



Nelson Mandela Resistor Profile

Deep Green Resistance Underground Promotion Committee
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Much of this profile is taken from Nelson Mandela's well-written autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*. Mandela's life story has several important parallels with the DGR analysis and strategy.

Mandela was born on July 18th, 1918 in the district of Umtata, the capital of Transkei. Transkei is 800 miles east of Cape Town and 550 miles south of Johannesburg, near the coast. Mandela was part of the Thembu people or tribe, who are part of the Xhosa nation.

Mandela came from a privileged background and was groomed, like his father, to counsel the rulers of the tribe. His father died when Mandela was young, so Chief Jongintaba Dalindyebo, a friend of his father and acting regent of the Thembu people, basically adopted him. Mandela received the best education possible.

It was during this education that he first came into contact with white people. The South African education system was based on the European model. When Mandela was about twenty, attending college in Fort Beauford, a great Xhosa poet, Krune Mqhayi, visited his school. During his speech this poet described the brutal clash between indigenous South Africans and the foreigners. He predicted a victory over the Europeans. Mandela could hardly believe his ears and this started to change his perception of white people.

At college, Mandela and his schoolmates listened to radio reports from the Second World War. They all supported the men fighting for freedom in Europe, even though there were not these freedoms for all in South Africa. A fellow student of Mandela's stated that the English had oppressed them, which the English called 'civilizing'. Even with the issues between the Boer and British, they would unite to suppress an African threat in South Africa. At the time, Mandela found this 'dangerously radical' and was informed that the person stating this was a member of the ANC (African National Congress), which he had only vaguely heard about.

While in his second year at college, his friend Paul Madabane visited. His father was Reverend Zaccheus Madabane, who had twice been president-general of the ANC. While they were both in town, a white local magistrate asked Paul to buy him some stamps. Paul refused and called the magistrate a 'rogue'. Mandela found this uncomfortable but was 'beginning to realise that black men did not

have to accept the dozens of petty indignities directed at him each day.'

Mandela returned home before finishing college due to a moral decision related to an election for the Student Representative Council. Once home the regent informed Mandela and his adopted brother that he had arranged marriages for both of them. Neither of them wanted this, so they ran away to Johannesburg, where Mandela went from learning about theories in a classroom to learning about reality through life experience.

Once in Johannesburg, Mandela decided to train as a lawyer and got a job as a clerk at a large law firm while he studied. One of the other clerks was Gaur Radebe, a prominent member of the ANC and Communist Party. He made comments to whites like 'You people stole our land from us, and enslaved us. Now you are making us pay through the nose to get the worst pieces of it back'. Mandela attended a number of Communist Party meetings and became aware of the history of racial oppression in South Africa. He viewed this struggle as purely racial while the Communist Party viewed it as a class struggle.

Mandela grew closer to Gaur, who 'believed in finding solutions rather than spouting theory'. Gaur believed the engine for change was the ANC, with its long history of advocating change since being founded in 1912. 'Its constitution denounced racialism, its presidents had been from different tribal groups, and it preached the goal of Africans as full citizens of South Africa'. Gaur gave Mandela lectures, gave him books to read, and recommended people for Mandela to talk to and meetings to attend. Gaur's total commitment to the freedom struggle made the deepest impression on Mandela. 'He lived and breathed the quest for liberation.'

In August 1957, Mandela marched with ten thousand others in support of the Alexandra bus boycott, a protest against fare rises. Mandela was no longer an observer and found the march exhilarating and inspiring. He was also impressed by the boycott's effectiveness. After nine days of empty buses the company reinstated the original charge.

At this point, Mandela thought of nothing but revolution. Mandela attended his first ANC meeting with Gaur as he was considering some sort of political involvement, but was still working out what this might be. He was starting to see that his duty was to his people as a whole, not just to a particular tribe or branch, a place where regional and ethnic loyalties gave way to a common purpose. Mandela was no longer satisfied with having a successful career and a comfortable salary. He was drawn into the world of politics because he was no

longer content with his old beliefs. He realised that at his recent university, the teachers had shied away from topics like racial oppression.

In 1943, Mandela enrolled at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg for a bachelor of law degree. He was the only African student at the law school and never felt entirely comfortable there. He met both generosity and animosity but did discover a core of sympathetic whites who became friends and later colleagues. Many of the whites at Wits were not liberal or colour-blind. Mandela did make many lifelong freedom-fighter friendships with people who were, despite their privilege, willing to sacrifice themselves for the cause of the oppressed.

On page 109 of Mandela's autobiography, he explains that he cannot pinpoint the moment that he became politicised, when he knew he would spend his life in the liberation struggle. He states that any African born in South Africa is politicised from birth with the oppression and inequality Africans in South Africa suffer. 'I had no epiphany, no singular revelation, no moment of truth, but a steady accumulation of a thousand slights, a thousand indignities and a thousand unremembered moments produced in me an anger, a rebelliousness, a desire to fight the system that imprisoned my people.'

In 1941 Roosevelt and Churchill signed the Atlantic Charter, which reaffirmed faith of democratic principles. This inspired the ANC to draft the African Claims in 1943, which called for full citizenship for all Africans, the right to buy land and the repeal of all discriminatory legislation. The hope was that ordinary South Africans would see that the principles that were fought for in Europe were the same ones the ANC were advocating for in South Africa.

Mandela then started to spend more time at the home of Walter Sisulu's, another prominent ANC member. There he met Anton Lembede, one of a handful of African lawyers in South Africa. Lembede believed that Africa was a black man's continent and it was up to Africans to reassert themselves and reclaim what was rightfully theirs. He hated the idea of the black inferiority complex and castigated what he called the worship and idolization of the West and its ideas. The inferiority complex, he affirmed, was the greatest barrier to liberation."

The parallel here with the current environmental crisis is interesting; most who understand the seriousness of the situation do not feel empowered enough to do what is really necessary.

Lembede had spent time teaching Afrikaans (whites) and saw Afrikaner nationalism as a prototype of African nationalism. He believed that ethnic differences were melting away and that young men and women in South Africa were starting to think of themselves as African first, instead of along ethnic lines. Lembede described how imperialist powers spent a lot of money and effort to dismiss indigenous nationalism which made Mandela realise that he was being manipulated by British colonialism and the “appeal of being perceived by whites as 'cultured' and 'progressive' and 'civilized.'” Mandela was already on his way to being drawn into the black elite that Britain sought to create in Africa. A number of his seniors wanted this for him but he knew it was an illusion and came to see the antidote as militant African nationalism.

At this point a number of ANC members believed that the ANC as a whole had become tired, unmilitant and made up of a privileged African elite more concerned with protecting their own rights than those of the masses. At that time, the ANC was headed by Dr. Xuma, who had “done a great service to the ANC. He had roused it from its slumbering state under Dr Seme.” Dr Xuma was admired by traditional leaders and had relationships with cabinet ministers. But Dr Xuma conducted ANC business in an English manner and enjoyed the relationships he had established with the white establishment. Mandela was part of a group that formed the ANC Youth League to light a fire under the ANC leadership.

In 1946, 70,000 African miners went on strike. The union leadership had lobbied the Chamber of Mines for a minimum wage of ten shillings a day (from two shillings), as well as family housing and two weeks' paid leave. This was ignored. The strike was maintained for a week and the states retaliation was ruthless. Leaders were arrested and a march was broken up by police with twelve deaths.

Mandela was impressed by the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) response to the Asiatic Land Tenure Act, which curtailed the free movement of Indians. “The Indian people registered an extraordinary protest against colour oppression in a way that Africans and the ANC had not.”

In 1948 the South African National Party led by Daniel Malan beat the United Party to form a Government. Africans could not vote in this election. The National Party had publicly sympathized with Nazi Germany during the war. Their campaign had focused on the 'black danger' and used the twin slogans of 'the nigger in his place' and 'the coolies out of the country' (coolies was the Afrikaner's derogatory term for Indians). Most Africans did not expect the National Party to win.

Immediately repression increased with a number of Parliamentary acts to control Africans, Indians and Coloureds (people of mixed race).

The ANC responded by turning itself into a mass organisation to mobilise Africans in South Africa. The Youth League proposed a Programme of Action which was adopted at the 1949 annual ANC conference. It called for boycotts, strikes, stay-at-homes, passive resistance, protest demonstrations and other forms of mass action. National days of stay-at-home and strikes were organised in 1950, with many Africans showing solidarity. Police killed eighteen at a Freedom Day strike gathering on May 1st 1950.

The repression increased with the Nationalist Government introducing the Suppression of Communism Act which allowed the government to outlaw any organisation and restrict any individual opposed to its policies.

Mandela joined the ANC National Executive Committee in 1950. He then coordinated actions around the country for the ANC's first big national action, the Day of Protest, which was moderately successful. "It was the first time I had taken a significant part in a national campaign, and I felt the exhilaration that springs from the success of a well-planned battle against the enemy and the sense of comradeship that is born of fighting against formidable odds."

Up until this point Mandela had been suspicious of the Communist Party and its ambitions in South Africa, even though he could not fault the anti-apartheid dedication and sacrifice of individual members, many of whom were his friends and ANC members. These communist friends convinced him that they were not trying to dominate the ANC and were working within the context of African nationalism. Mandela read up on communism and it helped him to see the situation in South Africa outside the prism of black and white relations, to transcend black and white. "I found that African nationalists and African communists generally had far more to unite them than to divide them."

Similarly, those in the current anti-civilisation, anti-capitalist and environmental movements mostly share the same goals and need to start working together more.

Repression increased in 1950 and 1951, with four new acts of Parliament forming the corner stones of apartheid: the Population Registration Act; the Group Areas Act; the Separate Representation of Voters Act; and the Bantu Authorities Act. The ANC leadership wrote to Prime Minister Malan requesting that he repeal these laws but received

a response saying that the whites had an inherent right to take measures to protect their identity as a separate community. They were also told that if the ANC pursued their actions the government would use its resources to squash any resistance.

The ANC leadership took this dismissal as a declaration of war, and along with the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), started to plan the Defiance Campaign. There was discussion around whether the campaign should follow the Gandhian principles of non-violence, but some believed the issue should be approached from the point of view of tactics rather than of principles, and that they should employ the methods demanded by the conditions.

“If a particular method or tactic enabled us to defeat the enemy, then it should be used. In this case, the state was far more powerful than we, and any attempts at violence by us would be devastatingly crushed. This made non-violence a practical necessity rather than an option. This was my view, and I saw non-violence on the Gandhian model not as an inviolable principle but as a tactic to be used as the situation demanded. The principle was not so important that the strategy should be used even when it was self-defeating, as Gandhi himself believed. I called for non-violent protest for as long as it was effective.”

It was decided that the Defiance Campaign should be an open-ended programme of non-cooperation and non-violence. There would be two stages to the campaign; firstly, a small number of well trained volunteers would break selected minor laws to get arrested, and secondly, there would be mass defiance, with nationwide strikes and industrial action. During the first five months of the campaign a cross section of 8,500 people took part in the campaign. The campaign received a lot of publicity and ANC membership went from 20,000 to 100,000. “The campaign freed me from my lingering sense of doubt or inferiority I might still have felt; it liberated me from the feeling of being overwhelmed by the power and seeming invincibility of the white man and his institutions.”

Surely many in the environmental movement can relate to Mandela in terms of the seeming invincibility of the systems of power that stop us from transitioning to a more sustainable society.

Mandela was arrested in July 1952 for violation of the Suppression of Communism Act along with twenty-one other leading anti apartheid activists. The government also started a pattern of raids of homes and offices confiscating papers and documents. The President of the ANC, Dr. Moroka, betrayed his comrades by renouncing the ANC principles in

court. A good lesson may be learnt here on the importance of choosing your comrades carefully to ensure that they are fully committed to the cause.

The government saw the campaign as a threat and so responded with the Public Safety Act in 1953. This gave the government power to declare martial law and detain people without trial. They then introduced the Criminal Laws Amendment Act, which authorised corporal punishment for resisters.

At the 1952 ANC conference, a new, more 'vigorous' president was elected - Chief Albert Luthuli. Mandela was elected as one of four deputy presidents. Mandela was unable to attend as he and fifty-one other ANC leaders were banned from attending any meetings, including his son's birthday. It was agreed at this conference to elaborate a contingency plan for when the government made the ANC and other organisations illegal. The ANC National Executive instructed Mandela to come up with this plan so that the organisation could operate from underground. This strategy came to be known as the Mandela-Plan, or simply, M-Plan. The ANC simultaneously introduced an elementary course of political lectures for its members around the country.

Also in 1952, Mandela and Oliver Tambo opened the only firm of African lawyers in South Africa. This was based in Johannesburg and was soon besieged with clients. Mandela and Oliver listened to and witnessed the thousands of injustices that ordinary African suffered every day. They got an even deeper understanding of the oppression average people faced. Their firm offered "a place where they could come and find a sympathetic ear and a competent ally, a place where they would not be either turned away or cheated, a place where they might actually feel proud to be represented by men of their own skin colour."

They suffered a lot of racist prejudice in court. Under the Urban Areas Act they were not permitted to occupy business premises in the city without ministerial consent. Their request was denied and they were told to relocate to an 'African' location, which was virtually unreachable for their clients. They carried on practicing with the threat of eviction hanging over their heads.

Under the Western Areas Removal scheme, parts of Johannesburg, including Sophiatown, were due for evacuation to an area thirteen miles from the city. In 1953, the ANC were holding meetings every Sunday evening in Freedom Square in the centre of Sophiatown.

Mandela spoke at one of the meetings and enjoyed stirring up the audience.

“As I condemned the government for its ruthlessness and lawlessness, I overstepped the line: I said that the time for passive resistance had ended, that non-violence was a useless strategy and could never overturn a white minority regime bent on retaining its power at any cost. At the end of the day, I said, violence was the only weapon that would destroy apartheid and we must be prepared, in the near future, to use that weapon.”

This fired up the crowd and they all started singing a freedom song, with the lyrics 'There are the enemies, let us take our weapons and attack them'. Mandela then pointed at the police and said 'There are our enemies!', which made the police present look very nervous. Mandela had been thinking about these ideas for a while as the Nationalist government was making protest impossible. He saw that Gandhi had been dealing with a foreign power that was more realistic than the Afrikaners. Non-violent resistance works if your opposition is playing by the same rules but if peaceful protest is met with violence then tactics need to evolve. For Mandela “non-violence was not a moral principle but a strategy; there is no moral goodness in using an ineffective weapon.”

Mandela was pulled up by the National Executive for making these remarks. While some people sympathised, many criticised him for what they felt had been reckless and dangerously premature remarks. The risk was that the government would retaliate by crushing the ANC. Mandela accepted the collective verdict and publicly supported non-violence, despite feeling that this was no longer the answer. Many in the ANC were simply not ready for the violence that would later be needed to end Apartheid.

Whilst it may at this point have been too early in Mandela's story for more militant tactics to be applied in South Africa, this is not the case when considering the current destruction of the biosphere. Indeed, it is very much late in the day, and more radical action is needed.

Later in 1953, Mandela was served with an order under the Suppression of Communism Act, requiring him to resign from the ANC, restricting his movements to Johannesburg and prohibiting him from attending any meetings for two years. From this point on, all Mandela's action for the liberation struggle were secret and illegal. As a result, he was far less involved in the direction and activities of the struggle, although he was consulted and continued to influence events.

Mandela had written a speech for the ANC Transvaal conference the following month which had to be read out by someone else. This speech became known as 'The No Easy Walk to Freedom' speech. In this speech, Mandela explained that new forms of political struggle were now necessary since the government had made attendance in mass protests dangerous and suicidal. Newspapers and printing presses would no longer print ANC texts for fear of prosecution under the Suppression of Communism Act. Mandela explained that this called for a new phase of resistance.

“The oppressed people and the oppressors are at loggerheads. The day of reckoning between the forces of freedom and those of reaction is not very far off. I have not the slightest doubt that when that day comes, truth and justice will prevail... The feelings of the oppressed people have never been more bitter. The grave plight of the people compels them to resist to the death the stinking policies of the gangsters that rule our country... To overthrow oppression has been sanctioned by humanity and is the highest aspiration of every free man.”

The Sophiatown anti-removal campaign was long running, with rallies twice a week. The final eviction was in February 1955. This campaign confirmed Mandela's belief that in the end there would be no alternative to violent resistance. All the non-violent tactics were met by 'an iron hand'. “A freedom fighter learns the hard way that it is the oppressor who defines the nature of the struggle. And the oppressed is often left no recourse but to use methods that mirror those of the oppressor. At a certain point, one can only fight fire with fire.”

In 1953, the Bantu Education Act was passed, which stated that African primary and secondary schools operated by Church and mission bodies should either agree to operate under government control or be denied subsidies. The intent was to train Africans to be menial workers in order to keep them in perpetual subordination to the white man. Whilst the vast majority of schools initially protested, most handed over control to the government. The ANC organised a week long school boycott with mixed results, which led to a small retreat by the government. However, African students eventually had to choose between this lesser education or none at all. This programme “came back to haunt the government in unforeseen ways. For it was Bantu Education that produced in the 1970's the angriest, most rebellious generation of black youth the country had ever seen. When these children of Bantu Education entered their late teens and early twenties, they rose with a vehemence.”

Later in 1953 Professor Matthews returned from the US with the idea of “convening a national convention, a congress of the people,

representing all the people of this country irrespective of race or colour, to draw up a Freedom Charter for the democratic South Africa of the future". This was accepted at the ANC national conference and a Council of the Congress of the People was created. Suggestions for this new constitution were to come from the people themselves. The Congress of the People would be a public display of strength and would step in when the ANC was made an illegal organisation. Three thousand people met in June 1955 to approve the final document.

In September, the security police raided over five hundred homes and offices around the country armed with warrants authorizing the seizure of anything regarded as evidence of high treason, sedition or violations of the Suppression of Communism Act.

This was soon followed by the publication of the report of the Tomlinson Commission for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bantu Areas. This was the start of 'Grand Apartheid'. The Bantustans were separate ethnic reserves or homelands for all African citizens, which served to preserve the status quo in which three million whites owned 87 percent of the land and eight million Africans lived on the remaining 13 percent.

In March 1956, Mandela received his third ban. This restricted him to Johannesburg for five years and he was prohibited from attending any meetings during this time.

In December 1956, Mandela was arrested for high treason along with one hundred and fifty-six other anti apartheid leaders – African, Indian and white. They included almost the whole ANC executive leadership, both banned and unbanned. They were kept in prison for two weeks and housed together. It became one of the longest unbanned meetings of the Congress Alliance in years. Protest meetings and demonstrations were held all over South Africa and around the world.

The preparatory examination began on December 19th and all one hundred and fifty-six were accused of high treason and a countrywide conspiracy to use violence to overthrow the present government and replace it with a communist state. The Freedom Charter was cited as proof of communist intentions and evidence of the plot to overthrow the government. They were released on bail. On January 9th it was the defense's turn to refute the state's charges. The defense denied "that the terms of the Freedom Charter are treasonable or criminal. On the contrary, the defense will contend that the ideas and beliefs which are expressed in this charter, although repugnant to the policy of the present government, are such as are shared by the overwhelming

majority of mankind of all races and colours, and also by the overwhelming majority of the citizens of this country.”

Some of the accused were released during the thirteen-month long preparatory examination. In January 1958 the magistrate ruled that he had found 'sufficient reason' for putting the ninety-five remaining accused on trial in the Transvaal Supreme Court for high treason.

In 1957 there was massive resistance across the country by women in protest against having to carry passes, supported by the ANC Women's League. Women could be fined £10 or imprisoned for a month for failing to produce one.

The ANC attempted to organise a three day strike during the 1958 election but most non-whites still went to work. Only the three million whites could vote in the election and the Nationalist Party increased their popular vote by 10 percent.

The high treason trial began again in August 1958 and it was moved to court in Pretoria to deliberately inconvenience the accused. The accused had an excellent defense team who argued that the indictment was vague and that the planning of violence was necessary to prove high treason. The prosecution needed to provide examples of its claims that the accused intended to act violently. The three judges agreed and in October the Court withdrew the indictment. Then a month later the prosecution issued a new, more carefully worded indictment and announced that the trial would continue against only thirty of the accused. All thirty were ANC members.

On April 6th 1959, the anniversary of Jan van Riebeeck's landing at the Cape, a new organisation formed called the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC). This organisation rejected the multiracialism of the ANC and were against all 'foreign minority groups'. They thought Africa should be for Africans only. They also thought that the ANC was not militant enough and 'out of touch with the masses and dominated by non-Africans'. They rejected the Freedom Charter, claiming it violated the principles of African nationalism. Mandela knew a number of the people that formed PAC.

“Many of those who cast their lot with the PAC did so out of personal grudges or disappointments, and were thinking not of the advancement of the struggle, but of their own feelings of jealousy or revenge. I have always believed that to be a freedom fighter one must suppress many of the personal feelings that make one feel like a separate individual rather than part of a mass movement. One is fighting for the liberation of millions of people, not the glory of one

individual. I am not suggesting that a man become a robot and rid himself of all the personal feelings and motivations. But in the same way that a freedom fighter subordinates his own family to the family of the people, he must subordinate his own individual feelings to the movement.”

PAC put forward a dramatic and over-ambitious programme that promised quick solutions. They became the darling of the western press because they were anti-communist. Mandela found PAC to always be a spoiler. “They would ask the people to go to work when we called a general strike, and make misleading statements to counter any pronouncement we would make.” This was the most difficult horizontal hostility faced by the ANC. (“Horizontal hostility” is a term coined by Florynce Kennedy in 1970 to describe the damage caused when oppressed groups fight amongst themselves instead of fighting back against the powerful.) Mandela always held out hope that unity between the two groups could be found.

In 1959, the Parliament passed the Promotion of Bantu Self Government Act, which created eight separate ethnic Bantustans. The people of Zeerust and Sekhukhuneland resisted and revolted, with many innocent people arrested, prosecuted, jailed, banished, beaten, tortured and murdered. By 1960, people in Sekhukhuneland had reached open defiance and were refusing to pay taxes. The ANC played a big role with many joining the ANC and new branches forming. There was also significant resistance in eastern Pondoland, Thembuland, Zululand and Transkei.

The high treason trial restarted in August 1959 and the prosecution concluded its case in March 1960. Then the defense started their response. In the rest of Africa, Ghana become independent in 1957 and seventeen former African colonies were due to become independent states. This had alarmed the Nationalist government and made them even more intent on squashing any dissent.

The 1959 ANC annual conference voted for a countrywide anti-pass campaign beginning on March 31st and culminating on June 26th with a great bonfire of burning passes. Just before this, the PAC organised their own anti-pass protest on March 21st in Sharpeville, about thirty-five miles from Johannesburg. A crowd of several thousand unarmed protesters surrounded the police station. For some reason the police opened fire, killing sixty-nine and injuring hundreds as they fled. This caused outrage around the world, with the UN Security Council urging the government to initiate measures to achieve racial equality.

The ANC responded by calling for a nationwide stay-at-home on March 28th in protest to the shooting and several hundred thousand Africans followed the call. "Rioting broke out in many areas so the government called a State of Emergency, suspending habeas corpus and assuming sweeping powers to act against all forms of subversion. South Africa was now under martial law."

Mandela was illegally arrested on March 30th with no warrant. Forty other leaders were also arrested. They were released at midnight only to be officially arrested under the Emergency Regulations. The Pretoria trial continued even with the State of Emergency. The State of Emergency was lifted five months later in August and Mandela and the others were released from prison.

The ANC and PAC were declared illegal organisations in April 1960, with membership punishable by jail or a fine. Furthering the aims of the ANC could result in a prison sentence of up to ten years. The ANC initiated the M-Plan so that it could continue its underground work.

On March 29th 1960, the accused were found not guilty of attempting to use violence to overthrow the state. Immediately after the trial, Mandela went underground to avoid re-arrest and being banned from continuing his work to build the movement around the country. He initially focused on planning the May 29th stay-at-home. Hundreds of thousands refused to go to work, and faced huge state repression as a result.

At the next Executive meeting it was agreed, after much debate, that the time for violence had come. "At the meeting I argued that the state had given us no alternative to violence. I said it was wrong and immoral to subject our people to armed attacks by the state without offering them some kind of alternative. I mentioned again that people on their own had taken up arms. Violence would begin whether we initiated it or not. Would it not be better to guide this violence ourselves, according to principles where we saved lives by attacking symbols of oppression, and not people? If we did not take the lead now, I said, we would soon be latecomers and followers to a movement we did not control."

This new military movement was a separate and independent organisation, linked to the ANC but fundamentally autonomous. At this point the ANC was still the main part of the struggle, until the time was right for the military wing to take the lead.

“This was a fateful step. For fifty years, the ANC had treated non-violence as a core principle, beyond question or debate. Henceforth the ANC would be a different kind of organisation.”

The parallels with the modern environmental movement's commitment to non-violence over the last fifty years are interesting.

The military organisation was named Umkhonto we Sizwe (The Spear of the Nation) or MK for short. Mandela formed the high command and started recruiting people with relevant knowledge and experience. “Our mandate was to wage acts of violence against the state - precisely what form those acts would take was yet to be decided. Our intention was to begin with what was least violent to individuals but more damaging to the state.” Mandela began reading and talking to experts, especially those on guerrilla warfare. In June 1961, Mandela released a letter to the press explaining that he continued to fight the state and encouraged everyone to do the same. In October 1961 Mandela moved to Liliesleaf Farm in Rivonia, where the Umkhonto we Sizwe constitution was drafted.

“In planning the direction and form that MK would take, we considered four types of violent activities: sabotage, guerrilla warfare, terrorism and open revolution. For a small and fledgling army, open revolution was inconceivable. Terrorism inevitably reflected poorly on those who used it, undermining any public support it might otherwise garner. Guerrilla warfare was a possibility, but since the ANC had been reluctant to embrace violence at all, it made sense to start with the form of violence that inflicted the least harm against individuals: sabotage.

“Because it did not involve loss of life, it offered the best hope for reconciliation among the races afterwards. We did not want to start a blood-feud between white and black. Animosity between Afrikaner and Englishman was still sharp fifty years after the Anglo-Boer war; what would race relations be like between white and black if we provoked a civil war? Sabotage had the added virtue of requiring the least manpower.

“Our strategy was to make selective forays against military installation, power plants, telephone lines and transportation links; targets that would not only hamper the military effectiveness of the state, but frighten National Party supporters, scare away foreign capital and weaken the economy. This we hoped would bring the government to the bargaining table. Strict instructions were given to members of MK that we would countenance no loss of life. But if sabotage did not

produce the results we wanted, we were prepared to move on to the next stage: guerrilla warfare and terrorism.”

DGR advocates for strategic sabotage in the hope that we can transition to a truly sustainable society but we believe it unlikely that those in power will allow this. Hence phase four of the DGR strategy, Decisive Ecological Warfare, calls for decisive dismantling of all infrastructure.

MK's structure mirrored the ANC, with a National High Command at the top, Regional Commands in each of the provinces, and local commands and cells operating below. The High Command determined tactics and general targets and managed training and finance. Regional Commands could select local targets to be attacked. MK members were forbidden to be armed when on operations and were forbidden to endanger any life.

On December 16th 1961, MK carried out its first operation. “Homemade bombs were exploded at electric power stations and government offices in Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and Durban. On the same day, thousands of leaflets were circulated around the country announcing the birth of Umkhonto we Sizwe.” The attacks took the government by surprise and “shocked white South Africans into the realization that they were sitting on top of a volcano.” Black South Africans now knew that the ANC was no longer a passive resistance organisation. A second attack was carried out on New Year's Eve.

The ANC received an invitation to attend the Pan-African Freedom Movement for East, Central and Southern Africa (PAFMECSA) conference in Addis Ababa in February 1962. This later became the Organisation of African Unity, aiming to promote the liberation movements in Africa. The conference offered important connections for the ANC and a chance to get support, money and training for MK. Mandela was chosen to lead the delegation.

While en route to the conference, as he boarded the plane, Mandela saw that the pilot was black. This made him panic because he thought 'how could a black man fly a plane'. “But a moment later I caught myself: I had fallen into the apartheid mind-set, thinking Africans were inferior and that flying was a white man's job.”

The parallels here with the environmental movement are interesting in that we let those in power set the agenda, continuing to abide by their structures (such as non-violence), even when we recognise how ineffective it is and how serious things are.

Mandela gave a speech at the PAFMECSA conference, where he retraced the birth of Umkhonto we Sizwe and explained that all opportunities for peaceful struggle had been closed. "A leadership commits a crime against its own people if it hesitates to sharpen its political weapons where they have become less effective..."

Mandela spent several days with Dr. Mustafa, head of the Algerian mission in Morocco, who gave a briefing on the Algerian resistance to the French. It was very similar to South Africa as it also had a large white settler community ruling the indigenous majority. He explained how the guerrilla war evolved and stressed the importance of the political side of the war. He also explained how important international public opinion was to the struggle.

After visiting a number of African countries, he traveled to London and then back to Addis Ababa for six months of military training. After eight weeks of this training the ANC requested he return to lead the MK as the struggle was escalating.

Mandela had not been back in South Africa long before he was arrested on August 5th 1961. He was brought for formal remand before a senior magistrate and realised that he knew the magistrate and many of the attorneys present from his time practicing law. Mandela realised "These men were not only uncomfortable because I was a colleague brought low, but because I was an ordinary man being punished for his beliefs. In a way I had never quite comprehended before, I realized the role I could play in court and the possibilities before me as a defendant. I was a symbol of justice in the court of the oppressor, the representative of the great ideals of freedom, fairness and democracy in a society that dishonoured those virtues. I realized then and there that I could carry on the fight even within the fortress of the enemy."

Mandela was accused on two counts, that of inciting persons to strike illegally (during the 1961 stay-at-home) and that of leaving the country without a valid passport. He conducted his own defense. The trial started in October 1962 and Mandela gave his famous 'Black man in a white court' speech. Mandela was sentenced to five years in prison.

Another military organisation had formed called Poqo (Xhosa for 'independent' or 'standing alone'), that was loosely linked to PAC. They were carrying out terrorist actions against African collaborators and whites. The ANC wanted people to contrast these actions with its own controlled and responsible new militancy within MK.

In May 1963 the General Law Amendment Act (better known as the Ninety-Day Detention Law) was passed. 'This waived the right of

habeas corpus and empowered any police to detain any person without a warrant on grounds of suspicion of a political crime. Those arrested could be detained without trial, charge, access to a lawyer, or protection against self-incrimination for up to ninety days'.

The Sabotage Act was passed in June 1962, 'which allowed for house arrests and more stringent banning not subject to challenge in the court, restricting the liberties of citizens to those in the most extreme fascist dictatorships. Sabotage itself now carried a minimum penalty of five years without parole and a maximum of death'.

In May 1963, Mandela and a number of other political prisoners were moved to Robben Island and forced to work long days of manual labour. Then in July 1963, Mandela and a number of other prisoners were back in court, now charged with sabotage. There had been a police raid at the Rivonia farm during a MK meeting where they had been present discussing Operation Mayibuye, a plan for guerrilla warfare in South Africa. A number of documents about Operation Mayibuye were seized.

What became known as the Rivonia Trial began in Pretoria on October 9th 1963. Huge crowds of supporters gathered outside the court each day and the eleven accused could hear the singing and chanting. The Crown concluded its case at the end of February 1964, with the defense to respond in April. 'Bram was deeply pessimistic. He avowed that even if we proved that guerrilla war had not been approved and our policy of sabotage was designed not to sacrifice human life, the state could still impose the death sentence'.

"Right from the start we had made it clear that we intended to use the trial not as a test of the law but as a platform for our beliefs. We would not deny, for example, that we had been responsible for acts of sabotage. We would not deny that a group of us had turned away from non-violence. We were not concerned with getting off or lessening our punishment, but with making the trial strengthen the cause for which we were struggling – at whatever cost to ourselves. We would not defend ourselves in a legal sense so much as in a moral sense. We saw the trial as a continuation of the struggle by other means."

Then on April 20th 1964, Mandela gave his famous speech, 'An Ideal For Which I Am Prepared To Die'. ([Read full speech](#), or [listen to audio](#).) Three important sections are:

"I must deal immediately and at some length with the question of violence. Some of the things so far told to the Court are true and some are untrue. I do not, however, deny that I planned sabotage. I did not

plan it in a spirit of recklessness, nor because I have any love of violence. I planned it as a result of a calm and sober assessment of the political situation that had arisen after many years of tyranny, exploitation, and oppression of my people by the Whites.”

“We of the ANC had always stood for a non-racial democracy, and we shrank from any action which might drive the races further apart than they already were. But the hard facts were that fifty years of non-violence had brought the African people nothing but more and more repressive legislation, and fewer and fewer rights.”

“During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

Eight of the eleven, including Mandela were sentenced to life imprisonment on Robben Island. These eight had been expecting the death sentence.

Mandela was released after 27 years in prison on February 11th, 1990.

RESOURCES

Read a [summary of Umkhonto we Sizwe](#) and the armed struggle

[Umkhonto we Sizwe timeline](#)