



Nelson Mandela's natural leadership qualities are reflected in this photograph taken at the All-In Africa Conference in Pietermaritzburg in March 1961. The conference was called in response to the decision of white voters to leave the British Commonwealth and form an apartheid republic.

Dressed elegantly in a smart hounds-tooth suit, Mandela told the conference that they could either accept discrimination and humiliation – or they could stand firm for their rights. He called for a national convention representing all the people of the country, irrespective of race, colour or creed.

This proved to be Mandela's last public appearance in South Africa for 30 years. But, by this time, Nelson Mandela had made his mark as a leader of great standing.

# CHARACTER COMRADE LEADER

# PRISONER NEGOTIATOR STATESMAN

"He has a natural air of authority. He cannot help magnetising a crowd. He is a born mass leader; a key figure in thinking, planning and devising new tactics." Oliver Tambo

"Sometimes one must go public with an idea to push a reluctant organisation in the direction you want to go." Nelson Mandela



"One day I will be the first black president of South Africa." Nelson Mandela, 1952

## THE M-PLAN



In May 1952, Mandela joined the organising committee of the Defiance Campaign and was appointed to the highly visible and risky position of Volunteer-in-Chief. He toured the country, mobilising people to break unjust apartheid laws and to court arrest. Prison could be a badge of courage and leadership, he urged.



It was perhaps at this time that Mandela clearly began to realise the power of his personality and that he was destined for greatness. At a banquet in Port Elizabeth in honour of Professor Z K Matthews, his son Joe recalls Mandela saying:

*"One day I will be the first black president of South Africa."* Nelson Mandela



In September 1952, Mandela and other leaders of the Defiance Campaign were convicted for "statutory communism" and given a suspended sentence. In October, Mandela was elected successor to J B Marks as president of the ANC in the Transvaal. In December, he was banned from attending meetings.



Mandela's acceptance speech as President of the Transvaal ANC was to become historic. It was inspirational and strategic; his moral authority was growing. He quoted the famous words uttered by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of an independent India:

*"There is no easy walk to freedom anywhere and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountain tops of our desires."* Jawaharlal Nehru

At the same meeting, Mandela introduced the ANC's M-plan which was, significantly, named after him. Its purpose was to build a mass membership organised on a street-by-street basis, able to be quickly mobilised. Mandela and other leaders did this in anticipation of growing oppression and the knowledge that the ANC and its allies needed to prepare to go underground.





# HIGH TREASON

In December 1956, in the year that the Freedom Charter was formally adopted, Mandela was in the political spotlight again. Along with 155 others, he was arrested for high treason.



"The State wanted to show that the ANC was violent in nature, that inflammatory speeches by its office-bearers reflected the intentions of the organisation. Furthermore, the State wanted to show that the ANC was a communist organisation and that the Freedom Charter envisaged a communist state." *Walter Sisulu*



The accused chose Mandela to be their spokesperson. Articulate, calm and logical, he emerged a more thoughtful politician than before. He was learning to temper his impatience, to pause and reflect.

"It was then that I first realised that he was a natural leader of men. He was firm, courteous, his views always based on thought and reason. His real political intellect emerged from his answers to questions."

*Sydney Kentridge*



On 21 March 1960 the breakaway party from the ANC, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), embarked on an anti-pass campaign. On the same day, police opened fire on a demonstration in Sharpeville, officially killing 69 people but, in reality, nearly 100 people lost their lives.



Following the Sharpeville Massacre, the government banned the ANC and the PAC, and declared a State of Emergency. The leader of the PAC, Robert Sobukwe (front row, fourth from the left), was arrested and sentenced to three years in prison. 2 000 men and women, including Mandela, were detained. While Tambo was sent abroad, the ANC bestowed on Mandela the task of organising the movement underground.

"Walter Sisulu had been convinced that the ANC must have a single leader underground who could be much more active than Luthuli, now banned in Natal; and that it must be Mandela." *Anthony Sampson*



On 26 March Chief Luthuli publicly burnt his pass as a gesture of protest against the Sharpeville Massacre. Hundreds of public pass burnings by ANC members, including Mandela and Sisulu, followed.



# CALL TO ARMS



Chief Luthuli (right), President of the ANC since 1953, refused to comply with the government's demand that he either resign from the ANC or be deposed as chief of his people in Grootvlei, Natal. Mandela and other Youth League comrades were impressed with his integrity and quiet militancy.

The horror of Sharpeville brought a dramatically changed political landscape. Chief Luthuli was virtually in retreat since his banning. Sections of the leadership decided that Mandela – younger, charismatic and imposing – should become the public face of the struggle, now driven underground.



Needing to mobilise while avoiding arrest, Mandela now acquired the romantic aura of the "Black Pimpernel", popping up around the country, making calls from public phone booths to newspapers and appearing unexpectedly at editors' offices.

"It was at the All-In Conference in Pietermaritzburg that the romanticism of his underground activity, appearing at a conference, made him a leader." Dennis Goldberg

The conference ended by deciding that if the government did not accept their call for a national convention, they would organise a countrywide three-day stay-away.



In his first-ever television interview in 1961, Mandela crossed a personal Rubicon. He took the risk of stepping out of line from existing ANC policy.

"If the government reaction is to crush by naked force our non-violent demonstration, we will have to seriously reconsider our tactics. In my mind we are closing a chapter on this question of a non-violent policy." Nelson Mandela, TV interview, 1961

Mandela had issued his statement without consultation with or permission from the ANC executive, for which he was roundly criticised.

A number of ANC and Congress Alliance leaders made their way to a secret destination near Chief Luthuli's home to discuss Mandela's closely guarded motivation for armed struggle.

In early 1962 the decision was taken to form an armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), with the initial aim of launching a sabotage campaign. Mandela was appointed Commander-in-Chief.

For many, the timing of the move was surprising. Just two months earlier, Chief Luthuli had received the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway.





# A MOMENT OF TRUTH

"I came out to furnish the various African leaders, leading sons of our continent, with the up-to-date information about the situation in South Africa." *Nelson Mandela*

As military leader of MK, Mandela undertook an extended visit to Africa in January 1962 – pictured here with members of the Algerian liberation fighters in Morocco – and then moved on to London. A British sympathiser advised him to base himself in Washington. Mandela replied that he needed to be with his people. He returned to South Africa in July. Soon after his return, he drove with a comrade, Cecil Williams, to report to Luthuli.

"It was a dangerous journey. Luthuli was under surveillance, and Mandela was certainly being sought. But he accepted that his position as a leader laid extra obligations and duties on him. That was his style. He led from the front. He never asked anyone to take a risk that he was not prepared to take." *Rusty Bernstein*



Mandela was arrested on his way back to Johannesburg, near Howick Falls in Natal. Held at the Fort in Johannesburg, he was brought to trial in late 1962. He began his own defence with a sensational argument:

**"I consider myself neither legally nor morally bound to obey laws made by a parliament in which I have no representation. Why is it that no African in the history of this country has ever been tried by his own kind? I am a black man in a white man's court."** *Nelson Mandela*

This was, as his biographer Anthony Sampson wrote, "a moment of truth". Mandela was gaining a new and even greater moral authority. In a packed room in the Old Synagogue court room in Pretoria, Mandela was sentenced to three years in jail for inciting people to strike, and two years for leaving the country without a passport. But worse was to come.



“Shutting these brave, just men away for long years in the brutal and degrading prisons of South Africa will leave a vacuum in leadership. With them will be interred this country's hopes for racial co-operation.” Chief Albert Luthuli



## THE RIVONIA TRIAL



While Mandela was in hiding in Rivonia, a suburb of Johannesburg, he disguised himself as a gardener, sleeping in the servants' quarters of Liliesleaf farm (photographed above by the police during their raid in 1963).

In July 1963, scores of policemen swooped on Liliesleaf farm, the headquarters of MK in Rivonia. As accused Number 1, Mandela was brought back to Pretoria from Robben Island, where he was serving his five-year sentence. Now, together with 12 comrades who were arrested at Rivonia, he was on trial for his life in the Palace of Justice in Pretoria.



“We were charged with sabotage and conspiracy rather than high treason. This was because it was easier for the state to prove sabotage and still get the death penalty.” Nelson Mandela

“What I did was right. I had no alternative. Freedom will come to South Africa one day; even if you hang me, it will give inspiration to others.” Nelson Mandela



With the world and his family watching, Mandela chose to make a statement from the dock rather than the witness stand, speaking for nearly five hours. When he finally got to the end, he took off his reading glasses, looked straight at the judge and said:

“During my life-time, 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.”

Nelson Mandela



Mandela's momentous statement summed up all the lives that had been lost, and those still to be lost, so that freedom could be achieved one day. It was the statement that sealed Mandela's position as leader of the oppressed people in South Africa.

On 12 June 1964, the day after finding the main accused guilty of all charges, Justice De Wet handed down his sentence. Addressing the accused – Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Kathrada, Andrew Mlangeni, Raymond Mhlaba, Elias Motsoaledi and Dennis Goldberg – the judge said that he did not have to give them the death sentence. But that was the only mercy he could show.



“The sentence in the case of all of the accused will be one of life imprisonment.”

Justice De Wet

Mandela had learnt that leadership meant being faithful to the wishes of the collective – and he remembered too the lessons of his guardian, the Regent Jongintaba – that there are times when a leader has to show courage and go ahead of the flock. These qualities of leadership displayed by Mandela were to be called into play again and again in the years that were to follow. They required both physical and moral courage – and in the end, the judge of such great leadership would be history itself.