the Cape were all but disenfranchised, their names summarily removed from the common

voters' roll and their franchise restricted to the election of three "Europeans" to the House of Assembly and four to the Senate. Despite property and educational qualifications under the old legislation (which did not apply to whites) "it kept numbers down, [but their presence on a common voters' roll] was enough to be important."

I remember her anger most. She reserved this for the whites-only legislature, which had substituted direct representation in parliament for consultation on any matters specially affecting the interests of Africans. All matters, she said, concerned everybody, whether they were connected with health, education, labour, land – or anything else: to beg the question, was "silly". "The NRC was a toy parliament, powerless and ignored ... The African people do not want a dummy parliament. They want a part in the real thing."⁴⁰ She'd begun to enjoy the event and entered the spirit of the debate. Lucas followed. He did not get much support from the members for presenting the puerile case for the other side and of course lost the debate hands down. The final vote, overwhelmingly in favour of the motion, was accompanied by much handclapping and despite some boos for the losers, it was all very good-natured and its success very encouraging.

The phrase "native affairs" virtually died with the Smuts government in May 1948, although the succeeding concepts of "own affairs" and "general affairs" which enjoyed great currency under apartheid, were worse. This was apparent much later, as the concept of apartheid became clearer. By that time it was evident that it was the "white question" rather than the "native question" that was really being addressed, namely how to rationalize the position of a privileged minority in a country with an overwhelming black majority in a world newly conscious of the freedoms it had won in the war against Hitler.

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- 1 Verbatim Report of proceedings of the Natives Representative Council (NRC), 14 and 15 August 1946, p. 43.
 - 2 Three of the elected members represented the urban areas and were elected by the local advisory boards; three were elected by the Transkeian General Council and six represented the rural areas, other than in the Transkei.
 - 3 Provision for consultative conferences was made under the Native Affairs Act, 1920. Conferences were held intermittently, ceasing in 1930. In 1937 the NRC replaced them.
 - 4 Robert Edgar, *The Making of an African Communist: Edwin Thabo Mofutsanyana and the Communist Party of South Africa 1927–1939*, Hidden Histories Series (UNISA Press, Pretoria, 2005), p. 3.
 - 5 *The Guardian*, 10.09.1942.
 - 6 For a fuller profile for the period after 1942, see T. Karis and G. Carter eds, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882–1964, Volume 4: Political Profiles* (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1977), p. 92.
 - 7 Maliba, an activist, was quite different in profile and appearance from Mofutsanyana, two years younger and from a poor peasant family in Venda in the Northern Transvaal. In 1935 he came to Johannesburg, where he was employed as a factory worker. Like Kotane a few years earlier, he enrolled in classes in

the Party night school and became a member of the CPSA in 1936. Soon he joined the Johannesburg District Committee and worked with Mofutsanyana as editor of the Venda section of *Inkululeko*. He remained on the District Committee until the Party was banned in 1950. An activist until the very end, he died tragically in 1967 while in the Louis Trichardt Prison, where he was held under the Terrorism Act. Mofutsanyana was also banned under the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950 and he left for Lesotho where he remained until he died in the 1980s. Both gave their lives to the Movement, never doubting that the future would be a Socialist one.

- 8 Karis and Carter eds, *From Protest to Challenge, Volume 4*, p. 70.
- 9 Five of the white appointees were native commissioners and the sixth, the (white) secretary for Native Affairs, acted as chairman of the council.
- 10 Three of the elected members represented the urban areas and were elected by the local advisory boards; three were elected by the Transkeian General Council and six represented rural areas other than in the Transkei. Votes were cast by chiefs, local councils in rural areas and electoral committees. Each electoral college had as many votes as there were tax payers registered in its area.
- 11 See Z.K. Matthews, *Freedom for My People* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1981), p. 137.
- 12 Dube was the oldest member of the Council, first president-general of the ANC and editor of Natal's first African/English newspaper, *Ilanga lase Natal*. A.W.G. Champion was his rival in the ANC and equally conservative. A leader with Kadalie in the ICU in the 1920s but destructive, he created an independent ICU in Natal but that declined before 1930. He was inserted as acting president general of the ANC during the long absence abroad of the conservative Dr A.B. Xuma who actively sought Champion's cooperation. See Karis and Carter eds, *From Protest to Challenge, Volume 4*, for fuller profiles.
- 13 Karis and Carter eds, *From Protest to Challenge, Volume 4*, p. 80; see at the ANC's Annual Conference in 1953.
- 14 Letter (heavily censored) from Robben Island dated 1 October 1970, written by Nelson Mandela to Professor Matthews' widow, cited in Matthews, *Freedom for My People*, p. 230.
- 15 Hyman Basner was for many years (until 1938) prominent in the CPSA, a natives' representative in the senate for the Transvaal and Orange Free State from 1942–1948. In many respects he set the tone for Sam Kahn by his lively and fearless engagements with reactionary MPs. For a brief portrait see Karis and Carter eds, *From Protest to Challenge, Volume 4*, p. 6. See also an engaging biography of Basner, *Am I an African?* by his wife Miriam Gordon, 1993.
- 16 Verbatim report of the proceedings of the Native Representative Council (NRC), 14 and 15 August 1946, (adjourned ninth session).
- 17 Data for Luthuli and the other profiles were largely drawn from Karis and Carter eds, *From Protest to Challenge, Volume 4*.
- 18 Matthews, *Freedom for My People*, p. 145.
- 19 Matthews, *Freedom for My People*, p. 146.
- 20 Verbatim report of the proceedings of the NRC, 14 and 15 August 1946, p. 8.
- 21 Verbatim report of proceedings of the NRC, 14 and 15 August 1946, p. 8.
- 22 Verbatim report of proceedings of the NRC, 14 and 15 August 1946, pp. 9, 10.
- 23 Verbatim report of proceedings of the NRC, 14 and 15 August 1946, p. 71.

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- 24 Verbatim report of proceedings of the NRC, 14 and 15 August 1946, p. 43.
 - 25 Verbatim report of proceedings of the NRC, 14 and 15 August 1946, p. 67.
 - 26 Verbatim report of proceedings of the NRC, 14 and 15 August 1946, p. 31.
 - 27 Matthews, *Freedom for My People*, p. 147.
 - 28 Matthews, *Freedom for My People*, pp. 148, 149.
 - 29 Matthews, *Freedom for My People*, p. 152.
 - 30 Kotane, in *Freedom*, 6, 3 (June 1947).
 - 31 Kotane, in *Freedom*, 6, 3 (June 1947).
 - 32 Matthews, *Freedom for My People*, pp. 153–155.
 - 33 Report on the proceedings of the NRC, 11th Session, 1950, p. 8.
 - 34 *The Guardian*, 28.06.51.
 - 35 *The Guardian*, 28.06.51.
 - 36 *The Guardian*, 06.01.49.
 - 37 *The Guardian*, 13.01.49.
 - 38 *The Guardian*, 13.01.49.
 - 39 Preamble to the 1949 Programme of Action adopted at the annual conference of the ANC, December 1949, cited in *The Guardian*, 07.07.49.
 - 40 *Youth for a New South Africa*, 2, 6 (July 1947).