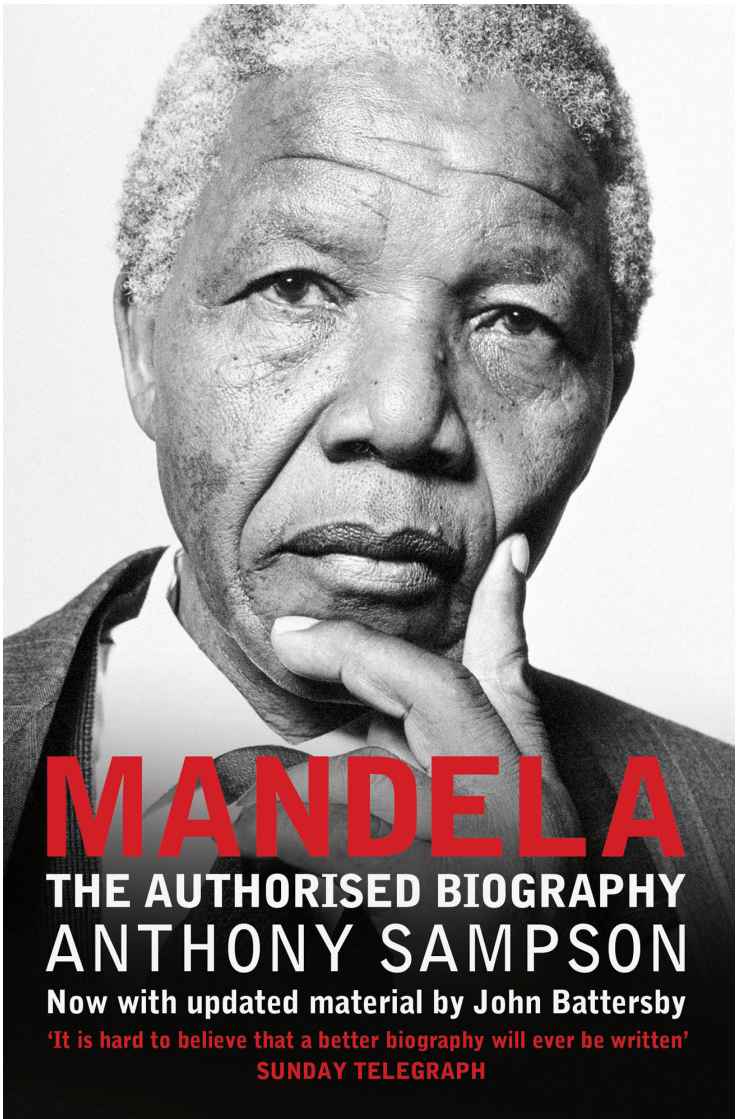

MANDELA

THE AUTHORISED BIOGRAPHY

ANTHONY SAMPSON

Now with updated material by John Battersby

'It is hard to believe that a better biography will ever be written'
SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

Anthony Sampson
Mandela: The Authorised Biography

Аннотация

Widely considered to be the most important biography of Nelson Mandela, Antony Sampson's remarkable book has been updated with an afterword by acclaimed South African journalist, John Battersby.Long after his presidency of South Africa, Nelson Mandela remained an inspirational figure to millions – both in his homeland and far beyond. He has been, without doubt, one of the most important figures in global history. His death, on 5 December 2013 at the age of 95, resonated around the world.Mandela's opposition to apartheid and his 27 year incarceration at the hands of South Africa's all-white regime are familiar to most. In this utterly compelling book, eminent biographer Anthony Sampson draws on a fifty year-long relationship to reveal the man who rocked a continent – and changed its future.With unprecedented access to the former South African president – the letters he wrote in prison, his unpublished jail autobiography, extensive conversations, and interviews with hundreds of colleagues, friends, and family – Sampson depicts the realities of Mandela's private and public life, and the tragic tension between them. Updated after Sampson's death with a new afterword by distinguished

South African journalist John Battersby, this is the ultimate biography of one of the twentieth century's greatest statesmen.

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Mandela

The Authorised Biography

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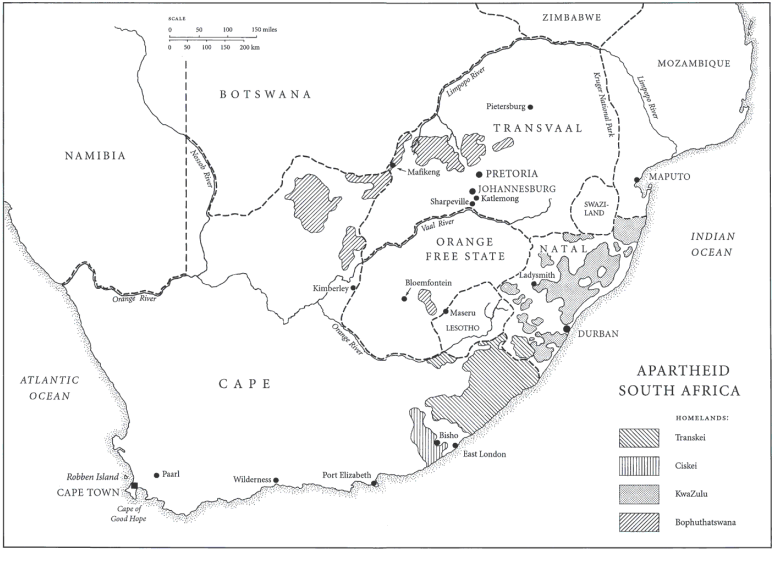
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INTRODUCTION

I am conscious of both the unusual opportunity and the responsibility in undertaking this book. When I wrote to President Mandela in 1995 suggesting an authorised biography he invited me to breakfast in his house in Johannesburg, and told me he would like me to write it because of our long friendship – 'Provided,' he joked, 'that you don't mention that we first met in a shebeen.' He reminded me that he had read my book Anatomy of Britain when he was awaiting trial in 1962. He promised to discuss critical questions with me, to try to ensure that the facts were accurate, and to let me see relevant letters and documents. But he would leave me free to make my own judgements and criticisms: it was important, he said, for the movement to learn from mistakes; and, he insisted, 'I'm no angel.'

It had been my good luck to have first known Mandela in Johannesburg in 1951, and to have seen him at several decisive moments over the next decade before he went to prison. I first encountered him after I had come out to South Africa to edit the black magazine Drum, which opened all doors into the vibrant and exciting world of black writers, musicians and politicians in the Johannesburg in which Mandela moved, and gave me a front seat from which to observe the mounting black opposition to the apartheid government which had come to power in 1948. I attended the ANC conference which approved the Defiance

Campaign of 1952; I watched Mandela organising the first volunteers, and mobilising resistance in 1954 to the destruction of Sophiatown, the multi-racial slum where I had spent many happy evenings. In 1957 I saw him frequently at the Treason Trial, about which I later wrote a book; and in 1960, as a correspondent of the Observer, I covered the Sharpeville crisis and interviewed Mandela in Soweto just after the massacre. My last, poignant sight of him was in 1964, when I was observing the Rivonia trial in Pretoria, which gave me a chance to see the final speech he was then preparing (see pp. 192–3). As a journalist I could not see Mandela during his twenty-seven years in prison, but I revisited black South Africa and kept in touch with exiles in London and elsewhere. In the mid-1980s, when the conflict was escalating, I saw much of Oliver Tambo, the ANC President, in London, and arranged meetings for him with British businessmen. I also talked often to Winnie Mandela by telephone. I returned to Johannesburg for the crises of 1985 and 1986, preparing a book about black politics and business, Black and Gold, before the South African government in 1986 banned me from returning. My ban was temporarily lifted just in time for me to return before Mandela's release from jail in February 1990; later, I visited him twice a week in his Soweto house. Over the next four years I saw him many times, both in London – where he asked me to introduce him at fund-raising receptions – and in Johannesburg, to which I often returned, and where I watched the elections of April 1994.

Since beginning this book I have made several journeys through South Africa with my wife Sally, trying to piece together the jigsaw of Mandela's varied life, while immersing myself in the fast-changing contemporary scene. I have seen President Mandela in contrasted settings: in his offices and mansions in Pretoria and Cape Town, in his own house in Houghton, on Robben Island, at banquets and conferences, in Parliament in Cape Town, at the UN in New York or at state occasions in London. I have travelled to the Great Place where he was brought up in the Transkei, and to his new house in Qunu. I have talked to scores of his old friends and colleagues, but also to his former opponents, whether warders, officials or political leaders – including ex-President P.W. Botha in Wilderness, ex-President F.W. de Klerk in Cape Town, and the former Foreign Minister Pik Botha in the Transvaal.

Mandela's moving autobiography Long Walk to Freedom, published in 1994, has provided his own invaluable record of his political development; I have had generous advice from his collaborator Richard Stengel, whose recorded interviews with Mandela have also been useful. I have also been given access to the unpublished memoir which Mandela wrote in jail, and have seen the original manuscript in his own hand. But Mandela's own autobiography, published when he had first become President, with political discretion and modesty, leaves all the more scope for a many-sided picture which can describe him as others saw him, show how he interacted with friends and enemies, and put

his life into a global context.

In writing this book I have tried to show the harsh realities of Mandela's long and adventurous life as they appeared to him and to his friends at the time, stripped of the gloss of mythology and romance; but also to trace how the glittering image of Mandela was magnified while he was in jail, acquiring its own power and influence across the world; and to show how the prisoner was able to relate the image to reality.

I have given special emphasis to the long years in prison, with the help of extensive interviews, unpublished letters and documents; for Mandela's prison story has unique value to a biographer, with its human intensity and tests of character, providing an intimate play rather than a wide-ranging pageant; and Mandela's relationships with his friends and warders became a universal drama, with a significance that transcended African politics. The prison years are often portrayed as a long hiatus in the midst of Mandela's political career; but I see them as the key to his development, transforming the headstrong activist into the reflective and self-disciplined world statesman.

I also try to put Mandela's life into a wider global context, with the help of his letters and hitherto unpublished diplomatic and intelligence sources. I trace how the Western world misunderstood and mishandled the gathering South African crisis in the 1960s and seventies, and was misled about Mandela and his friends through the obsessions and crusades of the Cold War; how he so nearly disappeared from the world's radar

screens, and how governments and individuals contributed to his triumphant return. I have tried to trace the changing and contradictory perceptions of South Africa in the outside world, providing first dire predictions of an imminent bloodbath, then a model of negotiation and reconciliation, with Mandela at the centre.

In this ambitious task I owe an obvious huge debt to President Mandela himself, who has been generous with his precious time, not only by giving personal interviews, but by reading the draft typescripts. He has corrected points of fact and detail, while honouring the agreement not to interfere with my own judgements; and his lively comments have added rather than subtracted from the original draft. It has been a rare experience to have such exchanges with a major historical figure in his own lifetime, which I hope compensates for any of the limitations of a contemporary biographer.

I also owe debts to Mandela's close friends, some of whom have been friends of mine since the early fifties. Ahmed Kathrada, Mandela's colleague in jail for twenty-five years, has been my chief adviser and a major source throughout the enterprise, and has unlocked doors which would otherwise have remained closed; he has selflessly given long interviews and allowed me to see his valuable letters – which will soon be published. Walter Sisulu, whom I often interviewed in the fifties and sixties, has patiently given his time for long, reflective talks, adding his special insights into the political background and

thinking over fifty years. Mac Maharaj has been through the drafts and has added his unique knowledge of events in and out of jail. Professor Jakes Gerwel, the Secretary of the Cabinet, has given me many ideas and perceptions about Mandela and his government. Nadine Gordimer, my oldest and most valued white South African friend, with whom I usually stayed in Johannesburg, has contributed her unique observations as a close friend of the President and as witness to many historical events. Frank Ferrari, the most distinguished American authority on South Africa, has shared many experiences with me and has added his own judgements. Dr Nthato Motlana, another veteran of the fifties, has been forthcoming with his own witty recollections and insights. Adelaide Tambo, the widow of Oliver Tambo, who has been a friend in both London and Johannesburg, has provided reminiscences and letters which throw new light on the friendship between the Mandelas and the Tambos. George Bizos, Mandela's chief lawyer whom I first met at the Rivonia trial and whom I have seen on every successive visit to South Africa, has been generous with his wisdom and vivid memories from the front line.

Old Drum colleagues, who have witnessed the extraordinary changes in South Africa over five decades, have provided their varied recollections and views. They include Jim Bailey, the former owner of Drum; Es'kia Mphahlele, the former literary editor; Jürgen Schadeberg, the pioneering photographer and picture editor, and Peter Magubane, his distinguished

successor; Arthur Maimane, the versatile writer whom I first lured into journalism in 1951; Esme Matshikiza, widow of the brilliant composer and journalist Todd Matshikiza, together with their son John Matshikiza; and Sylvester Stein, my immediate successor as editor in 1955.

Two former biographers of Mandela, both lifelong friends of the President, have been wonderfully unselfish and forthcoming with advice and documents: Mary Benson, the veteran campaigner against apartheid in London, has had unique insights into the ANC and the Mandela family over forty years; while Fatima Meer, who has seen Mandela through many critical experiences since the fifties, has given me invaluable advice and precious documentation. My old friend Joe Menell generously allowed me to see transcripts of the extensive original interviews for his documentary film about Mandela. For more general advice on difficult problems of biography I am grateful to Michael Holroyd and Arthur Schlesinger.

Among the many new friends who have helped me I am especially grateful to Gail Gerhart, the uniquely well-informed editor of the five-volume history of black politics in South Africa, From Protest to Challenge, which is indispensable to any student of the subject. She has been unstinting in her advice and in sharing her sources, including unpublished documents and interviews. I am grateful to Iqbal Meer, President Mandela's London lawyer, both for making the arrangements for the book, and for very constructive suggestions. I have appreciated the

help of Ismail Ayob, the President's long-standing attorney in Johannesburg. And I have learnt much from Guy Berger and his colleagues at Rhodes University, where I enjoyed a very productive stay.

I have had wonderful assistance from librarians and archivists in South Africa who have put previously unseen documents at my disposal. They include the Brenthurst Library, with its unique collection in Johannesburg; the Cullen Library at Witwatersrand University; the ANC archives in Shell House, Johannesburg and also at Fort Hare University; the valuable Cory Library at Rhodes University, Grahamstown; the Harry Oppenheimer Library at the University of Cape Town; the Mayibuye archive at the University of the Western Cape; and the admirable press cuttings of the Johannesburg Star and the Cape Times. I have also been given access to government archives which must remain more discreet. In London my researcher has used the libraries of the School of Oriental and African Studies and the Institute of Commonwealth Studies; while in Washington the National Security Archive has been wonderfully helpful.

My whole task has been made much easier by the energy and resourcefulness of my research assistant Dr James Sanders, who has been persistent in tracking down documents, checking sources, and finding new avenues of investigation which have unearthed remarkable new information from archives in London, Washington and Pretoria. His contribution has gone far beyond research, and I owe much to his creative and scholarly mind,

which provided ideas, questions and solutions to difficult problems, and made the whole enterprise less lonely and more enjoyable.

Through the stressful process of editing and preparing the book for publication I have enjoyed marvellous support and cooperation from the team at HarperCollins. The first idea of the book came from Stuart Profitt, without whom it would not have happened; but after he left HarperCollins in 1998 it was strongly backed by the chairman Eddie Bell, by my long-suffering editors Richard Johnson and Robert Lacey, and by Helen Ellis the publicity director, all wonderfully committed to the project. I have also benefited from the encouragement and long experience of my American editor, Charles Elliott of Alfred A. Knopf. I am grateful to Jonathan Ball, my publisher in South Africa, for his help and enthusiasm. My indexer Douglas Matthews has, as with previous books, added his scholarship. As always I have been loyally supported by my agent Michael Sissons, who has now seen me through over twenty books. And I could not have got through the task without my assistant Carla Shimeld, who has once again remained efficient and unflappable in producing order out of chaos. Above all, my enjoyment and human understanding of the subject has been magnified by having my wife Sally with me through many of my travels and interviews.

I have been indebted to many people for corrections and clarifications, but I must take full responsibility for any surviving errors; and I will be grateful for any rectifications and suggestions

from readers which I can incorporate in subsequent editions.

I would like to thank all the following people in South Africa who have generously contributed interviews and conversations with myself or my assistant James Sanders (marked with an asterisk):

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In this revised paperback edition I have made some corrections and additions to the original text. I am grateful to all those correspondents who have taken the trouble to suggest changes.

ANTHONY SAMPSON

London, December 1999

PROLOGUE

The Last Hero

WESTMINSTER HALL in London, the ancient heart of the Houses of Parliament, is preparing to honour a visiting head of state, in a ceremony which happens only once or twice in a lifetime. The last such guest of honour was General de Gaulle in 1960; this time, in July 1996, it is President Nelson Mandela. The comparison is apt, for both were solitary, lost leaders who came to be seen as saviours of their country. But Mandela's transformation is much more surprising than de Gaulle's. In the past, many of the politicians in the audience had regarded him as their enemy, who should never be permitted to lead his country. Many Conservative Members of Parliament had condemned him as a terrorist; the former Prime Minister Lady Thatcher, who is sitting near the front, had said nine years before that anyone who thought the African National Congress was ever going to form the government of South Africa was 'living in cloud-cuckoo land'. Now cloud-cuckoo land has arrived in Westminster Hall. But the ceremonials in this medieval hall have legitimised many awkward shifts of loyalty over the centuries, whether from Richard II to Henry IV in 1400 or from Charles I to Oliver Cromwell in 1649. And now all recriminations are drowned in

a fanfare of trumpets.

It is like a scene from grand opera, with Beefeaters lining the steps and helmeted guardsmen at the back of the hall. The Lord Chancellor, Lord Mackay of Clashfern, arrives in his robes of state. Then, at last, the tall, lean figure of Nelson Mandela appears and walks shakily down the grand staircase, holding the hand of the Speaker of the House, Betty Boothroyd: she says afterwards it was the most memorable five minutes of her life. The Labour peer sitting in front of me allows tears to flow down his cheek. The band of the Grenadier Guards plays 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika', for decades the hymn of South Africa's black revolutionaries. The Lord Chancellor makes a modest speech, recalling how this hall has witnessed the slow evolution of democracy, ever since the Magna Carta in 1215, and how Britons and South Africans share the democratic right to one person, one vote. Then he warmly introduces the former revolutionary, who now looks as benign as an old-fashioned English gentleman.

Mandela speaks slowly, with his usual formal emphasis. Although most guests cannot hear him through the echoing acoustics, it is a tough speech which does not please Lady Thatcher, as she says afterwards. He looks back two hundred years, to when Britain first colonised South Africa and seized the land of his forebears. He reminds his audience how the ANC first petitioned the British parliament eight decades ago, in protest against being left to the mercy of the white rulers of the new Union of South Africa. But now, he says, he comes as a friend

of Britain, to the country of allies like William Wilberforce, Fenner Brockway, Archbishop Trevor Huddleston. He goes on to refer to the horrors of racism, whether in South Africa or in Nazi Germany – 'How did we allow these to happen?' – and the appalling massacres and miseries in other parts of Africa; but he ends by looking ahead to the closing of the circle, to Britain and South Africa joining hands to construct a humane Africa.

This is the historic Mandela: the last of the succession of revolutionary leaders in Asia and Africa who fought for their freedom, were imprisoned and reviled, and were eventually recognised as heads of state. But the Afrikaner nationalists were much more ruthless enemies, and he now shows more magnanimity than his predecessors, giving hope both to his own people and to others that they can bridge their own racial chasms. He has become a universal hero at the end of the twentieth century. In a time of vote-counters, spin-doctors and focus groups, he conjures up an earlier age of liberators, war leaders and revolutionaries. To conservative traditionalists he evokes memories of great men who personified their own country; to the liberal left, battered by lost causes, he brings new hope that righteous crusades can still prevail; his three decades in jail cut him off from the surge of materialism and consumerism that swept through the Western world.

As Mandela goes through the pompous routines of a state visit, he even brings new life to the British monarchy itself, under siege with its own troubles. Some of the audience go straight from

Westminster Hall to the Dorchester Hotel, where he is giving a banquet for the Queen. He arrives with her, looking both more regal and more at ease than the monarch as he lopes between the guests. At the end of the lunch he gives another brief speech, reminding the Queen that he's just a country boy, thanking her for opening all doors to British society and for letting him walk in her garden early in the morning. The Queen's relaxation in his company is obvious as they talk. 'She's got a lot in common with him,' one courtier explains. 'You see, they've both spent a lot of time in prison.'

In the evening another Mandela is presented to the young generation: the showbiz idol and friend of pop stars. He is the guest of Prince Charles, together with most of the royal family, for a concert attended by five thousand people at the Albert Hall. Mandela has always praised musicians for their role in confronting racism, and for agitating for his release from jail; now they have gathered to pay him tribute, beginning with Phil Collins' Big Band and ending with a triumphant finale led by the South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela. The whole audience clap and sway. In the royal box Mandela jumps to his feet and begins jiving, jauntily swinging his arms. Prince Charles awkwardly begins to shuffle, the Queen makes some cautious claps, and even Prince Philip is seen to tilt. Beside them Mandela seems like a fantasy monarch: the man with rhythm who can swing and dance with his subjects.

The next morning there is another Mandela: the champion

of the underdog, the people's president who can bring all the races together. With Prince Charles he makes a tour of the multi-racial south London suburb of Brixton, where he is greeted by a huge crowd of black and white Londoners. From there he goes on to Trafalgar Square, dominated on one side by South Africa House, the old fortress of apartheid which is now the symbol of liberation. The square is closed to traffic, and is packed solid with people wearing Mandela T-shirts and waving flags. As he walks slowly through the crowd children gaze in wonder, and reach out to touch him. When he appears on the balcony of South Africa House he seems more like a pope blessing the crowd than a politician: 'I would like to put each and every one of you in my pocket.' He talks about love, without embarrassment: 'I am not very nervous of love, for love is very inspiring.'

Why should an elderly African politician attract such unique affection – not just in Britain, but throughout Europe, America and Asia – at a time when politicians everywhere are more distrusted than ever before? What has happened, I cannot help wondering, to the stiff, proud young lawyer and revolutionary whom I first knew in Johannesburg in the fifties, who looked so suspiciously at the hostile white world and made fierce speeches denouncing the British imperialists? What has changed that young man's flashing smile into the welcoming grin which seems so genuinely warm?

From Trafalgar Square he goes on to the Dorchester, where I have the chance to talk to him briefly in private. He is in

a euphoric mood, delighted by his welcome from the Queen and from the crowd in Brixton. He recalls how he first visited London in 1962 when he was on the run as a 'raw revolutionary', two months before he went to jail for twenty-seven years. I ask him why he seems so transformed. He laughs: 'Perhaps I was defensive then.' Now he seems totally at ease with everyone, including himself; but he makes it clear, as always, that he does not wish to talk about his own feelings.

It is not easy for a biographer to portray the Nelson Mandela behind the icon: it is rather like trying to make out someone's shape from the wrong side of the arc-lights. The myth is so powerful that it blurs the realities, turning everything into show business and attracting Hello! magazine as much as the New York Times. It is a myth which fascinates children as much as adults, the world's favourite fairy-tale: the prisoner released from the dark dungeon, the pauper who turns out to be a prince, the bogeyman who proves to be the wizard. Cynical politicians also wipe away tears in Mandela's presence, perhaps seeing him as a secular saint who makes their own profession seem noble, who rises above their failings. Some have warned me: 'I don't want to hear anything bad about him.'

But it is not realistic to portray Mandela as a saint, and he himself has never pretended to be one: 'I'm no angel.' No saint could have survived in the political jungle for fifty years, and achieved such a worldly transformation. Mandela has his share of human weaknesses, of stubbornness, pride, naïveté,

impetuousness. And behind his moral authority and leadership, he has always been a consummate politician. 'I never know whether I'm dealing with a saint or with Machiavelli,' one of his closest colleagues has said. His achievement has been dependent on mastering politics in its broadest and longest sense, on understanding how to move and persuade people, to change their attitudes. He has always been determined, like Gandhi or Churchill, to lead from the front, through his example and presence; and he learnt early how to build up and understand his own image.

For all his international acclaim, Mandela remains very African: and in Africa he emerges even more clearly than elsewhere as the master of politics. A week after his visit to Britain he is giving a birthday party in the grounds of his official mansion in Pretoria for 'veterans of the struggle'. Coachloads of guests, including ancient grandmothers and grandfathers, converge on the huge marquee. Mandela appears at one end, towering above them, luminous in a brightly coloured loose shirt, while his bodyguards dart to and fro to cover his highly visible back. He works the room like any presidential candidate, revelling in the love from the crowd, spotting distant faces, remembering names, radiating goodwill and reaching out with his big boxer's hands. He fixes each guest with an intimate look, a personal smile, listening apparently intently – 'I see, I see' – leaving them glowing with pride and pleasure. He moves to the middle of the marquee to welcome his special guests, enfolding

them in his bony embrace, including his cabinet and a few white friends like Helen Suzman and Nadine Gordimer. He sits between two friends of fifty years' standing, Walter Sisulu and Ahmed Kathrada. But he remains the arch-politician, showing little difference between his political and private self, relating to everyone in the same hearty style.

And he has his own agenda of nation-building, which he explains in an impromptu speech, without spectacles, with no journalists to report it. He has invited his guests, he says, because each of them has made some contribution to South Africa's peaceful transformation; but also to remind them where they came from: 'The history of liberation heroes shows that when they come into office they interact with powerful groups: they can easily forget that they've been put in power by the poorest of the poor. They often lose their common touch, and turn against their own people.' Here Mandela is playing his last political game, for the highest stakes: to hold together the disparate South African nation. 'I'm prepared to do anything,' he says later 'to bring the people of this country closer together.'

As the band strikes up and the real party begins, the old man at the top table surveys the scene. The musicians and singers include stars of the fifties like Dolly Rathebe and Thandi Klaasens, who conjure up memories of Mandela's youth in Johannesburg. The guests come from every stage of his long political career: country tribespeople who still see him as a traditional ruler; white and Indian communists who shared his struggle in the

fifties and sixties; ex-prisoners from Robben Island who hacked limestone with him in the quarry; white businessmen who condemned him as a terrorist until the nineties, then welcomed him to their dinner parties. With each group he extended his political horizons, and he moves casually between them all, slipping easily from township slang to financial jargon. But in repose, he suddenly gives a glimpse of another Mandela, with a turned-down mouth and a weary gaze of infinite loneliness, as if the scene around him is only a show. And behind all his gregariousness he still maintains an impenetrable reserve, defending his private hinterland, which seems much deeper than that of other politicians.

A few days after the party, in his sombre presidential office in the Union Buildings in Pretoria, he reflects quietly about the hectic past two weeks. He happily remembers the warmth and enthusiasm of his welcome in Britain, but he becomes much more intimate when he goes on to talk about his twenty-seven years in jail. He recalls again how he came to realise in prison that the warders could be good or bad, like any other people. 'It was a tragedy to lose the best days of your life, but you learnt a lot. You had time to think – to stand away from yourself, to look at yourself from a distance, to see the contradictions in yourself.'

He still seems to keep his prison cell inside him, protecting him from the outside world, controlling his emotions, providing a philosopher's detachment. It was in jail that he developed the subtler art of politics: how to relate to all kinds of people, how to

persuade and cajole, how to turn his warders into his dependants, and how eventually to become master in his own prison. He still likes to quote from W.E. Henley's Victorian poem 'Invictus': 'I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.'

In this book I try to penetrate the Mandela icon, to show the sometimes harsh realities of his long and adventurous journey, stripped of the gloss of mythology; and to discover how this most private man relates to this most public myth. I try to penetrate into the prison years, when for almost three decades he was hidden from the glare of public politics, and gained the detachment which steeled him for the ordeals ahead. And I try to trace the unchanging man behind all the Mandelas in his bewildering and wide-ranging career: the son of an African chief who retained many of his rural values while bestriding the global stage.

PART I

1918–1964

1

Country Boy

1918–1934

FEW PARTS of South Africa are more remote from city life than the Transkei, six hundred miles south of Johannesburg. It is one of the most beautiful but also one of the poorest regions of the country. The limitless vistas of rolling hills, pale green grass and round thatched huts, with herdboys and shepherds driving their flocks between them, present an almost Biblical vision of a timeless, idyllic, pastoral life. But the beauty is skin-deep: the land is desperately overpopulated, and the thin soil is so eroded that it can only sustain scattered groups of scrawny cattle or sheep and sporadic crops of maize.

It is here that Nelson Mandela was born and brought up, and here that he has built the house to which he retreats for Christmases and holidays, and where he intends to retire. It is a large red-brick bungalow with Spanish-style arches alongside the main road, the N2 from Durban to Cape Town, a few miles south of Umtata, Transkei's biggest town. It stands at the end of an avenue of cypresses, surrounded by a wall and a bushy garden which cuts it off from the open countryside. Mandela conceived the house during his last year in jail, and based its floor-plan on the warder's house in the prison compound where he was living. He chose the site, which looks over his home district of Qunu, in the belief that 'a man should die near where he was born'.

Mandela's actual birthplace is several miles south, in the small village of Mvezo on the banks of the winding Mbashe (Bashee) river, where his father was hereditary chief. (The family's group of huts, or kraal, is no longer there: in 1988 Mandela, then in jail, would ask a local lawyer to locate it, but he could find no trace.[1]) Rolihlahla Mandela was born in Mvezo on 18 July 1918 – at a time, he would later reflect, when the First World War was coming to an end, the Bolshevik revolution in Russia was being consolidated, and the newly-formed African National Congress sent a deputation to London to plead for the rights of black South Africans. The British Cape Colony, which included the 'native reserve' of the Transkei, had been absorbed into the Union of South Africa in 1910, and three years later the Native Land Act dispossessed hundreds of thousands of black farmers, many of whom trekked to the Transkei, the only large area where Africans could own land. The Transkei has produced more black leaders than any other region of South Africa, and it was with this history that they were brought up.

Rolihlahla's father, Hendry Mandela, suffered his own dispossession. The year after his son was born the local white magistrate summoned Hendry to answer a tribesman's complaint about an ox. Hendry refused to come, and was promptly charged with insubordination and deposed from the chieftainship, losing most of his cattle, land and income. The family moved from their ancestral kraal in Mvezo to the nearby village of Qunu, where the boy Mandela would spend his next few years. Although

their fortunes had suddenly declined, they kept together without too much hardship. They shared food and simple pleasures with cousins and friends, and Mandela never felt alone: in later life he would look back warmly on that collective spirit and sense of shared responsibility, before Western influences began to introduce competition and individualism.

Hendry Mandela was a strict father, with a stubbornness which his son suspects he inherited. He was illiterate, pagan and polygamous; but he was tall and dignified, darker than his son, and with no sense of inferiority towards whites. He inhabited a self-contained rural world with its own established customs and rituals. He had four wives, of whom Mandela's mother, Nosekeni Fanny, was the third. Each had her own kraal, which was more or less self-sufficient, with its own fields, livestock and vegetables.[2] Hendry would move between the different kraals visiting his wives, who appear to have been on good terms with each other. He kept some home-brewed liquor in his hut, with a bottle of brandy in the cupboard which would last three or four months. He respected tribal customs: when a baby was born he slaughtered a goat and erected its horns in the house.[3]

Hendry never became a Christian, but he had some Christian friends, including the Reverend Tennyson Makiwane, a scholarly community leader who was part of the elite of the Transkei (his offspring were later to be controversial members of the ANC).[4] He was also close to the Mbekela brothers, George and Ben,

who belonged to the separate tribal group called Amamfengu, or 'Fingoes'; this group remained apart from the Xhosa people, and were more influenced by missionaries and Western customs, many of them becoming teachers, clergymen or policemen. The Mbekela brothers converted Mandela's mother to Methodism, after which she began wearing Western dresses instead of Xhosa garb. She had her son baptised as a Methodist, and later the brothers persuaded both parents that Mandela should go to the local mission school – the first member of the family to do so.

Mandela's sisters Mabel and Leabie would recall with pleasure the simple country life of their childhood in Qunu, revolving around the three round huts or rondavels in their mother's kraal – one for sleeping, one for cooking, one for storing food – fenced off with poles. The rondavels were made by their mother from soil moulded into bricks; the simple chairs and cupboards were also made of soil, and the stove was a hole in the ground. There were no beds or tables, only mats. The roofs were made of grass held together with ropes.[5] They lived largely on maize, which was stored in holes (izisele) in the kraals. The boys spent the day herding the cattle, and the girls and women of the family prepared the food together in one of the houses, grinding the maize between stones, cooking it in black three-legged metal pots and mixing it with sour milk. The family would all take the main meal together in the evening, sitting on the ground eating from a single dish.

Mandela's father already had three sons by other wives, but

they had already left home. As a boy, he had much more freedom than his sisters. He was very close to his mother, but would often stay with another of his father's wives, with whom he felt the same security and love as with Nosekeni Fanny. Throughout his life he would always feel most at ease with women – particularly with strong women who could provide rewarding friendships, which may be linked to his childhood experience. He thrived within his extended family of cousins, stepmothers and half-brothers and-sisters (Bantu languages have no words for stepsisters or stepmothers, so he called all his father's wives his 'mothers'). 'I had mothers who were very supportive and regarded me as their son,' he recalled. 'Not as their stepson or half-son, as you would say in the culture amongst whites. They were mothers in the proper sense of the word.' His happy experience as a son loved by four mothers made his childhood very secure, and he sometimes talks nostalgically about polygamy at that time, although he firmly rejects it in today's conditions: 'Quite inexcusable. It shows contempt for women, and it's something I discourage totally.'[6]

In his letters and memoirs Mandela often harks back to his life as a country boy. From his prison cell he wrote vividly about the splendour of the hills and streams, the pleasures of swimming in the pools, drinking milk straight from the cows' udders or eating maize roasted on the cob. Many world leaders, caught up in power-politics in the capitals, have played up their romantic rural roots, like Lloyd George revisiting his Welsh village or

Lyndon Johnson longing for his Texas ranch. But President Mandela would be more insistent in calling himself a country boy; and with more reason, for the security and simplicity of his rural upbringing played a crucial part in forming his political confidence.

He was also fortified by his knowledge of his ancestors. His father was the grandson of Ngubengcuka, the great king of the Tembu people who died in 1832, before the British finally imposed their power on Tembuland, the southern part of the Transkei. The Tembu royal family, however poor and dependent they might seem to whites, retained a special grandeur in the Transkei, commanding the loyalty and respect of their people. Mandela was a minor royal, and he always stressed that he was never in the line of succession to the throne.[7] He was only one of scores of descendants of King Ngubengcuka, and he came from a junior line. But his father was a trusted friend and confidant of King Dalindyebo, who had succeeded to the Tembu throne, and later of his son King Jongilizwe. Hendry in fact was a kind of prime minister, and the boy Mandela commanded respect in his community.

His was a royal family, as they saw it, but under an occupying force, for since the time of Ngubengcuka their powers had been circumscribed: first by the British government, then after 1910 by the new Union of South Africa, and the Transkei monarchs were torn between their duties to their people and the demands of an alien power. However proud and respected the Tembu royals

remained, they were always conscious that the new patricians, the British and the Afrikaners, had deprived them of their authority and wealth. When the young Mandela began to travel beyond his home district, he saw that the towns in the Eastern Cape – Port Shepstone, King William's Town, Port Elizabeth, Alice – were named after British, not Xhosa, heroes, and that the white men were the real overlords.

Many mission-educated children of Mandela's generation were named after British imperial heroes and heroines like Wellington, Kitchener, Adelaide or Victoria, and at the age of seven Mandela acquired a new first name, to precede Rolihlahla. 'From now on you will be Nelson,' said his teacher. His mother pronounced it 'Nelisile', while others would later call him 'Dalibunga', his circumcision name. His later city friends called him 'Nelson' or 'Nel', until he expressed a preference for his clan name, 'Madiba', which the whole nation was to adopt.

In 1927 Mandela, then aged nine, came closer to royalty. His father had been suffering from lung disease, and was staying in Mandela's mother's house. His friend Jongintaba, the Regent of the Tembu people, was visiting, and Mandela's sister Mabel overheard Hendry telling him: 'Sir, I leave my orphan to you to educate. I can see he is progressing and aims high. Teach him and he will respect you.' The Regent replied: 'I will take Rolihlahla and educate him.' Soon afterwards Hendry died. His body was carried on a sledge to his first wife's house, and a cow was slaughtered; but he was also given a Christian funeral

conducted by the Mbekela brothers, and was buried in the local cemetery.[8]

Mandela was taken by his mother on a long journey by foot from Qunu to the 'Great Place' of Mqhekezweni. It was from here that the Regent presided over his people as acting king, since the heir apparent, Sabata, was too young to rule. Jongintaba, who was also head of the Madiba clan, was indebted to Mandela's father for recommending him as Regent, which may explain why he so readily agreed to adopt Mandela as if he were his own son. But the tradition of the extended family was much stronger in rural areas than in the towns, for which Mandela remained grateful. As he wrote from jail: 'it caters for all those who are descended from one ancestor and holds them together as one family'.[9]

The Great Place at Mqhekezweni hardly conforms to the European image of a royal palace. Even today it remains ruggedly inaccessible, and is difficult to reach by car. From the main road a rough, deeply-rutted dirt track twists across the landscape, down into dried-up riverbeds and up stony banks, passing isolated clusters of rondavels and huts and a deserted railway station. At last a small settlement appears: two plain houses facing a group of rondavels, with an overgrown garden between them, a school building and some huts beyond. From one house a fine-looking, naturally dignified man emerges and reveals himself as the local chief, the grandson of Jongintaba; he still presides over the local community. He points out the plain rondavel where President Mandela lived as a boy. A

photograph on the wall of one of the houses shows the fine face of Jongintaba, with a trim moustache. Nearby is a solemn-looking young Mandela, alongside his smiling face on an election poster of 1994.

To the Western visitor today the Great Place may seem small and remote, but to the young Mandela in 1927 it was the centre of the world, and Mqhekezweni was a metropolis compared to the huts of Qunu. It was here that Mandela spent his most formative years and gained the impressions of kingship which were to influence his whole life. He would never forget the moment when he first saw the Regent arriving in a spectacular motor car, welcomed by his people with shouts of 'Aaah! Jongintaba!' (The scene would be re-enacted seventy years later when President Mandela was hailed by cries of 'Aaah! Dalibunga!') Mqhekezweni was more prosperous then, and almost self-sufficient; its chief was then also regent, attracting tribesmen from all over Tembuland to consult him.

The nine-year-old boy arrived with only a tin trunk, wearing an old shirt and khaki shorts roughly cut from his father's old riding breeches, with a piece of string as a belt. His cousin Ntombizodwa, four years older, remembered him as shy, lonely and quite silent, but he was immediately welcomed by Jongintaba and his wife No-England.[10] Mandela shared with their son Justice a small whitewashed rondavel containing two beds, a table and an oil lamp. He was treated as one of the family, together with Jongintaba's daughter Nomafu, and later with Nxeko, the

elder brother of Sabata, the heir to the kingdom. He saw himself as a member of a royal family, with a much grander style of life than that of Qunu; but he did not altogether belong to it – which may have spurred his ambition.

The Regent, Jongintaba, otherwise known as David Dalindyebo, became Mandela's new father-figure. He was a handsome man, always very well-dressed; Mandela lovingly pressed his trousers, inspiring his lifelong respect for clothes. Jongintaba was a committed Methodist – though he enjoyed his drink – and prayed every day at the nearby church run by his relative the Reverend Matyolo. His son Justice, four years Mandela's elder, was to be his role model for the next decade, the ideal of worldly prowess and elegance, as sportsman, dandy and ladies' man. Justice was an all-rounder, excelling in team sports like cricket, soccer and rugby. Mandela, less well co-ordinated, made his mark in more rugged and individual sports like boxing and long-distance running. A photograph shows Justice as bright-eyed, confident and combative, while the young Mandela was less assertive, and strove to acquire Justice's assurance. Justice was after all the heir to the chieftaincy, while Mandela depended on the Regent's favours.

Mandela loved the country pleasures at Mqhekezweni, which were more numerous in those days than they are now, and included riding horses and dancing to the tribal songs of Xhosa girls (how different, he reflected in jail, from his later delight in Miriam Makeba, Eartha Kitt or Margot Fonteyn). But Mandela

was also more serious and harder-working than the other boys. He thrived at the local mission school, where he began to learn English from Chambers' English Reader, writing on a slate and speaking the words carefully, with a slow formality and the local accent which never left him.

Whites were hardly visible at Mqhekezweni, except for occasional passers-by. Mandela's sister Mabel remembers being impressed when he and his schoolfriends met a white man who needed help because his motorbike had broken down, and Mandela was able to speak to him in English.[11] But Mabel could also be quite frightened of Mandela: 'He didn't like to be provoked. If you provoked him he would tell you directly … He had no time to fool around. We could see he had leadership qualities.'[12]

A crucial part of Mandela's education lay in observing the Regent. He was fascinated by Jongintaba's exercise of his kingship at the periodic tribal meetings, to which Tembu people would travel scores of miles on foot or on horseback. Mandela loved to watch the tribesmen, whether labourers or landowners, as they complained candidly and often fiercely to the Regent, who listened for hours impassively and silently, until finally at sunset he tried to produce a consensus from the contrasting views. Later, in jail, Mandela would reflect:

One of the marks of a great chief is the ability to keep together all sections of his people, the traditionalists and reformers, conservatives and liberals, and on major questions there are

sometimes sharp differences of opinion. The Mqhekezweni court was particularly strong, and the Regent was able to carry the whole community because the court was representative of all shades of opinion.[13]

As President, Mandela would seek to reach the same kind of consensus in cabinet; and he would always remember Jongintaba's advice that a leader should be like a shepherd, directing his flock from behind by skilful persuasion: 'If one or two animals stray, you go out and draw them back to the flock,' he would say. 'That's an important lesson in politics.'[14]

Mandela was brought up with the African notion of human brotherhood, or 'ubuntu', which described a quality of mutual responsibility and compassion. He often quoted the proverb 'Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,' which he would translate as 'A person is a person because of other people,' or 'You can do nothing if you don't get the support of other people.' This was a concept common to other rural communities around the world, but Africans would define it more sharply as a contrast to the individualism and restlessness of whites, and over the following decades ubuntu would loom large in black politics. As Archbishop Tutu defined it in 1986: 'It refers to gentleness, to compassion, to hospitality, to openness to others, to vulnerability, to be available to others and to know that you are bound up with them in the bundle of life.'[15]

Mandela regarded ubuntu as part of the general philosophy of

serving one's fellow men. From his adolescence, he recalled, he was viewed as being unusually ready to see the best in others. To him this was a natural inheritance: 'People like ourselves brought up in a rural atmosphere get used to interacting with people at an early age.' But he conceded that, 'It may be a combination of instinct and deliberate planning.' In any case, it was to become a prevailing principle throughout his political career: 'People are human beings, produced by the society in which they live. You encourage people by seeing good in them.'[16]

Mandela's admiration for tribal traditions and democracy was reinforced by the Xhosa history that he picked up from visiting old chiefs and headmen. Many of them were illiterate, but they were masters of the oral tradition, declaiming the epics of past battles like Homeric bards. The most vivid story-teller, Chief Joyi, like Mandela a descendant of the great King Ngubengcuka, described how the unity and peace of the Xhosa people had been broken by the coming of the white men, who had divided them, dispossessed them and undermined their ubuntu.[17] Mandela would often look back to this idealised picture of African tribal society. He described it in a long speech in 1962, shortly before he began his prison sentence:

Then our people lived peacefully, under the democratic rule of their kings and their amapakati, and moved freely and confidently up and down the country without let or hindrance. Then the country was ours, in our own name and right. We occupied the land, the forests, the rivers; we extracted the mineral

wealth below the soil and all the riches of this beautiful country. We set up and operated our own government, we controlled our own armies and we organised our own trade and commerce.

It was, in his eyes, a golden age without classes, exploitation or inequality, in which the tribal council was a model of democracy:

The council was so completely democratic that all members of the tribe could participate in its deliberations. Chief and subject, warrior and medicine man, all took part and endeavoured to influence its decisions. It was so weighty and influential a body that no step of any importance could ever be taken by the tribe without reference to it.[18]

The history of the Xhosas was very much alive when Mandela was a child, and old men could remember the time when they were still undefeated. The pride and autonomy of the Transkei and its Xhosa-speaking tribes – the Tembus, the Pondos, the Fingoes and the Xhosas themselves – had survived despite the humiliations of conquest and subjection over the previous century. Some Xhosas had intermarried with other peoples, including the Khoikhoi (called 'Hottentots' by white settlers), which helped to give a wide variety to their physical features: Mandela's own distinctive face, with his narrow eyes and strong cheekbones, has sometimes been explained by Khoikhoi blood.[19] But the Xhosas retained their distinctive culture and language. Many white colonists who first encountered them in the late eighteenth century were impressed by their physique, their light skin and sensitive faces, and their democratic system of debate

and government: 'They are equal to any English lawyers in discussing questions which relate to their own laws and customs,' wrote the missionary William Holden in 1866. In the 1830s the British Commander Harry Smith called the Xhosa King Hintsa 'the very image of poor dear George IV'.[20] But, over the course of a hundred years and nine Xhosa wars, the British forces moving east from the Cape gradually deprived the Xhosas of their independence and their land. By 1835 Harry Smith had crossed the river Kei to begin the subjugation of the Transkei. By 1848 he had imposed his own English system on the Xhosa chiefs, informing them that their land 'shall be divided into counties, towns and villages, bearing English names. You shall all learn to speak English at the schools which I shall establish for you … You may no longer be naked and wicked barbarians which you will ever be unless you labour and become industrious.'[21] In the eighth Xhosa war in 1850 the British Army – after setbacks which strained it to its limit and atrocities committed by both sides – drove the Xhosa chiefs out of their mountain fastnesses and firmly occupied 'British Kaffraria', later called the Ciskei. The Tembu chiefs who ruled the southern part of the Transkei had been relatively unscathed by the earlier wars, but now they were subjugated and sent to the terrible prison on Robben Island, just off the coast from Cape Town, which became notorious in Xhosa folklore.

After this humiliation and impoverishment, in 1856 the Xhosas accomplished their own self-destruction. A young

prophetess, Nongqawuse, told them to kill all their cattle and to prepare for a resurrection. As a result, over half the population of the Ciskei starved to death. By the end of the ninth Xhosa war in 1878 the two chief houses of the Xhosa people, the Ngqika and the Gcaleka, had been subjugated and were forced into a new exodus across the Kei. Successive leaders were sent to Robben Island, in keeping with the order of Sir George Grey, the Governor of the Cape, 'for the submission of every chief of consequence; or his disgrace if he were obdurate'.[22]

It was not till 1894 that Pondoland, in the northern part of the Transkei, came under the Cape administration. But after the Union of South Africa came into being in 1910, the Xhosas faced growing controls by white magistrates. The whites, as Mandela came to see it, captured the institution of the chieftaincy, and 'used it to suppress the aspirations of their own tribesmen. So they almost destroyed the chieftaincy.'[23]

In the later nineteenth century the Zulus, the other major tribal power to the north, became more famous among whites and foreigners as ruthless fighters than the Xhosas, particularly the Zulu warrior-king Shaka, who had set out to conquer and unify all the southern tribes in the 1820s. The Zulus attracted the admiration of many British churchmen, including the dissident Bishop John William Colenso of Natal; but they acquired unique military fame in January 1879 when the British provoked a war with Shaka's successor Cetewayo, whose army completely destroyed a British force of 1,200 at the battle of Isandhlwana.

When the British sent out reinforcements they included the Prince Imperial, son of Louis Napoleon, who was ambushed and speared to death by Zulu assegais. ('A very remarkable people the Zulus,' said Disraeli. 'They defeat our generals, they convert our bishops, they have settled the fate of a great European dynasty.'[24]) The humiliation of Isandhlwana was finally avenged in July when the British crushed Cetewayo at the battle of Ulundi and subjugated the Zulus; but their reputation for fighting spirit remained.

The Xhosa chiefs appeared less martial and intransigent than the Zulus, and after the Xhosa wars they seemed defeated and demoralised – sometimes with the help of alcohol. But out of the desolation of the Xhosa wars another tradition was growing up, that of mission schools and Christian culture, which gradually produced a new Xhosa elite of disciplined, well-educated young men and women. While embracing Western ideas, they still aspired to restore the rights and dignity of their own people. The British liberal tradition was reasserting itself in the Cape, with the expansion of the mission stations and the introduction of a qualified vote for blacks. Educated young Xhosas were exploiting the aptitude for legal argument, analysis and debate which early white visitors had observed. It was a route that would in time lead some of them into the political campaigns of the black opposition in the 1960s – sometimes called the tenth Xhosa war – and, like their predecessors, to Robben Island; but they would win their battle, and not through military might, but

through their skills in argument and reasoning.

Like other conquered peoples such as the Scots or the American Indians, the Xhosas retained their own version of history which, being largely oral, was easily ignored by the outside world. 'The European insisted that we accept his version of the past,' said Z.K. Matthews, the African professor who would teach Mandela. But 'it was utterly impossible to accept his judgements on the actions and behaviour of Africans, of our own grandfathers in our own lands'.[25] Mandela, despite all his Western education, would always champion oral historians, and would continue to be inspired by the spoken stories of the Xhosas which he had heard from his elders: 'I knew that our society had produced black heroes and this filled me with pride: I did not know how to channel it, but I carried this raw material with me when I went to college.'[26] While most white historians regarded the Xhosa rebellions as firmly placed in the past, overlaid by the relentless logic of Western conquest and technology, Mandela, like other educated Xhosas, saw the white occupation as a recent interlude, and would never forget that his great-grandfather ruled a whole region a century before he was born.

2

Mission Boy

1934–1940

IN 1934, when he was sixteen, Mandela went with twenty-five other Tembu boys, led by the Regent's son Justice, to an isolated valley on the banks of the Bashee river, the traditional setting for the circumcision of future Tembu kings. No rural Xhosa could take office without this ritual. Mandela would vividly remember the ceremony which marked the coming of manhood: the days spent beforehand with the other boys in the 'seclusion lodges'; singing and dancing with local women on the night before the ceremony; bathing in the river at dawn; parading in blankets before the elders and the Regent himself, who watched the boys to see that they behaved with courage.

The old circumcisor (incibi) appeared with his assegai, and when their turn came the boys had to cry out 'I am a man!'[1] Mandela was tense and anxious, and when the assegai cut off his foreskin he remembered it as feeling like molten lead flowing through his veins. He briefly forgot his words as he pressed his head into the grass, before he too shouted out, 'I am a man!' But he was conscious that he was not naturally brave: 'I was not as forthright and strong as the other boys.'[2]

After the ceremony was over, when they had buried their foreskins, covered their faces in white ochre and then washed

it off in the river, Mandela was proud of his new status as a man, with a new name – Dalibunga, meaning the founder of the council – who could walk tall and face the challenges of life. He still felt himself to be part of a proud tribe, and was shocked when Chief Meligqili told the boys that they would never really be men because they were a conquered people who were slaves in their own country.[3] It was not until ten years later that Mandela would recognise that chief as the forerunner of brave politicians like Alfred Xuma and Yusuf Dadoo, James Phillips and Michael Harmel. In the meantime he would take great pride in his circumcised manliness and the superiority it implied; at university he was shocked to learn that one of his friends had not been circumcised. Only when he later became immersed in politics in Johannesburg did he, as he put it, 'crawl out of the prejudice of my youth and accept all people as equals'.[4]

Mandela soon had to make a more fundamental social transition – into the midst of a rigorous missionary schooling. The Regent was determined to have him properly educated, as a prospective counsellor to Sabata, the future king, so he sent him to board at the great Methodist institution of Clarkebury, across the Bashee river, which had educated both the Regent and his son Justice, and would educate Sabata. For the Tembu royal family Clarkebury had a special resonance: it was founded in 1825, when King Ngubengcuka, Mandela's great-grandfather, had met the pioneering Methodist William Shaw and promised to give

him land to set up a mission.[5] The station was duly founded by the Reverend Richard Haddy, some miles from the king's Great Place, and named in honour of a distinguished British theologian, Dr Adam Clarke.

The Methodists were the most adventurous and influential of the missionaries who had penetrated the Eastern Cape at the same time as the British armies – sometimes in league with them, sometimes at odds. To many Xhosa patriots missionaries were essentially the agents of British governments, who used them to divide and disarm the rival chiefs: the Trotskyist writer 'Nosipho Majeke' wrote in 1952 that the Wesleyan missions were 'ready at all times to co-operate with the Government', and were able to surround the great King Hintsa, turning other chiefs against him.[6] But the mission teachers were frequently in opposition to white administrations, and played an independent role in the development of the Xhosa people. By 1935 the mission schools throughout South Africa registered 342,181 African pupils, and as the historian Leonard Thompson records, they 'reached into every African reserve community'.[7]

Mandela would retain a respect for the missionary tradition, while criticising its paternalism and links with imperialism. 'Britain exercised a tremendous influence on our generation, at least,' he has said, 'because it was British liberals, missionaries, who started education in this country.'[8] Sixty years after his schooling, in a speech at Oxford University, he explained: 'Until

very recently the government of our country took no interest whatsoever in the education of blacks. Religious institutions built schools, equipped them, employed teachers and paid them salaries; therefore religion is in our blood. Without missionary institutions there would have been no Robert Mugabe, no Seretse Khama, no Oliver Tambo.'[9] In jail he would argue with Trotskyists who quoted Majeke's attacks on the missionaries, and would welcome priests who brought encouragement and news from outside.[10] And he would write to some of his old mission teachers, to reminisce and to thank them. In prison he became more aware of the political influence of both the chieftaincy and the missions: 'I have always considered it dangerous to underestimate the influence of both institutions amongst the people,' he wrote. 'And for this reason I have repeatedly urged caution in dealing with them.'[11]

By the time of Mandela's matriculation in 1934, Clarkebury had become the biggest educational centre in Tembuland, with a proud tradition of teaching, mainly by British missionaries. It had expanded into an imposing group of solid stone buildings, including a teacher-training college, a secondary school and training shops for practical courses, with boys' and girls' hostels, sports fields and tennis courts – a self-contained settlement dominating an isolated hillside in the Engcobo district, with its own busy community. Its past achievement would look all the more remarkable after the coming of Bantu Education in 1953,

when it lost its funds and became a ruined shell, with only a small school and a Methodist chapel to maintain its continuity. Today it presents a tragic vista of crumbling buildings, collapsed roofs and gutted schoolrooms, burnt down by pupils rioting against the Transkei Bantustan government. There are still memorials of its past glory, including a plaque commemorating the Dalindyebo Mission School built in 1929. And some of the buildings are being restored, to provide a revived school: the rector explains that it will train Xhosas in how to create jobs, rather than to seek them, and that Mandela inspires local people to realise that small communities can produce great leaders. Mandela still revisits Clarkebury, talks and writes about it with warmth, and chose it as the location from which to launch a new version of his autobiography.[12]

In 1934 Clarkebury was near the peak of its achievement. It was run by a formidable pedagogue, the Reverend Cecil Harris, who was closely involved with the local Xhosa communities and their chiefs. The Regent warned Mandela to treat Harris with suitable respect as 'a Tembu at heart', and Mandela shook his hand with awe – the first white hand he had ever shaken. Harris ruled Clarkebury with an iron hand, more like a field commander than a school head.[13] He had an aristocratic style, and walked like a soldier, which he had been in the First World War. 'He was very stern dealing with the students,' Mandela recalled; 'severe with no levity.'[14] But Mandela also saw a much more human

and friendly side of Harris and his wife when he worked in their garden. Years later, while in jail, he traced the address of the Harrises' daughter Mavis Knipe, who had been a child when he was at Clarkebury. She was 'flabbergasted' to receive a letter from the famous prisoner.[15] Mandela reminded her how her mother would often bring him 'a buttered scone or bread with jam, which to a boy of sixteen was like a royal feast', and asked her for information about the Dalindyebo family: 'At our age one becomes deeply interested in facts and events which as youths we brushed aside as uninteresting.'[16]

Mandela was expecting the other pupils to treat him with respect, as a royal whose great-grandfather had founded the school. Instead he was mocked by one girl pupil for his country-boy's accent, his slowness in class and for walking in his brand-new boots 'like a horse in spurs'.[17] He found himself in a community which respected merit and intelligence more than hereditary status. But after the first shock he held his own, and with the benefit of his retentive memory he passed the Junior Certificate in two years. He also made some lasting friends, including Honourbrook Bala, later a prosperous doctor who joined the opposition in the Transkei and corresponded with Mandela in jail; Arthur Damane, who became a journalist on the radical paper the Guardian and was in jail with Mandela in Pretoria in 1960; Sidney Sidyiyo, the son of a teacher at Clarkebury who became a prominent musician; and Reuben

Mfecane, who became a trades unionist in Port Elizabeth and, like Mandela, ended up on Robben Island.[18]

Mandela was occasionally critical of the hierarchy at Clarkebury, and particularly of the food, which was minimal and at times almost inedible. But his first alma mater opened his eyes to the value of scientific knowledge, and introduced him to a much wider world than Tembuland, including as it did students from Johannesburg and beyond of both sexes – for unlike British public schools Clarkebury was co-educational. Even so, he still saw himself as a Tembu at heart, destined to advise his royal family, and continued to believe that 'My roots were my destiny.'[19]

After two years at Clarkebury Mandela was sent further away to Healdtown, a bigger Methodist institution, again following in the footsteps of Justice, the Regent's son. Healdtown was almost as remote as Clarkebury: to reach it students had to walk ten miles from Fort Beaufort along a dirt road which wound through the valley, crossing and recrossing the stream, until it reached a cluster of fine Victorian buildings with red corrugated roofs, looking over a ravine. Today, like Clarkebury, the school is largely ruined. The handsome central block, with its picturesque clock-tower, has been restored and, sponsored by Coca-Cola, revived as the comprehensive high school; but most of the schoolrooms and houses are empty shells with smashed windows, rusty roofs and overgrown gardens, occupied by nothing but the ghosts of the old community on the hillside.

Healdtown, thirty years younger than Clarkebury, had an even more resonant history. It was established in 1855, after Sir Harry Smith had subjugated the surrounding Xhosa tribes, in the midst of the battle-areas. It was well placed as a British outpost, below the great escarpment of the Amatola hills where the defeated Xhosa had taken refuge, and surrounded by old military frontier-posts – Fort Beaufort, Fort Hare, Fort Brown. It was strictly Methodist, named after James Heald, a prominent Wesleyan Methodist British Member of Parliament, but it was also intended to serve as a practical experiment in training Fingo Christians in crafts and industry. That first experiment failed, but the college widened its scope and intake to become a teacher-training college and an important secondary school. By the 1930s it had over eight hundred boarders.[20] It was close to other great missionary educational centres such as Lovedale, St Matthew's and Fort Hare, and together they comprised the greatest concentration of well-educated black students in Southern Africa.

Healdtown, like Clarkebury, offered an uncompromising British education with few concessions to Xhosa culture. The missionary and imperialist traditions often converged, particularly on Sundays, when the schoolboys and girls, in separate ranks, marched to church in their white shirts, black blazers and maroon-and-gold ties. The Union Jack was hoisted and they all sang 'God Save the King' and 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika', accompanied by the school brass band and watched by

admiring visitors who came from far and wide.[21] The school governor since 1927 had been the Reverend Arthur Wellington – whom Mandela would always enjoy mimicking – a diehard English patriot who boasted of his descent from the victor of Waterloo. Wellington inculcated British history and literature in his students, assisted by a mainly English staff, and publicised the school by inviting eminent Britons to visit it, among them Lord Clarendon, the Governor-General of South Africa, who shortly before Mandela's arrival had laid the foundation stones for the new dormitories and dining hall.[22] Wellington was a hard-driving autocrat – though he protested that he was naturally lazy – who claimed to run the largest educational institution south of the Sahara (Lovedale was in fact bigger).[23] He banned alcohol at Healdtown. His staff called him 'the Duke', and regarded him as a missionary-statesman. Under Wellington, wrote Jack Dugard, who ran the teacher-training school after 1932, 'within a short time the once rather dowdy mission was transformed into an attractive education centre'.[24]

The Methodism of Healdtown and Clarkebury did not make a deep religious impact on Mandela. He would never be a true believer, although many of his later friends, including his present wife, were educated by Methodists. But he would always be influenced by the schools' puritanical atmosphere, the strict discipline and mental training, the Wesleyan emphasis on paring down ideas to their bare essentials, avoiding frills

and distractions. He would always disapprove of heavy drinking or swearing; and the self-reliance in these boarding-school surroundings would add to his fortitude.

Mandela was immersed not just in Methodism, but in British history and geography. 'As a teenager in the countryside I knew about London and Glasgow as much as I knew about Cape Town and Johannesburg,' he would recall from jail fifty years later, writing to the Provost of Glasgow and mentioning Scots patriots like William Wallace, Robert the Bruce and the Earl of Argyll.[25] But he was resistant to becoming a 'black Englishman', and took great pride in his own Xhosa culture, encouraged by his history teacher, the much-liked Weaver Newana, who added his own oral history to the accounts of the Xhosa wars already familiar to the boy. Mandela won the prize for the best Xhosa essay in 1938; and he was thrilled when the famous Xhosa poet Krune Mkwayi visited the college, appearing in a kaross of hide, with two spears, to recite his dramatic poems in praise of the Xhosas.

Mandela made close friendships with several Xhosa boys who subsequently joined the ANC, including Jimmy Njongwe, with whom he later 'starved and suffered in Johannesburg', and who became a doctor and later a key organiser of the Defiance Campaign.[26] He also made friends outside his tribe among Sotho-speakers like Zachariah Molete, who later befriended him in Alexandra township in Johannesburg, and the zoology teacher Frank Lebentlele.[27] Mandela was much impressed by another

Sotho-speaker, his housemaster the Reverend Seth Mokitimi, who later became the first black president of the Methodist Church; Mokitimi pushed through reforms to give students more freedom and better food.[28]

The white teachers at Healdtown kept aloof from the black teachers, eating separately: one even had to resign after other teachers complained that he was fraternising with blacks. 'What a racist place Healdtown was and continued to be!' wrote Phyllis Ntantala, who was a student till 1935, and whose son Pallo Jordan would later join Mandela's cabinet.[29] A few of the younger white teachers, though, were beginning to make friends with black colleagues and some students.[30] Like Clarkebury, the school was co-educational, but girls and boys were strictly separated outside the schoolrooms, and could be expelled for talking to each other. By 1935, however, the Reverend Mokitimi had instituted mixed dinners every Sunday, where girls and boys sat together wearing their best clothes. The more sophisticated and prosperous students loved to show off: as Phyllis Ntantala wrote, 'They went to those dinners dressed to kill.'[31] But for those from simpler homes the European etiquette of knives and forks was a strain. Mandela recalled: 'We left the table hungry and depressed.'[32]

The Duke and his white staff had little sense that they were educating future black leaders. They were exasperated by the students' periodic protests and strikes, usually starting over

the poor food, but which they suspected were really based on conflicts between tribes, or between town and country. In 1936 there were more serious political protests when the government's new 'Hertzog Bills' removed blacks from the common voters' roll and abolished the title deeds of the local Fingo people, who were in turn disillusioned by the failure of the missionary staff to defend their interests.[33] But Mandela was only vaguely aware of black politics. At Healdtown he first heard about the African National Congress, which was set up in 1912; the Tembu king had paid thirty cattle to enrol his own tribe in it. Yet to Mandela 'it was something vague located in the distant past'.[34] The mission teachers were inclined to ascribe any political protests to 'agitators' stirred up by communism, and most saw themselves as educating a small elite who were quite different from ordinary blacks: as one envious government official explained to them, they were dealing with the layer of fertile soil on top, while he dealt with the hard rock which was impervious to change.[35]

Mandela was still torn between the two aspects of the British presence in South Africa: the brutal military subjugation of the Xhosas and the enlightened influence of liberal English education. This contradiction had been summed up in a poem, 'The Prince of Britain', by Mandela's favourite poet Mkwayi, written to celebrate the visit of the Prince of Wales to the Ciskei in 1925:

You sent us the truth, denied us the truth;

You sent us the life, deprived us of life;
You sent us the light, we sit in the dark,
Shivering, benighted in the bright noonday sun.[36]

Mandela graduated from Healdtown in 1938, and the next year went on to the university at Fort Hare, a few miles from Healdtown and a mile from the great missionary school of Lovedale, to which it was linked. The Regent bought him a three-piece suit: 'We thought there could never be anyone smarter than him at Fort Hare,' said Mandela's cousin Ntombizodwa.[37]

The 'South African Native College' at Fort Hare was a tiny black university, the only one in South Africa, but it was destined to be a seedbed of the revolution that followed. In 1939 it was only twenty-three years old, having been set up, surprisingly, in the midst of the First World War, and opened by the Prime Minister Louis Botha himself. The first principal, Alexander Kerr, suspected that Botha had regarded it as a sop, a gesture to the blacks in wartime, when the whites feared 'native trouble'. But after white governments hardened their attitudes to blacks in the 1920s, the anomaly of its existence was even more remarkable.[38] The later Prime Minister General Jan Smuts worried little about its revolutionary potential; he viewed Fort Hare in the context of his policy of trusteeship. When he addressed the university's graduates in 1938, the year before Mandela arrived, he argued: 'The Europeans have come here as the bearers of the higher culture. They have been in some

sense a missionary race, but if salvation is ever to come to the native peoples of South Africa it will finally have to come from themselves.'[39]

The university's start had been very modest, with twenty students preparing for matriculation (the first four candidates all failed).[40] When Mandela arrived there were still fewer than two hundred students (of whom sixty-seven were Xhosa-speaking), including ten Indians and sixteen Coloureds.[41] But the influence of Fort Hare already went far beyond its student numbers. Supported by the surrounding schools, it had become the focus for the intellectual elite of black South Africans. Its student body was both aristocratic and meritocratic, bringing together royal and mission families. It had been founded not only by white missionaries but by black educationalists from pioneering mission families, including the Jabavus, the Makiwanes and the Bokwes, all of whom were linked by marriage. The great teacher John Tengo Jabavu, editor of the black newspaper Imvo, was a promoter of Fort Hare: his son 'Jili' was its first black professor, and married the daughter of the Reverend Tennyson Makiwane. Jili Jabavu was later joined as professor by Z.K. Matthews, the son of a Kimberley miner, who had become the first graduate of Fort Hare; he called himself 'a new specimen in the zoo of African mankind'.[42] Matthews in turn married Frieda Bokwe, the sister of his college friend Rosebery Bokwe, from another prominent mission family.

This small elite was all the better educated because Fort Hare had admitted women students from the beginning. The principal had objected, but the African members declared that 'there was little point in educating their young men if their future wives were unable to offer them the companionship and community of interest which only an educated woman could give'.[43] By the late thirties, when Mandela arrived, Fort Hare still had only a handful of women students, housed in a separate hostel in an old farmhouse. They were correspondingly in demand, and were often cleverer than the men – which came as a shock to Mandela. But he was aware of the strong women among his Xhosa forebears, including the mother of the Mandela who founded his clan. 'Women have been monarchs and leaders,' he explained later, 'in some of the most difficult times in our history.'[44]

Generations of students from Fort Hare and Lovedale, many connected with the chiefly families of the Transkei, would develop formidable family networks, often with strong Christian values, self-disciplined and frequently teetotal, reminiscent of early Victorian British networks like the Clapham Sect. Jili Jabavu's daughter Noni, who spent some years in Britain, described her own extended family's 'all-embracing net' as spreading out from Fort Hare and Lovedale, reminding her of the English old school ties.[45] That network was to be tragically torn apart during the apartheid years by political persecution and

exile. But the black professional middle class with its missionary influence would never be destroyed or bypassed, as it was in other parts of Africa like Ghana or Uganda; and some of its offspring – including Pallo Jordan, the son of Phyllis Ntantala and A.C. Jordan, and Stella Sigcau, daughter of the King of East Pondoland – would join Nelson Mandela's government in 1994.

Mandela was never at the heart of this intellectual elite, but it included many of his friends and relations. And he always respected Z.K. Matthews, with whom he had family links. The big, square-jawed professor, who taught generations of black students at Fort Hare, infuriated many rebels with his political moderation, but usually came to influence them with his powers of reasoning and quiet argument. Mandela was to admire Matthews still more after he originated the ANC's Freedom Charter in the fifties. 'There are some people inside and outside the movement who are critical of his cautious attitude,' he wrote to Matthews's widow after he died in 1970, 'but I am not sure now whether they were not wild.'

The Fort Hare which Mandela joined in 1939 was a small, compact institution with a quadrangle of simple Italianate buildings surrounded by student hostels. It was still dominated by its first principal, Alexander Kerr, a strict and austere Scot who avoided public controversy but was dedicated to the advancement and academic standards of the university, without colour prejudice: 'He dealt with every student as he was,' said Z.K. Matthews, 'and colour did not enter the relationship.' Kerr

was a passionate teacher of the English language, imbuing his students with a love of its literature – above all of Shakespeare, which he taught with a vividness which made him seem totally relevant to contemporary Africa.[46] Mandela would always remember verses from Tennyson's 'In Memoriam', which Kerr declaimed in his Scots accent:

Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove … [47]

The rigorous but liberal scholarship of Kerr and the two African professors Jabavu and Matthews fortified the students throughout their later revolutionary phases. As well as its Coloured and Indian students Fort Hare included a few local whites, but it was dominated by Africans. A young African-American academic, Ralph Bunche – later Under-Secretary General of the United Nations and a Nobel Prize-winner – visited Fort Hare in 1938, and declared that 'the good native student is the equal of any Indian or Coloured student.'[48]

Mandela was proud to be at Fort Hare, and the Regent was glad to have a member of his clan at the famous college. The teachers told their students that they would become the leaders of their people, and when Mandela arrived as a fresher of twenty-one he was daunted by the sophistication and confidence of his seniors. His friend Justice had stayed behind at Healdtown, but

Mandela now found a new ally and idol in Kaiser Matanzima, his nephew from the Tembu royal family. Like Mandela, Kaiser (or K.D., as he was called) was descended from King Ngubengcuka, but through the senior line, the 'Great House', and he was destined to be a king or paramount chief. Technically he was Mandela's nephew, but he was older and more confident as both leader and scholar: he would be the first chief to take a degree.[49] He became Mandela's mentor, encouraging him in his future role as royal counsellor. In later years the two cousins were to become political opponents, but at Fort Hare they were best friends. They both lived in the Methodist hostel, went to church together, played football, went dancing, and did not drink. They were both very tall, with courtly manners, fond of clothes and quite vain. 'The two of us were very handsome young men,' Kaiser would recall, 'and all the women wanted us.'[50] Even the tribal circumcision names by which they called each other, Dalibunga and Daliwonga, made them sound like twins. Sixty years later, from his Great Place in the Transkei, Kaiser looked back with gratitude on that youthful friendship: 'We were always together: when someone saw me alone, they would say, "Where's Nelson?"… We had warm hearts together.' Mandela even found Kaiser his wife, Agrineth, the daughter of Chief Sangoni, which was all the more important since Kaiser had forsworn polygamy.[51] And despite their later political differences, Mandela would never deny his earlier admiration of

Matanzima: 'You probably will not believe it,' he wrote to Fatima Meer from prison in 1985, 'when I tell you he was once my idol.'[52]

Mandela, though less grand than K.D., was nevertheless also seen as a young prince; and royal families still had a special status even in the intellectual atmosphere of Fort Hare, which inspired both respect and resentment. 'Xhosa princes think the world belongs to them,' said Joe Matthews, the professor's son who would follow Mandela to Fort Hare. 'Some would kick tribesmen out of their way, thinking everyone else unimportant. Aristocrats can't believe you'll contradict them – as in Britain, like the women in Harrods who ignore everyone else and say loudly: "I'll have some of that."'[53] Mandela never displayed that arrogance, and always respected commoners like Oliver Tambo who were cleverer than him; but he became accustomed to people treating him like a prince.

Mandela blossomed at Fort Hare. He loved the university's beautiful setting on the banks of the Tyume river, below the Amatola Hills, and would later reminisce about the journey by the railway line curving along the hillside, and the magnificent landscape: 'the green bushes and singing streams after the summer rains, the open veldt and clean air'.[54] He excelled at cross-country running and boxing, and his heroes were sportsmen and athletes rather than intellectuals: later, from jail, he would ask about his rival in the mile races, 'Sosthenes'

Mokgokong.[55] He enjoyed ballroom dancing and the drama society: he once played John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of Abraham Lincoln. And he made new friends from many backgrounds in this meeting-place for blacks from all over the country. 'You saw the tribes welding into a new nation,' remembered Noni Jabavu. 'You had only to listen to the exclamations and shouts. Their various English accents gave you a sense of the vast spread of South Africa.'[56]

Some of Mandela's friends were already active in politics: Paul Mahabane, who spent holidays with him, was the son of a former president of the ANC; Ntsu Mokhehle, a brilliant scientist, would become head of the Basutoland Congress Party; Nyathi Khongisa stirred up the students by attacking Prime Minister Smuts as a racialist and publicly hoping that Nazi Germany would defeat Britain, so that Africans could overthrow European domination; Lincoln Mkentane, from another prominent Transkei family, joined the ANC and was imprisoned; Oliver Tambo, an outstanding scholar in both science and the arts, was already a keen political debater.[57] But Mandela himself was not then politically aware. He was not close to Tambo, and was embarrassed by the rebelliousness of friends like Mahabane. His immediate ambition was to be a court interpreter, a much esteemed profession in the rural areas, which promised both influence and status: 'I could not resist the glitter of a civil service career.'[58] He studied interpreting at Fort Hare,

together with law, native administration, politics and English. He saw a degree as his passport not to political leadership, but to a position in the community which would enable him to support his family.

Most of the other students were not very political either, and expected to become civil servants or, most often, teachers, which worried the university's Governing Council: 'It cannot be expected that the teaching profession will continue to absorb all grades,' the council reported in 1940.[59] There had been a time when Fort Hare was more revolutionary. In the early 1930s the young communist Eddie Roux had pitched a tent on the hill near the university, and given courses in Marxism-Leninism which fascinated African students including the young Govan Mbeki, while the black American Max Yergan taught Mbeki about dialectical materialism.[60] But by Mandela's time most students were preoccupied by their careers, and the Red Star had waned after Stalin made his pact with Hitler in August 1939. Soon after Mandela arrived at Fort Hare, Britain declared war on Germany, and Prime Minister Jan Smuts immediately announced that South Africa was entering the war on Britain's side. When Smuts came to talk to the students at Fort Hare they nearly all applauded him – including Mandela, who was relieved that Smuts's English accent was almost as poor as his own.[61] Mandela eagerly supported Britain's stand against Hitler, and would remain fascinated by Winston Churchill. Over fifty

years later he would tell Churchill's daughter Mary Soames how he listened to his wartime broadcasts at Fort Hare, and recalled how Churchill had escaped from the Afrikaners during the Boer War.[62] But at twenty-two, Mandela remembered, 'Neither war nor politics were my concern.'[63]

Mandela seemed to have golden prospects as a future civil servant, but they were to be smashed by his rebelliousness. This did not concern politics, but a more immediate cause – the terrible food. The meals at Fort Hare were Spartan, and the African students felt all the more hard-done-by after they discovered that the white students at Rhodes University, which they visited for sporting contests and debates, were much better fed.[64] In his second year Mandela had been elected to the Students' Representative Council, but only a quarter of the eligible students had voted, the majority having boycotted the elections and demanded improvements in the college diet and more powers for the council. Mandela and the other five elected representatives resigned, and the shrewd principal Dr Kerr ordered new elections, to be held at dinner, when all the students would be present. But again only a quarter voted, electing the same six representatives. The other five agreed to stay on the council, but Mandela felt he could not ignore the views of the majority, and resigned again. He was encouraged in his stand by Kaiser Matanzima, who had previously been on the council.

Dr Kerr summoned Mandela, and warned him sympathetically but firmly that if he continued to resist he would be expelled. Mandela spent a sleepless night, torn between his ambition and his duty to his fellow-students: 'I was frightened,' he said later. 'I feared K.D. more than Dr Kerr.'[65] The next day he confirmed that he would not serve. Kerr gave him one last chance to think again, and told him to return to his studies. Believing that Kerr was infringing students' rights, Mandela refused, and was expelled. He went home to the Great Place, where the Regent, angry with him for throwing away his career, told him to apologise and go back to Fort Hare. But Mandela's stubbornness came to the fore. 'He was very obstinate,' said his cousin Ntombizodwa. 'He would never go back.'[66]

Soon the Regent dropped a bombshell which brought their relationship to a head. He believed he would not live much longer, and had arranged for both his son Justice and Mandela to marry and to settle down with their own families. Mandela was horrified: the girl chosen for him was rather fat and did not attract him, and he also knew she was in love with Justice: 'She was probably no more anxious to be burdened with me than I with her.'[67] It was the breaking point. Mandela knew he owed a great deal to the Regent, who had adopted him as his own child and had paid for his education, and who was now ill and in need of support. But he was determined to have his own freedom: he would secretly run away with Justice, to try his fortunes in

Johannesburg.

'Life has its own way of forcing decisions on those who hesitate,' he wrote afterwards. This was his own choice, which put an abrupt end both to his tribal expectations and, it seemed, to his university career: 'Suddenly all my beautiful dreams crumbled and the prize that was so near my grasp vanished like snow in the summer sun.' But the decision had even greater repercussions than he realised at the time. If he had not defied Fort Hare's principal, he reflected four decades later from jail, 'perhaps I would have been safe from all the storms that have blown me from pillar to post over the last thirty years'. As it was, he was plunged into a much more dangerous sea; but it rapidly opened up much wider horizons, through which 'I could see the history and culture of my own people as part and parcel of the history and culture of the entire human race.'[68]

3

Big City

1941–1945

IN APRIL 1941, aged twenty-two, Mandela left the Great Place for Johannesburg with Justice. He was one of the thousands of rural blacks who arrived every year in the 'City of Gold', most of them in blankets or tattered clothes, hoping to find jobs as mineworkers, servants or labourers. They were a familiar sight to white Johannesburgers, commemorated in contemporary films and novels, from Jim Comes to Jo-burg to Cry, the Beloved Country.[1] Their arrival seemed an extreme example of the transition from rural poverty to metropolitan sophistication, typified by the recurring image of a bewildered tribesman gazing in wonder at the skyscrapers, fast cars and bright lights of the white man's city. But it was a misleading image: rural Africans from rooted homes could have a deeper sense of security and a clearer ambition in the city jungle than rootless urbanites who took its confusion for granted. And few whites realised that the country bumpkins included highly-educated, ambitious young people with proud traditions, who were to prove capable of overturning white supremacy within their lifetime.

Johannesburg was only fifty-five years old, but was already one of the major cities of Africa, with a confident centre including grand hotels and a stone cathedral, wealthy suburbs spreading to the north and sprawling black townships in the

south-west. The Second World War was now creating a boom economy in South Africa, as in other industrial centres across the world: the cutback of imports stimulated local production, and created an urgent need for black labour to replace white workers, many of whom were fighting overseas. Between the censuses of 1936 and 1946 the black population in South Africa's cities increased by almost 50 per cent, from 1,142,000 to 1,689,000. When the rural tribal areas were devastated by droughts the flow into Johannesburg turned into a flood, and for two years the government abandoned influx control and its enforcement by pass laws. The inrush created chaotic new shanty-towns around the fringes of the city, but also new opportunities and hopes for ambitious young blacks – and new political aspirations encouraged by the war.

The South African government needed the support of blacks in wartime, and 120,000 Africans and Coloureds had been recruited by the armed forces as drivers, servants and guards. They were armed with spears, not guns, but felt themselves to be part of the fight against Nazism and racism. In the middle of the war the government even began to relax the traditional policy of segregation that confined blacks to their own townships, schools and buses. In a major speech in February 1942, Prime Minister Smuts described how the high white expectations of segregation had been sadly disappointed, as the rest of the world moved in the opposite direction: 'Isolation has gone and segregation has fallen on evil days too.' It was fruitless to attempt to resist the movement

to the cities: 'You might as well try to sweep the oceans back with a broom.'

But the African migration into the cities was provoking Afrikaner nationalists, who felt threatened by black competition. They campaigned all the more fiercely against the 'black peril', and demanded a more extreme segregation, which they called 'apartheid' – literally 'separateness'. Smuts dared not make concessions to the blacks which would risk frightening white voters into the nationalists' camp. 'What will it profit this country,' he wrote to a friend in June 1943, 'if justice is done to the underdog and the whole caboodle then, including the underdog, is handed over to the Wreckers?'[2]

It was in the goldmines that Mandela and Justice first looked for work. The mines, which were at the centre of Johannesburg's economy, were strictly segregated, with enclosed compounds and hostels for the black workers who made up the vast majority of their labour force cut off from the rest of the city. The mining companies maintained close links with chiefs in the rural areas, who helped provide their cheap labour, and reproduced the tribal hierarchies and divisions within the mines in order to bolster discipline and allegiance. The Regent had written some months earlier to arrange a job for Justice as a clerk with Crown Mines, one of the oldest and biggest; and Justice persuaded the headman to give Mandela a humbler job as a mine policeman, with the prospect of a clerical job in three months.[3] For a short time Mandela worked as a nightwatchman, with a helmet, whistle

and knobkerrie or club – the very picture of the loyal company employee – patrolling the entrance to the compound, which bore notices reading 'Natives Cross Here' (one was amended to 'Natives Very Cross Here').[4] At the time the mineworkers were seething with discontent about their conditions and wages – anger which later erupted in the mine strike of 1946.[5] Mandela kept aloof from the politics, but would always remain proud of having been a mineworker, as he would later tell the union.[6]

However important Mandela may have felt in Qunu, he was quite insignificant in Johannesburg, and he soon found himself in trouble for boasting that he had run away from home and deceived the Regent. He and Justice were ordered to return home, and fired from the mine. Mandela, who had no wish to return to the country, now had to find a job urgently. A cousin sent him to see a black estate agent, Walter Sisulu, who had an office – before Johannesburg was as strictly segregated as it later became – in the Berkeley Arcade in the city centre.

Sisulu was a short, energetic man of twenty-eight, with light skin, gap-teeth, spectacles and a habit of chewing his lip. He lacked great presence, but he had extraordinary inner confidence – 'super-confidence', he called it – and was to be the most important political influence in Mandela's life.[7] He had already shown unusual resilience. Like Mandela he came from a poor region of the Transkei – in his case the Engcobo district – but he lacked Mandela's status. His father was a white magistrate

called Victor Dickinson, who had fallen in love with his mother in Engcobo, but had left her with two children.[8] Walter's mother talked respectfully about his father, but Walter realised that he had failed in his duty to his family.[9] Walter was brought up by his mother and his uncle, a headman, to be God-fearing and respectful towards whites. He enjoyed reading the Bible, and identified with underdogs like David and Moses, but he rebelled against the conservatism of his mission teachers and his family, who once warned him: 'I doubt if you'll be allowed to work for the white man.'

Sisulu left school at sixteen, became a cowherd and then tried his luck in Johannesburg. He worked for four months in a goldmine, hacking rock a mile underground, where he came to be enraged by the brutality of the system. After working in a kitchen in East London he returned to Johannesburg with a new interest in trade unionism. He stayed with his mother, who was now working as a washerwoman for white housewives, and was fired from a succession of factory jobs for insolence and disobedience. He took refuge from his humiliations by learning Xhosa history from a great-grandson of Hintsa, the great chieftain who had also inspired Mandela, but at the same time he broadened his outlook to embrace a wider African unity. After working for two years in a bank he had recently set up his estate agency with five black friends, which he hoped would make him independent of whites (it was to be taken over by a white firm two years later).[10]

Sisulu's white father, Victor Dickinson, was now a judge at the Supreme Court in Johannesburg; Sisulu would sometimes watch him there, incognito. He was also chairman of a building society, and when Sisulu's estate agency began experiencing difficulties he went to see him to ask for help. Sisulu did not reveal their relationship: he wanted to give his father a chance 'to recollect that he had a son like that', but he gave no sign of recognition. He was, Sisulu remembered, decent and warm, but did not offer him any help with money.[11] It was a poignant encounter, about which Sisulu still remains reticent. Did Dickinson ever know that his son was to be one of South Africa's greatest leaders?

Mandela was immediately impressed by Sisulu's mastery of city ways and his fast-talking English, and assumed that he must have had a university education. Sisulu, in turn, was impressed by Mandela's air of command. 'When he came into my office,' he recalled, 'I marked him at once as a man with great qualities, who was destined to play an important part.'[12] It was the beginning of a partnership which would be crucial to Mandela's political career. Mandela recognised Sisulu as his intellectual superior, a mentor with an analytical mind. He would never be his rival. He would be the kingmaker, never the king; the trainer, not the boxer. And he provided, by a happy chance, the first crucial rung in Mandela's city career. 'It was the most difficult time in my life,' Mandela wrote later.[13]

Mandela's real ambition was to be a lawyer, so Sisulu took

him to see Lazar Sidelsky, of the firm of Witkin, Sidelsky & Eidelman, which had black clients as well as white. Sidelsky was a lively, bright-eyed young Jewish attorney who disapproved of politics but believed in treating blacks fairly, and had been shocked to see big law firms 'suck the blood out of their black clients'. He respected Sisulu, who brought him Africans who needed mortgages, remembering him as 'a cunning bloke, a bit of a blighter, but astute'. Sidelsky agreed to employ Mandela as an articled clerk, without charging a fee. He soon saw his potential: 'He was conscientious, never devious, tidy in person and in mind.' He took an interest in the young man, lent him £50 – a generous sum – and gave him an old suit, which he was to wear for five years. He urged Mandela to keep out of politics: 'You could serve your people better,' he told him, 'if you could prove that there's one black attorney who's honest and successful.'

Mandela never forgot that Sidelsky, as he has written, was 'the first white man who treated me as a human being', the man who 'trained me to serve our country'. A few years later, when Mandela was briefly prosperous and was driving an Oldsmobile, he noticed Sidelsky, who had fallen on hard times, waiting at a bus stop, and gave him a lift home. Sidelsky was puzzled that Mandela would go no further than the kitchen; and the next day Mandela sent him a cheque repaying the £50. Forty years later Sidelsky and his daughter visited Mandela in prison, and joked about his advice to keep out of politics: 'You didn't listen, and look where you ended up!'[14]

But politics were all around him. He shared an office with a young white lawyer named Nat Bregman, a cousin of Sidelsky, a 'light-hearted communist', as he later called himself. Bregman, a part-time stage comedian, enjoyed Mandela's company, finding him reserved but with a good sense of humour.[15] He took Mandela to communist lectures and to multi-racial parties where he met friendly white left-wingers, including the young communist writer Michael Harmel. Mandela was amazed by Harmel's combination of intelligence and simple living – he refused to wear a tie – and later he would become a close friend.

In the law office Sidelsky warned Mandela against a black communist, Gaur Radebe, who worked in the firm. A flamboyant, strongly-built man ten years older than Mandela, Radebe spoke five languages, and was helping to set up the new African Mineworkers' Union.[16] He did not conceal his militant views in the office. 'Keep away from Gaur,' said one colleague. 'He will poison your mind. Every day he sits on that desk planning a world revolution.' But Radebe befriended Mandela, and told his white bosses he was really a chief: 'You people came all the way from Europe, took our land and enslaved us. Look now, there you sit like a lord while my chief runs around on errands. One day we will catch all of you and dump you into the sea!' Mandela was dazzled by the coolness and confidence with which Radebe argued with whites.[17] Radebe urged him to join the communists, but Mandela was working too hard in the

evenings for his law examinations. Twenty years later the two men had almost reversed their positions: Radebe, after being expelled from the Communist Party in 1942 for money-lending activities, joined the anti-communist Pan Africanist Congress, while Mandela defended the communists within the ANC.[18]

Mandela was now living in the midst of a black slum, lodging with a minister, the Reverend Mabutho, at 46 Eighth Avenue, Alexandra, a chaotic township six miles north of the city with no electricity, called 'the Dark City'. Alexandra was a jumble of brick houses and makeshift shacks overflowing with the wartime influx of workers from the countryside. It was insanitary and noisy with hungry dogs – a total contrast to the secluded white mansions beyond its fence. But Alexandra had a village vitality and a sense of community which they lacked. It was 'a cauldron of black aspirations and talent, and a mirror of black frustrations', wrote the activist Michael Dingake.[19] Alexandra mixed up the tribal Xhosas, Zulus and Sothos in the scramble for urban survival, and Mandela was surprised to find himself pursuing a Swazi girl. He became more interested in other tribes, learning about the Zulus' past glories from a property-owner called John Mngoma, who told him long stories about the heroism of the Zulu King Shaka and described events which never appeared in the whites' history books.[20]

In Alexandra, Mandela was among the poorest, sometimes having to walk twelve miles a day to save the bus-fare to

and from the office in the centre of town. He remembers feeling humiliated when girls noticed his shabby clothes, and was envious of the more glamorous young 'Americans', the dandies in sharp suits with wide hats and flashy watches, often stolen, who attracted women; but he maintained his more staid English style.[21] He was helped by friends who lodged in the same house: later he felt guilty that 'not once did I think of returning their kindness'.[22]

Mandela soon found his feet as an urban African, able to fend for himself. He no longer needed the support of his father-figure the Regent, who was now very frail. The Regent visited him in late 1941, and did not reprove Mandela for his past disobedience; six months later, when the old man died, Mandela went to his funeral in the Transkei, and regretted that he had not been more grateful for the Regent's past kindness. He also wished he had taken the opportunity to ask him about white supremacy and the liberation movement.[23] By now he had outgrown his purely Xhosa perspectives, but he was still torn between his tribal obligations and the opportunities offered by the big city.

Mandela completed his BA degree through a correspondence course, but soon realised it was not the key to success: 'Hardly anything I had learned at university seemed relevant in my new environment.' He returned to Fort Hare to receive his degree, wearing a new suit bought with a loan from Sisulu. His nephew Kaiser Matanzima, now preparing to be a chief, urged him to

return as a lawyer to the Transkei, but Mandela was becoming more interested in the national stage.

He soon moved out of Alexandra. To save money he lived for a short spell in the mining compound of Wenela (Witwatersrand Native Labour Association), which provided special quarters for visiting chiefs; there he met tribal dignitaries, including the Queen Regent of Basutoland. Then he moved to Orlando (now part of Soweto), a municipal suburb twelve miles outside Johannesburg which had been planned in 1930 as a model township for 'the better class of native'. Orlando stretched out across open farmland, overshadowed by the giant towers of a power station, a vista of two-roomed houses without floors or ceilings between bumpy dirt tracks. It was more hygienic but less intimate than Alexandra: Mandela liked to say that in Alexandra he had no house, but a home, while in Orlando he had a house without a home. But he was now close to Walter Sisulu, who lived with his mother in a house noisy with politics; and Orlando was destined to set the pace for all black South Africa.

Mandela still had to study – this time for a law degree. Early in 1943 he enrolled at the University of Witwatersrand, which stood, with its imposing columns, on a hill north of Johannesburg. 'Wits', unlike the Afrikaans universities, admitted a handful of black students to study alongside whites, though they could not use the sports fields, tennis courts or swimming pool. Some white lecturers strongly disapproved of black students, including Professor Hahlo, a German-Jewish lawyer

who regarded law as a social science for which blacks and women lacked the mental discipline and experience.[24] But other law lecturers, like Julius Lewin and Rex Welsh, were generous liberals, and many of the white students had returned from the war with a hatred of racism. Among them were several communists, including Joe Slovo and his wife Ruth First, Tony O'Dowd and Harold Wolpe. Ruth First, who was later to be a close friend and colleague, remembered Mandela as 'good-looking, very proud, very dignified, very prickly, rather sensitive, perhaps even arrogant. But of course he was exposed to all the humiliations.'[25] Joe Slovo had the impression of 'a very proud, self-contained black man, who was very conscious of his blackness' and very sensitive to the perception that 'when you work with a white man, he dominates'.[26] Ismail Meer, who was Ruth's close friend, found Mandela 'fairly unsure of himself' and detached from student politics: 'He was the best-dressed student, and he was not going to get involved readily in the political activities at the campus. He was very cautious.'[27] Mandela 'had a friendly dignity about him', recalled another contemporary, Nathan Lochoff: 'a little shy, not assertive in any way'.

Mandela was to spend six years at Wits, from 1943 to 1949, without any great distinction. He had an excellent memory, but his studies had to be squeezed in between his job as an articled clerk and his political commitments. Professor Hahlo could be scathing: 'You call this an essay?' 'You know what I wish for

him?' Mandela told one of his white friends, Jules Browde: 'That one day he has to write by paraffin light in Soweto.'[28] When he failed at the end of his course he applied to Professor Hahlo for permission to resit some papers, explaining that he often arrived home in Orlando after 8 p.m., 'feeling tired and hungry and unfit to concentrate on my studies … if I could have done my work under more suitable conditions, I would have produced better results.'[29] But Hahlo, strictly following the rules, turned down his application, and Mandela was eventually to leave Wits without his LlB degree. Despite his justifications, he still felt a sense of failure.[30]

At Wits Mandela suffered many humiliations. When he sat at a table in the law library, a white student moved away. When he went to a café with some white students, they were kept out because there was a 'kaffir' among them; one of them, Julius Wulfsohn, protested, but Mandela put his hand on his shoulder and simply said, 'Just leave it.'[31] When he went on a whites-only tram with two Indians the conductor called him their 'kaffir friend', and had them charged in court.[32] But he revealed no lasting grudges. Fifty years later, as President of the Republic, he invited the whole class of '46 to a reunion at Wits. 'I am what I am,' he told them, 'both as a result of people who respected me and helped me, and of those who did not respect me and treated me badly.'[33]

Back in Orlando, Mandela was seen as a man about town,

and a ladies' man. ('I can't help it if the ladies take note of me,' he said later. 'I'm not going to protest.'[34]) He spent much of his time with Walter Sisulu and his mother 'Ma' in their small Orlando house. In 1944 Walter married Albertina Thethiwe, a young nurse from the Transkei who had been educated by Catholics. She soon became 'the backbone of the home', as Sisulu described her, strong enough to be both mother and politician, while providing a fixed base.[35] Albertina felt protective towards the handsome young country boy – 'You could see from the way he dressed that he was from the country' – and worried that gangsters in Alexandra, 'the Spoilers', would recruit him and exploit his aggression.[36]

But Mandela soon seemed to be settling down. In the warm atmosphere of the Sisulus' house he met Walter's young cousin Evelyn Mase, four years younger than him, who had also recently arrived from the Transkei, to become a nurse – the most respected profession for African women – and was working at the Johannesburg General Hospital with Albertina. Their neighbour Es'kia Mphahlele later described her as an unassuming girl, with lazy eyes and a subdued and coy smile.[37] Mandela was quickly attracted to Evelyn: after a few days they were going steady, and within months he proposed to her. They were married simply in 1944 at the Native Commissioner's Court, without church bells or a wedding feast. At first they lived in one room of the small Orlando house of Evelyn's brother Sam Mase, and later moved

in with her brother-in-law Mgudlwa, a clerk in a mine.

'Everyone we knew said that we made a very good couple,' recalled Evelyn.[38] She was very house-proud, always busy polishing, gardening or cooking, and took good care of Mandela. 'She was a well-behaved, quiet lady, devoted to her family and husband,' Mandela said.[39] She was religious, from a more devout mission background than his. She did not see him as a politician, she recalls, but as a student.[40] Mandela's young sister Leabie, who came to stay with them, noticed that Evelyn 'didn't want to hear a thing about politics'.[41] But she was supportive of her ambitious husband. 'It was during his years with Evelyn that he grew and blossomed politically into the national figure he is today,' wrote Phyllis Ntantala, who was a friend of both.[42]

A year after the wedding Evelyn gave birth to their son Thembi. They moved briefly to 719 Orlando East, and soon afterwards to 8115 Orlando, one of hundreds of identical three-roomed 'matchbox' houses, with no electricity or inside lavatory. A stream of visitors, including Nelson's nephew Matanzima, came to stay in the little house, often sleeping on the floor. The next year Evelyn produced a daughter, Makaziwe, who died after nine months.

Evelyn was often helped by Nelson's mother, who came up from the Transkei; the two women got on well. Mandela also helped with the shopping, bathing the babies, and even sometimes took over the cooking. 'Many wives envied Evelyn

for her man who was dedicated to the family and bought food in town to take home,' recalled Oliver Tambo's wife Adelaide.[43] He was 'a highly organised person and very regular in his habits', said Evelyn. 'He was up at crack of dawn, jogged a few miles, had a light breakfast and was off for the day.'[44]

In four years in Johannesburg Mandela had come a long way from the quiet rural life of the Transkei. He had survived in the crowded townships, worked in a law office, studied at university and married. He had found his feet in a harsh and competitive environment. He still felt like a country boy confronting streetwise townsmen, fast-talking in English and Afrikaans. Yet his rural values and upbringing gave him an inner security, and he was conscious of being royal. 'Whatever he did he was thinking more of becoming a chief and an important person of the royal house,' said Sisulu. 'When he was getting into big politics he still had that in mind.'[45]

But Mandela was being drawn into the political fray, which would give a wider context and a purpose to his urban life. As a proud aristocrat he had come up against all the frustrations and humiliations of a black man in the white man's city, which had made him more aware of being one black man among millions. He was now having to see himself in a much harsher mirror; and soon he was to become an aspiring African nationalist, with an aggression and anger which it would take him a long time to control.

It was Mandela's militant office friend Gaur Radebe who first brought him into politics in Alexandra township. In August 1943 Radebe helped organise a spectacular boycott of the buses to the city – the third in three years – after the fares went up from fivepence to sixpence. Mandela joined the boycott and a march of 10,000 blacks, which left the buses empty for nine days until the fare was put back to its former rate. It was an encouraging lesson in the power of boycott.[46]

It was also Mandela's first close contact with the African National Congress, the main black political body, which was now reawakening from a long slumber. The ANC had been set up in 1912 by a Zulu lawyer, Dr Pixley ka Seme, in direct response to the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, which had brought together the Afrikaners and the British: a union, said Seme in his opening address, 'in which we have no voice in the making of the laws and no part in the administration'. The ANC's first President was Dr John Dube, a Zulu educationalist, and the Secretary was Sol Plaatje, an interpreter and writer from Kimberley, while Seme was made Treasurer.[47] As the ANC leaders watched their worst fears about white supremacy being borne out they organised delegations, demonstrations and protests, but they dreaded mass action or confrontation. The ANC was a staid, formal body with many members from royal families, represented in their own House of Chiefs – like the House of Lords – and Mandela came to see it as 'obsessed

with imperialist forms of organisation'.[48] It was easily bought off by ineffectual government bodies: when Africans in the Cape Province were deprived of their vote in 1936, Congress leaders agreed to join the 'Natives' Representative Council', which was supposed to advise the government, though they soon discovered it was (as one of them, Paul Mosaka, called it) a 'toy telephone'.[49] By the late thirties the ANC had become dormant and disorganised, overshadowed in its protests by communists and Trotskyists, and discredited by putting its faith in easily-broken white promises.

In 1940 the ANC had elected a more effective President, Alfred Xuma, a small, busy doctor with a black American wife, who like Sisulu had begun as a herd-boy in Engcobo. He now lived in a comfortable house on the edge of Sophiatown, a multi-racial suburb of Johannesburg. Dr Xuma quickly pumped life into the moribund body. 'There was no membership to boast about, no records, and the treasury was empty,' as he described it.[50] He toured the country, reviving the branches, and took personal control over the Transvaal, whose overflowing black population provided many new recruits. He brought a new unity to the Congress, breaking down its tribal divisions and abolishing the House of Chiefs.[51] But it remained mainly middle-class and middle-aged, and while only Africans were admitted it had no popular following. Xuma was fussy about his dignity and proud of his respectable white friends, including government officials;

and he dreaded the demagogy and militancy of the younger leaders who were now making themselves felt.

It was at Sisulu's house in Orlando in 1943 that Mandela first met the fiery young Zulu activist Anton Lembede, then only twenty-nine, who had just given up teaching to work in the law firm of Dr Seme, the co-founder of the ANC. Lembede, the son of a farm labourer, was a devout Catholic who, appalled by the moral degradation of the townships, had resolved that blacks must mobilise themselves without relying on whites or Indians. He believed the British were systematically working 'to discourage and eradicate all nationalistic tendencies among their alien subjects' and to co-opt the young black elite, making them their instruments. It was a charge to which Mandela felt himself vulnerable.[52]

Lembede had a strong populist touch: 'A pair of boots,' he said, 'is worth all the works of Shakespeare.'[53] But he was also an intellectual, steeped in English literature (including Shakespeare) and inspired by such black American leaders as Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. du Bois. 'My soul yearns for the glory of an Africa that is gone,' Lembede said, 'but I shall labour for the birth of a new Africa, free and great among the nations of the world.'[54] Mandela realised that Lembede was unscientific, verbose and sometimes irrelevant, but he admired the vigour of his rhetoric and his vision, which evoked past Xhosa heroes.[55]

Lembede became the leader of a small group of young

blacks, including Sisulu and Mandela, who wanted to form a Youth League within the ANC. Their aim was to press the organisation towards mass action of the kind which had been so successful in the Alexandra bus boycott. While they supported the ANC, they resented Xuma's 'heavy hand'. They also felt challenged by the new African Democratic Party under Paul Mosaka which had just broken away from the Congress and, as they saw it, could 'prance around the country'.[56] They were encouraged by the Anglo-American idealism of the war against Hitler, particularly by the apparent radicalism of the Atlantic Charter, which Churchill and Roosevelt had signed in August 1941; this committed the signatories to 'respect the rights of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live'. Churchill soon afterwards began backtracking from the anti-colonial implications of the Charter, explaining to Leo Amery, the Secretary of State for India, that he did not mean the 'peoples' to include the natives of Nigeria or East Africa, let alone Arabs who might expel Jews from Palestine.[57] But Mandela and his friends took the Charter at its face value and admired Churchill for it; while Smuts appeared to support its application to Africa, particularly after the Japanese victories in the Pacific at the end of 1941, when he feared that Japan might invade Africa with support from blacks. (There was some reason for Smuts's fear: Walter Sisulu, among others, admired the Japanese as a successful coloured people, and declared himself 'happy

when South Africa was threatened by the Japanese'.[58]) The ANC set up a committee under Professor Z.K. Matthews to interpret the Atlantic Charter. It produced a document called Africans' Claims in South Africa, which reasserted the right of all peoples to choose their government: the acid test of the Charter, it said, was its application to the African continent.[59]

Mandela was now, at twenty-five, committed to ANC politics, and in 1943 he joined a delegation led by Lembede to put the idea of the Youth League to Dr Xuma in the library of his Sophiatown house. It was a historic but spiky encounter. Mandela admired Xuma for having revived the ANC, and was impressed by his international friends like Tshekedi Khama of Bechuanaland, Hastings Banda of Nyasaland and King Sobhuza of Swaziland.[60] But he disliked Xuma's pompous English style, and his obsession with delegations and telegrams. Xuma, for his part, craved the support of young intellectuals, and was quite flattered by the visit of 'my Kindergarten boys', as he called them; but he warned them that the ANC was not ready for mass action.[61] Mandela, Sisulu and others nevertheless pressed ahead with a provisional committee, working away on a manifesto in the dingy Congress office in the Rosenberg Arcade in downtown Johannesburg.[62]

In April 1944 the Youth League was formally launched at the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg, with Lembede as President and Sisulu, Tambo and Mandela on

the executive committee. The stirring manifesto opened with Lembede's description of the difference between white and black perceptions:

The white man regards the Universe as a gigantic machine hurtling through time and space to its final destruction; individuals in it are but tiny organisms with private lives that lead to private deaths …

The African, on his side, regards the Universe as one composite whole; an organic entity, progressively driving towards greater harmony and unity whose individual parts exist merely as independent aspects of one whole …

The manifesto went on to reject any claim that the white man was helping to civilise the African, and to insist that the African 'now elects to determine his future by his own efforts'. It endorsed the ANC, with some reservations, and promised the support of the new Youth League as 'the brains-trust and power-house of the spirit of African nationalism'. 'The hour of youth has struck,' said a flyer issued by the provisional committee in September, which ended with the lines from Julius Caesar:

The fault … is not in our stars,

But in ourselves, that we are underlings.[63]

This was the first time, Mandela reckoned, that the idea of African nationalism had been set out in a clear fashion. But the policies were still uncertain. Did they really aim to drive the white man into the sea, as the radicals claimed? Eventually a more moderate view prevailed, shared by Mandela: that other racial

groups were in South Africa to stay, but white supremacy must be abandoned.[64]

Another political organisation had also gained support from the convulsions of wartime. The Communist Party of South Africa, which Mandela first encountered at Wits, was now quite rapidly gaining popularity among Africans after twenty turbulent years. It had been formed in 1921, led by a small group of Jewish immigrants and British non-conformists, and operated under the strict rules of the Comintern in Moscow. South Africa, with its highly concentrated mining finance, interested many Marxist theorists, including Lenin, as a case-history of economic imperialism and monopoly capitalism; but on the ground many communist leaders became confused between class and race conflicts. At first the communists showed little interest in attracting black members or leaders: in 1922 they actually supported the all-white Labour Party in the mine strike, under the slogan 'Unite for a white South Africa'. The communists broke with the white Labour Party when it joined a cynical coalition with the Afrikaner nationalist government two years later; but in 1926 the Party alienated many white members when it accepted the new Comintern doctrine of a 'black republic'.

By the 1930s the communists were recruiting more black members, including two able young activists, J.B. Marks and Moses Kotane, who were trained at the Lenin Institute in Moscow and returned to help organise black unions. The communists had little appeal to the ANC, still influenced by

traditional chiefs. In 1939, loyal to the pact between Hitler and Stalin, the Communist Party opposed the war. But after Russia was invaded by Hitler in June 1941 and became Britain's ally, the communists were more acceptable, and also more concerned with championing black rights. By 1945, helped by extra newsprint allocations, the circulation of the two South African communist-influenced papers the Guardian and Inkululeko had gone up to 67,000.[65]

Mandela had been impressed, through white friends like Nat Bregman and Michael Harmel, by the multi-racialism of the communists, who brought blacks into contact with whites on an equal footing. It was only the communists, Mandela wrote later, who 'were prepared to treat Africans as human beings and their equals; who were prepared to eat with us, talk with us, live with us and work with us. They were the only political group which was prepared to work with the Africans for the attainment of political rights and a stake in society.'[66] The ANC included many African communists in its ranks, and most members did not regard them as a threat. The ANC's Secretary-General from 1936 to 1949, the Reverend James Calata, believed that 'Communism had no influence worth worrying about.' He saw African national life as still built on a binding system, linking the individual to the family, to the clan, to the tribe: 'Communism, which is a purely materialistic system, cannot change the heart of the African towards it until that particular African feels that it is the only way

out of oppression.'[67]

But the young nationalists of the ANC Youth League were very hostile to the communists, whom they saw as alien influences corrupting African nationalism, the 'vendors of the foreign method'.[68] Lembede fiercely attacked them, and broke up one communist meeting in Orlando with such a menacing tirade that Inkululeko commented: 'Hitler may lose the war in Europe but he has found a convert in S. Africa.'[69] Mandela (in spite of his communist friends) and Tambo shared Lembede's distrust, and the three put forward a motion that 'members of political organisations' should resign from the ANC. It was rejected by the national conference, but the Youth League's crusade against communists continued.

The conflict was part of a broader rivalry between nationalism and communism within liberation movements across Africa and Asia that would flare up after the Second World War. The nationalists could appeal to the historical pride of their people and offer them a new self-esteem; while the communists, backed by the victorious Soviet Union, could provide organisation and funds, and an intellectual critique of imperialism. But South Africa was a special ideological battlefield. The Africans had suffered domination and humiliations, which gave impetus to their nationalism; but the country's white minority was too large simply to be sent home, as was being urged elsewhere in Africa. 'They talked of independence,' said Govan Mbeki. 'We talked of

freedom. There's a great difference.'[70] The Communist Party of South Africa was the only party which embraced all the races, and it was becoming more genuinely multi-racial than any other Communist Party.[71] It was between these magnetic poles of nationalism and communism that Mandela was now pulled.

4

Afrikaners v. Africans

1946–1949

THE HOPES OF MANDELA and his friends for a more benign post-war world were soon dashed: not by an apartheid regime, but by the United Party government of Jan Smuts, who had been Churchill's loyal ally in the war, and who was supported by South Africa's English-speaking businessmen. In 1946, only months after the final Allied victory over Japan, Smuts made two ruthless moves which pushed both Africans and Indians into greater militancy, and into working together.

The first was against a strike by the newly-formed African Mineworkers' Union, whose prime mover and first President was Mandela's friend Gaur Radebe. Radebe had been succeeded in 1942 by J.B. Marks, a robust African communist who had studied in Moscow and who led the strike of 70,000 black miners in August 1946, demanding more pay and better food and conditions. The mining companies, supported by the government, forced the workers back down the mines with bayonets, killing nine and wounding hundreds. Ten days later, fifty of the leaders were charged with fomenting a strike. Several were found guilty, and were fined or imprisoned.[1]

Most whites saw the crackdown as a necessary response to the communist menace, which was now re-emerging after the wartime truce. Smuts flew off to London, 'not unduly concerned',

while the Rand Daily Mail attacked the 'wild speeches and absurd demands' of the union leaders, including 'J.B. Marx'.[2] The conservatives within the ANC, including Dr Xuma, blamed the communists for provoking a premature test of strength, but the Youth Leaguers criticised Xuma for not calling a general strike in sympathy.[3] The brutal suppression seemed to vindicate Lembede's warning that blacks could expect no mercy from the whites. Mandela was moved by the bravery and solidarity of the strikers – some of whom he knew – and he visited them with J.B. Marks. He discussed communism with Marks, and was struck by his humour and humility. Marks saw Mandela as a rabid nationalist, but thought he would outgrow that phase.[4]

The crushing of the mine strike made fools of the patient delegations of the ANC 'Old Guard', who had put their faith in Smuts. While the black miners were being bayoneted, the Natives' Representative Council was quietly debating black grievances with the government in Pretoria. Its members adjourned in protest, but did not actually boycott the Council. Smuts, however, realised that he had alienated 'moderate intellectuals of the Prof. Matthews type', and the next year he tried to placate a delegation of Council members headed by Matthews.[5] Smuts spoke in his usual paternal mode: 'This young child, South Africa, is growing up, and the old clothes do not fit the growing boy.' He deplored their 'sulking' attitude, and offered them 'a bone to chew' in the form of a bigger Council,

all black and all elected, and legalised black unions, though not in the mines. Matthews was sceptical, and explained that the black people had lost confidence in the Council. Afterwards he told the press that the mountain had given birth to a mouse, and that the hungry masses needed more than a bone to chew.[6] But the Natives' Representative Council remained passive and ineffective (it would be abolished by the first Nationalist government).

Nelson Mandela was more lastingly influenced by Smuts's second harsh move, against the Indians in South Africa. The 300,000 Indians who had arrived in Natal since the 1860s, first as contract labourers, then as traders, had their own history of discrimination and protest. They had first learnt about peaceful protest in 1911 from Mohandas Gandhi, who devised his kind of passive resistance while he was working as a lawyer in South Africa, and had led thousands of Indians illegally from Natal into the Transvaal. Africans and Coloureds tried similar protests in 1919 and 1939, but without success. The Indians, some of whom had become prosperous merchants, kept themselves aloof from blacks, and hoped for better treatment after the war. But in 1946 the Smuts government introduced the Asiatic Land Tenure Bill, the 'Indian Ghetto Act', which banned the sale of any more land to Indians, while offering them the sop of white representatives in Parliament and an advisory board. It shook the Indians out of their complacency. For two years they sustained a passive-resistance campaign echoing Gandhi's of thirty-five years before,

occupying land reserved for whites: two thousand protesters went to jail, including the campaign's two leaders, Dr 'Monty' Naicker and Dr Yusuf Dadoo.[7]

Mandela was coming closer to the Indians. He was impressed by their progress from speech-making and resolutions to mass action, in contrast to the inertia of the ANC. He was struck by the solidarity and sacrifice of the protesters, who included both militant and conservative Indians, and he admired both Naicker and Dadoo.[8] In Johannesburg he was now meeting many Indians, and found himself personally at ease with them. A flat in downtown Johannesburg, 13 Kholvad House, in Market Street, had become a crucial meeting-place between the races. There Mandela would meet Ismail Meer, Ruth First, Yusuf Cachalia and many other Indian and white communists in a relaxed atmosphere. He also spent much time at the home of Amina Pahad (whose two sons Aziz and Essop were later to join the Mandela government), where they would all eat curry and rice with their fingers. It reminded him of his childhood at Jongintaba's Great Place.[9] And after some early arguments he worked closely with Ahmed Kathrada, a young Indian communist who was to spend twenty-five years with him in prison.

Through his Indian friends Mandela became more interested in India itself, which was then on the verge of independence, and in the achievements of Gandhi and his disciple Jawaharlal Nehru.

'When we were starting the struggle we really had very little to go by from the leadership in our country,' he recalled, 'because their experiences were not reduced to writing, whereas people like Gandhi and Nehru had recorded their experiences. So we had to look up to them, and their influence was tremendous.' He was more influenced by Nehru, who was not a pacifist, than by Gandhi: 'When a Maharajah tried to stop him he would push him aside. He was that type of man, and we liked him because his conduct indicated how we should treat our own oppressors. Whereas Gandhi had a spirit of steel, but nevertheless it was shown in a very gentle and smooth way, and he would rather suffer in humility than retaliate.'[10]

The Indian passive resisters in South Africa in 1946 and 1947 taught Mandela and other African politicians an important lesson. Only a few non-Indians joined them (including the radical British monk Michael Scott), but they soon attracted support from the ANC. In 1947 the ANC president Dr Xuma joined with Naicker and Dadoo in the so-called 'Doctors' Pact', which promised co-operation between the ANC and the two Indian Congresses. Xuma reinforced the alliance by appearing at the first session of the United Nations in New York in company with an Indian representative, H.A. Naidoo, to protest against the 'Ghetto Act', thus initiating the UN's campaigns against racism. Mandela would come to see this pact as the origin of all the later collaborations between the races, and many young Indians were inspired by the prospect of racial co-operation.[11] 'It was this pact

which gave me and my generation a sense of what it is to be South African,' said Kader Asmal, later Minister of Water Affairs in Mandela's government.[12]

But at the time, Mandela opposed closer political co-operation with Indians. He was convinced that only separate Congresses could effectively mobilise their masses, and was worried that the Indians or the Communist Party would take over or dominate the ANC for their own purposes, watering down the concept of African nationalism.[13] He still had a burning sense of the Africans' special suffering and identity, and he felt defensive, both personally and politically, in face of the more qualified and sophisticated Indians.

The two showdowns of 1946 both ended in defeat. The African Mineworkers' Union was effectively destroyed, not to be resurrected until the 1980s, and the Indians were increasingly restricted to their ghettos.[14] The setbacks left a deep mark on Mandela and other young black politicians. The Old Guard of delegations and petitions, epitomised by the Native Representative Council, was now discredited, and there were signs of a more courageous leadership emerging among the Indians and the communists.

The independence of India in August 1947 provided a powerful precedent for the struggle in South Africa, as in the rest of the continent, by showing how an established ruling power could be defeated by a unified and organised mass-movement.

India's first Prime Minister, Nehru, had been urging Indians to co-operate with Africans in South Africa ever since 1927, and he would soon show himself a determined ally of both Congresses, making India the first country to impose sanctions against South Africa.[15] Mandela would always be grateful to Nehru for this. The influence of Indian communists would become an obsession for both the South African and the British governments, but Nehru, without being a communist, could provide a broader message for Mandela and others, to see beyond racial and local nationalism. 'Nationalism is good in its place,' Mandela would quote Nehru, 'but it is an unreliable friend and an unsafe historian. It blinds us to many happenings and sometimes distorts the truth, especially when it concerns us and our country.'[16]

The ANC Youth League in the meantime was moderating some of its nationalism. In July 1947 its firebrand founder Anton Lembede suddenly died, aged thirty-three, only a few hours after Mandela had been talking to him.[17] Mandela was appalled; but Lembede's successor Peter Mda proved a clearer political thinker and a greater influence (though Mandela would later find him too cautious).[18] Mda was a spellbinding talker, with a rich vocabulary, a small head and a huge laugh. The son of a Xhosa shoemaker, he had been educated by Catholics, and as a former teacher and lawyer he had both practical and intellectual training.[19]

Mandela himself became Secretary of the Youth League,

responsible for political organisation and setting up branches.[20] With Mda he recruited more members beyond the Transvaal, in Natal and the Cape. He tried to infiltrate African schools, visiting St Peter's in Johannesburg, where Oliver Tambo had taught, in an attempt to address the students. But the headmaster, D.H. Darling (as he told Tambo afterwards) felt he could not allow the school to be used as a platform.[21] Mda had more success at Fort Hare, where he persuaded a young lecturer in anthropology, Godfrey Pitje, to start a branch of the Youth League, to 'soak them in our nationalistic outlook' and to work hand-in-hand with the executive in Johannesburg, 'of which the general secretary is N.R.D. Mandela Esq, BA, a law student'.[22] Pitje's professor, Z.K. Matthews, was sceptical of the 'armchair intellectualism' of the Youth League but did not prevent it from operating in Fort Hare. The university became the Youth League's most valuable seedbed, attracting a militant new generation of students that included Robert Sobukwe, Joe Matthews and T.T. Letlaka, into the ANC.[23]

Mda insisted that he was not against white men as such, only against white domination: but he warned that Africans could not expect whites to side with them 'at the time when the horizontal colour bar gave them a privileged way of life'.[24] He wrote a new manifesto for the Youth League, less rhetorical and more analytical than Lembede's, which Mandela approved. It defined African nationalism as 'the militant outlook of an

oppressed people seeking a solid basis for waging a long, bitter and unrelenting struggle for its national freedom'. It warned Africans not to 'look up to Europeans either for inspiration or for help in their political struggle'. But it was more conciliatory about Indians, recognising that they were an oppressed group who 'had not come to South Africa as conquerors and exploiters, but as the exploited'.[25]

Mandela, in spite of his Indian friendships, was still worried that Indians would dominate the ANC in the Transvaal.[26] The tension came to a head after a 'Votes for All' campaign was launched in May 1948 at a 'People's Assembly' in Johannesburg, opened by Michael Scott, demanding universal suffrage. The Transvaal branch of the ANC was divided: Mandela complained that the People's Assembly had bypassed existing organisations, while Walter Sisulu insisted that Africans must find allies where they could.[27] Mandela and Tambo went to a meeting of the Indian Congress with Sisulu, and were so angry when he supported the Indians' arguments that they did not talk to him after the meeting, and departed in different directions.[28] But they were gradually becoming less suspicious of communist friends like J.B. Marks and Moses Kotane. 'If Moses represents the Party,' said Tambo, 'I don't think I will quarrel with it.'[29]

Mandela joined the Transvaal National Executive of the ANC in 1947, and became fiercely loyal to it. He was befriended by its President Constantine Ramohanoe, who taught him how to

keep in touch with the grassroots.[30] But Ramohanoe wanted to cooperate with Indians and communists, a move which was opposed by the majority, including Mandela. When he defied them by making his own statement Mandela, seconded by Oliver Tambo, moved to depose him, which led to a stormy meeting and Ramohanoe's departure. 'Loyalty to an organisation,' Mandela would always maintain, 'takes precedence over loyalty to an individual.'[31] He maintained that stern rule over the next fifty years, as dissidents would learn to their cost. Having subjugated his own will to the movement, he was determined that others should do so too.

Mandela encountered many intellectuals who were fiercely critical of the ANC; particularly in Cape Town, where Trotskyists had formed the 'Unity Movement', which included many leading African and Coloured academics who insisted on total non-collaboration. In 1948 he visited Cape Town for the first time, staying for three months. He went up Table Mountain by the cable car, and gazed across at Robben Island.[32] He was invited to visit A.C. Jordan, a university lecturer prominent in the Unity Movement, who had written a book much admired by his Tembu friends, Ingqumbo yemiNyanya (The Wrath of the Ancestral Spirits), and was impressed by his intellect. With Jordan was Isaac Tabata, a founder and propagandist for the Unity Movement who talked brilliantly about South African history, but criticised Mandela with venom for joining the

ANC: 'I am sure you did so simply because your father was a member.'[33] (In fact Mandela's father was only part of his tribe's collective membership.) Mandela was in some awe of Tabata: 'It was difficult for me to cope with his arguments … I didn't want to continue arguing with the fellow because he was demolishing me just like that.'[34] He was shocked that Tabata seemed more hostile to the ANC than to the government.[35] Afterwards Tabata wrote him a very long letter, warning him against the 'collaborators' of the ANC and pressing him to base his actions on principles, to 'swim against the stream'.[36] But Mandela thought the Trotskyists' insistence on non-collaboration was merely 'their pet excuse for doing nothing'. Cape Town left him more than ever convinced that only the ANC could mobilise his people to provide effective mass action.[37]

However disillusioned he was by the Smuts government, Mandela – like many of his friends – still placed some hope in the liberalism of the post-war transatlantic alliance, of the UN and of the Labour government in Britain. In April 1947 King George VI, with his Queen and the two young Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, made a spectacular two-month state visit to South Africa which was intended to bolster the links between the two countries. But the British High Commissioner in South Africa, Sir Evelyn Baring, correctly warned London that Afrikaner nationalists would attack the visit as a symbol of the 'Empire bond which they had pledged themselves to break'.[38]

The royal party spent thirty-five days touring the whole country in a special white train. Smuts – more of a hero to the British than to the South Africans – made the most of it, declaring a public holiday to celebrate the twenty-first birthday of Princess Elizabeth, later Queen, who would always look back on the tour warmly as her first experience of the Commonwealth. The celebrations were officially boycotted by the ANC, including the Youth League, which met at Mandela's house to discuss it.[39]

The King's contacts with Africans during the tour were strictly limited by the Smuts government. He was not allowed to shake black hands at official ceremonies, but crowds of black spectators cheered the royal visitors, and Dr Xuma, the President of the ANC, could not resist travelling to Zululand to see the King.[40] The left-wing Guardian in Cape Town was exasperated by the Africans' celebrations: 'If the pitch and tone of the people's struggles for freedom can be lowered by these spectacular feudal devices,' complained an editorial, 'it will be extremely difficult to recover the ground that has been lost.'[41] Mandela himself, with his own chiefly background, thought the British monarchy should be respected as a long-lasting institution, and noted the veneration which the Xhosa chiefs showed for George VI. One Xhosa poet described how the then Paramount Chief Velile Sandile 'pierced the ground' in front of the King. 'He was grovelling really,' Mandela recalled, 'but I can't blame him. I might have done the same.'[42]

Smuts was already losing much of his popularity with white South Africans, particularly Afrikaners, before the general election of May 1948. He had been careful not to alarm the white electorate by making concessions to blacks, but the Afrikaner National Party under Dr Daniel Malan, with its doctrine of apartheid and its warnings against the 'black peril' and the 'red menace', was gaining support as Africans became more visible in the cities. The ANC saw the white election as a choice between two evils, while Dr Xuma claimed that apartheid was nothing new, merely 'a natural and logical growth of the Union Native policy'.[43] Educated black Africans in Orlando despised the raw Afrikaners who made up most of Malan's supporters. 'We only knew Afrikaners as tram-drivers, ticket-collectors, policemen,' said Mandela's friend Esme Matshikiza. 'We thought they couldn't run the country. We didn't know that their leaders had studied in Nazi Germany.'[44]

In the election Dr Malan's National Party gained victory, in alliance with the smaller Afrikaner Party. Its majority was only eight, but this was enough for the country to be ruled for the first time by Afrikaner nationalists without more moderate English-speaking support. Smuts was humiliated, and when he died two years later he was venerated in the outside world as a statesman and war leader, but blamed in his own country for ignoring both Afrikaners and Africans – a warning to his successors that a statesman must not forget to remain a politician.

Malan's new government soon changed the whole character

and perspective of the South African state. The Afrikaners, descendants of Calvinist Dutch settlers in the seventeenth century, had retained a very separate culture from the English-speakers, little influenced by subsequent European liberalism. Their oppression by British imperialists, culminating in the Boer War at the turn of the century, had forged a powerful nationalism, with its own religion and epics, and they nursed their grievances against the British. When the Union of South Africa was created in 1910 the British had hoped to retain an English-speaking majority, gradually softening the Afrikaners' resentment. But the numbers of Afrikaners had multiplied, while their relative poverty and continuing experience as underdogs fuelled their nationalism. The Afrikaners (as British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan would tell them in 1960) were really the first of the African nationalists, with their own need to prove themselves and defend their culture; and they would inevitably come into conflict with black African nationalists who threatened their jobs and their supremacy.[45] As Mandela later looked back on forty years of rivalry: 'Perhaps history ordained that the people of our country should pay this high price because it bequeathed to us two nationalisms that dominate the history of twentieth-century South Africa … Because both nationalisms laid claim to the same piece of earth – our common home, South Africa – the contest between the two was bound to be brutal.'[46]

The new Afrikaner government did not conceal its intention to further separate the races and to build an Afrikaner state. 'For the

first time since Union,' said Dr Malan, 'South Africa is our own.' Sir Evelyn Baring had few illusions: his despatches to London would compare Afrikaner nationalism to Nazism, and he came to dislike the Afrikaner ministers so much (his wife complained) that he could hardly keep the venom out of his voice.[47] But at first most British politicians and commentators were not seriously worried by the change in government. 'Dr Malan's majority is far too small,' wrote the Economist, 'to enable him to do anything drastic.'[48] The Labour government in London, beset by economic crises, needed South African uranium and was anxious not to offend the Malan government lest it take over the three British protectorates – Swaziland, Basutoland and Bechuanaland – on its borders.

Many Africans, including Oliver Tambo, actually welcomed the victory of Malan's party, an unambiguous enemy that would unite the blacks against it; but Mandela was 'stunned and dismayed'.[49] Twelve years later he would still explain the possibility that growing black pressure would gradually compel white governments to extend the vote, leading eventually to universal suffrage.[50] But now that prospect seemed much less likely. And, like nearly all black politicians, he seriously underestimated the Afrikaner determination to impose total segregation and to suppress black resistance, against the trend elsewhere in Africa and in America. Hardly anyone foresaw that over the next forty years successive National Party governments

would pass laws which would ban the black leadership, imprison them or force them into exile.

In the face of this new threat, the Africans proved slow to unite. In December 1948 the ANC held a joint meeting with its rival body the All-African Convention, which was dominated by Trotskyists, including Mandela's opponent Isaac Tabata. Dr Xuma called for blacks to 'speak with one voice'. J.B. Marks warned that 'the people are being crushed while we complacently quibble about technical difficulties'. Peter Mda insisted that the basis of unity must be African nationalism. But Tabata called for unity among all non-Europeans on the basis of total non-collaboration, which ANC delegates could not accept.[51] The meeting was inconclusive, and the arguments continued at another assembly four months later.

The need for unity emerged much more sharply with riots in Durban in January 1949, when enraged Zulus set on Indians and the police and military intervened, leaving 142 dead. Mandela heard from his Indian friends that whites had encouraged the riots by transporting Zulus to the scene.[52] The bloodshed, Mandela thought, put the 'Doctors' Pact' to the test, and he was impressed to see Dr Naicker playing a critical role in quickly restoring peace and promoting goodwill. 'The year 1949,' he wrote thirty years later, 'was an unforgettable experience for those who have given their lives to the promotion of inter-racial harmony.'[53] Dr Xuma blamed the riots on the government's

divisive policies, and warned against 'the law of the jungle'. The black fury spread to the Johannesburg area, where some Indian and African leaders hoped the Congresses would jointly appeal for calm. Ahmed Kathrada went with a journalist, Henry Nxumalo, to Mandela's house in Orlando to try to persuade him to support a joint statement, but Mandela, still wary of the ANC being influenced by Indians, insisted that the ANC should act on its own.[54]

By mid-1949 Dr Malan's government was preparing to enforce apartheid with drastic laws: each person would be classified by race; the races would live in separate parts of the cities; and mixed marriages would be forbidden. The firebrands of the Youth League, including Mandela, felt challenged to respond. Their President Peter Mda advocated a 'Programme of Action' based on organising mass protests against the government. The Youth League was gaining more support in the ANC as a whole, and was losing patience with Xuma's caution. In November 1949, a few weeks before the ANC's annual conference, Mda went with Sisulu, Mandela and Tambo to see Xuma in Sophiatown. They argued that the ANC must adopt mass action and passive resistance like Gandhi's in India, or the Indians' in South Africa three years before. Xuma retorted that it was too early, that action would only provoke the government to crush the ANC. The Youth Leaguers warned him that if he did not support them they would vote against his presidency at the conference. Xuma replied angrily that they were young and

arrogant, and showed them the door.[55]

Looking round for an alternative President, they first asked Professor Matthews, who thought they were naïve and immature, with their emotive rhetoric, and turned them down.[56] Then they made a rash choice, turning to Dr James Moroka, a dignified and relatively wealthy African doctor who had inherited a small estate in the Orange Free State, where a century before his great-grandfather Chief Moroka had welcomed the Afrikaner Voortrekkers – who then betrayed him. Moroka, a courteous gentleman, had, like Dr Xuma, many white friends and patients. He had been courageous in opposing the 'Hertzog Bills' in 1936, but he had since been attracted by the Trotskyists, and had become President of the ANC's rival the All-African Convention. Now, surprisingly, he told the Youth Leaguers that he supported their radical Programme of Action, and agreed to stand against Xuma even though he was not even a member of the ANC – which he kept calling the 'African National Council'.[57]

The ANC Youth League opened its own conference on 15 December 1949, just before the main ANC conference at Bloemfontein, with a humble prayer:

Thou, Heavenly Father, art continuing to lift us up from the sinks of impurity and cesspools of ignorance. Thou art removing the veil of darkness from this race of the so-called 'Dark Africa'.[58]

The inner group of Youth Leaguers – headed by Mda, Sisulu,

Mandela and Tambo – clearly emerged at the conference as 'the kingmakers', though Mandela could not attend. They had some differences: Mda remained a firm African nationalist, with Mandela closest to him. Sisulu was much more open to other racial groups, while Tambo remained diplomatic.[59] But they all demanded mass action.

The main ANC conference was eclipsed in the South African press by a much more melodramatic event: the opening by Prime Minister Malan of the vast Voortrekker Monument outside Pretoria, commemorating the sufferings of the Great Trek, before a crowd of 100,000 Afrikaners. 'The hour has come,' said Malan. 'A sunbeam from the heavens is striking down on the sarcophagus.'

Dr Xuma did his best to challenge this ceremony, with a speech in the market square of the Bloemfontein township in which he warned prophetically that the Voortrekker Monument would remind future generations of the racial strife between Europeans and Africans. The white press took little notice.

In his presidential address to the ANC conference Xuma tried to rally support, and emphasised that Africans were united against apartheid.[60] But he firmly rejected the Youth League's policy of boycotting apartheid institutions. His speech received meagre applause, and Diliza Mji, an outspoken young medical student in the Youth League, then moved a vote of non-confidence. 'A shock-wave went through the hall,' as Mji described it. 'Never in the history of the ANC had the President

been criticised.'[61] The kingmakers then turned to Moroka, who had already pledged his support, and the conference elected him as President. Xuma remained on the executive until he resigned on 13 March 1950, complaining that the Youth League had betrayed him. But Sisulu, Mandela and Tambo wrote a forceful rebuttal in the Bantu World: 'We are as a nation entitled at any time to call upon any one of us to lead the struggle.'[62]

The ANC also elected a much more radical National Executive, including the Youth Leaguers Peter Mda, Oliver Tambo and Godfrey Pitje, the young activist from Fort Hare. Mandela himself was co-opted onto the National Executive two months later, to fill the place left by Xuma. More importantly, the Congress chose a new Secretary-General. The veteran clergyman James Calata stood down, finding the Programme of Action too radical, and in his place Walter Sisulu was elected by one vote.[63] Sisulu was the right man at the right time. Unlike Moroka, he was totally dedicated to the ANC and its new policy. As he recalled: 'Once they had decided to elect me my approach was: "I have nothing to live for except politics. So I cannot draw up a programme of action which I am not able to follow myself." That required me to be confident of the future, otherwise I would weaken somewhere. That confidence kept me in.'

Mandela had a narrower view than Sisulu. 'When I became Secretary-General my duty was to unite people,' Sisulu said later, 'whereas Nelson and Mda were still thinking in terms

of projecting the Youth League.'[64] But Mandela thought the Programme of Action would transform the attitudes and methods of the Congress. 'The ANC was now going to rely not on a mere change of heart on the part of the authorities,' he explained later. 'It was going to exert pressure in order to compel the authorities to grant its demands.'[65] He was now at the heart of a new movement towards confrontation with the Afrikaner nationalists. As Frieda Matthews, the wife of the staid professor at Fort Hare, described it: 'People were excited, men and women, young and old. At last there was to be ACTION!'[66]

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.